Stephen Spender Prize
For Poetry in Translation
2021

Judges
Daljit Nagra
Samantha Schnee
Khairani Barokka
Urdu Spotlight judge
Sascha Aurora Akhtar

in association with
The Guardian
14-and-under

Winners

- Adeline Goh
  ‘The Temple by the Stars’
  by Li Bai
  (Ancient Chinese)

- Matilda Hardman
  ‘All the Birds’
  by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben
  (German)

- Millie Farrell
  ‘A.A.’
  by Christian Bernard
  (French)

Highly commended

- Eylül Karakullukçu
  ‘Spring’s Idleness (extract)’
  by Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı
  (Turkish)

- Katarina Fong
  ‘To Love the Lotus’
  by Zhou Dunyi
  (Ancient Chinese)

- Mia Harris
  ‘In a Pit Like a Bear’ (extract)
  by Guillaume Apollinaire
  (French)

Commended

- Eloise Allen (French)
- Juliette Blua (Spanish)
- Sahelous Bazardius (Lithuanian)
- Cameron Brookes (German)
- Rebecca Cayley (Polish)
- Sophie Dain (German)
- Matilda Gifford (Italian)
- Alexandra Glavan (Romanian)
- George Gronow (Polish)
- Saraha Sara Hashmi (Arabic)
- Matjiun Rua Spencer (Spanish)
- Arina Kar (Bengali)
- Aryan Khetarpal (Hindi)
- Julia Koloedzieje (Polish)
- Jessica Lawrence (French)
- Natasha Lawrence (German)
- Rafael Lynx (French)
- Kai O’Neill (Gaelic)
- Daniel Omuonwoko (Chinese)
- Martha Pender (Spanish)
- Carlota Pia-Parrado (German)
- Vinusha Ratnarajah (Tamil)
- Louisa Roberts (German)
- Naranjo Santana (Hebrew)
- Letia Santanton (Spanish)
- Megan Slattery and Freya Rogerson
  (Spanish – joint entry)
- Amrith Sostan-Basogun (Japanese)
- Ishhta Sood (Hindi)
- Konstantin Spasov (Bulgarian)
- Paeze Ubahede (Spanish)
- Peter Xu (Chinese)
- Musab Wahab (German)
- Freya Warren (Spanish)
- Sophie Young (Spanish)

16-and-under

Winners

- Steffan Nicholas
  ‘Instant Houses’
  by Iwan Llwyd
  (Welsh)

- Maddie Stoll
  ‘25th October 1994 – Modena.’
  by Fatima Bouhtouch
  (Italian)

- Iona Mandal
  ‘Kolkata’s Jesus’
  by Nirendranath Chakraborty
  (Bengali)

Highly commended

- Rosie Evans
  ‘Folksinger’
  by Elizabeth Pérez Tzintzún
  (Mexican Spanish)

- Karolina Kuhta
  ‘To Kachalov’s Dog’
  by Sergei Yesenin
  (Russian)

- Sarah McLaren
  ‘Masses’
  by César Vallejo
  (Peruvian Spanish)

Commended

- Umar Ahmed (Spanish)
- Ciara Andreil (Spanish)
- Romy Assuri (Spanish)
- Ritika Chakraborty (Spanish)
- Emma Cortinovis (Italian)
- Zony Chung (Chinese)
- Drew Evans (German)
- Tina Filipiak (Polish)
- Charlotte Fox (Latin)
- Liv Goldreich (Modern Hebrew)
- Charlie Harrison (German)
- June Hyun (Korean)
- Luca Kalmar (Hungarian)
- Simran Kastri (Hindi)
- Akshata Lakundri (Kannada)
- Amber Mallet (Spanish)
- Hazel Morpurgo (French)
- Elly Na (Korean)
- Adam Noah (Portuguese)
- Marianne Peuch (French)
- Erick Riera (French)
- Elly Sabarap (Farsi)
- Rosa Saville Sneath (German)
- Isabel Sykes (Latin)
- Daniel Topalovic (Spanish)
- Jack Van Den Heuvel (French)

Commended

- Emma Cortinovis (Italian)
- Zoey Chung (Chinese)
- Drew Evans (German)
- Eva Filipiak (Polish)
- Charlotte Fox (Latin)
- Liv Goldreich (Modern Hebrew)
- Charlie Harrison (German)
- June Hyun (Korean)
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- Elly Sabarap (Farsi)
- Rosa Saville Sneath (German)
- Isabel Sykes (Latin)
- Daniel Topalovic (Spanish)
- Jack Van Den Heuvel (French)
18-and-under

**Winners**

Doga Acikgun
‘Last Will’
by Nâzım Hikmet
(Turkish)

Jahan de Bellaigue
‘O Iran, My Bejewelled Land’ (extract)
by Forough Farrokhzad
(Farsi)

Jasmine Hardy
‘They Are Unbeaten by the Rain’
by Kenji Miyazawa
(Japanese)

**Highly commended**

Marco Cheung
‘Funeral of the Flower’
by Cao Xueqin
(Chinese)

Lilia Foster
‘Underdevelopment Problems’
by Nicolás Guillén
(Cuban Spanish)

Chloe O’Connor
‘Talking’
by Chen Cang
(Chinese)

**Commended**

Alicia Bushell (French)
Sam Colvine (Russian)
Fraser Cory (French)
Rebecca Crawley (Spanish)
Marianne Doherty (Irish)
Harry Eisinger (French)

Sophie Harrison (French)
Carisna Hay (German)
Isabelle Horrocks (Ancient Greek)
Preya Jerkinson (French)
Kitty Joyce (Spanish)
Harvey Kernohan (Spanish)
Kian Khan (German)
Krystyna Lazaro (Polish)
Edward Maher (Yiddish)
Lidia Marshall-Sanchez (Spanish)

Olivia Minucci (Spanish)
Kate O’Connor (German)
Izzi Pullin (French)
Jennifer Raphael (German)
Sarah Roberts (Bulgarian)
Surna Saif (French)
Emily Stonebridge (French)
Diederik Zuetemudier (Dutch)

**First-time entrant commendations**

Christina Lucassi
‘Have You Ever Heard of Little Dwarf Dwimble?’
by Christina Tropper and Alexander Smutni-Tropper
(German)

Harriet McAlonan
‘In the Twilight of Life’
by Abdellatif Laâbi
(Moroccan French)

Arthur Allen
‘I Have Barely Had Time to Build Your Name’
by Maria Wine
(Swedish)

**Winners**

FIRST
Harry Man
‘The Green Tent’
by Endre Ruset
(Norwegian)

SECOND
James Garza
‘Room’
by Kurobe Setsuko
(Japanese)

THIRD
Georgina Collins
‘A Name is Sewn into the Flesh’
by Jean-Claude Awono
(Cameroonian French)

**Highly commended**

Suzannah V. Evans
‘Sailor’ (extract)
by Tristan Corbière
(French)

Robin Munby
‘Fálala’ by Claudia Elena Menéndez Fernández
(Asturian)

Antoinette Fawcett
‘The Hares’
by H.H. ter Balkt
(Dutch)

