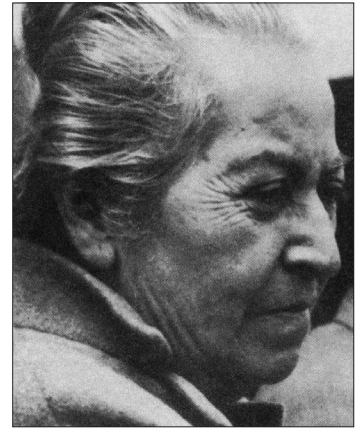


EMBARGOED UNTIL 9PM, 19 NOVEMBER 2009

Winning translation brings back into focus one of Latin America's most unconventional poets

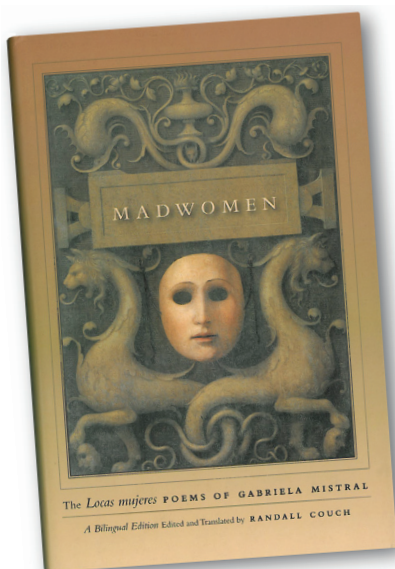


Professor Randall Couch's translation of *Madwomen* by Gabriela Mistral wins the Corneliu M Popescu Prize for Poetry in Translation 2009.

When selecting the winner of this year's Corneliu M Popescu Prize for Poetry in Translation, judges Elaine Feinstein and Stephen Romer were keen to find a new experience for the English reader.

In Professor Couch's translation of *Madwomen* by Gabriela Mistral they got exactly that. As Romer elaborates, "The Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, magisterially translated into English by Randall Couch, is not only hair-raising, she took the top of my head off. The voices of her *Madwomen*, her *Locas mujeres*, in their austerity and eerily controlled emotion, now made available in English, strike me as something both new and permanent. An instant classic."

Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) is one of the most significant and enigmatic figures in Latin American literature of the last century. Nothing about her life or work was conventional. Growing up in Chile in poverty, with little formal education, she went on to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, help to modernise the education system in Mexico and Chile, as well as work for the League of Nations and the U.N.



The poems collected in *Madwomen* are amongst her most powerful, exploring both personal and political catastrophe with emotional clarity and exactitude. Couch's translation responds precisely to the original power of Mistral's writing – a feat made even more remarkable given the complexity of Mistral's Spanish texts.

Despite winning the Nobel Prize for Literature she is relatively unfamiliar to English-language readers. Professor Couch has made it possible for a new generation of readers to experience the work of this amazing poet who is little read outside of her native Chile.

The winner of the £1,500 award was announced at a reading and reception at the Ratiu Family Foundation in London on 19th November.

Professor Couch flew in from America to attend the event, reading alongside the other shortlisted translators. He has published essays and book chapters on Ezra Pound, Gabriela Mistral, and Harryette Mullen. His poems have appeared in numerous journals

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For further information

Telephone Lisa Roberts on 020 7420 9895
or Alan Ward on 020 7420 9886
Email: marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society,
22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX
Tel: 020 7420 9880 Fax: 020 7240 4818
www.poetrysociety.org.uk

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and have been anthologised in *Best New Poets 2005* and *Xconnect: Writers of the Information Age VIII*. In 2000 and 2008 he was awarded fellowships in poetry by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He is currently Professor of English at Arcadia University and has taught advanced poetry writing and poetics since 2003.

The eight shortlisted titles are:

- *Madwomen* by Gabriela Mistral, translated by Randall Couch. Spanish / Chile. (University of Chicago Press).
- *Unfinished Ode to Mud* by Francis Ponge, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic. French / France. (CB Editions).
- *Against Heaven* by Dulce María Loynaz, translated by James O'Connor. Spanish / Cuba. (Carcanet).
- *Poems* by Oktay Rifat, translated by Ruth Christie and Richard McKane. Turkish / Turkey. (Anvil).
- *Courts of Air and Earth*, various, translated by Trevor Joyce. Middle and Early-Modern Irish / Ireland. (Shearsman Books).
- *Birdsong on the Seabed* by Elena Shvarts, translated by Sasha Dugdale. Russian / Russia. (Bloodaxe).
- *Rime* by Dante Alighieri, translated by JG Nichols and Anthony Mortimer. Italian / Italy. (OneWorld Classics).
- *Selected Poems* by CP Cavafy, translated by Avi Sharon. Greek / Greece. (Penguin Classics).

Organised by the Poetry Society and sponsored by the Ratiu Family Charitable Foundation, the Corneliu M Popescu Prize for Poetry in Translation is given biennially to a collection of poetry translated into English from another European language.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

- The Corneliu M Popescu Prize for Poetry in Translation was launched in 2003 and is named after Corneliu M Popescu who translated the work of one of Romania's leading poets, Mihai Eminescu, into English. On 4 March 1977, at the age of 19, Popescu was tragically killed in an earthquake.
- 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 and Ilmar Lehtpere for his translation of *The Drums of Silence* by Kristiina Ehin in 2007.
- Elaine Feinstein is a poet, novelist, short-story writer, playwright and translator. Her most recent poetry collection is *Talking to the Dead*.
- Stephen Romer is a poet, translator and editor living in France. His latest collection is *Yellow Studio*, shortlisted for the 2008 T.S. Eliot Prize.
- The Ratiu Family Charitable Foundation was established in London in 1979 by Ion and Elisabeth Ratiu to promote and support projects which further education and research in the culture and history of Romania. This year, the Foundation celebrates 30 years of the fight for independent thought and cultural excellence. The Foundation offers 100 annual grants worth £200,000 to Romanian students studying a wide range of subjects in the UK, principally for projects, postgraduate courses, conference participations, travel grants, and other short term courses including academic research. They enable talented graduates and young professionals to become familiar with the UK and gain skills, which they can adapt and apply in Romania. The Ratiu Foundation offers annual seed funding for innovative projects, principally in Romania, which foster Romanian arts and civilisation, heritage, civil society, democracy, and environmental protection.
www.ratiufamilyfoundation.com
- The Poetry Society is Britain's leading voice for poets and poetry. Founded in 1909 to promote 'a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry', the Society is now one of literature's liveliest organisations with nearly 4,000 members worldwide. For 100 years the Society has championed exciting, new work through its leading international poetry magazine Poetry Review, featuring contributions from Blok to Brodsky, and Shapcott to Szyborska. With its innovative commissioning, education and publishing programmes, and a packed calendar of readings, performances and competitions, the Poetry Society celebrates poetry in its many forms. "*The Poetry Society is the heart and hands of poetry in the UK – a centre which pours out energy to all parts of the poetry-body, and a dexterous set of operations which arrange and organise poetry's various manifestations. It has a long and distinguished history, and has never been so vital, or so vitalising, as it is now.*" – Sir Andrew Motion.
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