



The Stephen Spender Prize 2017
in association with **theguardian**

zag ik de doodstil staande wit
I saw the stock-still silent w

Так начинаются цыг
This is the way their travel

y quitará el póster donde la inf
and remove the posters from whe

Carand patru geaman ae mari, pline
Carrying great suitcases full of uselo

denevérek cikáznak az a
bats zigzag over the wr

einer alten Sprache. Versprechenssc
of an old language, heavy with prom

for poetry in translation

The Stephen Spender Prize 2017 for poetry in translation

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Winners and Commended

Winner of the 14-and-under category



Katherine Linaker
'This is the Way'
by BL Pasternak
(Russian)

14-and-under commended

Hannah Gillot
'The Anxious Lotus
Flower'
by Heinrich Heine
(German)

Natasha Symes
'On our Way Home
from School'
by Jacques Prévert
(French)

Warsan Zubeir Masabo
'You will get Wealth
from the Farm'
Traditional
(Swahili)

Winners of the 18-and-under category



First

Ambah Brondum-Christensen
'Per Diem'
by Daphne Pratt
(Krio)



Second

Euan McGreevy
'Architectural Pride'
by Sergio C Fanjul
(Spanish)



Third

Marina Kisluik
'A Mistake'
by Marina Tsvetaeva
(Russian)

18-and-under commended

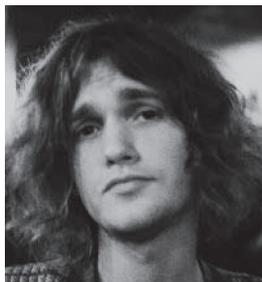
Isobel Sanders
'Elegy 3.8'
by Propertius
(Latin)

Winners of the Open category



First

Gabi Reigh
'The Traveller'
by Marin Sorescu
(Romanian)



Second

Andrew Fentham
'Balaton Accident'
by András Gerevich
(Hungarian)



Third

Antoinette Fawcett
'Wind-still'
by Leo Vroman
(Dutch)



Highly commended

Deirdre McMahon
'Beneath The World A Storehouse Of Stars'
by Marica Bodrožić
(German)

Open category commended

Stewart Sanderson
'Charm to Quiet a
Crying Baby'
Anonymous
(Akkadian)

Kevin Maynard
'Building Walls'
by Liu Kezhuang
(Chinese)

Antoinette Fawcett
'Journey into the Known'
by Han van der Vegt
(Dutch)

Taking over the reins for the Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation from Robina Pelham Burn has been a wonderful experience. Submissions for the prize ranged from aged 11 to 93 and the languages and dialects have been truly global, from Akkadian to Swahili by way of Krio and Romanian. Many entrants were from UK residents translating from their mother tongue into English and, while the European languages were healthily represented, it was wonderful to encounter poems from less accessible languages.

My thanks go to the judges, Sean O'Brien, Olivia McCannon and Margaret Jull Costa – conscientious, thoughtful and good humoured. This year the prize was generously sponsored by the Old Possum's Practical Trust, the Sackler Trust, the John S Cohen Foundation and the Rothschild Foundation; I am very grateful for the continued support and encouragement, and thank you to our media partner, *The Guardian*.

Suzanne Joinson
Director of the Stephen Spender Trust

Judges' comments



What first struck me was the sheer variety of languages and also how many of the entrants were translating from their mother tongue, having been brought up bilingually or having come here as children or having grandparents who spoke that other language. The most popular source languages were still Spanish, French and German, but it was gratifying to see such a multitude of other languages.

The unanimous choice for winner of the 14-and-under section was Katherine Linaker for her version of 'This is the way' by Boris Pasternak. Katherine chose not to rhyme, but to use instead a 4-stressed syllabic line. The result is strikingly confident and compelling, with that insistently repeated 'This is the way' drawing the reader on to that unexpected last line: 'This is the way that true poets are made.' Hannah Gillot, on the other hand, chose to keep to the rhyme scheme in her subtle translation of Heine's 'The anxious lotus flower', and she remarks on the word choices imposed by both rhyme and rhythm. In her comments on her appropriately playful version of Jacques Prévert's 'On our way home from

school', Natasha Symes also observes how rhyme often forces the translator away from the original vocabulary and into new discoveries.

Ambah Brondum-Christensen's version of Krio poet Daphne Pratt's 'Per Diem' is impressively inventive, managing to preserve the sly humour of the original, while bringing the whole poem smartly up to date and, in effect, creating a brand-new poem. Euan McGreevy's translation of young Spanish poet Sergio C. Fanjul's 'Architectural pride' maintains the simplicity of the original, but very wisely opts for calling the 'city' 'she' rather than 'it', thus breathing necessary life into the inanimate. Marina Kisluik, in her translation of Marina Tsvetaeva's 'A Mistake', deftly negotiates the seemingly simple language. I particularly liked her alliterative opening lines: 'A flying snowflake,/ Falling like a shooting star.'

The winner of the Open Category is Gabi Reigh's translation of the Romanian poet Marin Sorescu's 'The traveller', a poem that revels in discomfort and danger, and Gabi effortlessly captures the poet's comic/ironic delight in precariousness: 'I am not well unless/ Confused, uncomfortable,/ Standing on one foot on a blister/ Clutching on a

rail, hanging from a windowsill...' She skilfully maintains the driving rhythm and the helter-skelter imagery leading us ever onwards. Andrew Fentham's version of Hungarian poet András Gerevich's 'Balaton accident' is equally brilliant at replicating the unremitting grimness of the poem's subject matter, with some wonderful imagery, for example: 'the faces in the crowd/ rearranged with grief'. And I loved all of Antoinette Fawcett's translations from the Dutch, particularly 'Windstill' which makes captivating use of assonance and alliteration to evoke the stillness of the original: 'I saw the stockstill silent white/cow-parsley blooming by the ditch/in a deathly hush...' I was also very taken with Deidre McMahon's bold translation of the German poet Marica Bodrožić's 'Beneath the world a storehouse of stars', with her free and fertile use of alliteration, as well as the English neologisms she invents to match those in which the poet herself delights – 'falcon-light', 'everland', 'untetheredness'.

