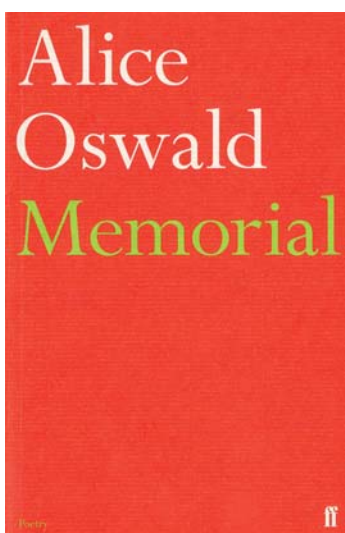


29 November 2013 *For immediate release*

Memorial, Alice Oswald's excavation of Homer's *Iliad*, wins the Poetry Society's Corneliu M Popescu Prize 2013 for poetry in translation



Oswald's excavation of the *Iliad* is a radical retelling that at once translates and transforms this ancient text into a deeply moving exploration of the horrors of warfare in any age.



Organised by the Poetry Society, the Corneliu M Popescu Prize is given biennially to a collection of poetry translated into English from another European language. This year's winner was chosen from a selection of 79 submitted books, representing 26 languages. Judges Karen Leeder and David Wheatley said "Oswald has turned Homer into a contemporary war poet, taking an audacious concept – the trimming down of the *Iliad* to its death scenes – and imbuing the results with compelling formal necessity. *Memorial* answers to its Greek original yet stands as an autonomous and deeply moving work of art."

In *Memorial*, Oswald strips back the narrative and lists the death of every soldier as written in Homer's *Iliad*, accenting them with the striking and startling similes from the original poem and small details from aspects of their lives. The repetition has a slightly hypnotic effect, memorialising each and every soldier as part of an almost incomprehensible whole. Judge Karen Leeder added "In *Memorial* translation moves away from any kind of strict deference to the original and obeys instead its spirit, thereby opening up new vistas and bringing an ancient voice – singing – into the here and now." Following an opening list of the dead soldier's names, war memorial-like, the poem begins:

The first to die was PROTESILAUS
A focused man who hurried to darkness
With forty black ships leaving the land behind
Men sailed with him from those flower-lit cliffs
Where the grass gives growth to everything
Pyrasus Iton Pteleus Antron

Continues over

He died in mid-air jumping to be first ashore
 There was his house half-built
 His wife rushed out clawing her face

Alice Oswald lives in Devon and is married with three children. Her book-length poem *Dart* won the T. S. Eliot Prize in 2002. Her third collection, *Woods etc.*, won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize 2006, and in 2009 she was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*, a night-piece for several voices set on the Severn Estuary. Oswald was the inaugural winner of the Poetry Society's Ted Hughes Award in 2010 for her collection *Weeds and Wildflowers*. *Memorial* has also been awarded the 2013 Warwick Prize for writing.

Oswald says she first read the *Iliad* around the age of 18, and loved the "bright energy" that you get from Homer, which she didn't feel was present in any English version that she'd read. She decided, twenty years on, to attempt to translate it herself. She said "The translator has to work like a scientist, with absolute, impersonal attention to her material. This is the rigour at the centre of all writing, so it's no surprise that some of the best poems in the English language (Wyatt's sonnets) are actually translations. As for the Homeric poems, they speak in several dialects at once as if providing their own translation service – a kind of ancient Esperanto."

Speaking in an interview in the December 2013 issue of *Poetry Review*, Oswald added "All my poems are in some way translations of the *Iliad*."

The winner of this year's £1,000 award was announced at a celebratory event at Europe House, London, on 29 November.

Memorial is published by Faber and is available at £12.99

– ENDS –

**For further information about the Corneliu M Popescu Prize 2013, telephone
 Sophie Baker on 020 7420 9895 or email sbaker@poetrysociety.org.uk**

Notes to Editors:

- **The Corneliu M Popescu Prize**, run by the Poetry Society was formerly called the European Poetry Translation Prize. The first winner of the Prize, in 1983, was Tony Harrison for *The Oresteia*. The prize was relaunched in 2003, and renamed in honour of the Romanian translator Corneliu M Popescu, who died in an earthquake in 1977, at the age of 19.