**Commended**

Chris Beckett (Ethiopian Amharic)
Elena Bossi (Italian)
Jane Bradley (Romanian)
Philip Chadwick (German)
Marian de Vroght (Dutch)
Oliver Falken (Sanskrit)
Noaise Gale (Italian)
Jane Hunter (German)
Rosemary Mitchell-Schutevoorder
(Dutch)

Claire Miranda Roberts (Italian)
Robert Sargent (German)
Rebecca Simpson (Catalan)
Michael Swan (Old English)
Elaine Thornton (German)
Karin Van heerden (Dutch)
Sue Vickerman (Slovenian)
Emma Walker (Spanish)
Stephen Walsh (isiNdebele)
Caitlyn Ward (Latin)
 Urdu Spotlight Prize
10-and-under

Winner
Safi Robertson
‘There is a fairy with many colours’
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

Commended
Bruno Scott-Buck
‘A fairy is bright’
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

Deiminas Grudzinskas
‘There is one fairy I like’
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

Ashwaq Nassa
‘There is a fairy on its own’
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

 Urdu Spotlight Prize
14-and-under

Winner
Faaiz Adil
‘If it is grief let it torture my heart’
by Ahmed Faraz

Winner
Faaiz Adil
‘If it is grief let it torture my heart’
by Ahmed Faraz

Commended
Manal Salman
‘A Child’s Prayer’
by Allama Iqbal

Alishba Tariq
‘Clouds’
by Shehla Shibli

Amman Ali Hussain Shaheen
‘Speak Up’
by Faz Ahmed Faiz
**Urdu Spotlight Prize 18-and-under**

**Winner**
Sarah Jilani
’Speak’ by Faiz Ahmed Faiz and ‘Timi’ by Javed Akhtar

**Commended**
Iona Mandal
‘The Birds’ Eyes Open’ by Sara Shagufta and ‘Demolition’ by Nahid Rana

Lucas Omar Ali-Hassan
‘The Face of Your Lord’ by Faiz Ahmed Faiz

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**Outstanding Teachers 2021**

**CÉLESTE ROBILLARD AND COLLEAGUES**
THE HOLT SCHOOL, WOKINGHAM

**LIZ MCWATT, JOE SYKES AND JEN SERJEANT**
LORETO GRAMMAR SCHOOL, ALTRINCHAM

**CARA BLEIMAN, OLIVIA SENENSIEB, MARTIN CHMIELECKI AND VIENNA GODDARD**
SWIRE CHINESE LANGUAGE CENTRE (HARRIS FEDERATION), LONDON

Collaboration with teachers is at the heart of all that we do, and we are now working to build and support a community of educators inspired by creative translation. Partnership with translators, teachers and poets has fuelled our growing bank of virtual resources, from e-booklets of poetry in eighteen languages to ready-made lesson plans and video masterclasses. We are grateful to the wonderful teachers who continue to advise and assist us, including Katrina Barnes, Candida Javaid, Nadia Siddiqui, Crista Hazell, Steven Fawkes, Kate Thirlwall and Stephen Walsh, to all the teachers involved in our education programmes, and to all who engaged their pupils in this year’s Stephen Spender Prize.

This year for the first time we enabled teachers to register for the Prize, and were thrilled that over 200 did so – the majority engaging for the first time. We sent fortnightly bulletins to all who registered, with virtual resources and ideas for bringing poetry translation into the classroom. It was always a pleasure to receive the responses to those newsletters, often from teachers trying poetry translation with their pupils for the first time, and surprised by the enthusiastic responses and broad appeal to students of all backgrounds and abilities.

We’re delighted to recognise this growing collaboration with teachers and schools through our new Stephen Spender awards for teachers, which we introduced last year. The group of teachers highlighted here engaged huge numbers of their pupils in poetry translation, and it is particularly pleasing that a primary school teacher is amongst them – reflecting the great rise in entries from primary schools this year.

We’re delighted to recognise our growing collaboration with teachers and schools through our new Stephen Spender awards for teachers.
An Introduction to the Stephen Spender Prize 2021

A record number of young people entered translations into the Stephen Spender Prize this year, and many more translated poetry with their teachers in classrooms and lunchtime clubs. This would not have been possible – nor so pleasurable – without the support of all our partners and collaborators, to whom this year’s Prize is dedicated.

2021 has been a watershed year for SST. We have reached greater numbers of young people than ever before through our creative translation workshops and resources. We have forged new partnerships and developed new collaborations with teachers, translators and poets. And we have trained a brand new cohort of talented translators to design and deliver creative workshops in schools across the UK, making our work more geographically diverse, multilingual and accessible.

For all this I am grateful to the small but superb SST team for their dedication and hard work, to our trustees and our growing team of translators, and to all who fund our work, from individual donations to philanthropic and public funding. We are especially grateful to the Rothschild Foundation, Polonsky Foundation, John S Cohen Foundation, Old Possum’s Practical Trust, and Björnson and Prodan Foundation for supporting this year’s Prize.

This year’s Urdu Spotlight strand deserves special mention. Beautifully curated and judged by poet and translator Sascha Aurora Akhtar, who was introduced to us by our friends at the Poetry Translation Centre, Sascha in turn connected us to the Rekhta Foundation in India. Rekhta publishes a huge number of contemporary and classic Urdu poems open-access, and they supported the Spotlight by providing inspiration and poems. The result of this partnership and of Sascha’s careful curation is a unique collection of Urdu poems, many at the time untranslated, yet now rendered in English for the first time by young Urdu speakers and their classmates in the UK. In their commentaries the entrants write time and again of the conversations with parents and grandparents that were sparked by their translations. This, for me, is creative translation at its best – creativity through collaboration and conversation. Alongside the Spotlight, the Prize remains beautifully multilingual, with translations from 80 languages amongst this year’s entrants. It has been a pleasure to work with our judges Khairani Barokka, Daljit Nagra and Samantha Schnee, to watch as they have carefully, caringly selected the winning and commended poems from so many of great quality and verve. Those winning and highly commended entrants bring poems in twenty-one languages from twenty-one nations into our orbit. Together, they paint a unique and heartening picture of a community still open to the world, looking through and beyond borders that were hardened by the pandemic, made porous again through poetry.
The act of communing with a foreign country is, perhaps more than ever, a political act; the act of crossing borders to live in the house of an established poem and to claim it as our own is a moving identification of shared humanity. It is a grand act of humility, of respect and ultimately of love. This is why I love translation, because it can remind us of a shared aesthetic excellence, because it can offer pleasure; the play of translation is perhaps equal to the play of the inception of the original poem. I felt the rich experiences of ‘carrying over’ while reading the many poems submitted to this year’s competition.

I loved the many traditional translations in regular forms, those composed in free verse, the concrete poems which took on some dazzling shapes, and the spoken word poems. There are many types of poems in the house of poetry, and as judges we were keen to celebrate all types of poetry presented to us, so long as they read well and demonstrated a genuine attempt to translate. There were so many superb commentaries that showed poets grappling with the many technical demands facing them, and I enjoyed reading how our poets tried to evaluate the original poet’s intentions as they grappled with the act of translation.

