

## Translating Berlin #7 Simeonstraße

1. **Starter activity: What do you know about Berlin?**
  - a) Name five facts about Berlin.
  - b) Name one cultural connection between Germany and the UK.
  - c) Name three English writers in the 1920s.
  
2. **Read the English text below about Simeonstraße.**
  - a) Where was the street located?
  - b) Why was the street significant in the 1920s in Berlin?
  - c) Who was associated with the street, and why?
  
3. **Present Simeonstraße to your neighbour or group. Your presentation should contain the answers to 2a), b), and c).**



People queuing to swap firewood for potato peelings – a favourite trade on Simeonstraße. Photograph by Carl Weinrother, 1930s © bpk/Carl Weinrother

Simeonstraße was a typical working-class street of old Berlin located in the district of Kreuzberg. In 1930, Christopher Isherwood lived for a period at Simeonstraße 4, with the family of his teenage lover Walter Wolff. A fictional account of his experiences, titled 'The Nowaks', was published in the first issue of the British anti-fascist literary magazine *New Writing*, edited by John Lehmann. The story, which captures the harsh domestic life of working-class families in the city, then became part of *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939).

In Berlin's large tenement blocks, revealingly known as *Mietskasernen* or rent barracks, wealthier families typically occupied apartments in the front, while poorer tenants were crammed in less spacious – often downright insalubrious – accommodations in the many inner courtyards. Inner courtyards are a distinctive and now much beloved feature of Berlin's urban landscape. Isherwood gave a vivid description of the life of the inner courtyards on Simeonstraße. The experience of social injustice in Berlin made a strong impression on Isherwood, W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender. All raised in privileged circumstances in Britain, these writers experienced working-class life for the first time in Berlin, often introduced by young prostitutes and male lovers. Stefano Evangelista.



# Arthur Symons

4. Who was Arthur Symons? Scan the QR code to find out.

The decadent poet and critic Arthur Symons (1865–1945) visited Berlin in 1891. He left a fragmentary account of the city's nightlife and a poem about a Polish girl named 'Emmy'. Stefano Evangelista.



Arthur William Symons. Photograph by Frederick Henry Evans, sepia platinum print, circa 1895–1900. NPG P104  
© National Portrait Gallery, London

# Translation Theory

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## 5. Answer the following questions in pairs or in your group:

- a) Can you think of a German or English word or phrase that you cannot translate verbatim (exactly word for word) into the other language? What strategy would you use to translate it?
- b) Would you like to become a professional translator? Why or why not? What do you think would be the most interesting aspects of being a translator?

## 6. Read and discuss the text on translation theory.

- a) What is the difference between micro- and macro-level translation?
  - b) What is the difference between domestication and foreignisation?
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Translation theory often distinguishes between micro- and macro-level translation. The micro level refers mainly to the accurate translation of single words, terms, or shorter segments of a text from the source language into the target language. In this context, the emphasis is placed on linguistic accuracy. For the sake of precision, decisions on the micro level are often made independently.

The macro level, on the other hand, rather looks at a text in its entirety and takes into account not only linguistic accuracy, but also social and cultural aspects. For the sake of consistency, decisions on a macro level are often made for the entire text. How can local dialects be translated from one language into another? Should personal names be translated in such a way that their meaning can be understood in the target language? And how should certain cultural references be approached, especially those that foreign readers may not understand? All of these questions belong to macro-level translation.

Translation decisions, whether on the micro or macro level, can always be located between the poles of domestication and foreignisation. Domestication means not only translating a text, but also adapting its content to the culture of the target language. Foreignisation, on the other hand, means keeping a translation as close to the original as possible, both in terms of content and style.

# In der Simeonstraße

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## 7. Read the German text 'In der Simeonstraße'.

- With whom associated Isherwood in Berlin?
- What social status represented Simeonstraße?

## 8. Translate the text into English. Choose:

- Translate the text directly.
  - Rewrite the text in simpler German. Next, translate your simpler version into English.
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### Glossary

zunutze machen	to take advantage of something
Mobilität (f.)	mobility
etwas an den Tag legen	to display something
Zugang (m.)	access
heruntergekommen	bedragged
Mietskaserne (f.)	block of flats

In Berlin machte sich Isherwood seinen Status als Ausländer zunutze und legte im Vergleich zu seinem Leben in Großbritannien eine deutlich höhere soziale Mobilität an den Tag. Durch seine Arbeit als Englischlehrer erhielt er zum einen Zugang zu den Häusern der Reichen. Zum anderen verschafften ihm seine wechselnden Liebschaften einen Einblick in die Welt der Arbeiterklasse. [...] Isherwood wohnte sogar eine Zeit lang bei der Familie eines seiner Geliebten in einer heruntergekommenen Mietskaserne in der Simeonstraße, die in einem besonders armen Teil Kreuzbergs lag.

Stefano Evangelista, Gesa Stedman.

# Emmy

9. Read the excerpt from Symons's poem *Emmy* (1892) and highlight all the words you know how to translate already.

10. Translate the poem into German. Choose:

a) Translate the poem directly.

b) Rewrite the poem as prose without rhymes. Next, translate your prose version into German.

## Glossary

air	here: Ausstrahlung (f.), Auftreten (n.)
haggard	hager
bud	Knospe (f.)
garland	Kranz (m.)
to wrong somebody	jemandem unrecht tun

*Emmy's exquisite youth and her virginal air,  
Eyes and teeth in the flash of a musical smile,  
Come to me out of the past, and I see her there  
As I saw her once for a while.*

[...]

*There with the women, haggard, painted and old,  
One fresh bud in a garland withered and stale,  
She, with her innocent voice and her clear eyes, told  
Tale after shameless tale.*

*And ever the witching smile, to her face beguiled,  
Paused and broadened, and broke in a ripple of fun,  
And the soul of a child looked out of the eyes of a child,  
Or ever the tale was done.*

*O my child, who wronged you first, and began  
First the dance of death that you dance so well?  
Soul for soul: and I think the soul of a man  
Shall answer for yours in hell.*

Arthur Symons, 'Emmy, Silhouettes (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1892).

# Plenary

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## **11. Talk about your translation process.**

- a) Did any difficulties or problems arise?
  - b) Which translation strategies did you use ...
    - I. ... to translate from German into English?
    - II. ... to translate from English into German?
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