that leaves virtually nothing to be desired. If I taught Ibsen, I'd say my ship had come in.

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Nelly Sachs: *Flight and Metamorphosis: Poems*. Translated by Joshua Weiner with Linda B. Parshall. Pp. vii + 164. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2022. Hb. £25.05, ISBN 978037157081. Pb. £18.26, ISBN 9780374606439.

Nelly Sachs: *If I Only Knew*. Translated by Jean Boase-Beier. Pp. 39. Todmorden: Arc, 2023. Pb. £10.99. ISBN 9781911469391.

Nelly Sachs: *Revelation Freshly Erupting: Collected Poetry*. Translated by Andrew Shanks. Pp. 555. Manchester: Carcanet, 2023. Pb. £27. ISBN 9781784105983.

The first volume-length English translation of the poems of Nelly Sachs (1891–1970) appeared in 1967 from Farrar Straus and Giroux: *O the Chimneys: Selected Poems*. On the front of the dust jacket, under the title, the impetus for this publication is identified: 'Nobel Prize for Literature 1966'. On the back, Sachs' Nobel Prize portrait looks the reader right in the eye, although her expression is ambiguous. So were her brief remarks at the ceremony: while she famously said exactly what she meant to say, her way of saying it nonetheless allowed others to project what they needed her to mean in the moment. In 1966 and 1967, many seemed to need to see in Sachs a frail, forgiving, feminine presence looking to the poetic word to bring reconciliation in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide. While she did push back against this reception, and indeed no less a literary figure than Hans Magnus Enzensberger counselled already in 1963 against this reading, her reputation as a Holocaust poet has endured. We must acknowledge her significance as one of the first German-language poets to confront the Shoah; her too close identification with the work of bearing witness, however, has made her a poet many have heard of, but few have read, beyond perhaps the handful of commonly anthologized Holocaust poems, 'the poems best known for being known best', as Joshua Weiner puts it. Her poems have been labelled by turns both kitschy and impenetrable, trivial and urgent, and this friction originates in frustrated attempts to read them as one thinks poems should be read, rather than how Sachs' poems demand to be read.

Three recent translations of Nelly Sachs' poetry provide an opportunity to reengage, or engage for the first time, with her work on its own terms. Weiner's *Flight and Metamorphosis* provides a translation of Sachs' fourth poetry volume *Flucht und Verwandlung* (Suhrkamp, 1959); Jean Boase-Beier's *If I Only Knew* contains a ten-poem cross-section of her work; and Andrew Shanks' *Revelation Freshly Erupting* responds to her entire postwar œuvre. Weiner's *Flight and Metamorphosis* stands out as a vital contribution, but each volume evokes critical points of interrogation that can help readers, new and experienced, approach Sachs' poetry.

Weiner and Boase-Beier provide *en face* originals of the German poems. Because her selection cuts across several volumes, Boase-Beier contextualizes poems within their original volume, giving the name, the year, and short descriptions of themes, history, and significance. This is in line with Boase-Beier's approach more generally to translating Sachs' poetry, and I would encourage anyone to seek out her essay on this topic (in *The Palgrave Handbook of Literary Translation*, 2018) as a complement to *If I Only Knew*, because the essay explains her rationale and methodology. The brevity of *If I Only Knew* does not allow for such (I think essential) framing discussion. Weiner's translation begins with a helpful Introduction that gives readers new to Sachs a necessary grounding in her reception history and an explanation of his motivation for translating Sachs' work, in particular the relevance of this volume to recent refugee crises around the world. Particularly satisfying for the reader more familiar with Sachs' work and reception are Weiner's short notes following the translation, in which he explains that Sachs' German is strange, and estranged, and addresses the challenges that this presents for a translator. He acknowledges the complexity of her lexicon and the way it develops within a structured sequence of poems, and has gone toward his translation with that in mind, allowing him to try to bring Sachs' idiom into English in a way no one else has to date, either because they do not recognize her particular way with words, or because they translate her poems as if they are isolated units, which is not how her poems function.