In the 16-and-under category, I admired Iona Mandal’s translation about Jesus in Kolkata, in which the controlled syntax and the momentum made for a compelling poem; Steffan Nicholas’ translation, meanwhile, is an excellent choice for these harsh times of inequality where some must sleep in cardboard boxes. This moving poem uses repetition and fluent line breaks as it works up to its sad conclusion. I enjoyed Maddie Stoll’s poem for its topicality as well, as well as for its mood of sorrow and resignation, and I loved Karolina Kukhta’s great control of form to convey the humour about a dog.

In the 18-and-under category, I was very taken by the poem about Iran translated by Jahan de Bellaigue. It is politically charged and this dimension is reinforced by the clean lines which frequently break when a unit of sense has been communicated, thereby ensuring the irony remains hard-hitting. Jasmine Hardy’s translation of a Japanese poem is good at conveying the hardship of rural workers and her commentary is helpful in explaining the context. Marco Cheung’s translation of a Chinese poem about a flower is sustained in its pathos for the flowers; considerable work must have gone into creating this superb poem in English.

In the Open category, I loved the winning poem — a concrete poem, of all things. This poem reminded me that translation should come in any and every form; the shape is superbly worked and the line breaks function wonderfully, such as with the words ‘the shattered glasses’, which are broken to great effect into several spaces. Similarly, I appreciated the block form of ‘Room’, translated by James Garza, where the shape is relentlessly claustrophobic yet fluent and apt for the psychic journey. I was also charmed by Christina’s Lucas-si’s poem about the dwarf Dwimble, where rhyming couplets work to great comic effect. Suzannah V. Evans’ ‘Sailors’ is perhaps the liveliest poem I came across; her translation powerfully dramatises the sailors at sea, manic yet controlled throughout.

Overall, I enjoyed the variety, the ever-present the illusion that these winning poems must have been written in English — they never feel as though they are translations, never letting the illusion drop. Congratulations to our amazing winning poets and to so many who just missed out, simply because the standard was exceptional.

There are many types of poems in the house of poetry, and as judges we were keen to celebrate all types of poetry presented to us.

Judge’s Commentary

Daljit Nagra
Commentary
Khairani Barokka

A real feat to translate well
'The grief forever changed into vines overflowing with roses'. It is an assured example of poem-as-illustration, a real feat to translate well on many levels.

As with last year’s competition, it was heartening to receive so many submissions in these pandemic times, translating from a breadth of languages, from isiNdebele to Asturian. We certainly had our work cut out for us as judges, choosing from between many excellent entries.

We certainly had our work cut out for us as judges, choosing from between many excellent entries.

In the Open category, our First prize goes to Harry Man’s translation of Norwegian poet Endre Ruset’s Bokmål poem, which does justice to the commemorated victims of right-wing terrorist attacks — in the words of the penultimate line, ‘The grief forever changed into vines overflowing with roses’. It is an assured example of poem-as-illustration, a real feat to translate well on many levels.

In second is James Garza’s translation of Kurobe Setsuko’s Japanese poem ‘Room’, conveying controlled use of form befitting the subject matter, with poignant commentary on how solitude manifested itself in the poet’s life. A take that may well resonate in our own lives, as we as readers ask ourselves, ‘Is there anything more ambiguous than a room?’. Georgina Collins’ translation from the French of Cameroononian poet Jean-Claude Awono takes Third, with a piece that conveys the force of the original as performance poetry, through evocative verses such as ‘A name flows / in the blood’. A formidable achievement.

Highly Commended in this category are Marco Cheung’s translation of Chinese poet Li Bai’s ‘A temple which can be seen across the lands’; Matilda Hardman’s translation of August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s German, delighting us ‘with song and sound’; and Millie Farrell’s translation of Christian Bernard’s ‘A.A.’, for its imaginary of light that ‘extinguishes the twilight’. These three stand out for tackling oft-translated poets; it is difficult to make a translation of one such poet stand out, but they have done so admirably. Highly Commended are Mia Harris, for a translation from the French of an extract from Guillaume Apollinaire’s ‘A.A.’; Katrina Fong, for a translation from the Chinese of Zhou Dunyi’s ancient poem ‘To Love the Lotus’; and Eyül Karakulukçu for an extract from Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı’s Turkish poem ‘Spring’s Idleness’.

In the 18-and-under category, our First prize is awarded to Christina Lucassi, Harriet McAlonan and Arthur Allen, translating Asturian, Moroccan and Swedish poets respectively.

In the 14-and-under category, Jahan de Bellaigue is one of three winners with a brilliant translation from Farsi of Forough Farrokhzad’s ‘O Iran, my bejewelled land’, a sardonic take on ‘the chirruping and cuckooing of the law’. Jasmine Hardy’s translation from Japanese of Kenji Miyazawa’s moving ‘They are unbeaten by the rain’, an ode to farmers ‘triumphant against the wind’, is also a winner in this category, as is Dogu Aciğer’s skillful translation of Nâzım Hikmet’s Turkish poem ‘Last Will’, with instructions on how to proceed ‘if I should die before our liberation’. Highly Commended are Marco Cheung’s translation of Cao Xueqin’s ‘Funeral of the Flower’, Lilia Foster’s translation of Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén’s ‘A temple which can be seen across the lands’; Matilda Hardman’s translation of August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s German, delighting us ‘with song and sound’; and Millie Farrell’s translation of Christian Bernard’s ‘A.A.’, for its imaginary of light that ‘extinguishes the twilight’. These three stand out for tackling oft-translated poets; it is difficult to make a translation of one such poet stand out, but they have done so admirably. Highly Commended are Mia Harris, for a translation from the French of an extract from Guillaume Apollinaire’s ‘A.A.’; Katrina Fong, for a translation from the Chinese of Zhou Dunyi’s ancient poem ‘To Love the Lotus’; and Eyül Karakulukçu for an extract from Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı’s Turkish poem ‘Spring’s Idleness’.

Congratulations to all, and long live poetry in translation!
You could say that reading a thousand poems in five weeks is a bit like drinking from a fire hose: consuming something good for you (even vital for survival) but in such vast quantity that you begin to wonder how much of a good thing is too much. Happily, this year’s submissions to the Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation provided ample gifts for lovers of the written word. It was also heartening to read the work of so many people — especially youth — who are inspired to render words that move them into the English language.

I, in turn, was inspired by these translations — among them, Robin Munby’s innovative and playful translation from Asturian of the poem ‘Fálala’ in the Open category, urging Spaniards who speak that language to keep it alive. Many other so-called ‘minority’ languages were represented among the submissions, and we judges were all pleased to be able to count the translation of a Welsh poem — Steffan Nicholas’s rendition of Iwan Llwyd’s ‘Instant Houses’ among this year’s winners in the 16-and-under category.

Reading the entries for this year’s prize expanded my literary horizons; these translations introduced me to the work of poets from Israel, India, Slovenia and more. I was especially moved by the work of Arthur Allen, a first-time entrant in the Open category, whose translation of ‘I have barely had time to build your name’ by a little-known Swedish poet — Marie Wine, who also worked as a translator — made me want to read more of her considerable body of work.

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of human creative expression, predating written literature according to some scholars, and I was particularly pleased that in this year’s group of winners there were several spoken word entries, including the impressive ‘25th October 1994 – Modena’ by young Italian poet Fatima Bouhtouch. Watching the YouTube video of her performance of this poem on Italia’s Got Talent inspired one of this year’s 16-and-under winners, Maddie Stoll, to translate the poem into English. Another standout was Georgina Collins’ translation of Cameroonian performance poet Jean-Claude Awono’s ‘A name is sewn into the flesh’ from the Open category.