My thanks to all the entrants for providing us with such riches, for the poems and the commentaries.

Margaret Jull Costa



This was my first year on the judging panel, and I was delighted to discover so many accomplished submissions across such a wide spread of languages and eras. I especially enjoyed work that engaged deeply with the translation process, had a genuine 'felt' presence, or nourished poetic innovation in English. I'll look forward to seeing entrants continue to reach out across the globe next year, bringing across contemporary writers, or voices from parts of the world, and the past, that speak to our times.

In the 14-and-under category, Katherine Linaker's translation of Pasternak, 'This is the Way', stood out for its beautifully sustained handling of metre. I appreciated her thoughtful commentary, charting the transformation of uncertainty into the search for possibility. I admired Hannah Gillot's rendering of Heine's 'Die Lotosblume', maintaining form without compromising the flow of the line, and Natasha Symes' inventive and unforced version of Prévert's 'En sortant de l'école', while Warsan Zubeir Masabo brought over a

long traditional poem (Swahili), 'You will get Wealth from the Farm', with limpidity and warmth.

In the 18-and-under category, many candidates engaged wholeheartedly with the complexities of translation, producing lively and original poems in English. We were impressed by the fiery political energy of Ambah Brondum-Christensen's 'Per Diem', and her confident strategies for turning the differences between Krio and English to her advantage. In Euan McGreevy's restrained and effective translation of Sergio C. Fanjul (Spanish), his considered importation of gendered pronouns gave him new possibilities in English. Isobel Sanders gave us a punchy version of Propertius, confidently treading the fine line of modernisation, while Marina Kisluik thought and felt her way into Tsvetaeva, facing the challenges with honesty and insight.

The judges unanimously selected Gabi Reigh's translation of Marin Sorescu, 'The Traveller' (Romanian), as the winner in the Open Category. We admired her ear for the restless tone of the poem, her skill in creating a convincing texture out of unsettling shifts

and unexpected associations: '...the telegrams are encrypted/And you have forgotten the code of leaves'. Andrew Fentham's sure-footed rendering of András Gerevich, from the Hungarian, was remarkable for its attentiveness to the 'new confusion in the poet's work' and its holding of nerve through a series of disturbing images. We were all struck by a set of atmospheric, nuanced poems from the Dutch, translated by Antoinette Fawcett – her 'Wind-still' took third place, with her 'Journey into the Known' also commended.

Deirdre McMahon's rendering of Marica Bodrožić (German) was a pleasure to read for the new-coined quality of its imagery, and the syntactic tension of lines hanging together by a thread. I was moved by Stewart Sanderson's 'Charm to Quiet a Crying Baby' from the Akkadian, speaking to us across the centuries, vividly and with great humanity, and by the human detail and realism of 'Building Walls' in Kevin Maynard's reconstructed version of a Song dynasty poem.

Thank you all for entering!

Olivia McCannon



Perhaps the most striking feature of this year's entries for the Stephen Spender Translation Competition was the translators' widespread preference for poems that were not obvious choices, either because they were less familiar pieces by internationally famous poets or because the poets translated are less familiar or indeed new to Anglophone readers. The latter is one of the most useful and delightful aspects of translation: a new imagination comes into view, with the promise of more waiting to be discovered and enjoyed beyond the immediate sample.

In the 14-and-under category, the winner Katherine Linaker delivered a mature and assured translation of Boris Pasternak's 'This is the way...', maintaining the momentum of the piece through the diverse images and moments of recognition that shape the imagination of a poet. Hannah Gillot made an impressive showing with her rendering of Heine's 'The Lotus Flower', which was marked by rhythmic confidence and consistency of tone. Natasha Symes dealt boldly and enjoyably with Prévert's 'On Our Way Home from School'. It was also refreshing to read Warsan Zubeir Masabo's commended translation from a traditional

Swahili poem, 'You Will Get Wealth from the Farm', a trenchant example of a kind of wisdom poetry which English seems not to have produced.

Winner in the 18-and-under category was Ambah Brondum-Christensen's translation from the Krio of Daphne Pratt. 'Per Diem: the Need for Expenses' is a dry and damningly funny address to those (of all nations) who are never off the political / diplomatic gravy train. 'Architectural Pride', in second place, translated by Euan McGreevy from the Spanish of Sergio Fanjul, offers a different but equally intriguing challenge – to sustain a tone of deliberate ordinariness while observing fate taking its course.

The effect is rather reminiscent of Cavafy. In third place came Marina Kisluk's free-verse version of Marina Tsvetaeva's 'A Mistake'. Isobel Sanders's raunchy contemporizing of the battle of the sexes in Propertius 3.8. was highly commended.

The Open Category produced some particularly impressive work, which made the judges' task more difficult – always a welcome state of affairs. The winner was Gabi Reigh, with her version of Marin Sorescu's 'The Traveller'. In this hilarious account of the misfortunes which make the traveller feel as it were at home, pessimism becomes a form of affirmation, black humour a liberation. In the grim hotel, 'The air smells of prison, the window is nailed shut. / And it would be imprudent to open it because the beggars can jump.' The word 'imprudent' is in the original:

here in English it gives the poem a whole repertoire of irony. Winner of the second prize was Andrew Fentham with his translation of the Hungarian poet András Gerevich's 'Balaton Accident'. This grim and meticulous poem about a fatal crash introduced me to a poet I want to read more of. The unyielding quality of attention slightly recalled Gottfried Benn. There is a documentary dimension here, but one shadowed by the ambiguous position of the speaker. In third place, Antoinette Fawcett offered a limpid rendering of the Dutch Leo Vroman's pastoral memory 'Wind-Still'. Ms Fawcett was also commended for her arresting translation of Hans van der Vegt's witty and elegant poem of metaphysical enquiry, 'Journey into the Known'.

