



Five different languages gave birth to Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, Ivan Turgenev's *First Love*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World* and the anonymous *Beowulf*. While each volume derives from a unique national tradition, the miracle of translation means that the five works, from every corner of Europe, are now accessible to modern readers.

Literary translators generally aim to produce texts in the contemporary language, but within a formal register, free from usage likely to become dated. The reasons are both practical and theoretical: many translations have a long shelf-life; it is unlikely that their creators fully master the idiom of past ages; and readers, quite reasonably, prefer versions that reflect their own time and place.

The respective translators of these Folio Society editions – Michael Hofmann, Joseph Laredo, Isaiah Berlin, Helen R. Lane and Seamus Heaney – come with distinguished literary, linguistic and professional credentials. All deploy the wide range of resources required of cross-border decipherers and decoders. All navigate away from the rocks and whirlpools of 'false friends' (foreign lookalikes), cultural misunderstandings and alien turns of phrase, and towards a natural-sounding text, with rhythm, balance, flow, variation of tone, even assonance, humour and dialectical variation. Each is an astute observer of the source culture, but deeply immersed in English literature. The amount of work involved in 'creating' the thousands of sentences that first tease out and then 'trans-late' (carry over) the original meaning, before finally becoming increasingly fluent and polished with the successive drafts, must have been immense.

Each in their own way thus produces a literary work with a distinctive voice, one that remains faithful to its origin but at the same time enjoys an independent existence. All five translations will surely stand the test of time.