In many cultures today poetry remains a dominant form of literary expression, much more a part of daily discourse than it is in the Anglophone sphere; this phenomenon is perhaps reflected in the number of winning entries translated from Turkish, Mandarin and Farsi. I was also impressed by the number of young classics scholars who submitted entries, many of which featured complicated and clever rhyming solutions; one playful translation of Theocritus from the Ancient Greek, which received a commendation in the 18-and-under category, was especially remarkable.

Reading this year’s submissions confirmed to me that although we may be — in the words of Fatima Bouhtouch, as translated into English by Maddie Stoll — ‘grieving for a world that no longer knows how to love’, the world is certainly full of those who love poetry, whether they write their own work, translate the work of others, or simply love the experience of reading it.

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Judge’s Commentary

Samantha Schnee
When translating 夜宿山寺, my direct translation didn't rhyme or flow very well; to overcome this I decided to slightly tweak the word order and choices, but I had to make sure it didn't stray too far away from the poem. I also found that it wasn't very structured, so I decided to repeat the first two lines of the first verse at the end, but slightly altered it. Another decision that I had to make throughout was trying to make the poem my own without changing the meaning or tone of the poem — the poem has quite a soft tone to it, so I had to try and maintain that. In addition, there is also a part about the narrator trying to touch a star, which was a bit of a challenge to try and incorporate in a way that not only ensured that it flowed, but that also made it rhyme with the other lines and maintain a steady rhythm.

Another decision that I had to make throughout was trying to make the poem my own without changing the meaning or tone.

Winners
14-and-under

Adeline Goh

The Temple by the Stars

Against the blissful starry night stands
A temple which can be seen across the lands,
Hundreds of feet high and dangerously tall
It seems as if it is about to fall.
I stand inside the sacred temple,
So close to the stars, and I am careful
Not to make a noise, or I may disturb
Heaven; they may have overheard.
Without making the slightest noise, I reach for the star,
However, it is impossible to touch because it is so far
From me and where I stand
Gazing into the distance across the land.
Against the constellations in the sky
Lives a temple, where the eye
Can see everything across the lands
Right from where the temple stands.
This poem expresses joy and cheer, as evident from the repeated exclamatives, and includes some quite detailed descriptions of ‘the birds’. As this poem employs a variety of adjectives, I was able to substitute different adjectives fairly easily in order to avoid repetition or breaking the poem’s rhythm in my translation. It was challenging at times to find an adjective that both made sense and fitted the metre of the poem, hence why I translated the adjective ‘Tirilieren’ as ‘trilling’ instead of ‘cat-erwauling’ to comply with the two disyllabic words before it. My greatest obstacle in translating this poem was deciphering the line ‘Frühling will nun einmaschiern’. I had to test out various combinations of this sentence by substituting in synonyms and shuffling the word order around. I was initially very confused by the verb, ‘einmaschiern’, which is directly translated as ‘to mash up’, but after much searching of my thesaurus, I found out this could also be translated as ‘to march’, thus personifying spring and creating a delicate, natural image in the reader’s mind. Finally, I chose not to make this poem rhyme as I felt like it would have deprived it of its depth and meaning. Had I made it rhyme, it would have created an inappropriate playful tone.
When translating my poem there were a few things that I changed just to make it run smoother and sound better in English; however I really liked the original poem and the words used so I didn't change much. Firstly I changed 'the grays of the light' to 'the gray light' because the original version wasn't grammatically correct in English. Then I changed 'there at the edge of, the armchair, empty in the apartment, empty' to 'there at the edge of the empty armchair in the empty apartment', because the word order wasn't quite right in the initial translation and because I personally prefer this word order too. The next thing I changed is the part that literally translates as 'she stands straight', which I converted into 'she holds herself' because the subject is supposed to be sitting in the armchair, but the literal translation makes it sound like she is standing up when really it just means that she is sitting up in the chair. The last thing I changed was 'who' to 'that' in the final stanza because the literal 'who' wouldn't be grammatically correct in English in the context of the line and since the tree is not a person, I thought 'that' would work better. Overall I changed a few bits in this poem, not really for style but to make it more grammatically correct in English.

Winner

14-and-under

Millie Farrell

When translating my poem there were a few things that I changed just to make it run smoother and sound better in English.
Bahar Sarhosluğu
Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı

Yuvușa saçakta kalan kırılçığ,
Yavrusu dallara emanet şerçe,
Derken camiler üstünde güvercin
Minareler katından geçiyorum
Gökyüzü mahallesi İstanbul’un
Șüt beyaz bir martıyım açıklarda
Gemilere ben yol gösteriyorum,
Buğday ve ilaç yüklü gemilere
Bir kanat vuruşta bulutlardayım;
Bir süzülüşte vatanım dalgalar!

I think to truly understand this poem, you would need to have seen Istanbul and its skyline in person, but I did my best to capture that feeling. A particular description that was hard to translate was ‘dallara emanet’, this translates literally as ‘entrusted to the branches’, but what it actually means is that the bird’s home is in the branches. Another challenge was the word ‘vatam’, which literally translates as ‘homeland’, but I changed it to ‘domain’ to make the poem end on a powerful note. A cultural reference that was difficult to portray was the pigeons on the roofs of mosques. This is quite a common sight in Istanbul, and people often feed them bird food outside the mosques. However, to someone who has never been to Turkey, it might seem odd! The original poem has a regular metre, but I decided to not incorporate this into my translation, since I think it sounds more natural without it.

Eylül Karakullukcu

Highly Commended

14-and-under

Spring's Idleness

The home of the swallow in the eaves,
That of the little sparrow in the branches,
And of the pigeons on roofs of mosques
Sweeping through the minarets
This is Istanbul’s azure neighbourhood.
I am a silver seagull, soaring along the horizon.
It is me who shows the way to ships,
Loaded with wheat and medicine.
In a wingbeat I am engulfed in the clouds;
In a glide, the waves are my domain!
It was an intentional choice not to translate ‘君子’ in my translation. I feel that this phrase is one of those phrases that have no equivalent in English. In the simplest sense, a junzi is a respectable, virtuous individual, but there are much heavier implications that come with it. It implies wide knowledge, wisdom, dignity, and is one of the highest compliments you could pay anyone in ancient Chinese society! The poem is written in what I interpret to be the ancient Chinese equivalent of free verse, so it posed a challenge to keep a lot of the original structure. It is also written in ancient literary Chinese (文言文), so one Chinese character could mean a whole phrase in English. I tried to keep to the original rhythm by using mostly the same punctuation and pauses, to preserve the original mood. It was difficult to translate the section ‘予獨愛蓮之出淤泥而不染, 濯清漣而不妖, 中通外直, 不蔓不枝, 香遠益清, 亭亭淨植, 可遠觀而不可褻玩焉。’ as it includes many phrases that have no direct equivalent in English, so I had to take some creative liberties. I tried to preserve the elegant flow and language of the original by using slightly archaic English as opposed to a more modern/casual approach.