Highly commended was Deirdre McMahon with 'Beneath the World a

Storehouse of Stars', translated from the German of Marica Bodrožić, a poet from the former Yugoslavia. It's a fascinating and disorientating piece, dramatizing its ancestral images from 'an old language, heavy with promises.' Also commended was Stewart Anderson's version of an anonymous Akkadian poem 'Charm To Quiet a Crying Baby', which includes the irresistible couplet 'You have woken the house god! / The bison is awake!'

At the risk of stating the obvious, the contact with poetry in other languages is an invaluable part of literary and of broader cultural activity. It delights; it informs; it helps to provoke the wide, disinterested curiosity necessary to the conduct of the examined life, particularly at a time like this, when bland ignorance seems to have begun to regard itself as respectable. Translators, please continue your work.

Sean O'Brien

Так начинают. Года в два...

Так начинают. Года в два
От мамки рвутся в тьму мелодий,
Щебечут, свищут, - а слова
Являются о третьем годе.

Так начинают понимать.
И в шуме пущенной турбины
Мерещится, что мать - не мать,
Что ты - не ты, что дом - чужбина.

Что делать страшной красоте
Присевшей на скамью сирени,
Когда и впрямь не красть детей?
Так возникают подозренья.

Так зреют страхи. Как он даст
Звезде превысить досяганье,
Когда он - Фауст, когда - фантаст?
Так начинаются цыгане.

Так открываются, паря
Поверх плетней, где быть домам бы,
Внезапные, как вздох, моря.
Так будут начинаться ямбы.

Так ночи летние, ничком
Упав в овсы с мольбой: исполнься,
Грозят заре твоим зрачком.
Так затевают ссоры с солнцем.

Так начинают жить стихом.

BL Pasternak

This is the Way

This is the way they begin, at two -
Torn away from their mother's love
They croon and whistle a shadowy tune.
Their words are formed by the age of three.

This is the way they begin to learn -
To hear in the roar of an engine's noise
That 'mother' is not mother at all,
That 'you' are not you, that 'home' is unknown.

This is the way they begin to suspect -
When, upon meeting a beauty they fear
And they ask, as they sit on a lilac-bench,
'Why do you steal the mind of a child?'

This is the way that fears start to grow,
When one man gives hope to aspiring stars.
When is he demon, when is he dreamer?
This is the way their travels begin.

This is their way to the open sky,
Above the walls where no houses stand.
A sudden breeze that sighs like the sea
Is the way their rhythms will start to beat.

This is the way they see light summer nights
Fall on their knees face-down in a field,
Then threaten and warn the sun to rise.
This is the way that their quarrels begin.

This is the way that true poets are made.

*Translated from the Russian
by Katherine Linaker*

Katherine Linaker's commentary

My mother is of Russian origin and has brought my sister and me up bilingually; she introduced me to Pasternak and told me something about his troubles with the authorities. When I first read the poem it seemed abstract; you don't really know what the poem is talking about until the last line, which could have a variety of meanings: "This is the way they start to live with poems", "This is the way poems start to live" or "This is the way poets start to live". As a result my first literal translation of the poem seemed confusing, like a set of unconnected statements.

But once the meaning became clearer the style evolved. I decided I could not achieve a realistic-sounding rhyme scheme to match the Russian; instead I developed a four-stressed syllabic beat to give some regularity. Repeating the phrase "This is the way..." created a rhythm and link between each stanza.

The poem gave me a number of problems. The word "Так" literally means "that's" but this monosyllabic word didn't fit in with the four-stress rhythm of each line. So instead I had to find different ways of saying "In this way" or "That's how". In the fifth stanza there is no indication that Pasternak is talking

about the rhythms or the rhythms of poems; he seems to be describing the "iambics" of poems in an abstract way. I decided the idea would be clearer if I added "their".

One particular issue was how to translate "Фауст" – literally "Faust". I thought that many young people reading the poem might not straight away make the link between Faust (a scholar from a German legend who was so dissatisfied with his life that it led to him giving his soul to the devil in exchange for unlimited worldly pleasures) and the idea of a demon, or a person with no moral integrity. Therefore I had to simplify it and make it clearer.

Pa Diem

Yu wan bay Masidiz Benz?
Jes bigin go wɔkshop, semina ɛn kɔnfrɛns
Di po pipul den de kray
Den nɔ ge it fɔ bay.
Nɔ lisin to dem
Wans yu get yu pa diem

Wen yu kɔmɔt di kɔnfrɛns
Yu dɔn kapu bɔku sens
Kam naw kan 'sensitayz' wi
Den pikin den angri
Nɔ bisin bɔt dem
Wans yu get yu pa diem

Naw rayt bɔku pepa
Put den ɔl wansayna
If eni fitay wan aks yu
Us gud di kɔnfrɛns du,
Nɔ bɔda ansa dem
Jes pɔkit yu pa diem

Yu nɔ go kɔnfrɛns fɔ ɛp yu kɔntri
Yu go kɔnfrɛns fɔ ge bɔku mɔni
Adɔnkia udat de sɔfa
Dat noto yu yon palava
Gɔd nɔ put yu de fɔ ɛp dem
Gɔd put yu de fɔ get – pa diem

Per Diem: The Need for Expenses

Does that Rolls-Royce Phantom elude you and yours?
Sign up for workshops, seminars and conferences
The cycle, vicious, pitiful;
Foodbanks boom
Don't listen, clutch your signature Hindmarch!
Focus on – Per Diem

Are you bursting with conference canapes and champagne?
Nod along to lectures, childhood obesity and healthy eating;
Vegetables, cost more, than doughnuts;
Hungry little mouths
Don't worry about that, fix later; claim expenses!
Pursue your – Per Diem

Retirement planning, endless options: Malta or Portugal?
Your white papers are copious, smeared with the dust of disregard -
Oppose, dare, question.
Sisyphian conference
No comment, classified. Triple Lock decided!
Submit your – Per Diem.

