



## JOAN TATE (1922-2000)

Tributes to Joan Tate are by: Paul Binding, Shropshire, writer and critic; Robert Bjork, Arizona, translator and university professor; Sigrid Combüchen, Stockholm, writer; Patricia Crampton, Wiltshire, translator; Roger Greenwald, Toronto, translator and university professor; Karl Haskel, Stockholm, broadcaster and TV producer; Inger Johansson, Lund, translator, Chair of the Swedish Translators' Association; Henning Koch, London, writer and translator; Torsten Kälvemarm, Stockholm, educational administrator and critic; Rika Lesser, New York, writer and translator; Christopher McLehose, London, publisher; Agneta Markås, Stockholm, foreign rights director; Eivor Martinus, London, writer and translator; Alastair Niven, London, arts administrator; Anna Paterson, St. Andrews, writer and translator; Linda Schenck, Gothenburg, translator and interpreter; Helen Sigeland, Stockholm, arts administrator; Tom Teal, Massachusetts, translator; Laurie Thompson, Wales, translator and editor; Mudite Treimane, Riga, translator and librarian.

**A factual survey of Joan Tate's life and work is on page 13.**

\* There is a silver thread running through Nordic literature. In cutlery drawers the length and breadth of Scandinavia are Victorian fruit knives, marmalade spoons and pickle forks. They all come from antique shops in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, and they are all tokens of friendship from Joan Tate. Joan could not see the point of superficial relationships, and hence being one of “her” authors often developed into something far more than the usual contact between a writer and a translator.

I was given my gherkin fork in London, when her translation of one of my books was published. We were in a restaurant, enjoying what she claimed was her favourite lunch of soup, bread and sherry, when she presented me with an elegant specimen with a mother-of-pearl handle. The following year we were both in Stockholm, celebrating our birthdays at the Café Piastowska in Tegnérsgatan. “When people ask me how old I am, I tell them I’m twenty-two,” she declared, in order to ease the burden placed on my shoulders by the passage of time, twenty years younger though I was. “Vintage is more interesting than age.” And she produced a fruit spoon, vintage 1911, according to the hallmark.

If Joan found herself with a bit of spare cash in her purse, after the artistic and financial success of translations of writers such as Ingmar Bergman or Kerstin Ekman, she would not just sit back and enjoy it in the afterglow of a job well done, but she would carry on translating — translating books for which she had no contract, no commission, but books she herself felt ought to exist in English, on the off-chance that a publisher would eventually turn up. In addition to all the titles she published there may well be almost as many as yet unpublished, including significant and centrally important books from the last twenty or thirty years.

Joan Tate learnt Swedish as a teenager. She was a sort of prisoner of war in Sweden, hemmed in by seas awash with explosives and hostilities. In the summer she would go swimming with her employer’s dog in the

Djurgården Canal. In the winter, she shivered. She was still learning Swedish at the age of seventy-five, seriously in love with Stockholm again, at home here. One even had the impression that she led two parallel lives: on the one hand an English life with broad international dimensions, and on the other a life modelled on and shaped by Scandinavian culture. Both of those lives have suddenly been cut off, and many of us are standing with a severed thread in our hands. But Joan eased our sense of loss in advance by linking us all together, with silver and other things.

Sigrid Combüchen

\* I first met Joan Tate in 1976 when, a Managing Editor at Oxford University Press, I commissioned her to translate the second and third volumes of the Finland-Swedish children’s writer, Irmelin Sandman Lilius’ *Fru Sola* trilogy, a magical chronicle of a Finnish coastal town. Joan and Irmelin became, and remained, firm friends — I didn’t know then that developing a friendship was a frequent feature of Joan’s work as a translator — and for my part, I was invited to stay with her and her husband Clive in Shrewsbury. This piece of hospitality was also characteristic, I was to find out.

But it wasn’t until 1991 that my own real friendship with Joan began. We met, after many years, at an international PEN ceremony — where I discovered that she’d followed very closely my career after leaving OUP — and then shortly afterwards I myself moved to Shropshire. This meant that I could, and did, visit the Tates about every three weeks, and, feeling myself a neighbour, would talk to Joan on the telephone at least twice a week — right up to her last days. Joan kept a very strict working regimen, and, perhaps because of this, a lunch or dinner at her house had something about it of a welcome, joyful island or oasis in the course of a dedicated day.

