



The Stephen Spender Prize 2018

in association with **theguardian**

lais dans ses cauchemars les morts se
But in his nightmares the dead are hid

Nie prześwietła ich światła
Light does not grace them

Det var som å ro i tomme
It was like rowing in empty a

quaeque Lycaonia terra sub axe
And the land which lies beneath the Ly

gatvā cordhvam daśamukhabhujoc
go up touch the peaks turned upside o

We hebben geen speelgoed,' zei ik tege
'We've got no toys,' I told the ma

for poetry in translation

The Stephen Spender Prize 2018 for poetry in translation

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Winners and Commended

Winner of the 14-and-under category



Rose Lewens
'The Sultan'
by Jacques Prévert
(French)

14-and-under commended

Jasper Hersov 'Under Mirabeau Bridge'
by Guillaume Apollinaire (French)

Alexis Richards 'Scylla and Charybdis'
by Homer (Ancient Greek)

and

'Your Eyes'
by Octavio Paz (Spanish)

Winners of the 18-and-under category



First

Emilia Leonowicz
'Braid'
by Tadeusz Różewicz
(Polish)



Second

Edward Chan
'Poem 39'
by Catullus
(Latin)



Third

Sam Hunt
'Tristia III:II'
by Ovid
(Latin)

18-and-under commended

William Butler-Denby
'Fragment 105(a)'
by Sappho
(Ancient Greek)

Helena Walsh
'MYS 1:16'
by Princess Nukata
(Japanese)

Winners of the Open category



First

Alice Fletcher
'On the Fjord'
by Stein Mehren
(Norwegian)



Second

William Roychowdhury
'The Cloud Messenger'
by Kalidasa
(Sanskrit)



Third

Antoinette Fawcett
'How poetry was discovered'
by Abdelkader Benali
(Dutch)

Open category commended

Jane Draycott
'Extracts from the Old English
Herbarium'
(Old English)

James Garza
'The Structure of the World'
by Kasuya Eiichi
(Japanese)

Michael Swan
'Legend of the Dead Soldier'
by Bertolt Brecht
(German)

Joining the Stephen Spender Trust as Director this spring was a delight. Its mission to promote international literature, intercultural understanding and the art of literary translation is very close to my heart, and at present feels more important than ever. Entries to the prize, this year out of forty-six languages and from poet-translators of all ages, are the perfect reflection of that mission, and a confirmation that this country remains open to impulses from multiple languages and cultures.

This has been a particularly exciting year for the prize, with more entries in the youth categories than ever before, new collaborations, first-time participation from numerous schools across the country, and the launch of our new

‘Spotlight’ strands. I am delighted that this booklet, along with the most outstanding of an extraordinarily rich and diverse set of entries to the prize, contains the fruit of our brand new ‘Polish Spotlight’ prize – turn to page 13 to read about this new initiative.

I am grateful to the Old Possum’s Practical Trust, the Sackler Trust and the Rothschild Foundation for their continued support and encouragement, to my predecessors Robina Pelham Burn and Suzy Joinson, and to all those who support the prize in numerous ways: the teachers who encourage their pupils to enter; our media partner the *Guardian*; and the many organisations that help us to spread the word, ensuring that the prize continues to flourish.

Charlotte Ryland
Director of the Stephen Spender Trust

Judges’ comments



We all agreed that Rose Lewens’ version of Jacques Prévert’s ‘The Sultan’ was a worthy winner in the 14-and-under category, ably capturing the original’s sardonic, colloquial tone. Alexis Richards receives two commendations, one for his energetic version of an extract from Homer’s *Odyssey*, with its excellent use of verbs – ‘spewed’, ‘spattered’, ‘snatched’, ‘snared’, etc. – and another for his version of Octavio Paz’s ‘Your Eyes’, with its rich use of assonance and alliteration. Apollinaire’s ‘Under Mirabeau Bridge’ is always a popular choice in this section, and I particularly enjoyed Jasper Hersov’s creative rendering of the poem’s refrain.

In the 18-and-under category, we chose as our winner Emilia Leonowicz’s translation of ‘Warkoczyk’, so full of stark, heart-breaking images, for example, a little girl’s braid of hair like ‘a mouse’s tail’. Edward Chan’s inventive translation of Catullus’s Poem 39 is wonderfully free and funny, even the Cheshire Cat gets a look in! In Sam Hunt’s version of Ovid’s *Tristia* III:II,

he abandons the rhyme scheme and rhythm of the original to produce a more conversational tone, which really suits the melancholy voice of exile. William Butler Denby’s Sappho fragment is equally audacious in expanding on the original, throwing in references to the Bible and to Milton. Helena Walsh asked the mother of a Japanese friend to provide her with a literal version of a poem by the seventh-century Japanese poet, Princess Nukata, then produced an exquisitely sensitive translation, full of delightful internal rhymes. I also loved Russ Houghton’s delicate translation of Ishigawa Takuboku’s tanka poem ‘Shimmering ice’, especially the lovely word ‘dotterels’.

The Open Category was equally full of wonders and discoveries. We chose Alice Fletcher’s version of Stein Mehren’s ‘On the Fjord’ as our winner, and the word that sprang to all our lips was ‘limpid’. Written in clear, simple language, the imagery is very striking: ‘Like rowing / in one’s own heart / through a sorrow as deep and cold / as death itself.’ In William Roychowdhury’s admirably inventive translation from the Sanskrit, ‘The

Cloud Messenger’, he made a deliberate decision to produce a more modern, ‘even modernist’ poem, bringing it bang up-to-date. I’m grateful to Antoinette Fawcett for introducing me to the work of Dutch poet Abdelkader Benali, especially ‘When I see someone sitting on a bench’, which expands into something about far more than just benches and their purpose in life. Michael Swan rendered Brecht’s ‘Legend of the Dead Soldier’ into convincingly soldierly English, while James Garza’s version of Kasuya Eiichi’s delightfully absurd ‘The Structure of the World’ and Jane Draycott’s approach to ‘Extracts from the Old English Herbarium’ both provided fine examples of finding the poetry in prose. Another personal favourite was Elliot Vale’s suitably Hopkins-like rendition of Artur Lundkvist’s ‘The Oak’, a hymn of praise to the ancient oak ‘a ponderer, a battler / prepared to become old and a loner... revered by ravens’.

Once again, it was a delight to read both the translated poems and the commentaries, all so redolent of the pleasure of translation.

Margaret Jull Costa



Among this year's splendid haul of translations from 46 languages, ancient and modern, I was delighted to read more contemporary poets, with pioneering work from Romanian, Polish, Turkish, Korean, Tagalog, Punjabi, Tamil, Urdu, Kiswahili, Twi and Yoruba.

I also enjoyed the variety of approach. While I had an eye for translations which 'worked' as lively and autonomous poems in English, I found I was most convinced by those that engaged meaningfully with their source, whose inventiveness consisted not in deforming or 'domesticating' the original, but in creating an innovative space in English hospitable to its foreignness.

It was heartening to read so many strong entries from translators whose work showed ethical insight and personal investment, and whose commentaries engaged transparently, robustly and passionately with the processes of translation.

In the 14-and-under category, Rose Lewens made simplicity look easy with her foot-sure handling of Prévert's satirical poem 'Le Sultan'. Alexis

Richards was commended twice, for the considered, stirring metre of his Homer, and the courageous ambiguity of his Paz. Jasper Hersov's translation of Apollinaire's 'Le Pont Mirabeau', stood out from the many (many) other versions submitted, for its fluid quality and pleasingly tolling refrain. I also enjoyed several promising entries from Romanian, and a luminous Musset by Arabella Greve.

Emilia Leonowicz, in the 18-and-under category, showed remarkable maturity, attending to Tadeusz Różewicz's 'Warkoczyk' with tact, intuition and emotional commitment. Edward Chan's persuasive, biting Catullus was a delight, with a fine ear for the sounds of Latin and English that might 'denote disgust', while Sam Hunt's sensitivity to the crucial issue of tone served his Ovid well. We admired William Butler Denby's sophisticated commentary on Sappho and the pitfalls of anachronism, and the atmospheric music of Helena Walsh's Princess Nukata. I would like to also personally commend Daniil Koterov for his accomplished rhyming translation of Eichendorff.