Conference presence, your pretend patriotism; helping your country?
Attend, submit expenses and master those back room deals
DWP, decide, fit to work;
Garrick, Bullingdon; crowd control – the status quo
Reekie, Sanderson, Bottrill are not my problem!
Exist for – Per Diem

Afta ol yu no bikful
Yu go wokshap fo it belful
Den disples den de day
Wei, day de olsay
No wori bot dem
Enti yu get yu pa diem?

Wans yu get yu pa diem
Oltin orayt
No lisin to dem
No bisin bot dem
No wori bot dem
No sori fo dem
Jes enjoy yu pa diem

Go semina olsay
Yu go eksplen we yu go bifo say
Go konfrans oltem
Wande yu go eksplen bot den pa-diem
Sonten yu go si Lazaros
Bot na ya, enjoy yusef fos

Daphne Pratt

Stupid enough to go after corporation tax?
Workshops, your entitlement to elusive peace of mind
Services cut, mental health, decline;
Death clasps unsightly rough sleepers close
I don't worry about them!
Protect your – Per Diem

As long as levels of parliamentary expenses continue to rise
Hard work will see us right!
Icecaps melt, don't listen to them
Don't mind them
Don't worry about them...
I don't pity the scroungers, nor does Osborne!
Enjoy your - Per Diem

Attend seminars, fact find around the globe
Edit the message for the masses chancellor
Just keep conferencing
White wash memoirs
Miracles happen, my knighthood beckons!
Carpe diem;
Expenses – per diem

*Translated from the Creole
by Ambah Brondum-Christensen*

Ambah Brondum-Christensen's commentary

I decided to translate this particular poem because it focuses on corruption and lack of social responsibility. I immediately saw parallels to my assessment of British politics.

The main problem I encountered was that the use of the second person in Krio is more intimate than its use in English. Because of this my translation was sometimes inconsistent. I also found it impossible to directly translate from a language that revels in implied meaning and very short sentence structures. The tone of voice and body language communicates as much as words do, much more than in English. Poetry is traditionally a spoken not literary discipline

in Sierra Leone. Poets are primarily performers and celebrated as such.

My approach to the artistic translation was to preserve its key message but make it relevant to the British audience. I did so by referencing topical issues and tragedies like the surnames of three people who took their lives due to benefit cuts, our prime minister's favourite designer handbag, and former chancellor turned editor.

I decided to focus on rhythm rather than rhyme and to maintain a line in most verses in the first person. I thought this would introduce the reasoning of the politician/official as a discordant note throughout.

The use of dramatic verbs and adjectives interspaced with clinically mundane commentary is aimed at mimicking the fickleness of the news cycle and public attention to social injustice.

I also highlight the appearance of action when in reality there isn't any by presenting verbs in a different way. 'Keep conferencing' instead of 'Attend conferencing'. Death is the only thing that actually does something in the whole poem.

The aim is to leave the reader feeling dissatisfied, outraged and slightly mesmerised by the repetitive use of 'Per Diem'.

Orgullo Arquitectónico

Ahí donde vives vivió gente,
no les oyes, ya se han ido,
dejaron vacíos jarrones y camas.
Tú estás ahí y eres tú mismo.

Otros
cada día amasan pan, sale otro sol,
se renueva cada célula, tu cuerpo
entero va cambiando, mañana
otro brazo, otro pie, otra forma de pensar
las mismas cosas.

Sin embargo,
la ciudad, con su orgullo arquitectónico
de hormigón armado y de cristal
siempre es la misma:
nos va acogiendo, nos va dejando hueco
dentro de ella, nos ve morir indiferente.

Alguien vendrá después de ti,
y quitará el póster donde la infancia duerme,
pintará de un color que no es el tuyo,
alguien extraño vendrá con su vida aparatosa
y ocupará donde no quedan ni tus pasos ni tu
olor,
ni una triste idea de las tuyas.

La ciudad ahí se queda, ahí el sitio que viviste,
dentro de nada nadie que conozcas quedará
para pasar por estas calles, señalar a tu ventana
y decir:
mirad, ahí vivió este.

Sergio C Fanjul

Architectural Pride

There where you live, lived people,
you don't hear them, they have already left,
they left empty vases and empty beds.
You are there now and you are the same.

Others
knead bread each day, another sun rises,
each cell is renewed, your whole
body is changing, tomorrow
another arm, another foot, another way of thinking
the same things.

However,
the city, with her architectural pride
of reinforced concrete and glass
is always the same:
she shelters us, she lends us the space
within her, she watches us die, indifferent.

Someone will arrive after you,
and remove the posters from where children sleep,
paint with a colour that isn't yours,
someone strange will come with their spectacular life
and stay where neither your footprints nor your smell
nor even a sad thought of yours
stays any longer.

There the city remains, there the place where you lived,
but inside there is nothing, no one you know will be left
to cross those streets, point at your window
and say:
Look, I lived there.

*Translated from the Spanish
by Euan McGreevy*

Euan McGreevy's commentary

I chose to translate "Orgullo Arquitectónico" as the scene Fanjul creates is not only fascinating but also based in truth. At first, the focus of the poem is on the brevity of our lives – in such a short time the place where we once lived, now belongs to others. In the modern day, humanity faces many threats and, whilst it may seem distant, one day humanity will succumb to extinction. When that happens, the great structures we have built will remain for thousands of years after we no longer exist ourselves. Fanjul paints this picture – a time when humankind

is no more but humankind's cities live on in remembrance.

As this poem is so modern I could find no English translation of the poem which gave me the freedom to truly write my own. For the most part I wanted to stay true to the poem but whilst also conveying the sense of the poem effectively in English. I decided to keep the structure of the poem very similar to the original Spanish; such as the length of the stanzas and the way the poet uses enjambment to keep the continuity between lines.