“This is Joan Tate,” said a Danish

publisher, introducing her at a literary party, “she makes excellent mayonnaise!” Indeed she did — and many other things besides, particularly vegetable soup. Her food was delicious, served like an artist, very resourceful and always made with knowledge of her guest’s habits and tastes. (Like her own son and grandson I am a vegetarian.) In that it was of a piece with everything else that Joan did; she was fascinated by everyone she came across as an individual, she established a relationship with the creative part of that person. In my case she assiduously cut out articles I’d written from papers and filed them because she knew I was too disorganized to do it for myself, and would read manuscripts of a book at any stage of its growth. I’ve no doubt she was simultaneously helping many another in precisely this way. She was, in an ideological and a very practical sense, a real humanist, perhaps the finest example I have known.

That I shall miss her I know from the fact that I am missing her very much already, am often seized with a desire to ring her up and ask her opinion or advice on some matter, and then have painfully to remind myself that she is dead. Her influence on me has been inestimable, and it will continue.

Paul Binding

\* The fax machine would suddenly start clattering. After only two lines it was obvious the message was coming from Joan. Densely typed and packed with meaning, and here and there a question mark or an ironic marginal note in her forceful handwriting.

Or the phone would ring. That characteristic deep voice from Shrewsbury wanted to ask a question about some dialect phrase or other in Swedish. I remember especially an odd name for a wooden chair, a word that had cropped up in one of Kerstin Ekman’s novels. On that occasion I was just as baffled as Joan at first, but after some discussion we hit upon what it must mean, and Joan rapidly thought of an English

word that could mean something similar.

In the early 1990s I spent some years in London as Cultural Attaché at the Swedish Embassy, and met a lot of fascinating people with an interest in Sweden. My closest and warmest contacts were with those who were working on translations into English of Swedish literature, often in their spare time. They were and still are an altruistic and enthusiastic bunch, driven by their love of another language and another culture.

At the forefront of my British friends was Joan: her friendship would express itself in a little gift from her latest visit to the antiques fair, or a personalized photographic collage to celebrate a birthday. Her stylistic ability reached its zenith in her brief, ironic messages on a postcard or a fax. Our spiritual harmony registered itself over the North Sea in telephone conversations where we would both complain about the ravages caused by new liberalism all over the world.

Joan’s brusque exterior was a front masking her gentle and affectionate nature. The many music boxes dotted around the bookshelves at College Hill in Shrewsbury were not just a joke: they also reflected a person who had succeeded in combining within herself various tunes and cultures to form a harmonic whole.

Torsten Kälvemärk

\* Joan Tate, who, like John Donne, had an immoderate, hydroptic desire after human languages and learning, also had an enormous, hydroptic capacity for friendship. I first met her at a conference at Stanford University in the early 1980s; we liked each other at once; and she made me feel at once and ever since that I was of singular importance and interest in her life. I was of singular importance. So were all of her countless friends. This amazing gift for friendship, for immediate empathetic contact with another person of any station — greater even than her literary gifts — is the first of a plethora of virtues that I will always remember Joan for and miss her because of.

But I'll always be visited, too, by a recurring series of images with Joan at their center. In her living room in Shrewsbury, for instance, Clive pouring the sherry, Joan (cigarette in hand) bringing out the most recent book she'd read or was in the midst of translating — and the ensuing discussion. My sitting in a park in Tempe, Arizona, reading her translation of *Barnens ö* against the original in preparation for publication — and the ensuing discussion. The day trip to Ludlow Castle and Paul Binding that she and Clive and I undertook one weekend during the spring of 1997. And, of course, the ensuing discussion. And, also of course, the bestowing of the ceremonial, silver relish fork, which implement will forever adorn my desk.

Joan endlessly enriched my life and will continue to grace it. I will not cease being grateful for having known her.

Robert E. Bjork

\* Here are a few things I loved about Joan Tate.

She spoke her mind. She was directness itself. I don't know if she'd always been this way, but when I met her in 1983 it was clear the habit was well-established. We were at a seminar for literary translators. Joan discovered that one of the participants was not a native speaker of English. Here's how she found out. She said to him, "What's your native language?" Upon hearing the answer, she declared, "My dear boy, you have no business translating *anything!*"

Such directness must have benefitted the publishers for whom she evaluated Scandinavian books. Of a recent best-seller, she remarked in e-mail that she found it "very slight, amusing, rather slick and eminently sellable, though with little or no literary merit."