In the Open Category, Alice Fletcher's 'On the Fjord', by Stein

Mehren, caught and held our attention for its consummate restraint, the limpid language a perfect foil for the still, clear waters of the fjord, and the feel of the poem: '...Like rowing / in one's own heart'. I was enchanted by William Roychowdhury's bold, inventive use of long compound nouns in English, and his wonderful description of the way the articulation of Sanskrit sounds expresses the moving raincloud. Antoinette Fawcette's work won us over again, this year, for her beautiful handling of a subversive prose poem by Abdelkader Benali. I loved the dark humour of James Garza's 'The Structure of the World' from the Japanese, and admired Michael Swan's Brecht for its attention to the disjunction between metrics and politics. Finally, Jane Draycott, listening through time for the miraculous prayer-like poetry of the Old English Herbarium, opened new ground with her magnificent and moving poem, founded in 'an act of imaginative sympathy'.

We are changed by encountering translations of this calibre, they give us a new sense of possibility and hope, and space. I'm looking forward to seeing what next year brings.

Olivia McCannon



One of the most interesting parts of the judge's role in the Stephen Spender Prize is the encounter with a plurality of tongues. This year did not disappoint. As well as the immediately familiar Western European languages, the winning and commended entries encompassed Dutch, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish and Sanskrit. Among variety there was imaginative boldness and confidence of a kind which might encourage quiet optimism at the moment when the United Kingdom seems prepared to risk

a weakening of vital cultural links and a narrowing of horizons. Fortunately the verbal imaginations of poets and translators are ungoverned by formal borders and loud divorce.

The winner in the 14-and-under section was Rose Lewens, with her translation of Jacques Prévert's 'The Sultan'. This was not the only attempt on this poem among the entries, but Rose Lewens' version won because of its assured movement, economy of phrasing and – perhaps above all – command of tone, to black-comic effect. Alexis Richards was rightly commended for two very different pieces – an urgent,

muscular, dramatic reading of the Scylla and Charybdis episode in the *Odyssey* and – equally challenging in its way – Octavio Paz's 'Your Eyes'. Also commended was Jasper Hersov's translation of Apollinaire's 'Le Pont Mirabeau' – a very familiar poem which – again – was attempted by several entrants. Jasper Hersov's version reaffirmed the lyricism of the original.

In the 18-and-under category there was a strong classical presence. In second place was Edward Chan's fluent and gleeful reading of Catullus's Poem 39 ('there is nothing more foolish than a / vain rictus'). Sam Hunt, winner of

the third prize, managed to represent the complex mixture of self-pity and grief in Ovid's *Tristia* III.II. William Butler Denby, whose entry was commended, took a boldly interventionist approach to Sappho's Fragment 105(a). Also commended was Helena Walsh's elegantly constructed translation of the 8th century Japanese poem 'Princess Nukata'. The winner in this category was Emilia Leonowicz's translation of Tadeusz Różewicz's 'Warkoczyk'. Różewicz's restraint and economy provide a severe test. There's a risk that the translation will seem commonplace, or more like a summary than an actual poem. In this account of the shaving of women's heads as they arrive in a concentration camp, Emilia Leonowicz combines restraint with intimacy and a scriptural-seeming formality. A most impressive piece of work, and a deserving winner.

The range of material among the winning and commended poems in the Open category speaks for the range of riches on offer in the competition as a

whole. Jane Draycott's commended entry, 'Extracts from the Old English Herbarium' took the intriguing step of versifying a prose original into something akin to the Anglo-Saxon line. The beautiful result asks to be read aloud. I would add that Draycott's commentary is commendable in itself for its eloquent advocacy of the poetic possibilities of the source material. Michael Swan was commended for a very speakable version of Brecht's rumbustious 'Legend of the Dead Soldier', as was James Garza's translation of the Japanese prose poet Kasuya Eiichi's droll 'The Structure of the World' – its title is that of a book forced on the speaker by a rural bookseller, but the subject appears to be pig-farming. In third place was a further prose poem, 'How poetry was discovered'. Translated by Antoinette Fawcett from the Dutch of Abdelkader Benali, this is a witty, gnomic domestic fable recalling the work of Charles Simic. William Roychowdhury took second place with the wide-screen lyric onrush of the Sanskrit 'The Cloud Messenger'.

The result is finely detailed and perpetually in movement, with an effect both erotic and exalted. It will be apparent that it was not easy to settle on an overall winner in this group, but first prize goes to Alice Fletcher for her translation of Stein Mehren's Norwegian poem 'On the Fjord'. The translator comments that it is 'a perfect example of a typically Norwegian poem; the language is clean, crisp and deceptively simple, whilst also being very evocative.' Indeed: but how to make it work in English? Alice Fletcher establishes a steady sense of irrevocable movement towards and through 'The sound of years / in starless water. Like rowing / in one's own heart / through a sorrow as deep and cold / as death itself'. The poem is both utterly clear and deeply mysterious, a poem of lost love, perhaps, very beautiful and endlessly re-readable. I feel lucky to have been introduced to it.

Sean O'Brien

Le Sultan

Dans les montagnes de Cachemire
Vit le sultan de Salamandragore
Le jour il fait tuer un tas de monde
Et quand vient le soir il s'endort
Mais dans ses cauchemars les morts se cachent
Et le dévorent
Alors une nuit il se réveille
En poussant un grand cri
Et le bourreau tiré de son sommeil
Arrive souriant au pied du lit
S'il n'y avait pas de vivants
Dit le sultan
Il n'y aurait pas de morts
Et le bourreau répond D'accord
Que tout le reste y passe alors
Et qu'on n'en parle plus
D'accord dit le bourreau
C'est tout ce qu'il sait dire
Et tout le reste y passe comme le sultan l'a dit
Les femmes les enfants les siens et ceux des autres
Le veau le loup la guêpe et la douce brebis
Le bon vieillard intègre et le sobre chameau
Les actrices des théâtres le roi des animaux
Les planteurs de bananes les faiseurs de bons mots
Et les coqs et leurs poules les oeufs avec leur coque
Et personne ne reste pour enterrer quiconque
Comme ça ça va
Dit le sultan de Salamandragore
Mais reste là bourreau
Là tout près de moi
Et tue-moi
Si jamais je me rendors.

Jacques Prévert

“Le Sultan” by Jacques Prévert in *Paroles*
© Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1949

The Sultan

In the mountains of Kashmir
Lives the sultan of Salamandragore
By day he kills a load of people
And when evening arrives he falls asleep
But in his nightmares the dead are hiding
And are devouring him
So one night he wakes
Giving a loud cry
And the executioner roused from his rest
Arrives at the foot of his bed
If there weren't any living
Says the sultan
There wouldn't be any dead
And the executioner replies OK
So they all need to die
And let that be an end to it
OK says the executioner
It is the only thing he can say
So they all die as the sultan said
The women the children his own and other people's
The calf the wolf the wasp and the gentle sheep
The good honest old man and the sensible camel
The actresses of the stage the king of the animals
The banana planters the witty people
And the cocks and their hens the eggs and their yolk
And nobody is left to bury any of them
Things are fine now
Says the sultan of Salamandragore
But stay there executioner
There right next to me
And kill me
If ever I go back to sleep.

*Translated from the French
by Rose Lewens*

Rose Lewens' commentary

I chose this poem because when I spent some time in French school I had to learn it off by heart and illustrate it. I find it quite gruesome because it is about execution. The sultan is cruel. Is he stupid or is he mad? The result is the same. I think some politicians today are tyrants. The poem does not help us understand them, but it does help us understand how awful it would be to live with one ruling over you.