Shanks has approached Sachs' work from the opposite direction: rather than moving toward her particular idiom, he attempts to bring out what he sees as the red thread of her entire postwar corpus, namely 'primary revelation'. I cannot stress enough how crucial it is to read the Introduction to *Revelation Freshly Erupting* before proceeding to the poems. The reader is warned that these poems do not necessarily represent Sachs' words as they appear in the original, but rather as Shanks experiences them. This is important to know, and is also troubling given how insistent Sachs was that her words say exactly what

they mean. Shanks, moreover, does not place the originals facing his 'approximative translations', as he calls them, so no immediate comparison is possible. He does give most of the poems their common German titles, a choice he does not explain, but that is a useful aid in finding the original poem in instances where the translation deviates so drastically from the original that it renders the poem unrecognizable. The sixty pages of notes Shanks provides after his translations make for interesting reading, as he gives historical context for most of the poems, explains some of his particular translation choices and interpretations, and glosses Sachs' many historical, mystical, and religious references. To my knowledge, no such collection of information exists in English elsewhere, although it is worth cautioning that Shanks does not compare his work to the original here, either, which leaves the reader unable to consider his interpretations alongside Sachs' words, at least immediately. This collection of information may prove helpful for those new to Sachs. Ultimately, though, readers may need more guidance in understanding her unique use of words and characteristic ambiguity, which compels the reader, as both Weiner and Boase-Beier note, to consider phenomenological questions that go far beyond the Holocaust or religious mysticism.

'In der Flucht', the poem Sachs read aloud at the Nobel Prize ceremony in 1966, is one of two found in all three volumes, and provides some good examples of the work of each translator. It is a poem that fights to harness a sense of relentless motion periodically halted by undetermined and indeterminable forces. Sachs is careful in the original to emphasize the motion over the agent, subject, or object, never fixing anything in a particular space, time, or condition. It begins 'In der Flucht', which both Weiner and Boase-Beier render 'In Flight' but Shanks renders 'For the fugitive', which replaces a state of motion with a far more specific subject and condition. The next stanza begins with the word 'Eingehüllt', which Weiner translates as 'shrouded', Boase-Beier as 'wrapped up', and Shanks as 'enveloped', each capturing a different aspect of the German, which conveys a bundling or wrapping of something for the purpose of safe-keeping. As the stanza moves on, a tension between stability and instability results in the modal verb of ability (*kann*) being negated, which Weiner and Boase-Beier retain, but Shanks erases. The difference between 'which can never say Amen' and 'which never reaches its amen' may seem small, but Sachs (like any poet) was deliberate in her word choices. It is the negated ability that is key here rather than the completion of a possessive action.

The final line of this stanza again underscores the relentless motion of the poem in the words 'und weiter –', including Sachs' preferred

breaking-off gesture of the dash. All three versions retain the dash, but translate 'weiter' differently. Shanks interprets this as 'beyond', which adds a more mystical-religious weight than the poem, which is much more world-bound, calls for; Boase-Beier's 'onwards' and Weiner's 'further' align much more with that relentlessness of motion inherent to the poem and to its cycle. The final stanza, containing arguably the best-known lines of this well-known poem, again cannot reach a resolution:

> An Stelle von Heimat
> halte ich die Verwandlungen der Welt –

As with the beginning of the poem, Weiner and Boase-Beier retain indeterminacy with 'In place of home' where Shanks fixes a meaning with 'Deprived of home'. There is not, or not only, the sense in this poem or in the cycle that deprivation is the issue; it is far more complicated than that. It is more an array of dynamic conditions and relationships that preclude the concept of 'Heimat', a word admittedly only partially reflected in the word 'home'. The entire volume calls into question the meaning of this concept as something like a location, because in Sachs' poetic space, location is only ever fleeting. Thus it is important that no exact point is determined, nor a specific condition of change cited. It is changes, the transformations and the metamorphoses, that are regarded (one possible translation of 'halten') rather than strictly held in place.