Joan knew what her priorities were and — what an inspiration! — seemed to live by them. At another conference, I ran into her at dinnertime. She asked how the sessions were going. Hadn't she gone to any? Oh,

no, she'd been in her room most of the time — what a glorious opportunity to *read*.

Joan was one of the most helpful people I've known: she shared her knowledge unstintingly. Before I learned that she was ill (from her, in characteristically direct e-mail), I sent her a question. It was only a few weeks before her death when she replied with a disquisition on the varieties of "pelargon" in Sweden and which ones did or did not correspond to "geranium."

The traits I've listed here are just parts, though, and the whole was far greater than their sum. If I were to try to give an overall impression of Joan to someone who never knew her, I'd say she was one of those people who are so completely alive that they make you realize by contrast how gray many "normal lives" are. And if it crossed your mind that perhaps your own life was somewhat gray, that thought did not survive long in Joan's company, because her incandescence made you shine a bit brighter too.

Roger Greenwald

\* What is a mentor? An inspiring colleague of unstinting generosity who puts everything else to one side when one needs help? A battle-worn companion to share laughter with over a late-night glass of whisky and a packet of cigarettes? A wry teller of home truths ("Your English is getting more and more peculiar: you must come and visit.")? Well, that is the kind of mentor Joan Tate was for me, and for many others.

Every translator, or at least those of us who are self-taught, needs to re-invent the job. Joan had done just that. She was primarily a writer, a pragmatist, a synthesist who rejected all translation theory — for her translation was a process that could never be explained; what was needed was talent and wide reading.

It seems to me that she was never happier than when she was able to help others. Especially when that happened thanks to "The Network".

"Of course I'm all right!" she would bark

down the telephone. "Either I'm all right, or I'm dead — and then you'll know about it."  
But knowing about it doesn't help my feelings of loss and bewilderment. Joan Tate lives on.

Inger Johansson

\* It is not always true that "whereof the heart is full thereof speaks the mouth". Joan materializes in my mind often, and because she is so unforgettable, never unexpectedly. Yet, speaking and writing about her seems so difficult. I should probably add "by now", because immediately after her death, I found it a comfort to reminisce about her persona and the way she lived, her paradoxical opinions and energizing presence. Now, as time has begun to distance the memories, they seem both more poignant and less easy to articulate. Making pilgrimages to Shrewsbury is somehow out of the question, though it was once such an attractive goal, made irresistible by the casual warmth of the welcome at 7 College Hill. Left is a great regret that I belong to the relative outsiders, who knew Joan's family and friends chiefly through her own narrative, and a sense of loss about the place she had created. Because she is no longer there, tending the plants, scolding and entertaining her guests, and gossiping with the world by fax and phone and email, the whole place and all the people in it have vanished out of my reach. Resentful at fate and disoriented by Joan's absence, I will remain for ever grateful that I once could call Joan Tate "my friend" and to the very limited extent she would allow, "my mentor" in the elusive world of literary translation.

Anna Paterson

\* "If you want to invite me for a conference, forget it," said Joan when we met for the first time in Guildford, in 1983. Nevertheless, it was mainly at conferences and seminars that I continued to meet Joan, the translator, writer and PEN-activist. It was never difficult to discover the human being behind the expert, however. Joan was not

only blessed with an ear for linguistic and literary nuances, she was also a very good listener. One autumn when I hinted almost as an afterthought that my workload could do to be a little less heavy, I received a fax with a sketch and handwritten description of the quickest and easiest way to get from Sweden House in Stockholm to College Hill in Shrewsbury.

In 1993 I was sent for information twelve pages of computer print-out with details of that year's Public Lending Right payment to Joan — the money paid to writers and translators in Great Britain calculated on the basis of the number of loans from public libraries. If you look up the entry on Joan in the Swedish Libris database, you will find 248 items. How on earth did she find the time to do it all? Few people have done more for Swedish literature in the English-speaking world, and I hope she realized how much we appreciated her work, which was outstanding both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view.

The last time we met was in a wine bar in Stockholm a few years ago. On that occasion our conversation was mostly about Indonesian shadow plays, and journeys we had made or would like to make. Once again she invited me to College Hill, and I regret to this day the fact that I never got round to accepting her invitation. But I still have that map as a souvenir of a unique woman, truth-sayer, prodigiously productive translator, but above all else a very warm-hearted and amusing friend.