Sometimes people say things in French that you wouldn't really say in English and it can be hard to find an alternative. For example, in

French you say 'to push a cry', but in English we say 'to give a cry'. In French there is just one present tense, such as 'je fais', but in English we could translate that by 'I do' or 'I am doing'. The second one means you are there, at that moment, doing it. The first one is more general. It sounds better in this poem to say that dead people 'are hiding' and 'are devouring' the sultan in his nightmares because it is more dramatic.

I understood most of the words, but I had to look up some things, such as 'les faiseurs de

bons mots'. I originally thought that it would mean soothsayers or prophets but then realised that 'bons mots' can be jokes. Another problem that occurred was that 'cockereel' in English has two syllables, but this would have stopped the flow of the rhythm in the French poem, and I wanted it to sound more like 'yolk' because 'coq' and 'coque' sound the same in French, so I put 'cock' instead.

I didn't put any punctuation in the poem because there is none in the original.

Warkoczyk

*Kiedy już wszystkie kobiety
z transportu ogolono
czterech robotników miotłami
zrobionymi z lipy zamiatało
i gromadziło włosy*

*Pod czystymi szybami
leżą sztywne włosy uduszonych
w komorach gazowych
w tych włosach są szpilki
i kościane grzebienie*

*Nie prześwietla ich światło
nie rozdziela wiatr
nie dotyka ich dłoń
ani deszcz ani usta*

*W wielkich skrzyniach
kłębią się suche włosy
uduszonych
i szary warkoczyk
mysi ogonek ze wstążeczką
za który pociągają w szkole
niegrzeczni chłopcy.*

Tadeusz Ró ewicz

Braid

Once all the women
from the transport were sheared
four workers with brooms
made of linden wood swept
and gathered the hair.

Beneath clear glass lay
the stiff hair of those lost
strangled in gas chambers
in this hair there are pins
and delicate combs made of bone.

Light does not grace them
wind will not blow through them
a gentle hand will not touch them
nor rain, nor lips

In huge crates
dry hair of the strangled
and one grey braid
a mouse's tail, secured with a ribbon
one which boisterous young boys
would tug on in the playground.

*Translated from the Polish
by Emilia Leonowicz*

Emilia Leonowicz's commentary

I chose to translate 'Warkoczyk' after my mum read it out to me; I felt that the author had gotten across a strong message using a fairly short poem, which despite its length has a huge impact on the reader. I truly wanted to get across this same feeling in my translation, and that is the author's grief and his bitterness at the loss of children – an entire generation – in the Holocaust. The last three lines of the poem are certainly the most powerful, speaking of a children's

playground that will never be, but should have been. I personally also liked the description of combs found in the hair being made of bone, as if death had already claimed these women before their arrival and evidence of it clung to their remains.

I faced several difficulties when translating this poem, especially the use of diminutives. The very title of the original, 'Warkoczyk', is a diminutive of the Polish for braid; this is a word used most commonly when speaking

to children, it is an almost 'cutesy' way of using the word. In English there is no such equivalent, thus it was difficult for me to really get across the feeling of the poem.

The original poem is not structured, nor does it rhyme, therefore I was able to take some artistic liberties, if you will. However, I did make sure to translate it in a way which preserved the original tempo as well as the number of lines and paragraphs which the poem comprises.

Catullus 39

Egnativs, quod candidos habet dentes,
renidet usquequaque. si ad rei ventumst
subsellium, cum orator excitat fletum,
renidet ille. si ad pii rogum fili
lugetur, orba cum flet unicum mater,
renidet ille. quicquid est, ubicumquest,
quodcumque agit, renidet. hunc habet morbum,
neque elegantem, ut arbitror, neque urbanum.
quare monendumst te mihi, bone Egnati.
si urbanus esses aut Sabinus aut Tiburs
aut pinguis Umber aut obesus Etruscus
aut Lanuvinus ater atque dentatus
aut Transpadanus, ut meos quoque attingam,
aut quilubet, qui puriter lavit dentes,
tamen renidere usquequaque te nollem:
nam risu inepto res ineptior nullast.
nunc Celtiber es: Celtiberia in terra,
quod quisque minxit, hoc sibi solet mane
dentem atque russam defricare gingivam;
ut quo iste vester expolitor dens est,
hoc te amplius bibisse praedicet loti.

Catullus

Poem 39

To showcase his great gleaming incisors, Egnatius is always smiling. Should the defendants take the stand, as the QC elicits tears from all, the Cheshire Cat presides. Even mourning at a dear son's funeral, when the bereaved mother is weeping for the loss of her only true light, he beams. Whatever the occasion, wherever he is, whatever he is doing, he grins. This is a sickness he nurtures, and surely one that is neither elegant nor in good taste, in my estimation. So it falls to me to caution you thus, my dear Egnatius: if you were a Roman or a Sabine or a Tiburtine, a pot-bellied Umbrian or a portly Etruscan, a dark and toothy Lanuvian or one of my own Transpadanes, or anyone else who cleans his ivories with fresh water, still I'd not suffer to see you smiling always: for there is nothing more foolish than a vain rictus. At any rate you are a Celtiberian, and in that Spanish state, they reason that since each man makes water, he should scrub his teeth and wine-dark gums with his matinal micturate: hence the more highly polished your princely pegs, the greater volume of piss they attest you have downed in your daily ablutions.

*Translated from the Latin
by Edward Chan*

Edward Chan's commentary

Catullus is best known for his saucier poetry, but he writes on other topics in an equally engaging manner. His passionate disposition always makes for an entertaining read, and I feel that his more colloquial and even complaining tone can help to humanise him and bridge the gap in time, where other ancient authors can come across as very static and serious. The character of Egnatius as the vain narcissist is almost universally recognisable, and I feel that this facilitates a particularly wide sympathy for Catullus' comments within this poem.

I began with a literal translation, and then worked through the poem looking for better renderings in English, where the structure of the Latin did not map well onto English. Having considered a couple of other translations (Loeb edition and Whigham 1966), I did my best to produce a version distinct from both, choosing synonyms that, if slightly less literal, were perhaps better representative of the tone of the poem.

The original work was written in a regular metre that would have been difficult to reproduce in translation. Instead, I elected

to use decasyllabic lines in order to impose a structure on my rendering without having to disrupt the meaning of the original excessively in forcing the English into a metre more suited to Latin.

On a specific stylistic note, Latin poets make frequent use of harsh consonantal sounds such as 'c' or 't' to denote disgust; for example, 'minxit' (urinates). I chose to use the words 'rictus' and 'micturate' as synonyms for 'smile' and 'urine' in order to mirror the effect from the Latin.

Tristia III: II

Ergo erat in fati Scythiam quoque uisere nostris,
quaeque Lycaonio terra sub axe iacet:
nec uos, Pierides, nec stirps Letoia, uestro
docta sacerdoti turba tulistis opem.
Nec mihi, quod lusi uero sine crimine, prodest,
quodque magis uita Musa iocata mea est:
plurima sed pelago terraque pericula passum
ustus ab assiduo frigore Pontus habet.
Quique, fugax rerum securaque in otia natus,
mollis et inpatiens ante laboris eram,
ultima nunc patior, nec me mare portubus orbem
perdere, diuersae nec potuere uiae;
sufficit atque malis animus; nam corpus ab illo
accepit uires, uixque ferenda tulit.
Dum tamen et terris dubius iactabar et undis,
fallebat curas aegraque corda labor:
ut uia finita est et opus requieuit eundi,
et poenae tellus est mihi tacta meae,
nil nisi flere libet, nec nostro parciior imber
lumine, de uerna quam niue manat aqua.
Roma domusque subit desideriumque locorum,
quicquid et amissa restat in urbe mei.
Ei mihi, quo totiens nostri pulsata sepulcri
ianua, sed nullo tempore aperta fuit?
Cur ego tot gladios fugi totiensque minata
obruit infelix nulla procella caput?
Di, quos exerior nimium constanter iniquos,
participes irae quos deus unus habet,
exstimulate, precor, cessantia fata meique
interitus clausas esse uetate fores!