The poem is written in what I interpret to be the ancient Chinese equivalent of free verse, so it posed a challenge to keep a lot of the original structure.
As soon as I read this poem in French, I really liked it and wanted to choose it. However, when I read it a second time, I realised that the structure was going to be difficult to recreate in English. English and French poems are structured very differently, but I still wanted to capture the essence of the poem, no matter which language it was in. To overcome this challenge, I took the words of the poem and kept its meaning the same, but I tweaked the structure so that it made more sense to English readers.

Another issue was that some of the words used only made sense in French. For example, the literal translation of one line was ‘The sky is blue like a chain’. When I translated this into English, it sounded like a simile, and this wasn’t what I wanted. Instead, as the poem is about feeling trapped in a prison cell, I changed it to ‘The sky is like a great blue chain’ to convey this sense more strongly. I did the same thing with a few more parts of the poem. The third problem I faced was trying to capture the mood of the poem. Sometimes when you translate something from another language, it loses its mood and no longer feels like a poem. I still wanted to capture the feeling of incarceration, so I tweaked some parts of the poem so that English and French readers would feel the same when they read the poem. I wanted to keep the sad, repetitive atmosphere of the poem, and I would say I did so fairly successfully by changing the structure and words, but the meaning of the poem remains the same.

### Dans une fosse comme un ours

Dans une fosse comme un ours  
Chaque matin je me promène  
Tournons tournons tournons toujours  
Le ciel est bleu comme une chaîne  
Dans une fosse comme un ours  
Chaque matin je me promène  
Dans la cellule d’à côté  
On y fait couler la fontaine  
Avec les clefs qu’il fait tinter  
Que le geôlier aille et revienne  
Dans la cellule d’à côté  
On y fait couler la fontaine

Dans une fosse comme un ours  
Chaque matin je me promène  
Tournons tournons tournons toujours  
Le ciel est bleu comme une chaîne  
Dans une fosse comme un ours  
Chaque matin je me promène  
Dans la cellule d’à côté  
On y fait couler la fontaine  
Avec les clefs qu’il fait tinter  
Que le geôlier aille et revienne  
Dans la cellule d’à côté  
On y fait couler la fontaine

### In a pit like a bear

Stuck in this cage,  
Like a bear, I am trapped,  
Each morning we walk,  
We walk round and round,  
And round and round.  
Each morning we walk,  
And each time, we finish our walk,  
Back in this cage,  
The sky is the limit,  
Like a great blue chain.  
Yet here we are,  
Incarcerated outcasts,  
Animals to the world.  
So each and every morning,  
We walk away and end up here,  
Over and over again,  
In another cell,  
An inmate has left,  
Left the taps running,  
Left the taps dripping.  
That guard,  
The guard who jingles his keys,  
Letting these men come and go,  
In another cell,  
An inmate has left,  
Left the taps running,  
Left the taps dripping.
The Bengali poem 'Kolkatar Jishu', one of Nirendranath Chakraborty's most beautiful creations, is particularly close to my heart for its simplicity in language, visual imagery and universality, transcending time and place. The poem narrates the poet's personal experience in watching a naked beggar child crossing a busy road in Kolkata, bringing the traffic to a complete standstill. The child is completely fearless and unaware of accidental consequences, much to the horror of those observing the act. To the poet, the child resembles Infant Jesus – an earthly ruler and saviour for mankind – engaged in the joyous act of taking his first baby steps, holding in his hands a magical orb, bringing the world to a standstill. The infant's fearlessness as he takes his first steps in facing the world upfront, oblivious of the dangers that lurk, makes the poem universal to everyone irrespective of where one belongs – and that is what makes the poem so appealing.

Iona Mandal

While translating 'State bus,' I realised there was no equivalent here in the UK and hence, I retained the same. Apart from this, there were no other words, phrases or cultural references posing any challenge in translation. However, that does not make the poem any less beautiful or unworthy of translation.

KOLKATA'S JESUS

Nirendranath Chakraborty

No red light at the signal, yet the turbulent pace of the city of Kolkata came to an abrupt halt; adjusting violently Taxis and private cars, three wheelers, tiger stamped double-deckers.

"He is gone!", they screamed, those running along from either side of the road - porters, vendors, shopkeepers, and customers - like a motionless image on an artist's easel. Each watching in silence, in wobbly feet crossing the road, one side to the other a naked child.

It has rained a while ago in the Chowringhee neighbourhood, now the sunlight, like a long spear descends, piercing the heart of the clouds; enveloping the city of Kolkata in magical light.

Resting my chin on the State bus window I see the sky, I see you. Child of a beggar mother, Infant Jesus of Kolkata, stopping the entire traffic in your mystic spell. The public furore, the impatient driver's grinding teeth, you seem perturbed by none; death looming on either side, juxtaposed in between you walk along in unstable steps. As if humanity was embodied, in the joy of taking the first step you wanting to conquer the entire universe in your fist. Hence, in wobbly feet you move from one end of the world to the other.
I started learning Italian three years ago quite by chance, and since then have loved the sonority of the language and the way it plays with allegory. I happened to discover a rich culture of Italian spoken word poetry on YouTube, and was struck in particular by Fatima Bouhtouch’s message and also her expressive use of rhetoric and rhyme. The first challenge, therefore, was creating an accurate transcription of her performance. Bouhtouch’s delivery of the text used pauses, changed speed at times, and used inflection to emphasise specific words. Everything Bouhtouch was able to convey with her voice – emotion and passion – had to be replicated with punctuation, and where possible, syllable count. Though English and Italian share many similarities at a grammatical level, one key difference that was brought home to me through this process was a tendency in Italian towards metaphor. For example, Bouhtouch uses the word ‘impastata’, literally meaning ‘kneaded’, to convey an uncomfortable, stifling atmosphere. It was difficult to find an English equivalent for this beautifully condensed description. ‘Fare i conti’ was another phrase whose connotations were hard to communicate. A literal translation would be to do maths, to calculate a bill or to face something, so this expression at once suggests something mathematical or calculated and something emotional. The act of translation has added depth to my understanding and appreciation of Bouhtouch’s performance, which grows more powerful each time I experience it. I’m humbled to be able to share her message.

Fatima Bouhtouch

Maddie Stoll

Winners
16-and-under

Fatima Bouhtouch

Mia madre è in travaglio ha le contrazioni, non c’è nessun parente a tenerle la mano, nessuno a tradurre per lei le nozioni di una lingua che le fa strano, che non somiglia, a nessuna idea di famiglia e non ancora.

Il medico non la capisce, è un po’ – si innervosisce. L’aria impastata di incomprensione e comincia così la storia di alienazione di una donna straniera in questa nazione.

“Ah vedrai – L’Europa ti piacerà” l’aveva assicurato papà, ma non riesci a dargli ragione rinchiusa nel monolocale fuori città, le tocca fare i conti con solitudine, nostalgia e umidità.

“Tu sei arrivata come una promessa” mi ha raccontato anni dopo, ma pareva lo dicessi a se stessa. “Mi aspettavo tanto ma ho avuto così poco poi sei arrivata tu e come un’ondata di mare hai tirato via il mio male.”

Oggi piange troppo spesso, e con uno sforzo immenso cerca di non guardarla invecchiare, intristita da un mondo che non sa più amare.