Helen Sigeland

\* Last spring I arranged to stay a weekend in Shrewsbury with Joan Tate. I called her on a Friday morning to let her know I was setting off from London.

"You'd better not come," she said.

"What's happened?"

"Well, apparently I'm going to die in a few days," she said with a note of anger at the doctors who had told her so.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we sat through several long telephone calls.

Joan wanted to discuss what to do about her books — her parallel texts. She wanted terribly to set up some sort of translator's centre. I got the impression that Joan viewed death as an untimely distraction from her life, family and friends. She simply didn't have time for it.

Many people go into writing to make grand statements. Joan seemed simply to love her work for its own sake.

The only time she bristled a little at me was when I presumptuously suggested she should charge higher rates. "*Don't you start telling me about that!*" she said.

Joan took both young and old under her wing. She always had a piece of advice ready, if asked. And her response, when she gave it, was specific. When asked to look over a couple of poetry translations of mine, she offered: "*Too many was, were, the, and, like etc.*" Then came the punchline: "*...They slow down the poem, jar any rhythm, whereas in Swedish they become more succinct because of the definite article actually enhancing a noun, or rather giving it a better rhythm in the poem...*" Finally, her characteristic recourse to individuality: "*Don't take any notice of this if you disagree — you have to develop your own style and stick to it...*"

What made Joan so good was that she took infinite pains with details. On one occasion she called my attention to the many ways there are of saying 'yes' in Swedish: "*Ja, javisst, jaha, jaa breathing in and ja-a breathing out, ja with an upward or downward intonation. You can't keep translating it as 'yes of course'. People don't talk like that...*"

Although it seemed obvious, I had never thought of it before; whereas Joan viewed it as yet another curiosity of a language whose characteristics she monitored with unflinching interest.

Henning Koch

\* Three hundred words isn't much (aren't many) in which to memorialize Joan, the smoky voice I always heard in my head

through something like 18 years of consistently — no matter how long any particular hiatus might last — warm and newsy and chatty and funny letters and later e-mails, our correspondence that went on and on (like our sentences) from after we first met in the summer of 1982 until shortly before she died in June.

Better to let her do the talking. In an aerogram postmarked 14 October 1981, Joan explains: "...this is what in our family is called a rabble letter the rabble being the family when not at home and anyone of their friends is a rabbleraver... anyhow rabble letters are written like this on a typewriter and the next thing that comes into your head gets put down as the obstacles of sentence composition and grammar and punctuation have been eliminated really nasty rabble like chinese daughter sometimes does it like this which is murder to read and almost impossible to disentangle at times — but as she says is very economical on paper and a good antidote to writing chinese. . . ."

All that and the dance of the puppets along the stairs in the 250-year old (so she described them in a letter from the early '80s) house in Shrewsbury, which I visited in 1983 and 1988. And the flea markets. And our endless letters kvetching back and forth about American/English/Swedish publishing and cultural bureaucracies and organizations (American vs. English vs. International PEN included). And Uncle Ted, the bear of the house. And the bunnies and the guinea pigs and the frogs in the garden. And, short of my Swedish and English dictionaries over the years, the single most important resources Joan made me acquire, marching me into her local bookshop and insisting that I buy *The Wildflowers of Britain and Northern Europe* (Fitter, Fitter, and Blamey, published by Collins, 4th edition 1985), which she knew I could get a Swedish translation of — *Bonniers flora i färg: en fälthandbok* (Bonnier Fakta, 1983). . . . For all this, Joan, thanks, and love.

Rika Lesser

\* A marvellously happy memory of Joan — not untypical, I think, almost a double-strength version of a picture familiar to many of her friends — comes from a visit to Denmark, to which a bevy of translators from Danish had been invited. Joan kicked off by accepting conditionally: she must not be expected to attend any meetings or talks; she would, if they would have her on that basis, stay in her room, absorbing a vast pile of relevant literature which was bound to be made available to us, and she would be glad to come to meals and evening festivities. Needless to say, she and her conditions were accepted, and the first view I had of her when I arrived at the fine house, dedicated to literature, was of Joan in the inevitable brownish trousers and Breton fisherman-type top, springing to and fro down one of the long passages, arms linked behind their backs, in a joyful dance of greeting with an old friend, long missed.