Ovid

Tristia III: II

So it seems I was fated to visit Scythia too,
And the land which lies beneath the Lycaonian sky.

You didn't think to help your priest,
No, not you, the learned crowd of Muses, nor you, son of Leto.

There was no real sin in my playful doings – true, but that can't help me now
The life I lived wasn't like the shameless dreams I dreamed – true, but that
can't help me now:
After all, here I am, subjected to all that land and sea can throw at me,
Held tight in cold Pontus' clutches.

I was born into leisure, not a care in the world,
Tender and impetuous when it came to work.
Now I weather the extremes: no harbourless ocean
Nor far-flung travels can break me;
My stout heart clung on in the face of my ills;
It leant my body the strength to bear what was not to be borne.
I was hurled halfway across the world, my faith was weak,
In the end it was toil that occupied me; kept those sorrows; that sick heart,
at bay.

And now I'm at my journey's end, toil is but a memory;
And here I am, in the place of my punishment:
There's nothing to do but grieve, and weep
Like springtime snow.

Rome's in my heart, and home, and places half-forgotten,
And that part of me I left behind in the city I've lost.
Oh, how often I've knocked on the door of my tomb;
Was it really never open?
Why have I escaped the fall of so many swords?
Why was my ill-fated life not taken by one of those storms that so often
threatened to take it?
Gods, unrelentingly unjust (as time has taught me),
Partakers of the fury which only one god holds,
Urge on my ailing fate, I pray,
And forbid the doors of death to close!

*Translated from the Latin
by Sam Hunt*

Sam Hunt's commentary

In choosing to translate a poem from Ovid's 'Tristia', I was especially inspired by a segment of a documentary about him that I saw recently in which he was described as the 'archetypal poet of exile'. He assumed this mantle in his last few years whilst confined to Tomis, far from Rome, and it contrasts so sharply with the more traditional literary baggage attached to Ovid, namely sensual elegiac love poetry and mythical epic in the form of the 'Metamorphoses'. Selecting a poem written during his banishment on the coast of the Black Sea enabled me to gain a new perspective on his work and his life, especially the circumstances of its

end. Because of the air of resignation and world-weariness which is so apparent in the 'Tristia' and 'Epistulae ex Ponto' (and indeed in this specific poem), I chose to do away with uniform stanza length, rhyme scheme, or rhythm in my translation and employ an (at times) conversational style of writing, certainly taking some inspiration from Philip Larkin in creating a poem that is pensive and reflective in a melancholic, but not tragic, manner. As for realising this aim by translating Latin into idiomatic English, I faced a number of challenges in conveying Ovid's general message whilst still maintaining grammatical sense. For instance, I translated

'nec mihi... prodest' as a parenthesis meaning 'but that can't help me now', repeated in order to stress the frustration that accompanies this helplessness that he describes. Similarly, some words like 'inpatiens' were better not translated entirely literally because of their context – to say that somebody is 'impetuous' in their work makes far more sense in modern English than some pervasive attitude of 'impatience'. Another technique I occasionally employed to bridge the linguistic disconnect was to translate some passive phrases as active, the latter being, as Orwell once remarked, so much more powerful in the English language.

På fjorden

Den natten jeg forlot deg
lå fjorden så stille og gjennomsiktig
som om selve vannet
hadde mistet all substans
Det var som å ro i tomme luften

Over en natt så uendelig klar
at jeg plutselig visste
jeg måtte leve uten skygge
Helt nær søvnens skillelinje
utenfor rekkevidden av dine drømmer

Lyden av årer
i stjernløst vann. Som å ro
i sitt eget hjerte
over en sorg så dyp og kald
som døden selv

Ved de stjerneklare breddene
langs sundet, lå husene
og lyste
med ditt ansikt i alle vinduer
Og du så meg ikke

Stein Mehren

On the Fjord

The night I left you
the fjord lay so still and clear
as if the water itself
had lost all substance
It was like rowing in empty air

Through a night so infinitely clear
that I suddenly knew
I had to live without shadow
Up against the edge of sleep
away from the reach of your dreams

The sound of years
in starless water. Like rowing
in one's own heart
through a sorrow as deep and cold
as death itself

On the banks of the starlit shores
along the strait, the houses lay
and shone
with your face in every window
And you did not see me

*Translated from the Norwegian
by Alice Fletcher*

Alice Fletcher's commentary

I have translated 'På fjorden' by Stein Mehren because I think it is a perfect example of a typically Norwegian poem; the language is clean, crisp, and deceptively simple, while also being very evocative. As with so much Norwegian literature and poetry, it is deeply connected to nature, as can be seen from the title itself. The language of Mehren's poem is simple but so poignant, and I think it is a poem that really makes one stop and think. Moreover, it is a poem about love, however tragic, which I think really brings the poem to life for readers.

There is not much complicated language

in this poem, so a challenge was keeping that same, minimalist language while still painting the same picture as the original. The mix of short and long lines means that accurately copying the rhythm of the poem is quite difficult, as Norwegian has many long compound words, and Mehren doesn't follow a specific rhythm. Knowing this, my translation has a mix of long and short lines, so although it is not identical, it still maintains that disjointed tone of the original.

When translating this poem, I wanted to keep a certain amount of 'Norwegianness', as I thought the original poem was so

evocative of Norway. The imagery created by words like 'fjord' and 'strait' immediately paint a Norwegian landscape. I also wanted to maintain the minimalist, simple tone; the Norwegian word for 'rowing', which is mentioned twice in the poem, is the same as the word for 'calm' or 'rest', and this ties in with the description of still water and empty air. Therefore I knew that this is a very calm, understated poem, despite the heartbreak that it describes, and this is something I wanted to carry over in the translation.

Meghadūta

kaścikāntāvīrahaguruṇā svādhikārapramattaḥ
māsāpenāstaṃgamitamahimā varṣabhogyeṇa bhartuḥ /
yakṣāścakre janakatanayāsānāpunyodakeṣu
snigdhačchāyātaruṣu vasatiṃ rāmagiryāśrameṣu // 1

tasminnadrau katicidabalāvīprayuktaḥ sa kāmī
nītvā māsānkanakavalayabhraṃsariktaprakoṣṭhaḥ /
āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase meghamāśliṣṭasānuḃ
vaprakrīḍāparīṇatagaḃaprekṣaṇīyaṃ dadarśa // 2

pratyāsanne nabhasi dayitājīvitāmbanārthī
jīmūtena svakuśalamayīm hārayiṣyanpravṛttim /
sa pratyagraiḥ kuṭajakusumaiḥ kalpitārghāya tasmai
prītaḥ prītipramukhavacanaṃ svāgataṃ vyājahāra // 4

dhūmajyotiḥsalilamarutāṃ saṃnipātaḥ kva meghaḥ
saṃdeśārthāḥ kva paṭukaraṇaiḥ prāṇibhiḥ prāpaṇīyāḥ /
ityautsukyādaparigaṇayanguhyakastaṃ yayāce
kāmārtā hi prakṛtikṛpaṇāścetanācetaṇeṣu // 5

saṃtaptānāṃ tvamasi śaraṇaṃ tatpayoda priyāyāḥ
saṃdeśaṃ me hara dhanapatikrodhaviśeṣitasya /
gantavyā te vasatiralakā nāma yakṣeśvarāṇāṃ
bāhyodyānasthitaharaśiraścandrikādhautaharmyā // 7

mārgaṃ tāvacchṛṇu kathayatastvatprayāṇānurūpaṃ
saṃdeśaṃ me tadanu jalada śroṣyasi śrotrepeyam /
khinnaḥ khinnaḥ śikhariṣu padaṃ nyasya gantāsi yatra
kṣīṇaḥ kṣīṇaḥ parilaghu payaḥ srotasāṃ copayujya // 13

tvayyāyattaṃ kṣīṣiphalamiti bhrūvikārānabhijñaiḥ
prītisnigdhairjanapadavadhūlocanaiḥ pīyamānaḥ /
sadyaḥsīrotkaṣaṇa surabhi kṣetramāruhya mālāṃ
kiṃcitpaścavraja laghugatirbhūya evottareṇa // 16