E noto inciso sulla sua pelle, il sacrificio in nome mio e delle mie sorelle. Qualcuno ci gridava, “Arabe di merda, tornatevene nella vostra tenda” e a me saliva la rabbia incontrollata mentre mia madre sembrava ormai abituata.

Fatima Bouhtouch

Ed è così che comincia la rassegnazione a non avere voce nella propria narrazione, a lasciare che sia l’altro, a definirci, a usare la propria ignoranza per ferirci.

E nel mentre di una pandemia globale ripenso alla mia realtà individuale, e mi accorgo che è per questo che io non trovo differenza, sicché siamo tutti eguali nella disperazione, compagni di viaggio, devoti alla speranza di merite un’opportunità che vada al di là della lingua con cui parliamo, con cui ci amiamo, con cui ci sosteniamo, e ci distruggiamo.

Ti regalerò un’opportunità mamma.

Reproduced by kind permission of the poet
The primary challenge for this translation was that the text was designed for performance. Bouhtouch’s delivery of the text used pauses, changed speed at times, and used inflection to emphasise specific words...Everything Bouhtouch was able to convey with her voice – emotion and passion – had to be replicated with punctuation, and where possible, syllable count.

And clearly, indelibly, is etched on her skin the sacrifice made in my name and that of my sisters. Someone shouts “Shitty Arabs, return to your tents”, and in me grows an uncontrollable anger whilst my mum seems by now numbed.

And so it begins: resigning yourself to having no say in the telling of your story, to letting it be other, letting it define us, letting another’s ignorance wound us.

And in the midst of a global pandemic, I think back to my individual reality and through that I see no differences – we can all be rendered equal by desperation, can become companions on a journey, hoping for an opportunity that surpasses the language with which we speak, with which we love, with which we support ourselves, and with which we, also, destroy ourselves.

I’ll give you that opportunity, mum.
The first and most fundamental decision I had to make was how to translate the title. The Welsh title, ‘Tai Unnos’, refers to the 19th-century Welsh tradition of building a house in one night and having smoke coming out of the chimney by daylight. If the villagers failed to complete the house in time, the landowner would be allowed to tear the house down. English culture doesn’t have a concept like this, so I eventually chose ‘Instant Houses’ because this ties both halves of the poem together (the historic oppression of the rural Welsh and today’s urban homelessness). The second problem I encountered was the use of the English loanword ‘landlord’ in the original Welsh poem. This word was chosen for poetic effect: it symbolises the fact that landowners in Wales were often English people and were often absentee landlords. Once again, as England hasn’t been oppressed in this way (people from other countries owning land), there is no word or way to convey a non-native landlord, so I chose to keep an English word with ‘Landowner’. For the Welsh reader the loanword also conjures up the threat to the language as well as to the people, which is a concept that again was lost in the translation, as English is not an endangered language. The third difficulty had to do with verb tenses. In Welsh, it is possible to stack infinitives in subclauses, e.g. Gosod, Cynnau, Hawlio. This isn’t allowed in English so I decided to change them into past tense.

‘Tai Unnos’ refers to the 19th-century Welsh tradition of building a house in one night and having smoke coming out of the chimney by daylight. If the villagers failed to complete the house in time, the landowner would be allowed to tear the house down.

An Ice Age litter of smooth stones lay scattered along the river’s bank: The waste and spoils of the ice flow’s hammer which shaped the valleys year by year; and with this waste, our ancestors built a rectangular cottage on the river’s turn, stone by stone through day and night, lit a fire before the landowner could knock it all down; claimed a spot of land and made it home, through the strength of an arm turned dream to reality: On the edge of the motorway in the grey city, and under the wing of empty concrete offices, under bypass bridges, and in car parks some are doubled over tonight also building a house, scouring through the waste and spoils beneath the stars, claiming a piece of land with a cardboard box.
‘To Kachalov’s Dog’ was written in 1925 when the poet visited his friend Kachalov. During the visit Yesenin established a strong bond with Kachalov’s dog (Jim). When I read the poem I immediately fell in love with its musicality. I looked at translations of the poem but was disappointed that most dismissed the rhyme scheme and overlooked the poem’s lyrical metre – its unique feature. This inspired me to create my own version of the poem and I challenged myself to preserve the iambic pentameter metre. I did this by listening to the poem and comparing its musicality to my translation and I felt it was necessary to preserve the ABAB rhyme scheme, representing Jim’s sincerity and predictability.

As I was translating I encountered ‘приятцей’, which comes from the word ‘приятно’ (‘pleasant’). I couldn’t translate this directly because it was made up by the poet to preserve the rhyme, so instead I translated it as ‘good nature’ as I felt that Jim’s good looks reflect his inner beauty and goodness. I also decided to change the last line of the first stanza by adding ‘come’ where the original poem just has ‘Jim give me your paw for luck’. In English commands are usually followed by ‘please’ to sound polite; this isn’t the case in Russian, so I added the ‘come’ to communicate to the reader the respect and friendship that the poet and dog share. Another challenge was that Russian words can be made to sound softer by adding a certain suffix to them, as in ‘голубчик’ (where ‘чик’ is the suffix). This word literally means ‘pigeon’ but is also used to show respect or care, so I translated it as ‘dear’, although the term ‘милый’ also means ‘dear’ and appears elsewhere in the poem, I felt the repetition would further show Yesenin’s admiration for Jim and so decided to keep it as ‘dear’ in both cases.

To Kachalov’s Dog

Jim, give me your paw for luck,
In all my life I haven’t seen one like it.
And at the moon let’s howl and bark
When nature’s still and silent.

Come Jim, give me your paw for luck.

My dear, do not lick yourself so.
With me accept the simple things, I pray.

What living life is like you do not know,
You do not know the price you have to pay.

Your owner is both known and admired
And he has guests, full house of them beset,
As each one with a smile extends their hand
To pat your fur of shining velvet.

You are a devilishly handsome dog,
With such an amiable, good nature.

Like a drunk friend you kiss and snog,
Not waiting on approval neither censure.

My dear Jim, among your guests
The one from many so-and-sos
That was the saddest and the quietest
Didn’t pass by, you don’t suppose?

Oh she will come, on that I swear and vow.
So without me, look at her sweetly,
And gently lick her hand with tender love
For all of which I was and was not guilty.

Karolina Kukhta

Highly Commended

16-and-under

Sобаке Качалова
Sergei Yesenin

Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне,
Такую лапу не видал я сроду.
Давай с тобой полаем при луне
На тихую, бесшумную погоду.

Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне.
Pожалуй, толстуха, грустящий, не лижись.
Пойми со мной хоть самое простое.
Ведь ты не знаешь, что такое жизнь,
Не знаешь ты, что жить на свете стоит.

Хозяин твой и мил и знаменит,
И у него гостей бывает в доме много,
И каждый, улыбаясь, норовит
Тебя по шерсти бархатной потрогать.

Ты по-собачьи дьявольски красив,
С такою милостью доверчивой приятцей.
И, никого ни капли не спросив,
Как пьяный друг, ты лезешь целоваться.

Мой милый Джим, среди твоих гостей
Так много всяких и невсяких было.
Но та, что всех безмолвней и грустней,
Сюда случайно вдруг не заходила?

Она придет, даю тебе поруку.
И без меня, в ее уставясь взгляд,
Ты за меня лизни ей нежно руку
За все, в чем был и не был виноват.

