



# The Poetry of Translation: From Chaucer & Petrarch to Homer & Logue

*Matthew Reynolds*

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Poetry is supposed to be untranslatable. But many poems in English are also translations: Pope's *Iliad*, Pound's *Cathay*, and Dryden's *Aeneis* are only the most obvious examples. *The Poetry of Translation* explodes this paradox, launching a new theoretical approach to translation, and developing it through readings of English poem-translations, both major and neglected, from Chaucer and Petrarch to Homer and Logue.

The word 'translation' includes within itself a picture: of something being carried across. This image gives a misleading idea of what goes on in any translation; and poets have been quick to dislodge it with other metaphors. Poetry translation can be a process of opening; of pursuing desire, or succumbing to passion; of taking a view, or zooming in; of dying, metamorphosing, or bringing to life. These are the dominant metaphors that have jostled the idea of 'carrying across' in the history of poetry translation into English; and they form the spine of Reynolds's discussion.

Where do these metaphors originate? Wide-ranging literary historical trends play their part; but a more important factor is what goes on in the poem that is being translated. Dryden thinks of himself as 'opening' Virgil's *Aeneid* because he thinks Virgil's *Aeneid* opens fate into world history; Pound tries to bring Propertius to life because death and rebirth are central to Propertius's poems. In this way, translation can continue the creativity of its originals.

*The Poetry of Translation* puts the translation of poetry back at the heart of English literature, allowing the many great poem-translations to be read anew.



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