In the third stanza Fanjul writes about the

'la ciudad' is if it were humankind's guardian. Having first translated the city using neuter pronouns, as would be common in English, I felt this lost the feeling that the poet creates of the city actively protecting us. To emphasise this personification of the city, I decided to draw inspiration from the Spanish and use the pronouns as if the city were a person; 'her architectural pride', 'she shelters us'. I believe this was a closer translation to what the poet had intended – personifying the city gives the impression that it is mothering humankind.

Ошибка

Когда снежинку, что легко летает,
Как звездочка упавшая скользят,
Берешь рукой - она слезинкой тает,
И вернуть воздушность ей нельзя.

Когда пленясь прозрачностью медузы,
Ее коснемся мы капризом рук,
Она, как пленник, заключенный в узы,
Вдруг побледнеет и погибнет вдруг.

Когда хотим мы в мотыльках-
скитальцах
Видать не грезу, а земную быль -
Где их наряд? От них на наших пальцах
Одна зарей раскрашенная пыль!

Оставь полет снежинкам с
мотыльками
И не губи медузу на песках!
Нельзя мечту свою хватать руками,
Нельзя мечту свою держать в руках!

Нельзя тому, что было грустью зыбкой,
Сказать: "Будь страсть! Горя
безумствуй, рдей!"
Твоя любовь была такой ошибкой, -
Но без любви мы гибнем. Чародей!

Marina Tsvetaeva

A Mistake

A flying snowflake,
Falling like a shooting star...
It touches your hand, but melts away,
as if it is a tear –
It leaves nothing behind.

You try and embrace a jellyfish,
Which seems no more than a ghost –
so pale it is,

Instead, it goes away,
And you're left there alone with your memories.

Now you're trying to catch a firefly
In the comfortable silence of the night,
Trying to catch the invisible beauty,
But, everything you are left with
Is harsh reality –
Your fingers, covered with coloured dust,
Are all you're left with.

You are the one disturbing them,
But now just leave them all alone!

Don't lock your dreams,
And, stop trying to hold them,
Or otherwise they'll fade away.

Stop forcing sadness into passion,
Stop trying to wake up.
Your love was so misleading,
But due to it I bothered to wake up.

*Translated from the Russian
by Marina Kisluk*

Marina Kisluk's commentary

Brought up surrounded by Russian literature, I was always fascinated by the poets whose works became part of so called Silver Age of the Russian poetry. Russian was my first language, yet the works of Marina Tsvetaeva, who has put a great effort into the development of Russian poetry, always seemed rather mysterious to me. I could read them again and again, and still quite an easy rhyme would make the meaning fade.

"A Mistake" is peculiar and unique precisely in that way – it's written in an easy manner, though with a hidden philosophical meaning which needs to be read between

the lines. However, I wouldn't choose to translate it just for that reason. In my opinion, this poem is uncommon in a way in which Marina Tsvetaeva describes love. How subtly she talks about it! Weightless subjects described in the poem are close in their meanings to dreams that are cherished by every single human being: the snowflake melts, the jellyfish dies and the firefly dies away. Thus, we dream about everything beautiful and unusual, however we can never be sure that those dreams will come true, and if they do, would it make us happier?

How often do people make mistakes? And, can we say that love is sometimes a mistake? But isn't it true that a human cannot fully be a human if he doesn't have this great emotion? And, as the answers to these questions are controversial, maybe Tsvetaeva meant that every single one of us is waiting for the great miracle in our lives? And this miracle must be true love...it is said that translation is hard and sophisticated work as the translator must not only transfer the author's words, but also transfer his thoughts. I hope my attempt to do that was successful.

Calatorul

Apele peste care am trecut
Mi-au dat ca amintire un mic licar sub piele.
Nu mai pot pasi sprinten, cu avant,
Decat daca am talpa plina de bataturi,
Daca-mi e toata ca un teren mlastinos,
In care te scufunzi imperceptibil.

Somnul nu-mi mai vine decat stand chircit,
Undeva pe geamantan, langa o usa de vagon
Supraaglomerat,
Trezit din motaiala de fiecare calator care urca sau
Coboara.
Intre aceste pauze am cele mai frumoase vise,
Toate intrerupte brusc, din pacate.

Ah, somnul in pat strain, neutru,
De hotel de mana a treia!
Cazi trasnit pe dormeaza slinoasa, jilava, usor inclinata.
In camera e un aer de puscarie, geamul e prins in cuie.
Si-ar fi imprudent sa-l deschizi ca sar cersetorii.

Pe la miezul noptii, te trezeste durerea
In coaste, pricinuita de arcuri,
Bajbai si nu stii de unde se aprinde lumina.
Unde esti? In ce oras?
Te crezi tot in tren si-astepti conductorul
"spuneti-mi, va rog, ce statie urmeaza?"

Uneori e adevarat, esti chiar in accelerat!
In vagonul lit. Ai vrut sa-ti faci damblaua.
Pe geam nu recunosti nimic,
Peisajul poate fi la fel de bine
Elvetian, ori italian, daca nu chiar din luna.
Copacii se schimba din secunda-n secunda,
Ca niste sentinele de garda
La un mort grabit,
Ori ca telegramele primite intr-o batalie
Ca rezultat nesigur.
Tu esti comandantul, tu le primesti, le deschizi,
Tot statul major se uita in gura ta, asteapta ordinele,
Dar telegramele sunt cifrate
Si-ai uitat cifrul frunzelor.

The Traveller

The waters through which I have passed
Have left the memory of a lake under my skin.
I can no longer walk briskly, gain speed,
Unless my feet are covered in blisters,
Unless I'm in a swamp
Where I am imperceptibly sinking.