As she will be.

Patricia Crampton.

\* I knew of Joan when I was at school round the corner and from that other towering mythical figure of the neighbourhood, Frank MacEachran, likewise polymath, linguist, lover of poetry and language, collector and teacher of “spells”. I can only regret that we worked with her as a translator for but the last ten years of her life because to have a bridge into Joan’s workshop was to have access to much, much more than a translation in a fraction of the time you expected it would take. There were those who held that her work was too swift, and one of those, the redoubtable Mary Sandbach, postponed for long years a close working association and very happy friendship which began too late with Harvill’s publishing Joan’s admirable translations of Ingmar Bergman’s novels. Joan herself had no time for grudges. She was the most generous of beings, most tireless in the cause of others, and what she did over five decades for Swedish authors and publishers cannot be guessed at because her circle of friends was so wide, and also

because she was so modest. She always put herself second, even her!

Her own literary achievements were brushed aside, and in defiance of a growl in my left ear I celebrate her Christian virtues: her unstinting generosity and hospitality, her sharing of reams of wise résumés, of counsel on bookselling, the gifted young, recipes, children’s books, plants, husbands, such a huge range of scholarly topics all sieved through that invariable sweetness of nature. Lord, how grateful Koukla and I have been to have known her, learned from her, supped with her forks.

Christopher McLehose

\* Joan Tate was unique in many respects. As a translator she not only undertook commissions from English and Swedish publishers, but she also translated on her own initiative Swedish books that appealed to her, without knowing whether her translation would ever be published in England. A lot of Swedish authors have had their novels translated into English in this way, and manuscripts have been passed round disinterested or reluctant publishers: some of them have been published eventually, at least as many haven’t but have nevertheless been useful and provided pleasure in various ways, not least for other translators.

I am certain Joan was proud of her work, even if she had a tendency to belittle her achievements. “I just translate,” she used to say; but “just translating” is of course a fundamental requirement if any literary work is going to cross linguistic boundaries and reach readers in other countries, and it plays a vital role in understanding other people and other cultures. I’m convinced that was a driving force behind Joan’s enthusiasm. She threw herself wholeheartedly into her work, and there is no doubt she made a major contribution to Swedish literature.

Joan may have meant a lot to Swedish literature, but she also meant a lot to her friends in the world of publishing: and there

were — and are — an awful lot of them. I will miss our discussions, usually about specific, concrete matters relating to translation or publishing; but they often went on to embrace existential problems, problems she used to tackle in her usual pungent but common-sensical way.

And I shall miss her amusing and ingenious faxes and e-mails, not to mention her little poems, which helped to make a hard day's work that little bit more bearable.

Joan has left behind an enormous vacuum.

Agneta Markås

\* It was fitting that Joan should die on the Swedish National Day. Her contribution to the promotion of contemporary Swedish literature was astounding. She herself did not like the word 'promotion' of course, but that is exactly what her tireless work amounted to. The selfless and often thankless task of translation almost became an obsession with her and her output will probably never be matched by any other member of SELTA. I doubt whether all the active members together could match her even. If she believed in a book she would translate it without a commission, in the hope of finding a publisher at a later stage. Her hunch often paid off. There were times when she could be a little acerbic about colleagues who worked part-time in other jobs. I think she felt I was cheating because I taught two days a week. She herself could not afford to pick and choose, she could not afford to spend days or weeks polishing and honing a script, and sometimes that meant that she had to part with a translation prematurely.

I used to meet Joan at various book launching parties from the mid eighties onwards. We had both started as writers in our own right, but she warned me that I would probably never write another book once I was hooked as a translator. I detected a note of regret in her warning. Her creative powers were used exclusively in the service of others. I found her honesty refreshing. She was also a very generous person and

often the first person to ring me up when there was a notice referring to my work in *The Bookseller* or *The Radio Times*. Joan did not have the academic world behind her, nor did she show any great respect for it. She was a lone fighter and she fought bravely and with enormous energy. I admired her and I feel sorry for the Swedish writers who will have to make do with a small band of — less than full-time — translators in the future.