gacchanīnāṃ ramaṇavasatiṃ yoṣitāṃ tatra naktāṃ
ruddhāloke narapatipathe sūcibhedyastaṃbhiḥ /
saudāmanyā kanakanikaṣasniḃghayā darśayorvīm
toyotsargastanitamukharo mā ca bhūrviklavāstāḥ // 40

tāṃ kasyāṃcidbhavanavalabhau suptapārāvātayāṃ
nītvā rātriṃ ciravilasanātkhinnavidyutkalatraḥ /
dṛṣṭe sūrye punarapi bhavānvāhayedadhvaṣeṣaṃ
mandāyante na khalu suhṛḍāmabhyupetārthakṛtyāḥ // 41

gambhīrāyāḥ payasi saritaścetasīva prasanne
chāyātmāpi prakṛtisubhago lapsyate te praveśaṃ /
tasmādasyāḥ kumudaviśadānyarhasi tvāṃ na dhairyo
ānmoghīkartuṃ caṭulaśapharodvartanaprekṣitāni // 43

tasyāḥ kiṃcitkaradhṛtamiva prāptavānīraśākhaṃ
hṛtvā nīlaṃ salilavasaṇaṃ muktardhonitambam /
prasthānaṃ te kathamāpi sakhe lambamānasya bhāvi
jñātāsvādo vivratajaghanāṃ ko vihātuṃ samarthaḥ // 44

gatvā cordhvaṃ daśamukhabhujocchvāsītaprasthasaṃdheḥ
kailāsasya tridaśavanitādarpaṇasyātīthiḥ syāḥ /
śṛṅgocchrāyāiḥ kumudaviśadairyo vitatya sthitaḥ khaṃ
rāśībhūtaḥ pratidinamiva tryambakasyāṭṭhāṣaḥ // 61

tasyotsaṅge praṇayina iva srastagaṅgādukūlāṃ
na tvāṃ dṛṣṭvā na punaralakāṃ jñāsyase kāmācārin /
yā caḥ kāle vahati salilodgāramuccairvimānā
muktājālagratītamalakaṃ kāmīnīvābhraṇḃdam // 66

Kālidāsa

from The Cloud Messenger by Kalidasa

Once a certain caretaker neglected that selected as his task and was
cut off from his love separated from his power
all that long year he ate it up his punishment in mountain hermitages
in tree-thick-sticky shade beside the waters Sita washed herself to clean ...

a sexual man he wasted from his lover on that hill for months until
his rings fell from his hands and then when the rains
broke he saw it – a cloud that wrapped itself around
the peak and seemed to stoop
like an elephant to scratch against the slopes ...

to use this cloud to send some news to soothe his lover through
the long monsoon the lie that he was peaceful that was his desire
so he wove a welcome out of dogbane flowers
and spoke kind words to the raincloud ... now

smoke-with-brightness-met-with-rain-and-wind met in a cloud
that's
one thing
a sentient thing with wherewithal for message and for meaning

something else
but when we're pained by love we cannot tell the conscious from the dumb
he didn't weigh this and he pleaded
"Raingiver because you give relief from burning will you go to the rich homes
of Alaka where moonlight laps the palaces whenever Siva turns
his head in far gardens and give a message to the one
the anger of the Lord of Wealth has cut me from ...

but before you hear my message and you drink it in
I'll point you out the way go so whenever you
are weary weary you'll land on drizzled hills whenever you
are spent up spent up you'll drink the lightest water you can
swallow from the streams ...

now clear the crown of this hill and as you go the women in the fields
will gulp you down with damp desiring eyes that never narrow
for you bring harvest you make the farmland sweet to plough
as you scud a little to the west rise nimble to the north

above the royal road when night is pin-prick-tight and blocks
the view of women going to a lover's house show them the way
by lightning like true gold scratched across a stone
but don't let thunder downpour give the game away ...

then pass the night on ridges of a roof with your own
lightning-wife slowly exhausted from sex
but when the sun comes up go on don't linger
when you've made promises to a friend ...

because you're beautiful it may be you'll find your way into
Gambhira's river water into her clear mind
even if it's only with your reflected-self don't disappoint
her night-lotus-white her leaping-fish-tremble glances with your
steadfastness

the reed branches that she holds fall slightly from her banks of waist
her blue water vestment help it off then
dear friend resume your journey
though you will be slow to go when you've tasted her there ...

so go up touch the peaks turned upside down by the demon king
a looking-glass for goddesses to see themselves lily-pure
across the sky as day piles onto day the high white laughter
of the three worlds ...

and finally Alaka lying in the lap of a lover the cloak of Ganges
falling away once you've seen it you cannot not know
Alaka with its turrets flooded Alaka with its multitude of clouds
like a woman necklacing her pearls at this time of year.

*Translated from the Sanskrit
by William Roychowdhury*

William Roychowdhury's commentary

'The Cloud Messenger' tells the story of a man who sends a message to his lover, by way of a passing raincloud. Translations of this ancient Sanskrit poem are often stilted and archaic. I wanted to attempt a modern, even modernist, version that captured some of the original's feeling, beauty, and complexity.

Some challenges: Sanskrit is often made up of long compound words, juxtaposing ideas. I have tried to show these compounds piling up – like the cloudbanks massing at this extract's close. Often the constituent words in these compounds have more

than one relevant meaning: sometimes I've made choices, sometimes I've made new compounds of my own.

It is hard to capture the music of the original's metre, its long lines, the patterns of alliteration and assonance. I haven't preserved metre, aiming for its effect instead through devices such as internal rhyme. I have attempted a modern version of the long, stately line. Sanskrit is organised by the places of articulation in the mouth: as the raincloud moves the play of gutturals, dentals or labials can rumble like thunder, crackle like lightning, build from the pater

of rain into a downpour, or float lightly on the hiss of a breeze. Throughout, the progress of the cloud is also linked to the static man on the hill. At times the lines are heavy and slow, reflecting the languor of separation, at other times erotically excited.

The full poem is over 100 stanzas; I have extracted 13 from its first half, describing the cloud's journey. Picking stanzas to tell a tale in miniature was hard, as was excluding Part Two, where the couple – in imagination at least – are reunited through the delivery of the message. But in trying to return this message to our time, some losses are inevitable.

De ontdekking van de poëzie

Er kwam een deurwaarder om onze complete inboedel te vorderen. Mijn vader zat in de fiscale problemen. Speelgoed kan hij toch niet meenemen, dacht ik, want dat hebben we niet.

‘We hebben geen speelgoed,’ zei ik tegen de man.

‘Dat zullen we nog wel zien,’ zei hij en begon door het huis te lopen, die paar kamers, en voordat ik het wist was hij naar me toe gekomen met onder zijn arm allerlei zaken waarvan ik niet had geweten dat ik ze in mijn bezit had.

‘Wat is dit?’

Het zag er niet uit als speelgoed.

‘Is dat speelgoed?’

Hij liet het op de vloer vallen, bukte en begon ermee te spelen, en voordat ik het wist was ik mee aan het doen. Het was inderdaad speelgoed eigenlijk en de deurwaarder die tijdens het spelen bevrijd was van zijn zakelijke kantjes, liet me zien hoe ik met kleine aanpassingen aan de dingen toch heel veel plezier kon maken.

‘Ja,’ zei ik, opgewekt en lachend om deze heerlijke ontdekking, ‘dit is speelgoed.’

‘En om die reden zal ik het mee moeten nemen. Ik geef je een minuutje om er afscheid van te nemen.’ Wat hij zei, deed hij ook, zoals alle mensen in dit land doen. Ze doen wat ze zeggen.

Abdelkader Benali

(Reproduced by permission of the poet)

How poetry was discovered

A bailiff came to the door to lay claim to all our possessions. My father had tax problems. He can't take toys away, I thought, because we don't have any toys.

‘We've got no toys,’ I told the man.