Sleep won't come unless I'm crouching
Over a suitcase, near the door
Of an overcrowded carriage,
Disturbed from dozing by every passenger getting on
Or off the train.
In between these breaks I have the most beautiful dreams...
Unfortunately, all abruptly interrupted.

Ah, to sleep in a strange, neutral bed,
In a third class hotel!
You drop on the slimy, shabby, slightly uneven mattress.
The air smells of prison, the window is nailed shut.
And it would be imprudent to open it because the beggars can
jump.

Around midnight, you're woken up
By an ache in the ribs, sore arches.
You fumble, can't find the light switch.
Where are you? What town?
You wake up on a train and wait for the conductor
'What's the next station, please?'

You're losing it.
Out of the window, you recognise nothing,
You could be in Switzerland, or Italy or the moon.
The trees are changing second by second,
Sentinels guarding a corpse in a hurry,
Or telegrams received in a battle
Where the result is uncertain.
You are the commander, you receive them, open them,
But the telegrams are encrypted
And you have forgotten the code of leaves.

Nu ma simt bine decat
Buimac, incomod,
Stand intr-un picior pe-o batatura
Agatat de-o bara, spanzurat de-un pervaz,
Pe-o scara de serviciu,
Trebuind sa dau fuga pana la mama dracului,
Carand patru geamantae mari, pline cu lucruri nefolositoare,
Renuntand din cauza lor la singurul obiect
Important: umbrela (peste tot cand esti calator, ploua de rupe).

Nu ma simt bine decat rau,
schiopatand,
Incercanat
Azvarlit in strada de propria-mi neliniste...

Mereu pe drumuri, impins ca de-un sut in rarunchi,
Cu ochii holbati, ca in preajma minunii.

Marin Sorescu

I am not well unless
Confused, uncomfortable,
Standing on one foot on a blister
Clutching on a rail, hanging from a windowsill,
By the tradesmen's entrance,
Running like hell
Carrying great suitcases full of useless things
Leaving behind the only
Useful object: an umbrella (because wherever you're a traveller,
it always rains buckets).

I am not well unless I'm sick,
Limping,
Dark-circled,
Hurled into the street by my own restlessness...

Forever on the road, pushed as if by a kick in the ribs,
Wide-eyed, like in the presence of a miracle.

*Translated from the Romanian
by Gabi Reigh*

Gabi Reigh's commentary

Reading 'Calatorul', I'm reminded of Pascal's comment that 'the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room'. The beauty of the poem, for me, is that it celebrates this unhappiness. His traveller is only 'happy' when stripped of all comfort and familiarity, released from habit and disorientated.

I first came across this poem when I was studying English at UCL and we had been asked to bring to a seminar a poem that we liked. Having moved from Romania as a teenager, I wanted to share my country's poetry with others. The poem captures for

me the feelings that still draw me to travel, the compulsive need to experience something new, a restlessness perhaps born out of being an immigrant and not feeling a sense of belonging to any particular place.

One of the things that I found most challenging was recreating the tone of the poem as closely as possible. Sorescu is known for his ironical tone, which he achieves chiefly through his use of colloquial language. I tried to find appropriate colloquialisms from English which convey the same meaning yet do not sound crude or clichéd. In contrast to the colloquial, prosaic language, Sorescu also

uses more lyrical images ('the code of leaves') to convey how travel transforms the world into something new and unfamiliar. He sometimes uses unexpectedly formal words such as 'imprudent', almost mimicking the voice of a travel guide warning travellers how to keep themselves safely insulated from the social realities of the countries they are voyaging through. I wanted to keep these shifts in tone from the original poem because I felt they expressed the nuances of the traveller's experience - the banal discomforts, the moments of exhilaration, the fear of the unknown.

Balatoni baleset

1.

Este iszapszagot hoz a szél,
egy kitekeredett, elfelejtett autó alatt
a fékolajtól ragad a langyos aszfalt.
Egy ember fekszik a földön,
fejében most ürül ki
gondolatainak labirintusa.

2.

Elpárolognak az emlékei: a test fénné lesz.
Elyeli a sötétet a pulzáló láng,
majd felemészti önmagát. Összepréselődik
az alváz, mint az eltaposott bogár,
meggörbül az acél, mint a világ tengelye.

Csak a megtört fémtörzs roncsa marad,
zárlatos vezetékek szikrázó idegrendszere,
és az emberi testben az elroncsolt,
átszakadt, feltépett, szétzúzott szervek.
A távozó lélek megcsillan a ködben,
mint a parti striptízbár neonfénye.
Elpárolog a hűtővíz és a vér.

A csóva körül szúnyograj zümmög,
denevérek cikáznak az autóróm felett,
és egy rókacsálád bújik elő a bokorból,
megkóstolják és szétcsócsálják a tetemet.
Megérik a húspan, a peték belsejében
a férgek, hogy eljött az idejük, kibújnak
zabálni, és labirintust rágnak a testbe.

Balaton Accident

1.

Sewage smell on the wind here
as brake oil sticks to the tarmac
under a single mangled car.
A man is lying on the ground
with all thought draining out
from the labyrinth of his head.

2.

Memories vaporise: the body becomes
a pulsing light, a flame to eat the dark
and then itself. The car chassis
is compacted like a trampled bug,
steel bending – an axis mundi.

Only this written-off frame, a shorted
nervous system of sparking wires
and these split, squashed, torn
human entrails. The soul departs
through fog, candescent as the neons
outside the strip clubs. Coolant
pools with blood, and evaporates.

Mosquitos cloud around the flare,
bats zigzag over the wreckage
and foxes lope from the bushes
to test the body and gnaw on it.
Worm eggs buried in the flesh
feel their time arrive and hatch
to chew a maze into the corpse.

3.
Lefekszel a földre. Nyomják a hátadat
a kavicsok, göröngyök és rozsdás csavarok.
Hallod a balatoni diszkó messzi
dübörgését,
a távoli sztrádán az autók úgy búgnak,
mint munka után a sztriptíz táncosok.