Eivor Martinus

\* Joan Tate's name was suggested to me early on as a potential member of the new translation advisory committee at the Arts Council of Great Britain, which was set up in 1988. She took some persuading and through most of her years on it she grumbled! Ideally she would have liked us to meet in her book-lined house in Shrewsbury, as she increasingly found the journey to London and the overnight stay it usually entailed arduous and inconvenient. She queried the value of having a translator of Swedish commenting on an application to put a book of Chinese poems into English. She was impatient with bureaucracy and withering about political correctness. Yet Joan was unstinting in the time she gave to preparing for the meetings, reading long chunks of books in progress. She was humorous, warm, intelligent and robust — in many ways the perfect contributor to a committee discussion, though she will be turning in her grave to be so described. She prided herself on her non-conformity and yet she upheld the highest standards of literary and linguistic judgement.

I think that it was above all Joan's belief that human beings could speak to each other across cultures which kept her involved with the Arts Council. She was pragmatic enough to know that you need national institutions to bring about some of the objectives one sets oneself in life. She wanted to see more books in English translated from other languages, not only from Scandinavian literatures, and initially



I suspect she regarded the Arts Council as a necessary evil. I like to think that she became quite fond of us and I am certain that she shared our vision.

Jilly Paver, who administered the translation fund, and I, who oversaw it, regarded Joan with a mixture of awe and affection. Through her advocacy she ensured that many books were published in translation and that others were not, because they did not meet properly exacting standards. More than that, she was a key player in developing a national policy at the Arts Council for the promotion of literary translation. She was a great lady and we were proud to have worked with her.

Alastair Niven

\* Inger Johansson, chairperson of the translators' section of the Swedish Writers' Union, reminded me as we sat side by side in a small exhibition stand in the crowded Göteborg Book and Library Fair in September 2000, with a video recording of the television interview with Joan on one side of us and a giant computer screen with the text of her memoirs on the other, that Joan had once told us that any gathering of people, no matter in what context, was always of value, in that it gave us the opportunity to make contact with one another. Joan was a firm believer in networking long before the term was everyday lingo. So what more fitting tribute than that the translators' section should devote its very first hands-on demonstration of the translation process for the general public to Joan, to her texts and to her memory. The idea of the project was for people to get some idea of what a translator actually does, of the *process* of translation. Joan's English text therefore occupied the top half of the giant screen, which faced outwards to the passers-by, while on the bottom half the translation was actually coming into being before their very eyes. Some fifteen translators took turns, in shifts of about two hours apiece, over the four days of the fair, sitting at the computer and translating, more or less at sight and

with a large English-Swedish dictionary as their only on-paper tool, whatever bit of Joan's text happened to be in front of them when they took over their shift. The project turned out to have various fringe benefits beyond the original intention. Firstly, it brought a group of translators closer together in planning and carrying out the project. Not less importantly, it gave almost anyone who was interested enough to focus, through the general chaos and din of a trade fair, on the matter at hand, the opportunity to *participate* in the translation process. Translators have to think as they work (to many people's surprise), and almost inevitably when the translator of the moment paused to reflect, or to look up a word, someone in the "audience" offered a suggestion, or had a comment to make. The collective project expanded into a mass project, of which Joan could not but have approved, had she been present. Her spirit was very much with us, as we laughed and joked, and occasionally reacted sarcastically to remarks that fell upon our ears. We will miss her participation in the networks of our daily lives, but she is very much a part of us, and will remain so.

Linda Schenck

\* I fell in love with Joan the day I met her. We were at a translators' conference in Mariefred in 1981, and she just swept me off my feet. Strong, opinionated, clever, tireless, she was the kind of colleague and ally I was always looking for but rarely finding. There was simply no one in our little corner of the literary world more fiercely committed to translation, translators, and the working conditions of translators. But she was a rare find as a friend as well, because there was also no one more loyal, more generous, or more fun to talk to.

I saw her again in Palo Alto the next year and then in London, and then my wife and I visited Joan and Clive in Shrewsbury several times. The Tate house was a revelation. The more I saw of it, the more it

seemed to resemble Joan herself: a strict façade hiding a museum of curiosities and marvels — a little Smithsonian of literal and mental nooks and crannies, jammed with content, neatly organized, full of discoveries.