It is challenging to see these nuances in just one poem, which is why Weiner's work on the entire volume *Flight and Metamorphosis* is so welcome. Where he cannot render the complex layers of Sachs' German in a specific set of words, he will often find a different aspect of the poem in which to express similar layering. An excellent way to observe how this works is by reading his translation of the first poem, 'Wer zuletzt hier stirbt' ('Who dies'), alongside the final poem, 'So rann ich aus dem Wort' ('So I poured forth from the word'). Generally in Sachs' cycles, the final poem leads back to the first, where, having seen throughout the cycle how Sachs expands and deepens the meanings words can have, the reader suddenly encounters a slightly different poem from the first time through. *Flight and Metamorphosis*, in addition to being an unusually long cycle, also ends with a period instead of a dash, which means the first and last poems here do not relate to each other in the way they often do. Weiner's translation choices demonstrate that he sees this function. There are some spectacular Sachsian renderings in the centre of the poem, in particular 'branding empyreal skin' for 'stigmatisieren die himmlische Haut'. Here, while 'empyreal' isn't necessarily the immediate choice for 'himmlisch' (often translated simply as 'heavenly'), its fiery

core (ἐμπύρος, 'fiery') expands on the burning imagery in the stanza in a way that reflects how Sachs often plays with literal layering of meaning across words.

The choice of 'tracks set down' for 'gesetzte Spuren' in the first stanza of the final poem at first reads as strangely disjointed, until you realize that 'set down' gestures back toward the 'tragen' ('carry') of the first stanza of the first poem. These two poems reflect and inform one another, the first one sparking, resonating, and energetic, even as its governing topic is dying; the last one dissolving, waning, and tired, as the lyrical I liquifies out of language. Each of the two poems ends with something being drawn or taken into something else:

> die schwarz vertropfte Zeit
> in ihren Gottesacker zieht.

and

> so nimmt die Nacht
> mich wieder in Besitz.

which become in Weiner's English:

> draws black dissolving time
> into its tomb.

and

> so night takes me again
> into its domain.

Although losing the word play between 'Samen' (literally 'seed') and 'Gottesacker' (literally 'God's field', a euphemism for 'tomb') in the first poem, Weiner takes an opportunity to make the connection between the two poems' endings clearer in matching the syntax of the final lines and choosing 'domain' for 'Besitz'.

Weiner's choices sometimes appear to deviate from the original, but on closer inspection these are usually the places where he is making Sachs' German come through structurally, if not semantically. Shanks' deviations, as is clear from his notes, are more about what he sees revealed in her poems. When her words become very direct, Shanks tends to soften their blow; when Sachs' words are characteristically ambiguous, he gives them disingenuous specificity. It is laudable that he is so upfront about his translations being 'approximative', and that he suggests readers do not take them at face value; it also highlights a problem in need of attention: where is the reader who does not read German, let alone Sachs' own unique German, to go to check, since his is

the only translation of a number of her poems? Shanks has clearly invested time and effort into approximatively translating all of her postwar poems. That is no mean feat. All three translators think she should be more widely read. But also more carefully read; and in that respect, Shanks misses the mark. This is one reason to heed Boase-Beier's advice that comparing translations is essential. We just need more of them.

Weiner finds Sachs' first postwar volumes far less approachable, so we are unlikely to see his nuanced treatment applied to those earlier works. Boase-Beier, on the other hand, has a similar sense of and appreciation for Sachs' language, and does not seem to shy away from Sachs' immediate postwar poetry. A Boase-Beier translation of *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (*In the Dwellings of Death*) would be most welcome.

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*The Philosophy of Literary Translation: Dialogue, Movement, Ecology*. By Clive Scott. Pp. x + 283. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Hb. £85. ISBN 9781009389952.

The appearance of Austrian soprano Elizabeth Schwarzkopf on the BBC radio programme *Desert Island Discs* has attained a legendary status in the history of British broadcasting. Accepting the role of 'castaway' in July 1958, Schwarzkopf pointedly diverted the show's format, selecting as musical solace in her projected isolation seven of her own recordings. The polyglot opera star had not misunderstood the premise. She acknowledged the oddity of her decision, but stated her determination to 'relive her own life'. If there was a problem of translation here, it was not an error of comprehension. If anything, her *détournement* was an acute assertion of selfhood that sought to adapt the form of the show into something more suited to the interviewee's existential experience. As such, Schwarzkopf's interpretation of the programme's rubric was more artistic than hermeneutic.

Readers familiar with the work of Clive Scott will doubtless have picked up on the analogy. Scott writes books about literary translation, and its artistic expansion beyond the scope of hermeneutics, in which the examples he analyses are almost exclusively his own adaptations of French poetry. This sometimes looks like 'pulling a Schwarzkopf'. However, while the great soprano's auto-commentary was probably the symptom of an egocentrism nurtured by her professional milieu, it would