Elcsavarogsz, és elképzeled
a saját haláloed minden pillanatát:
átgázol rajtad egy autó, érzed a vér szagát.
Látják, ahogy meghalsz, mosolyogsz,
Ahogy átrajzolja az arcokat a gyász.
Feküdj le és figyeled, ahogy elnyeli
a diszkó stroboszkóp pulzálása
a mezőn a szentjánosbogarak fényét
és a csillagok fénylabirintusát.

András Gerevich

3.
Lie down here. Press your back
against the clods, stones, rusty screws.
The clubs roar on at the lake,
other cars burr along other
roads, like exhausted strippers.

You ran away from home again
and now you picture each moment
of dying yourself: the car hitting,
the blood taste. You smile
to see the faces in the crowd
rearranged with grief. Lie down
and watch the strobes and vibrations
of the clubs disturb the fireflies,
and the star-labyrinth of sky.

*Translated from the Hungarian
by Andrew Fentham*

Andrew Fentham's commentary

Clare Pollard has praised the 'commingling of lucid style and complex emotion, innocence and guilt' in the work of András Gerevich. It was this mix which attracted me to Gerevich's work, and especially to 'Balatoni baleset'. The poet has published four collections in his native Hungarian and collections in translation have appeared across Europe, though not in the UK, despite a collection appearing in English from Corvina in Budapest. These English translations, made by George Szirtes, Christopher Whyte et al, were my introduction to the poet. I contacted him after

a short time teaching English as a foreign language in Hungary.

Another reason for choosing this poem was that it had not yet been translated into English (as yet uncollected even in the Hungarian). The poem is recent, and the poet's latest work seems written less by a man who Szirtes once described as having 'perfect balance' than one who tells himself, as does the speaker in this translation, 'Lie down here. Press your back / against the clods, stones, rusty screws.' As a newcomer to the Hungarian language, I cannot yet hope to attain perfect balance in translation. My approach instead has been

to communicate the new confusion in the poet's work, whilst striving, where possible, to retain in it that which Szirtes has elsewhere called 'so clear, so pellucid'.

This poem was translated in dialogue with the poet. Gerevich provided a literal translation in English which, with reference to the original, I fashioned into the submitted translation. The poet also altered his original in response to what he found useful or insightful in early draft translations. The work was partly carried out during a residency at the Magyar FordítóHáz (Hungarian Translators' House), Balatonfüred.

Windstil

Ik droomde bijna dat ik sliep
en door een wijde polderweide liep
en in de stille lentehitte
zag ik de doodstil staande witte
schermbloemen langs de sloot,
want er was geen wind
en boven de dijk de witte
slappe zeilen van een boot,
ze gleden zoals de IJssel stroomde
want er was geen wind
waar ik van droomde
en over het dijkpad reden
fietsers want ik hooarde het grind
van tachtig jaar geleden
en verder niets

Leo Vroman

Wind-still

I almost dreamt I was asleep
and walking through a water meadow
and in the silent heat of spring
I saw the stock-still silent white
cow-parsley blooming by the ditch
in a deathly hush, for there was no wind,
and high and white above the dyke
the slack sails of a wind-stilled boat
that glided as the IJssel flowed
for there was no wind
I was dreaming of
across the dyke-path cyclists rode
because I heard the gravelly sound
of eighty years ago
and that was it

*Translated from the Dutch
by Antoinette Fawcett*

Antoinette Fawcett's commentary

The word 'wind-still' doesn't exist in English, but it is a compound word that I believe most English speakers would intuitively understand, particularly in the context of this poem. To translate the word – as a dictionary would – as 'windless' or 'calm' wouldn't give the sense that something that was active – full of breath, and life, and spirit – has come to a halt. What might seem like an over-literal translation of the Dutch word 'windstil' is, in fact, a considered choice, selected for its effect within the full poetic dynamic.

The poem was published in Vroman's 2011

collection *Daar* – a kind of diary of poems and sketches, in which Vroman was almost literally gesturing 'over there', the place or point where he would be at his death, and perhaps after (although he had no conventional views on any kind of afterlife).

I first came across Vroman's poems many years ago, when I was immersing myself in Dutch poetry, trying to discover what I liked, what made an impact on me. I was struck then by the nakedness of Vroman's words, as well as the vivid imagery and often idiosyncratic mode of expression. This short poem, which I discovered recently, I also

found powerful, but in a much more pared-down and seemingly casual way than some of the perhaps more famous earlier pieces.

In translating the poem I have tried to retain the clarity of the imagery, which conveys the hyper-reality of a near-dream state, and have worked with sounds and rhythms. I have not used exactly the same rhyme-patterning, as I didn't wish to stiffen the natural flow of the words, wanting them to move as freely as they do in the Dutch. Instead I have used fleeting rhymes, assonances and alliterations to catch the stillness – and sound – that is heard.

Unter Der Welt Ein Sternenlager

UNTER DER WELT EIN STERNENLAGER,
ein Schiff, ein Hall, ein gemittelter
Bootsteg – mitunter hintan ein baumloser
Blick in jedwede Ebene. Stimmen, ach ja,
aus der Erinnerung,
aus dem Land erster Beschlüsse,
vielleicht auch ein Pfad
aus dem Vorratslager der Bilder:
Mein Käferleben
Mein falckenleichtes Herz.
Meerströme, mehr Wasserwege,
mehr vom Tauwasser der Träume.
Dann aber, welche Schönheit,
ein richtiger Wintertag auf der Erde
Erlösung aus dem Verschlag
einer alten Sprache. Versprechensschwere.
Losgebundenheit dann doch,
das Über-den-Wind-Stellen,
eigene Schwüre vergessen
und neugelöst sein, neubesprochen,
neu entbunden, hinausgegangen
aus der Verkehrung einer Warze.
Lebendigkeit, das Streben der Sterne
in die Zellen. Mein Wahrheitsanspruch,
eine Sekunde Bienennebel. Weben.
Gewoben sein vom Ganzen.
Jetzt aber vorerst ein Schlaf
aus innersten Kammern.
Wörter und Durchgänge,
Eine Krume Liebe. Eine Stunde
Immerland. Eine bindelose Woche,
Leben.