Joan was a resource, an education, a challenge, an entertainment, and an irreplaceable friend. She could be breathtakingly tough-minded and original. Some of her opinions struck me as loopy, but others were dazzling. She was prickly but sweet, sophisticated but naïve, exhausting but invigorating, dogmatic but open-minded, always in a hurry but always generous with her time, intellectually adventurous but rooted in a set of values that seemed immovable — and profoundly decent. She was (to confuse the metaphor yet further) a kind of thorn-covered cottage. Difficult to approach, but once through the door, you discovered that every room was equipped with hidden music boxes which you, as a friend, were invited to find and play.

Tom Teal

\* In 1990, when my late husband and I were struggling to acquire the correct visas and invitations necessary for a planned visit to England, Joan wrote *The Saga of Mudite and Vilnis* (with references to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*). It began like this:

“Once upon a time there were some human beings with funny names like lilius and tate or irmelin and carlgustaf and muddle and joan and clive who happened to come across each other because of funny things called books... One day the funny liliuses made friends with two funny people called mudite and vilnis in a country called latvia and one of them called mudite went to stay with the lilius family in finland...”

“Then because of the funny liliuses, funny joan started writing to the funny latvians, mostly about books, and thought it would be good if they came to england as they

were both translators and had never been to england...”

Joan was the first translator living and working abroad I ever got to know; fortunately, she happened to be a translator from the Scandinavian languages, like me. I learnt a lot from the way in which she worked, and at the same time it was a great comfort for me to realize that we shared the same views about the work of a translator. This gave me great self-confidence in my own translating.

I always admired Joan for her enormous capacity for work, her vast knowledge and her intellect. Her long letters about literary events and seminars she had attended, about magazines and books, about interesting Scandinavian writers — for me these were not only useful sources of information, but they also gave me consolation and great joy.

Her generosity and selflessness and understanding of others were unforgettable. “Books are food,” Joan used to say: how well she knew what such meals meant to her friends!

Joan became my friend, as dear a friend as a friend can be.

Mudite Treimane

\* Dear Josephine Esmerelda Dazzlefoot! I realize you won't have been able to take Adolfinia with you to the cloud you are now sitting on. I don't like having to accept that as fact, but I do understand that e-mails from you will no longer keep popping up on my computer screen two or three at a time every morning. Your dislike of her refractory predecessor, Adolf, is clear from the name you gave the machine and its limited powers of expression. On the other hand, you were very fond of Adolfinia with her six gigabytes of hard disc and her lightning-fast modem. I don't suppose your computer helpline in human form, Andy, had time to accompany you on your journey into the clouds.

Mind you, I expect you've already met up

again with Jimmy the Drain, your plumber and central heating expert who was writing his memoirs in his spare time. The mate who let you read through his latest chapters when he made his annual visits to keep the ancient pipework at 7CH in working order, and then was treated to the usual slap-up meal. It was only the other year you discovered that whenever he made those visits he'd always brought his wife with him, but she'd had to sit outside in the van and wait until he'd finished. That was because he was ashamed of the fact that the missus couldn't read or write. You immediately jumped up and fetched Mrs Harvey (which was their real name) and made her a guest of honour! And you still kept in touch with her even after Jimmy was promoted to maintain the heavenly pipework last year.

Another of your handymen, friendly Mr St.Claire, the clock specialist, is still active down here, and will no doubt miss the annual visit to service your clocks and have a natter, not to mention the more urgent emergency call-outs.

And who could fail to miss an e-mail correspondence in which messages had names like "kåjsa jäjnten" (case the joint), "blängsylta" (visual porridge), or "djuptrycksreducering" (entangled reduction)? Not to mention "poatoes" (with one 't'). It's enough to give a man withdrawal symptoms.

Kalle.

P.S. You didn't like your three real first names. Let's stick with the fantasy ones. K.  
Karl Haskel

\* The last time I saw Joan (we spoke on the phone several times a week) was about a year ago. "Laurie Thompson, fatter than ever," was her greeting. "Actually, I've lost three kilos since I last saw you," I retorted.

"Oh no you haven't," was her typical response.

It was not difficult to understand why some people were daunted by Joan, but behind that uncompromising front was a surprisingly warm, generous, hospitable and helpful — even lovable [I never thought I would write that] person.

It is significant that Joan made so many friends all over the world. She had no time for small talk or pleasantries, and although she could waffle on vaguely for hours, she was very good at discussing and uncovering subtleties of a specific text. Authors appreciated this, of course; and her willingness to help and advise fellow translators, and to act as mentor and endlessly hospitable friend to those who sought her assistance, has become legendary.