‘We'll see about that,’ he said and started to stomp through the house, a couple of rooms really, and suddenly he was coming towards me with all kinds of stuff tucked under his arm that I didn't even know belonged to me.

‘What's this, then?’

It didn't look like toys.

‘Is it toys?’

He dropped it all onto the floor, bent down and started to play with it, and before I knew it I'd joined in too. They really were toys. I'd never seen so many toys before. They were excellent playthings actually and the bailiff, stripped of all his bailiff-hood in the act of playing, showed me how I could create plenty of fun and games simply by making small adjustments to things.

‘Yes,’ I said in high spirits, laughing at this wonderful discovery, ‘these really are toys.’

‘And that's why I'll have to take them all away with me. I'll give you one moment now to say goodbye.’ And he did exactly as he said, as people always do in this country. They do what they say.

*Translated from the Dutch
by Antoinette Fawcett*

Antoinette Fawcett's commentary

This prose-poem is the first poem in Abdelkader Benali's latest collection *Wax Hollandais* (2017), which explores multiple ways of being and seeing in the poet's various homes and dwellings: his country of origin, Morocco, which he left as a child of four; the Netherlands, his adoptive country and now deeply-rooted culture; his childhood family home in Rotterdam; and the home he has created for himself with his own family and in the Dutch language.

I was enchanted by this amusing, ironic fable and wanted to translate it because of its verve and playful wisdom, which struck me

as being typical of Benali's work. By placing this piece of writing at the start of his poetry collection, Benali effectively declares that it *is* a poem, enacting exactly the same kinds of small adjustments to our thinking and perception that the bailiff made to his.

The challenges of translating prose-poetry (or a poem in the guise of prose) are somewhat different to translating line-governed poetry. I have not worried about the line breaks at all and have not even focused on the number of lines, words, or syllables. But I *have* listened carefully to the rhythms and the tone, and to the weight and valency of

the individual words.

One key word ‘speelgoed’ [toy/s] actually gave me some trouble in its translation as it is grammatically singular but includes both singular and plural concepts within it. Thinking carefully about what a child might say (‘Is it toys?’) enabled me to catch a little of that ambivalence in English. I also tried to convey something of its etymology, which has some weight in the effect of the whole (‘speel’ = ‘play’; ‘goed’ = ‘good’/‘goods’), by choosing the older English word for ‘toy’ – ‘plaything’ – as its translation at one crucial point in the poem.

This year we are delighted to launch a brand new strand to the Stephen Spender Prize. The ‘Polish Spotlight’ combines our education programmes – creative translation workshops for young people – with a special prize for translation from Polish. This new focus has enabled the Trust to reach out to diverse groups of young people across the UK, introducing more pupils, teachers and community groups to the inspiring activity of creative translation.

The Polish Spotlight originated in workshops run by the Stephen Spender Trust in Hull in 2017, during its year as UK City of Culture. This year we have developed the Spotlight into a series of workshops in primary, secondary and community-led supplementary schools. Each workshop is a hugely

stimulating experience in its own right, but this year they were also designed to inspire pupils to enter the new Spotlight prize, and we’re delighted to publish the three winners and a selection of commended entries in these pages. More details of the workshops are available at stephen-spender.org, and we look forward to developing additional language ‘spotlights’ in the years to come.

We are grateful to the Rothschild Foundation, the Polish Cultural Institute, the British Council and Christ’s Hospital School for making these workshops and the prize possible, and to the European Commission Representation in London for partnering with the Trust on the workshops and this publication.

Charlotte Ryland
Director of the Stephen Spender Trust

Judge’s comments

Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, a whole generation of bilingual speakers of Polish and English has been growing up in the UK, sparking an interest in the Polish language among their friends at school. There are also more bilingual families in Poland than in the past, so the Stephen Spender Trust’s Polish Spotlight competition comes at the perfect moment to encourage the literary translators of the future to try out their talents for the first time.

Even though we’re surrounded by other languages in the UK, most of us don’t give much thought to translation, or what it involves. But there are lots of children in this country who translate, or at least interpret, for their family and friends on a daily basis. The translation workshops organised by the Stephen Spender Trust are an excellent way of prompting children to find out not just about literature and translation, but about their own classmates – when there are Polish speakers in the group, they are able to translate for the others, and then all work together to produce effective English translations.

The competition results for the 10-and-under category show the value of this exercise. The poem that I have chosen as the winning entry was translated by a child aged only five, whose teacher used the prize to great effect. The Polish-speaking children read some short, sea-themed poems by Dorota Gellner with a Polish-speaking member of staff, using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words. Then they honed their translations from the English-language point of view. As first steps in literary translation, those are ideal. Gellner’s poems are simple, vivid and evocative, an ideal choice for very young children to begin their exploration of language and literature. Here’s a lyrical image from the winning poem, about the sun setting over the sea: ‘...night like a black ball spinning around / Spinning around on the shore...’

Polish children’s author Michał Rusinek led a workshop in which the children translated one of his poems, ‘Bird Feeder’, in which unfortunately the bird feeder turns out to be a cat feeder too. Rusinek’s poems rely on

rhyme, metre, word play and wit, and present a challenge to even the most experienced of translators. The translations that the primary pupils produced are impressive, ranging from superb efforts to reproduce the tone and form of the original poem, retaining the rhyme, rhythm and comedy (‘But at night the cats come to take a bite / Now the birds have lost their appetite’), through to highly inventive reinterpretations inspired by the tone of the Polish text. Here we have alternative approaches to translation, and another effective creative writing exercise.

I was not surprised to find that many of the competitors chose to translate classic rhymes by Julian Tuwim and Jan Brzechwa, because every Polish child grows up with these glorious poems. But they’re famously fiendish to translate – they depend on rhyme, metre, assonance, made-up words, puns and absurdity – the Polish equivalent of Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear. So the entries that succeeded in using some of the same poetic tricks are especially impressive. In the 14-and-under

category, brave soul Gerard Coutain tackled Tuwim’s ‘The Locomotive’ (a horse/of course, fatties/patties, bananas/fortepianos!), and a group of the under-10s came up with a valiant rhyming translation of Brzechwa’s ‘Show-Off’, calling her ‘Skite’, an interesting Australian-English word that’s new to me (‘When I answer, it’s so clever / At school I have no bad grades, never’).

The range of poems chosen by the competitors is very wide, from late nineteenth-century Romantics, Tuwim’s adult love poems (including a thoughtful translation of ‘You’ by Kaja Zawrotniak), poems by twentieth-century authors not widely known in English (Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Anna Świrszczyńska, for example), to the lyrics of a rock song, and some virtually unknown contemporary poets (such as Agnieszka Aleksandra Archicińska, whose poems inspired two of the best translations). The translations of two of Poland’s greatest twentieth-century poets stood out for me: in the 14-and-under category the winner is ‘The Pebble’ by Zbigniew Herbert, and in the 18-and-under category ‘Cat in an Empty Apartment’ by Wisława Szymborska, both translated with great sensitivity.

‘The Pebble’ was translated by Maya Azzabi, who says she’s ‘someone ... who doesn’t speak Polish extremely well’. Maya shows a mature understanding of the poet’s intention, and his method,

and also how to render them in English. In her commentary she describes the ‘deeper meaning’ of the poem, the metaphor of the pebble as something eternal and thus ‘indifferent to our lives’. Then she explores Herbert’s language, apparently simple, and weighs the best equivalents. ‘I have never translated a poem before,’ she writes, ‘and it has made me more aware of the words and languages around us’. Like the original, this impressively precise translation includes nothing superfluous. In the final lines, she captures the power of the Polish text: ‘Pebbles are untameable / Until the very end they will look at us / with a quiet, very bright eye.’