Marica Bodrožić

(Source text from *Ein Kolibri kam unverwandelt*, page 84. Marica Bodrožić. Salzburg-Wien: Otto Müller Verlag)

Beneath The World A Storehouse Of Stars

BENEATH THE WORLD A STOREHOUSE OF STARS,
a ship, an echo, a levelled
landing stage, now and then a treeless plain
viewed from every side.
Voices, oh yes,
from memory,
from that land of first decisions,
perhaps also a path
out of my treasury of images:
my life, vulnerable as a ladybird,
my heart, falcon-light.
Ocean currents, more watery waymarks,
more from the dew-water of dreams.
But then, what beauty
a true winter's day on earth
deliverance from the pen
of an old language, heavy with promises.
Untetheredness then,
that soaring above the wind
forgetting one's own oaths,
newly freed and freshly promised,
new-born, gone forth,
the transcendence of a wart.
Liveliness, the striving of the stars
into my cells. My demand for truth
an instant of humming bees. Weaving,
being woven from the whole.
But first, drawing sleep
from the innermost chambers.
Words and passageways,
a crumb of love, An hour
of everland. A week untied
Living.

*Translated from the German
by Deirdre McMahon*

Deirdre McMahon's commentary

This poem is the final one in Marica Bodrožić's first poetry collection *Ein Kolibri kam unverwandelt*, published in 2007. It summarises many of the questions and themes posed through the collection, offers direction and confidence to the poet-speaker of the first poem.

This poem embodies and expresses many of Bodrožić's preoccupations – journeys, history and memory, truth and integrity and above all, the nature of language itself. Born in the former Yugoslavia, where she lived with relatives, Bodrožić moved to Germany to live with her parents and siblings at the age of ten. She writes only in German.

Bodrožić has an imaginative and playful

relationship with language, frequently inventing new words and compounds and finding new and original links between words which challenge her reader's preconceptions and expectations.

The opening surprises us with the *Sternenlager*, a neologism meaning stock, depot or storehouse of stars lying beneath rather than above the world, as Bodrožić invites us to consider what lies beneath or within everyday reality. The tone of the poem is transcendent as the poet unites past, present and future into a life that is *eine Stunde Immerland* – an hour of eternity. The poem brings together many of Bodrožić's 'key' words and concepts such as dew-water,

memory, treasury of images, 'personhood', freedom and salvation through the German language. She sees herself as having escaped from the *Verschlag* (Line 14) [hovel, shed, coop] of an old language. I translated this as 'pen', playing on its meaning as cage and writing implement.

Through the poem Bodrožić plays with ideas of freedom and tethered-ness. She also plays with the senses – the sound of bees humming in the neologism *Bienennebel* - fog of bees, the sensation of weightlessness, yet being grounded by an essential truth. This poem is an affirmation of life itself.

Stephen Spender Prize in association with the *Guardian*

The idea of a poetry translation competition for young people was born of a discussion with the late Daniel Weissbort (co-founder with Ted Hughes of the journal *Modern Poetry in Translation*) and Susan Bassnett (founder and Director of Warwick University's Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies). At the time, young people studying languages rarely encountered literature, translation was frowned upon (it is now back on the curriculum) and language learning had ceased to be compulsory after the age of 14. Paradoxically, as the message went out that languages were not valued by educational policy-makers, the number of children in UK schools with mother tongues other than English was growing and has continued to grow ever since.

The annual Stephen Spender Prize was launched in 2004 in partnership with *The Times* under Erica Wagner's literary editorship and with the support of Arts Council England. Thirteen years later, and now in partnership with the *Guardian*, the prize continues to celebrate the art of literary translation and encourage a new generation of literary translators.

Entrants are invited to translate a poem from any language – ancient or modern – into English, and submit both the original and their translation together with a commentary of not more than 300 words. The commentary – a requirement described by AS Byatt as 'splendidly intelligent' – is intended to



Stephen Spender – poet, critic, editor and translator – lived from 1909 to 1995. Inspired by his literary interests and achievements, the Stephen Spender Trust was set up to widen appreciation of the literary legacy of Stephen Spender and his contemporaries and promote literary translation.

shed light on the translation process, revealing the decisions the translators have made and the solutions they have come up with, as well as each translator's reason for choosing a particular poem.

There are prizes in three categories: Open, 18-and-under and 14-and-under. For many of the younger entrants, the competition is an introduction to poetry in another language and a first attempt at poetry translation; for the adult translators, winning can bring public recognition and publishing contracts as well as, for a lucky few, a Hawthornden Fellowship.

Booklets of winning entries from previous years can be obtained from the Trust or downloaded from its website (www.stephen-spender.org), which also provides advice for entrants, an attempt (with examples) by former judge George Szirtes to categorise translated poetry, and a growing bank of poetry translation activities aimed at teachers.

Stephen and Natasha Spender

Stephen and Natasha Spender's manuscripts, letters, diaries and other personal papers are available to readers in the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library. *A House in St John's Wood*, Matthew Spender's intimate portrait of Stephen and Natasha Spender (William Collins, 2015), draws on his personal memories and unpublished material found in the north London house his parents had rented since 1941. It supplements Stephen Spender's *New Selected Poems* (ed. Grey Gowrie, Faber, 2009), his *New Collected Poems* (ed. Michael Brett, Faber, 2004), the *New Selected Journals* (ed. John Sutherland and Lara Feigel, Faber, 2012) and John Sutherland's authorised biography of Stephen Spender (Penguin, 2005).

For more information about the Stephen Spender Trust and its activities, please visit
www.stephen-spender.org
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