**Imagining a Narrow World: A Challenge to Read Translated Literature**

Can you imagine literature without Leo Tolstoy, Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Wislawa Szymborska, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Rainer Maria Rilke, or Kenzaburo Oe?

Can you imagine our understanding of World War II without Anne Frank or Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel?

Can you imagine Western culture without the Bible? Can you imagine how, say, Chaucer or Shakespeare would have written if they didn't have the bible to read and be inspired by?

No?

And yet a world without those writers, a world without that knowledge, a world without those perspectives and ideas is exactly what we would have if we didn't have translators.

Without translators, we would be limited to only reading literature written in our native tongue and whatever few other languages we could learn well. And that literature would be distinctly different if authors weren't able to read texts and access ideas from other cultures.

All this is to say that we would be distinctly poorer without translated literature.

But translations seem to scare many people, especially those who have English as their native language. There's the erroneous idea that translations are harder to read, and some readers fear that translators change texts beyond recognition. There are other people who simply think that anything that comes from outside the borders of their own country is just too different and unwelcome, not recognising that intercultural exchange has always been around and has already shaped most cultures to a certain extent.

What I love about translated literature is the opportunity it offers me to enter another world, another life. I get a little insight into an experience different from my own and I get exposure to new ideas, and this helps me grow as a person. Sometimes, though, I find that life elsewhere actually isn't all that different from my own, and that makes me feel just a bit closer to people who were previously "other".

I run an award-winning international literature book group here in Norwich. As far as we know, it's the only book group in the UK that just reads translated literature. This is surprising because translated literature is such a gift.

As a translator myself, from the Scandinavian languages to English, my goal is to make great writing available to people who don't know Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish, and to thereby make Scandinavia a tad more knowable and familiar than it previously was while also allowing readers to find out what kind of literature is being written in those countries and to learn from it.

Cultural and literary exchange is nothing to fear; on the contrary, we should welcome it and encourage it.

With that in mind, I'm issuing a challenge. If you are reading this article, I dare you to read more translations. Start with just one book. You can pick a Nobel Prize-winner, for example, or maybe one of the books that's up for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize this year. Pick a translated thriller, if that's your favorite genre, or try some poetry. It doesn't really matter which book you read; the aim is merely to read translated literature.

Then the next part of this campaign is to keep reading translated literature. Start with one book and then try to read a couple of translations a year, or even more. Encourage your friends to do so as well.

If you live in Norwich, come to my book group. If not, you could start a book group of your own that just focuses on translated literature. If you want some tips, here is a document I created to help people start book groups like the one I run.

Pass the word on. Tell others what books you're reading and what you think of them. Post comments here or on other blogs and discuss your experiences.

I challenge you to read just one translated book. I think it will change you and I suspect you'll want to keep reading translated literature. Translations aren't scary; rather, doing without them is.

If you can't imagine a world without great literature and fascinating ideas and intercultural understanding - and if you don't want to imagine such a world either - do your part and read translated literature. Go on. I dare you.