- **The other shortlisted books in 2013 were:**

Ciaran Carson, for *In the Light Of*: Arthur Rimbaud, pub The Gallery Press (from French)

Henry Israeli (plus additional translators), for *Haywire: New & Selected Poems*: Luljeta Lleshanaku, pub Bloodaxe (from Albanian)

Ilmar Lehtpere, for *1001 Winters*: Kristiina Ehin, pub Bitter Oleander Press (from Estonian)

Peter Manson, for *The Poems in Verse*: Stéphane Mallarmé, pub Miami University Press (from French)

Patrick McGuinness, for *Seizing: Places*: Hélène Dorion, pub Arc Publications (from French)

Lorna Shaughnessy, for *The Disappearance of Snow*: Manuel Rivas, pub Shearsman (from Galician)

- **Past winners of the Corneliu M Popescu Prize** have been David Constantine for his translation of *Lighter than Air* by Hans Magnus Enzensberger in 2003; Adam Sorkin and Lidia Vianu for their translation of *The Bridge* by Marin Sorescu in 2005; Ilmar Lehtpere for his translation of *The Drums of Silence* by Kristiina Ehin in 2007; Randall Couch for his translation of *Madwomen* by Gabriela Mistral in 2009; and Judith Wilkinson for her translation of *Raptors* by Toon Tellegen in 2011.

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The Judges:

- **Karen Leeder** is Professor of Modern German Literature and Fellow and Tutor in German at New College, Oxford. She has translated work by a number of contemporary German poets including Raoul Schrott, Durs Grünbein, Uljana Wolf, Ulrike Almut Sandig and Volker Braun. Her translation of Evelyn Schlag's *Selected Poems* (Carcenet, 2004) won the Schlegel-Tieck Prize in 2005 and her translation of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Fatal Numbers: Why Count on Chance?* (Upper West Side Philosophers' Press, 2011), was shortlisted for the US National Book Critics' Circle Award. In 2014 her translations of Michael Krüger, *The Eleventh Commandment: Selected Poems*, will appear with Sheep Meadow Press.
- **David Wheatley** is a poet and critic with particular research interests in the field of twentieth-century and contemporary poetry, Irish literature and Samuel Beckett. He has published four collections of poetry with Gallery Press: *Thirst* (1997; Rooney Prize for Irish Literature), *Misery Hill* (2000), *Mocker* (2006), and *A Nest on the Waves* (2010). He has also edited the Poems of James Clarence Mangan for Gallery Press (2003) and Samuel Beckett's *Selected Poems 1930-1989* for Faber (2009). His work features in various anthologies, including *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses* (Faber/FSG, 1994), *The New Irish Poets* (Bloodaxe, 2004), *Identity Parade: New British & Irish Poets* (Bloodaxe, 2010), *An Anthology of Modern Irish Poetry* (Harvard UP, 2010), and *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (2010). He was a founding editor of the poetry journal *Metre*, and has written on poetry for a variety of other journals including *London Review of Books*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *Essays in Criticism*, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, *The Irish Times* and *Poetry Review*.
- **Homer** is an ancient Greek epic poet, the author of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. It is not known when he lived, though most modern researchers place him in the 7th or 8th centuries BC.
- **Europe House** is the UK base of both the European Parliament Information Office and European Commission Representation. It provides a space for discussion and debate on EU issues as they relate to the UK, and hosts a wide range of cultural events.
- **The Poetry Society** runs a number of influential prizes recognizing excellence in poetry, including the National Poetry Competition, Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award, SLAMBassadors UK, the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize, Hamish Canham Prize and the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. Founded in 1909, the Poetry Society was set up to promote the study, use and enjoyment of poetry, and has grown to become one of the UK's most dynamic arts organisations. We organise extensive education and commissioning programmes, publish leading poetry magazine *Poetry Review* and edit the UK domain of poetryinternationalweb.net. For further information about the Poetry Society visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk