

Polish Spotlight 2018

Polish poems and literal translations

Many translators of poetry can't actually speak the language they're translating from. Somebody else does a literal translation for them (also called a 'trot'), and they turn that into a new version.

Pick one of the poems below and try turning the 'trot' into an English poem, then enter it into the Polish Spotlight Prize!

There are cash prizes and the opportunity to have your translation published. For more information, visit www.stephen-spender.org.



Poem #1

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, 'Fotografia'



Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (1891-1945) was a prolific Polish poet and dramatist. Her poems are among the best examples of Polish lyrical poetry from the interwar period, while her dramas were often unconventional, and socially charged.

'Photograph' is a poem typical of the poet's style. It is short, lyrical and very intimate in nature. Its power – as with many of Dorothy Parker's or Emily Dickinson's short poems – comes from contrast and the ability to 'pack a punch' using very few words!

Fotografia	Photograph
Gdy się miało szczęście, które się nie trafia: czyjeś ciało i ziemię całą, a zostanie tylko fotografia, to – to jest bardzo mało...	When one had luck, which does not happen: someone's body and the whole earth, and the only thing left is a photograph, this – this is very little...



Listen to the poem: <https://bit.ly/2KDgfmY>



Related English-language poets: Dorothy Parker, Emily Dickinson

Poem #2

Leopold Staff, 'Kowal'



Leopold Staff (1878-1957) was a Polish poet and one of the greatest artists of European modernism. His poems, often representative of classicism and symbolism, were influenced by philosophical ideas such as those of Friedrich Nietzsche.

'The Blacksmith' is an incredibly dynamic, driven piece of poetry. The verbs describe powerful actions; the movements come from immense depths to places of power and conflict; the things, ideas, beliefs – everything has urgency. Halfway through this maelstrom of a poem you get to notice structure: Staff manages to fit his monster of an idea into the elegant and classical form of the sonnet – echoing the work of the blacksmith he sets out to describe.

Kowal	Blacksmith
Całą bezkształtną masę kruszców drogocennych, Które zaległy piersi mej głąb nieodgadłą, Jak wulkan z swych otchłani wyrzucam bezdennych I ciskam ją na twarde, stalowe kowadło.	The whole shapeless mass of precious metals Which lay in the undiscovered depth of my chest Like a volcano I toss out of my bottomless depths And throw it onto a hard, steel anvil.
Grzmotem młota w nią walę w radosnej otusze, Bo wykonać mi trzeba dzieło wielkie, pilne, Bo z tych kruszców dla siebie serce wykuć muszę, Serce hartowne, mężne, serce dumne, silne.	I smash it with a thunder of the hammer in a joyous comfort Because I need to complete a grand, urgent task, Because from these metals I need to forge a heart for myself, A hardy, virile heart, a proud, strong heart.
Lecz gdy ulegniesz, serce, pod młota żelazem, Gdy pęknie, przeciw ciosom stali nieodporne: W pył cię rozbiją pięści mej gromy potworne!	But if you yield, heart, under the iron of the hammer, If you break, not resistant to the blows of the steel: The terrible thunders of my fist will smash you to dust!

Bo lepiej giń, zmiążdżone cyklopowym razem,
Niżbyś żyć miało własną słabością przekłętą,
Rysą chorej niemocy skażone, pękniętą.

Because it's better for you to die, crushed by a
cyclops' blow,
Than for you to live cursed by your own
weakness,
Tainted by a mark of sick infirmity, and broken.



Listen to the poem: <https://bit.ly/2zfQi7p>



Related poems: William Ernest Henley, 'Invictus'; Horace, Ode 3.30

Poem #3

Maria Konopnicka, 'A jak poszedł król na wojnę'



Maria Konopnicka (1842-1910) was a Polish poet, novelist, children's writer, translator, journalist, critic, and activist for women's rights and for Polish independence. She was one of the most important poets of Poland's 'Positivist' period.

'And when the king went to war...' is, at first glance, a poem for children – one of many in Konopnicka's collection. The topic, though, is far from innocent. Konopnicka's mission – as with so many writers of her generation – was to make every reader aware of important social issues, using all means available. The poem's simple language and relatable imagery (fairy-tale language, popular symbols, commonplace plants, sounds and landscapes) are used to deliver the message: those who benefit from wars are not those who suffer from them.

A jak poszedł król na wojnę, Grały jemu surmy zbrojne, Grały jemu surmy złote Na zwycięstwo, na ochotę...	And when the king went to war, Battle trumpets played for him, Golden trumpets played for him For victory, for courage...
A jak poszedł Stach na boje, Zaszumiały jasne zdroje, Zaszumiało kłosów pole Na tęsknotę, na niedolę...	And when Stach went to fight, Bright creeks babbled, Wind whooshed in the field of grain For yearning, for woe...
A na wojnie świszczą kule, Lud się wali jako snopy, A najdzielniej biją króle, A najgęściej giną chłopcy.	And on war, the bullets whizz, Folk go down like bales of hay. And the kings throw the bravest punches, And the simple folks die the most.
Szumiały orły chorągwie, Skrzypi kędyś krzyż wioskowy... Stach śmiertelną dostał ranę, Król na zamek wracał zdrowy...	The eagles on the banners whoosh, Somewhere a cross in the village creeks... Stach got mortally wounded, The king, healthy, came back to the castle...

<p>A jak wjeżdżał w jasne wrota, Wyszła przeciw zorza złota I zagrały wszystkie dzwony Na słoneczne świata strony.</p> <p>A jak chłopu dół kopali, Zaszumiały drzewa w dali. Dzwoniły mu przez dąbrowę Te dzwoneczki, te liliowe...</p>	<p>And when he rode into the bright gates, A golden dawn came up against him, And all the bells tolled On all the bright corners of the world.</p> <p>And when they dug the grave for the simple fellow, Trees hummed in the distance. And across the copse The lilac bluebells tolled for him...</p>
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Listen to the poem: <https://bit.ly/2KCFAx6>



Related English-language poem: Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'

Poem #4

Cyprian Kamil Norwid, 'W Weronie'



Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883) was a Polish poet, dramatist, painter, and sculptor. He spent most of his adult life living abroad – in London, Paris and the United States – and frequently enduring poverty and hardship. He is regarded as one of Poland's foremost Romantic poets.

'In Verona' is a poem which shows many of Norwid's typical literary techniques. The well-known story or myth is contrasted with reality; the supernatural or romantic beliefs – with what down-to-earth folks may be 'saying learnedly'. There is bitterness and irony in Norwid's description, but there's warmth and kindness, too!

W Weronie'	In Verona
I Nad Kapuletich i Montekich domem, Spłukane deszczem, poruszone gromem, Łagodne oko błękitu.	I Above the houses of the Capulet and Montague Washed by rain, moved by thunder, A gentle eye of the blue.
II Patrzy na gruzy nieprzyjaznych grodów, Na rozwalone bramy do ogrodów — I gwiazdę zrzuca ze szczytu;	II It looks on the ruins of the feuding houses, On the destroyed gates to the gardens - And throws a star down from up high;
III Cyprysy mówią, że to dla Julietty, Że dla Romea — ta łza znad planety Spada... i groby przecieka;	III The cypress trees say that it is for Juliet, That it is for Romeo - that this tear from above the planet Falls...and soaks through the graves;

IV A ludzie mówią, i mówią uczenie, Że to nie łzy są, ale że kamienie, I — że nikt na nie... nie czeka!	IV And the people say, and they say learnedly, That these aren't tears, but they're stones, And - that nobody...is awaiting them!
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Listen to the poem: <https://bit.ly/2KTqy2d>



Related English-language text: William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

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