As Amelia Sodhi, who translated ‘Cat in an Empty Apartment’, says to open her commentary: ‘There are many poems on grief, but never from a cat’s perspective’. This is a superb choice, because Szymborska speaks to all of us, across generations and cultures. As the translator says, in describing the cat whose owner will never return, she ‘captures a beautiful melancholy... through simplicity and repetition. ... Her illustration of the pain of loss is... something small and hence even more potent’. With this perfect sense of the poet’s aim, the translator has examined how she achieved it, and endeavoured to reproduce the meaning with the same lightness of touch. She identifies one of the biggest challenges for translators from Polish: ‘recreating

the few words necessary in Polish to convey something bigger’. This sensitivity has produced a translation that recreates the unsettling atmosphere of the poem, where amid the empty silence of the apartment the cat is alone and the owner has gone. And also the cat’s indignant tone in the final stanza, where: ‘Let him dare return, / let him dare show himself. Right away he’ll learn / that one doesn’t do this to a cat.’

The translators have taken care to choose poems that speak to them personally. ‘The carnival in Venice is an event I have always wanted to participate in,’ writes Katarzyna Birula-Bialynicka, translator of ‘il momento di carnevale’. ‘The poem makes time... suddenly stop, the reader feels special whilst reading it,’ she says, and in her skilful translation, capturing the mood and rhythm of the original, so does the English reader: ‘let us sail illuminated by the lights / of a swaying gondola / to our last ball...’ Archicińska’s work also appeared in the 14-and-under category, where her Eiffel-Tower-shaped poem, ‘Tour Eiffel’, has been competently translated into the same form.

Altogether, the high standard of the translations submitted for the competition, and the evident thought and effort that the entrants have put into making their translations as good as possible give me great hope for the future of Polish literature in English translation.

Antonia Lloyd Jones



Kot w pustym mieszkaniu

Umrzeć - tego się nie robi kotu.
Bo co ma począć kot
w pustym mieszkaniu.
Wdrapywać się na ściany.
Ocierać między meblami.
Nic niby tu nie zmienione,
a jednak pozamieniane.
Niby nie przesunięte,
a jednak porozsuwane.
I wieczorami lampa już nie świeci.

Słysząc kroki na schodach,
ale to nie te.
Ręka, co kładzie rybę na talerzyk,
także nie ta, co kładła.

Coś się tu nie zaczyna
w swojej zwykłej porze.
Coś się tu nie odbywa
jak powinno.
Ktoś tutaj był i był,
a potem nagle zniknął
i uporczywie go nie ma.

Do wszystkich szaf się zajrzało.
Przez półki przebiegło.
Wcisnęło się pod dywan i sprawdziło.
Nawet złamało zakaz
i rozrzuciło papiery.
Co więcej jest do zrobienia.
Spać i czekać.

Niech no on tylko wróci,
niech no się pokaże.
Już on się dowie,
że tak z kotem nie można.
Będzie się szło w jego stronę
jakby się wcale nie chciało,
pomalutku,
na bardzo obrażonych łapach.
O żadnych skoków pisków na początek.

Wisława Szymborska

Cat in an empty apartment

Dying – one doesn't do that to a cat.
For what can a cat do
in an empty apartment.
Scratching against the walls.
Rubbing on the furniture.
In a way, nothing here was changed,
and yet it has been altered.
In a way, nothing was moved,
and yet it has been confused.
In the evening, the light burns no more.

Footsteps heard on the stairway,
but not those.
The hand, which lays fish on the plate,
is too not the one, that did it once.

Something does not begin here
at its usual time.
Something does not happen here
as it should.
Someone was, and was here
then at-all-once disappeared
and now he's persistently gone.

It peered into all the cupboards.
Scampered across the shelves.
Wedge itself under the rug, investigated.
Even went against the rule
and scattered the papers.

What else is there to do.
Sleeping, waiting.

Let him dare return,
let him dare show himself.
Right away he'll learn,
that one doesn't do this to a cat.
There will be a stroll in his direction
as though utterly begrudging,
little by little,
on most offended paws.
And no leaps or chirps at first.

*Translated by
Amelia Sodhi*

Amelia Sodhi's commentary

There are many poems on grief, but never from a cat's perspective.

When I was looking for a poem to translate, 'Kot w pustym mieszkaniu' stood out to me. Szymborska captures a beautiful melancholy in this poem, through simplicity, repetition, and notably through the more subjective narration in the last stanza. She is able to recreate a certain feeling of grief that, so far, I have struggled to find in other poems; her illustration of the pain of loss isn't

something over the top but something small, and hence, even more potent.

As I translated 'Kot w pustym mieszkaniu', I focused on choosing words that could carry the same feeling behind them, even if they weren't the exact translation. 'Piski', for example, technically means squeals or squeaks but, after deliberating, I ended up picking the verb 'chirp' instead – chirping, learnt in childhood, can show a cat's happiness or is often used as a call to get another to pay attention.

One of the largest problems I found translating between Polish and British English was recreating the few words necessary in Polish to convey something bigger. Phrases like 'ale to nie te' can be translated to be equally short but the English equivalent often somewhat misses the mark. This is something I had to work hard on making sure to balance – retaining the simplicity in Szymborska's poem that she uses so well without changing the meaning.

il momento di carnevale

jestem maseczką wenecką
w renesansowej sukni
pomykam wąską uliczką
w stronę czarnej gondoli
gdzie ty czekasz na mnie
ukryty w stroju gondoliera

kurczowo ściskam skraj
sukni atłasowej
utkanej na krosnach marzeń
popłynmy w świetle latarní
chybotliwej gondoli
na ostatni bal

w słodkich ciemnościach
weneckiej nocy
tańczmy długo najdłużej
gdy orkiestra jeszcze gra
i póki na zawsze nie rozdzieli nas
ostry promień świtu

Agnieszka Aleksandra Archicińska

il momento di carnevale

i am a little venetian mask
wearing a renaissance ballgown
flitting along a narrow alley
towards a black gondola
where you await me
disguised as a gondolier

i am firmly grasping the hem
of a satin dress
woven on the looms of dreams
let us sail illuminated by the lights
of a swaying gondola
to our last ball

in the luscious shadows
of a venetian night
let us dance incessantly
whilst the orchestra still plays
until we are parted forever
by the piercing beam of dawn

*Translated by
Katarzyna Birula-Bialynicka*

Katarzyna Birula-Bialynicka's commentary

I have chosen this particular poem because Italy, Italian language and culture are inspirational and remarkable. The carnival in Venice is an event I have always wanted to participate in. The poem enables me to experience that and takes me there for a while. I feel as if I were the persona of the poem, as if I was wearing the mask and the ballgown. The poem has a magical touch and makes all the time in the world suddenly stop. The reader

feels special whilst reading it.

I approached the poem with the intention of translating it as accurately as possible but preserving the original ideas. I thought it would be best to leave the title of the poem as it is, because it is a perfect introduction to it.

I have decided not to capitalise any word in the poem, as it is in the original version, despite it not being grammatically correct. I used the same approach to punctuation.

The problems I have encountered were related to the use of tenses, which differ in Polish and in English. For example, the line 'where you await me' in the first stanza and the line 'whilst the orchestra still plays' in the third stanza should normally be translated using the present continuous tense. I decided to use the present simple tense instead, to make the lines more concise.

*The original poem and translation is unavailable for online presentation.
Enquiries are directed to the copyright holder.*

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Maya Azzabi's commentary

When I heard about the Polish Spotlight Prize and decided to take part, I wanted to find a poem that would be easy to translate for someone like me, who doesn't speak Polish extremely well.

As a big fan of writing, I quite enjoyed finding the best possible words that I could use to translate this poem. Zbigniew Herbert's 'Kamyk' does look simple, but if you really look into it, it's not hard to find the deeper meaning.

Pebbles are a part of nature and will be on this earth for much longer than humans will ever be. 'Kamyk' tells us how pebbles

are much bigger than us metaphorically and that they have 'seen' this Earth before humans began destroying it slowly and they will 'see' the state that humans will leave it in. They are much bigger than us and remain indifferent to our lives.

Whilst translating it I came across many problems. For example in this line: 'o zapachu który niczego nie przypomina / niczego nie ploszy nie budzi požądania'. It caused me a lot of trouble, because I was completely bewildered as to what this could be translated to in English. I eventually settled on the phrase that you see before

you now: 'its scent recalls nothing / doesn't alarm, doesn't awaken any passion'.