Karolina Kukhta

Sобаке Качалова
Sergei Yesenin

Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне,
Такую лапу не видал я сроду.
Давай с тобой полаем при луне
На тихую, бесшумную погоду.

Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне.
Pожалуй, толстуха, грустящий, не лижись.
Пойми со мной хоть самое простое.
Ведь ты не знаешь, что такое жизнь,
Не знаешь ты, что жить на свете стоит.

Хозяин твой и мил и знаменит,
И у него гостей бывает в доме много,
И каждый, улыбаясь, норовит
Тебя по шерсти бархатной потрогать.

Ты по-собачьи дьявольски красив,
С такою милостью доверчивой приятцей.
И, никого ни капли не спросив,
Как пьяный друг, ты лезешь целоваться.

Мой милый Джим, среди твоих гостей
Так много всяких и невсяких было.
Но та, что всех безмолвней и грустней,
Сюда случайно вдруг не заходила?

Она придет, даю тебе поруку.
И без меня, в ее уставясь взгляд,
Ты за меня лизни ей нежно руку
За все, в чем был и не был виноват.
This poem is the first poem in the anthology 'Ahora bebemos de la tierra' or 'Now we drink from the earth' by Elizabeth Pérez Tzintzún. The first problem that I faced was the title. ‘Cantador’ translates not only as ‘folksinger’ but also as ‘singer-songwriter’ or even ‘chorister’. I eventually decided to translate it as ‘folksinger’ because this encompasses the meaning and natural, traditional feeling of the poem. Describing the natural world is a common feature of folksongs, which can be seen in the description of the peach tree and the animals accompanying the song; therefore, I decided that ‘folksinger’ would be most appropriate.

The second problem I encountered was in translating ‘el canto’ on the thirteenth line. At first, I translated this as ‘the tune’, however, after some deliberation, I changed this to ‘the song’, owing to the repetition of the word ‘song’, and the verb ‘singing’, throughout the poem. Since even the title references the word ‘song’, and this repetition is integral to the meaning of the poem, I decided I could not leave it out. The final problem that I encountered was when translating lines fifteen and sixteen – ‘Si tienen tus ojos, dónde mirarse’. I was puzzled by the intended meaning of this line, since the verb used, ‘mirar’, is reflexive – leaving it unclear whether it was the eyes looking at each other, or perhaps at the peach tree, or inwards towards the soul. The translation ‘if your eyes have found a place to look within’ seemed most appropriate because this retains some of the reflexive meaning, yet also has a sense of contemplation of the soul and the natural world that matches the imagery and description in the original poem.

Folksinger
Elizabeth Pérez Tzintzún

You walk
looking everywhere for the song
although your feet don’t yet know it.

Like a peach tree
you see so many flowers on its branches.
And when the peaches begin to ripen
you pace round and round its base
longing to pick yourself the best fruit.

Then
you bite into it eagerly.

You walk sometimes looking
to be alone
and the song of the rooster, the bird, the owl
and the cricket accompany you.

If your eyes have
found a place to look within,
if your mouth speaks
and the guitar plays,
with you there will be
a peach blossom.
César Vallejo is viewed as a great Peruvian poet of the 20th century and throughout his lifetime he experienced poverty and war. This poem explores the pain and loss experienced in war and the strong bonds soldiers form while fighting alongside each other. As I am currently studying Spanish, I used the Collins Spanish Dictionary to help me translate words I did not recognise. The greatest challenge I faced when translating this poem was the word ‘incorporóse’. As a reflexive verb, ‘incorporarse’ means ‘to sit up’; I consequently had to be careful to avoid translating it in the sense of ‘incorporar’ as that would mean ‘to mix in’ or ‘add’ and wouldn’t fit with the poem. As well as the ‘-óse’ ending that posed a challenge in the final line of poem, in addition I had to make sure I translated the structure of ‘echar a ...’ correctly as there are many different translations of the verb ‘echar’. Its repetition throughout the poem is very effective and adds emphasis to the demoralising effects of war when people are injured, so given the significance of this repetition I had to make sure I translated the sentence in line with the context. Although the Collins Spanish Dictionary translates ‘ay’ as ‘Ow’, ‘ouch’ and ‘oh dear’, I made the decision that in this situation, where people are surrounding a dying man, ‘alas’ would be more fitting since this word reflects the sense of sadness and the tragic situation that occurs before the other soldiers’ eyes.

This poem explores the pain and loss experienced in war and the strong bonds soldiers form while fighting alongside each other.

Sarah McLaren

At the end of the battle,
and the fighter dead, a man came to him
And said, Don't die, I love you so much!
But the corpse, alas, continued dying.
He was approached by two men and they repeated to him:
Don't leave us! Be brave! Come back to life!
But the corpse, alas, continued dying.
20, 100, 1000, 500,000 people came to him
shouting 'So much love and yet nothing against death':
But the corpse, alas, continued dying.
Millions of individuals surrounded him,
With one common request, Stay brother!
But the corpse, alas, continued dying.
Then all the men on the ground surrounded him; moved, the sad corpse looked at them;
Raising himself up slowly
Embraced the first man; started to walk...

Masa
César Vallejo

Al fin de la batalla
Y muerto el combatiente, vino hacia él un hombre
y le dijo: ¡No mueras, te amo tanto!
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! Siguió muriendo.
Se le acercaron dos y repitieron:
¡No nos dejes! ¡Valor! ¡Vuelve a la vida!
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! Siguió muriendo.
Acudieron a él veinte, cien, mil, quinientos mil,
clamando ¡Tanto amor y no poder nada contra la muerte!
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! Siguió muriendo.
Le rodearon millones de individuos,
con un ruego común: ¡Quédate hermano!
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! Siguió muriendo.
Entonces todos los hombres de la tierra
Le rodearon; les vio el cadáver triste, emocionado;
Incorporóse lentamente,
Abrazó al primer hombre; echóse a andar...
Word order in Turkish is often very different to that in English and in the case of the poem ‘Vasiyet’, Nâzım Hikmet takes poetic licence and at times inverts the traditional Turkish word order, making translation doubly challenging. For example, I struggled with the fourth verse of the poem as I wasn’t sure with which verb or verbs to consider ‘ölüler’ (‘the dead’); ultimately, I decided to translate it as the subject of both verbs despite its irregular placement within the sentence. Hikmet’s use of colloquial language was an additional challenge, such as in the final line of the poem. Here ‘Taş maş’ (‘even a gravestone’, in my translation) is difficult to translate as it resembles something along the lines of ‘and so on and so forth’. I thought that something so literal would disrupt the flow of the poem and so I opted for the less accurate translation of ‘even’, which I felt nevertheless conveyed Hikmet’s dismissive tone regarding the gravestone. I found verse five particularly complicated to translate due to the presence of the reported past tense with the verbs ‘söylemişim’ (‘I realised I had sung’) and ‘duymuşum’ (‘I [realised I] had heard’). These types of verbs are difficult to translate succinctly into English as this tense is used when there is a lack of evidence for a piece of information, or when something is realised or discovered after the fact. Since the subject of the verb is the poet describing his own actions, I finally decided to translate the verbs in the latter sense.
This extract from Forough Farrokhzad’s satire on the superficialities of the Iranian bureaucracy also laments the broken promises of her childhood. The use of Iranian poetic clichés, such as the ‘gol’ (rose) and ‘bolbol’ (nightingale), two popular motifs symbolising perfection and the poet who seeks it, manifest this idea. However, the title is the most caustic example of these failed expectations and is taken from a popular nationalist poem, recited by children before school. Translated literally as ‘Land Full of Jewels’, it posed a problem because of my desire to convey the nationalist cliché that Farrokhzad attacks. The most obvious English equivalent was the line ‘Our green and pleasant land’ from ‘Jerusalem’, another nation-alist anthem that schoolchildren sing. But this realisation was tempered by the appreciation that the Iranian essence of the poem must be kept and that using English clichés to cater to the needs of English readers only distorts the meaning, which is why my title is closer to the literal translation whilst showing its personal relevance to Farrokhzad.