Telephone conversations with Joan as her end approached were desperately worrying and yet uplifting to the last. "I wish these confounded medical people would tell me the truth," she would say. "It's obvious I've got something awful, but I must know if I'm going to die next week or whether I can hang on for a couple more years. I've got translations in progress, and I need to tell my clients if I can meet their deadlines."

We spoke minutes before she was rushed to hospital for the last time. "Make sure my books serve a useful purpose," she said. "I have all my translations shelved alongside the originals. If we can get others to donate their translations and the originals as well, that would be a terrific resource for future translators. Try to make sure that happens, it's the most important thing of all."

We'll do our best, Joan.

Laurie Thompson.

Joan Eames was born in Tonbridge, Kent, on 23 September 1922. Her father was a housemaster at Tonbridge School, but Joan was educated at the progressive, co-educational Frensham Heights in Farnham, Surrey. She was an avid reader from an early age, but liked to claim that her main achievements at school were athletic. In the autumn of 1939 she travelled to Sweden with the intention of staying for three months with a pen-friend near Gävle and learning to ski and skate, but the Second World War broke out and Joan was trapped in Sweden until 1942. Faced with having to survive in a foreign country, she moved to Stockholm, and to temporary work as a child-minder, house maid, gardener, and reading English literature aloud for an upper-class Swedish lady, the amiable widow of an actor. Joan borrowed copies of *Vecko-Revyn* and taught herself to understand written Swedish as well as immersing herself in the spoken language, and eventually graduated to borrowing full-length books by Verner von Heidenstam and Selma Lagerlöf. In the autumn of 1940 she enrolled on a course at the CGI (Central Institution for Gymnastics) and qualified as a teacher of gymnastics in the spring of 1942. She had been earning her keep by giving English lessons, but was now offered a post by the press department of the British Embassy, scanning Swedish newspapers. One autumn night in 1942 she finally found herself aboard a British courier aeroplane, and after a bumpy flight landed in Scotland the next morning, and was eventually reunited with her family. Joan spent the rest of the war as a uniformed air raid warden, and also worked in schools, youth clubs and summer camps. She married Clive Tate, an agricultural adviser and later a conservationist, in November 1944, and the couple had three children: Jane, Sarah and Peter. From 1953 onwards they made their home in Shrewsbury. Besides continuing to read avidly, both in English and Swedish, Joan began writing books for teenagers and stories for English-language books in Sweden, and also developed an interest in puppetry, especially south-east Asian shadow theatre. She built up a substantial collection of shadow-figures, and travelled to Indonesia and Thailand to see performances. This interest led her to write an as yet unpublished book on the subject. Joan re-visited Sweden in the 1960s, and besides continuing to write her own books, she embarked on translating books of all kinds from Swedish, and later also from Danish and Norwegian. She also became one of the most frequently used freelance publishers' readers, advising on Scandinavian literature. Her translating gradually took over completely, and she was rarely able to find time to write books of her own. Joan's output was prodigious: she noted in an article published in 1995 that she had translated 186 books, while data discovered by the family in her computer suggests the total was over 200 by the time of her death. The names of authors Joan translated reads like a roll call of all the important Scandinavian prose writers of the modern era, and includes Kerstin Ekman, Sara Lidman, Astrid Lindgren, Sigrid Combüchen, P O Enquist, P C Jersild, Ingmar Bergman, Agneta Pleijel, Sven Lindqvist, Per Wästberg and Kjell Espmark, to name but a few of the Swedes on her list. And Joan didn't only translate their books: in many cases she became close personal friends with them. Among the many awards she received was a major translation prize from the Swedish Academy, and she was made an Officer of the Order of the Polar Star. She was a founder member of SELTA (the Swedish-English Literary Translators' Association) and on the editorial board of *Swedish Book Review*, besides being active in other translators' organizations, the Arts Council, PEN International, and a large number of more local causes dear to her heart — in the 1960s and 70s, for instance, when Shrewsbury found itself without a bookshop, Joan rallied local support and pestered potential funding providers until she and her friends in the Shrewsbury and District Arts Association could start one of their own. In 1999 Swedish Television broadcast a programme about Joan and her translating career, made by Karl Haskel at the Tate home in Shrewsbury. She worked with tireless energy and discipline even after being diagnosed as suffering from cancer in the spring of 2000, and carried on translating until she died on 6 June, 2000.