The word that I struggled with the most in this line was 'ploszy'. I could not find a relevant word that would fit in with the context. I decided I would just have to use a simple verb 'to alarm' as it conveys the meaning of the Polish word quite well.

Overall it was an interesting experience as I have never translated a poem before and I think it has made me more aware of the words and languages around us.

Tour Eiffel

zobaczyłam ją
dumną
z głową w chmurach
na jej piersiach
naszyjnik
z gwiazd dwunastu
złocą się
łśnią w płomieniach słońca
hojnie użyczone
od Madonny w Chwale

u jej stóp
kuglarze i szrudlarze
prorocy i guru
zbawiciele zagubionego świata
który już za chwilę spada
w przepastne otchłanie
KOSMOSU
liberté
egalité
fraternité
wirują karuzele
starzec bez nogi
gra na katarynce
ODE DO RADOŚCI

Agnieszka Aleksandra Archicińska

Tour Eiffel

I saw her
proud
her head high in the clouds
on her front
a necklace
composed of twelve stars
shining brightly
in the flames of the sun
accorded generously
by Madonna in Glory

at her feet
bateleurs and stilt walkers
prophets and gurus
saviours of the lost world
that in a moment shall fall
into the precipitous abyss
of the COSMOS
liberté
egalité
fraternité
spinning carousels
a legless old man
playing
ODE TO JOY
on the barrel organ

*Translated by
Bartosz Birula-Bialynicki*

Bartosz Birula-Bialynicki's commentary

There were several reasons why I chose this poem. Firstly, I love the theme of it. My dream is to become an actor and that is why I love all people involved in visual arts. Performers that appear in this poem, such as bateleurs and stilt walkers, have always amazed me. They seem to be incredibly talented. I also like this poem because when I read it I can feel the atmosphere around the

Eiffel Tower. I can even hear 'Ode to Joy' in my mind.

I assumed that I would translate this poem according to the original visual style with all the lines and stanzas looking exactly as the author intended. Therefore, I left three words in French because they are the motto of France from the times of the French Revolution.

Translating 'Tour Eiffel' was not an easy task at all. There were many words that I had to look up in a dictionary as they are not so commonly used in everyday life. I also decided to change the order of the last two lines of the poem, because of the differences in sentence structure when comparing Polish to English. I thought this change would result in a better ending.

Słońce Zachodzi

Słońce zachodzi. W morzu się chowa.
Chowa się słońca płonąca głowa,
światliste ręce, błyszczące oczy
i noc jak czarna piłka się toczy.

Toczy się brzegiem, skacze po falach
i w czarnych muszlach gwiazdy zapala!

Dorota Gellner

Sun Sets

Sun sets. Under the sea it's hiding.
Hiding the sun's flaming head,
Light arms, shiny eyes
And night like a black ball spinning around.

Spinning around on the shore, jumping on the waves
And in the black shells it lights stars!

*Translated by
Leo Domalewski*

Commentary by Charlotte Bowes, Leo Domalewski's class teacher

The children in my class are only five years old and I have been amazed at how they are fluent in both Polish and English to the point where they are able to translate for their friends!

Our class topic for the last two weeks has been 'Under the Sea' so we chose poems that

extended the play-based learning we have been completing in class. Each child had the opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion with a Polish member of the EAL* team who read them the poem line by line. She then wrote down what they said, word for word, in English. A few words were unknown to

the child so they typed them in online and looked them up in a Polish dictionary.

The children were so excited to share their translations with their friends in class.

**English as an Additional Language*

KARMNIK

Karmniki – prosta sprawa – mają daszki,
pod którymi powinny się chronić ptaszki,
kiedy przylatują do nas na kolację
złożoną z okruszków chleba. Mam rację?

Miałbym rację, gdyby nie nasz kot,
który chowa się w karmniku, tak ot*.
Czeka tam, aż skuszone okruszkiem pod daszkiem
przylecą jakieś smaczne ptaszki...

* WYJADESZY STARANNIE OKRUSZKI.
WSZAK KOTY TO NIE FLEJTUSZKI.

Michał Rusinek

Bird Feeder

Bird feeders are a pit stop for birds,
They all have little roofs, haven't you heard?
But at night the cats come to take a bite,
Now the birds have lost their appetite.

Bird feeders attract the birds,
And down below the cats have merged.
The cats fight, wonder and play,
But sadly birds get eaten every day.

*Translated by
Kian Armstrong, Abigail Easton,
Lexie Hunter and William Winch*



From *Wierszyki domowe* by Michał Rusinek, illustration by Joanna Rusinek.

Lodówka

Znałem pewnego półgłówka,
który myślał, że lodówka
to przejście na biegun południowy,
więc w pewien dzień sierpniowy
włożył kurtkę i rękawiczki,
otworzył drzwiczki,
po czym wyjął z lodówki śmiało
to, co wyjąć się dało:
mleko, masło, salami,
pięć jogurtów z wiśniami,
dżem, majonez z musztardą,
i trzy jajka na twardo.
Wlaź do środka, choć było tam ciasno,
usiadł w kucki i drzwiczki zatrzaskał.
Gdy go znaleziono nad ranem,
był już zwykłym bałwanem.

Michał Rusinek

Fridge

I knew one idiot, which
thought that the fridge
was a tunnel to Antarctica, say.
So one hilarious day
he put on his gigantic coat and his microscopic hat,
he opened the door, looked at
and took out everything he could:
milk, eggs and ham,
strawberry jam,
mayonnaise and mustard,
lots of cheese and custard.
He jumped inside although it was scuffed,
he slammed the door, well-buffed.
And in the morning, then,
he looked like a pale gingerbread man

*Translated by
Nataniel Garaś and Klaudiusz Gorol*

Abecadło

Abecadło z pieca spadło,
O ziemię się hukło,
Rozsypało się po kątach,
Strasznie się potłukło:
I - zgubiło kropczkę,
H - złamało kładeczkę,
B - zbiło sobie brzuszki,
A - zwichnęło nóżki,
O - jak balon pękło,
aż się P przelękło,
T - daszek zgubiło,
L - do U wskoczyło,
S - się wyprostowało,
R - prawą nogę złamało,
W - stanęło do góry dnem
i udaje, że jest M.

Julian Tuwim

The Alphabet

The Alphabet fell from the stove,
crashed onto the floor,
scattering into all corners,
injuring itself terribly, and more:
I – lost its mark,
H – broke its path,
B – bruised its bellies,
A – sprained its legs not fit for wellies,
O – burst like a balloon,
even P got shot to the moon,
T – lost its ceiling
L – jumped onto U for no meaning,
S – straightened itself out
R – broke its right leg overnight
W – went topsy turvy
pretending to be M, all nervy.

*Translated by
Zuzanna Bartosiewicz*

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. Fourteen 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 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;



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.

for the adult translators, winning can bring public recognition, publishing contracts and new contacts and networks.

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.

The Polish Spotlight 2018 is the first in a series of language-specific strands for younger entrants. There are three

categories: 18-and-under, 14-and-under, and 10-and-under, and the prize is supported by creative translation workshops in schools and community groups. We are grateful to our translator-facilitators Anna Blasiak, Maja Konkolewska and Michał Rusinek for devising and running workshops, and to the following schools for hosting Polish Spotlight workshops in 2017/18:

Gillshill Primary School, Hull

Irena Sendlers Polish Saturday School, Hull

Haydon Abbey Primary School, Aylesbury

St Joseph's Polish Saturday School, Amersham

Ruskin Community High School, Crewe

Christ's Hospital School, Horsham – host to pupils from Greenway Academy, Maidenbower Junior School, Slinfold Primary, St John's Primary, St Mary's Primary, Shelley Primary, Sompting Village Primary, Our Lady's Queen of Heaven, and Warnham Primary.

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
or email info@stephenspender.org

The Stephen Spender Trust

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