Another problem I encountered was the intentionally limited use of originally Arabic words, with Farrokhzad mostly utilising them when using the official language of the bureaucracy she is criticising, for example words like ‘sadere’ (issued), requiring a way to convey the intended alienation. Therefore, I decided to use capital letters to highlight these words’ foreignness in an attempt to differentiate them from the ‘pure’ Farsi words.

Certain lines were also problematic, for example when I found three different equivalents for the line ‘jegh jeghe jegheye ghanoon’. I finally settled upon the current translation to maintain the rhythm and onomatopoetic nature of the original whilst also showing the indifference Farrokhzad feels towards the law by reducing its toil to the inconsequential sound of birds.
Another problem I encountered was the intentionally limited use of originally Arabic words, with Farrokhzad mostly utilising them when using the official language of the bureaucracy she is criticising... I decided to use capital letters to highlight these words’ foreignness in an attempt to differentiate them from the ‘pure’ Farsi words.

**O Iran, my bejewelled land**

I am Victorious
I have now been made Official
I have ornamented myself with a name in a card of identity
and my existence has been Ratified with a number
so all hail the number 678 issued from sector 5, Tehran
and from now I have peace of mind in every possible way
and lo, the kind embrace of the motherland
the baby’s dummy, brimming with historic glories
the lullaby of civilisation and culture
and the chirruping and cuckooing of the law
Oh
from now I have peace of mind in every possible way
filled with joy
I go to the window and enthusiastically, sucked in six hundred and seventy eight times the
air crammed thick with the dust of shit, rubbish and piss
and beneath six hundred and seventy eight the Receipts of debts
and written on top of six hundred and seventy eight job applications: Forough Farrokhzad
in the land of poetry and the rose and the nightingale
life is a blessing, all the more
when the fact of your being after years and years has been accepted
and in that land with the first official glance through the curtains, I see six hundred and
seventy eight poets
what charlatans, all in the strange guise of beggars
in amongst the rubbish, searching for meter and rhyme
and at the sound of the first official step
suddenly from amidst the dark cesspool, six hundred and seventy eight mysterious
nightingales
that for fun
disguised themselves as six hundred and seventy eight old black crows
lazily fly towards the edge of the day
as my first official breath
is smeared with the smell of six hundred and seventy eight rose stems
Produced by the huge Plasco plastic factory
Oh isn’t life is a blessing

**Winners**

18-and-under

Jahan de Bellaigue
cont...
Kenji Miyazawa's poem, filled with emotive language and imagery, shows his passion for the agricultural class of Japan. Especially in recent times, the importance of key workers like farmers has become abundantly clear. We are privy to a poem that explores an idea close to Miyazawa's heart, resonating with many Western readers too. In understanding Katakana, the poem was simple to translate with the aid of a dictionary; however, in doing so I sought to express Miyazawa's love of the agricultural class. For example, 'マケズ' has been translated as 'unfazed' or 'unperturbed', but 'unbeaten' and 'triumphant' felt more fitting to portray Miyazawa's absolute admiration of the peasants. Deciding to add a subject ('they') could have proved complicated, perhaps obscuring the ambiguity of the poem; however, the poem is ultimately a love letter to the peasants that Miyazawa admired. I thus intended to translate a strong voice whose adoration of the agricultural class is potentially lost in other translations. In this way, a Western reader could appreciate the humanisation of the peasants, encouraging reflection upon a class that we may be removed from. Choosing to separate certain lines, meanwhile, would allow the reader to view the poem as a short recounting of a farmer's life - Miyazawa creates such a powerful image of the humble day-to-day existence of the peasants that I wanted to convey this idea as each stanza follows another aspect of their lives. Miyazawa's lack of rhyming structure felt important to maintain, as he writes with such intention that rhyme would hinder the poem's ultimate message. Similarly, the original form of the poem, written in bold strokes of Katakana, conveys a true devotion to allowing others to admire the peasants. I decided to focus on achieving this poignant idea through succinct language, reflecting Miyazawa's appreciation for the plight of the farmers.

They are unbeaten by the rain, triumphant against the wind, superior to the snow of winter and heat of summer. They are strong of body, rid of selfishness, unyielding to bouts of anger, with silent smiles always etched on their faces. Throughout the day they dine on plain brown rice and a bowl of miso soup, with the occasional vegetable or two. Yet in everything, they remain selfless. They experience through understanding one another, and never forget the lessons they learn. They live in tiny thatch huts, hidden in the shade of the meadow's pine. If, in the East, illness captures a child, they nurse him to health. If, in the West, mothers are weary, they bear the weight of her bundles of rice. If, in the South, a man is dying, they soothe his fears. And if, in the North, conflict ensues, they beg the foolishness to cease. In the season of drought, tears are shed, and summer's cold brings mournful confusion. Everyone considers them to be nobodies. Never praised, Nor a nuisance... These are the people I strive to be.
In translating the main subject of the poem, talking, I deliberated between using ‘conversing’, ‘speaking’, or ‘talking’. The use of the phrase in the original seems to imply conversation between the various natural objects; however, the troubles of the speaker centre around being able to speak but not being heard or understood. I ultimately chose ‘talking’ as I saw it as a middle ground verb, one that can express a lack of communication but is also informal enough to imply casual conversation. In Mandarin, words are often much more succinct than in English, so several words were quite long when translated like ‘sun’s reflection’ (反光) and ‘falling leaves’ (落叶). This seemed to disrupt the echoing rhythm of couplets that described the way the objects communicated nonverbally. I restored this balance by replacing ‘small’ (小) with ‘little’ to make two lines equal in syllables in the first stanza, and by adding ‘green’ before ‘moss’ to do the same for the second couplet. Translating ‘I really am so tired’ (我真的好累) was also somewhat of a challenge because it carries a very informal tone in the original language and makes use of two successive adverbs. I wanted to translate this accurately but bore the risk of it sounding awkward or overly hyperbolic. I finally decided to use a structure that to me sounds quite childlike, so as to create an informal tone while adding a softness to the line that strengthens the idea of tiredness.

Chloe O’Connor

Highly Commended
18-and-under

Talking

Two trees are talking.
Their language
Is the falling leaves when they are melancholy
And the little flowers when they are adoring

Two stones are talking.
Their language
Is the green moss when they are sorrowful
And the sun’s reflection when they are joyful

I want to talk to the trees,
But I don’t know which words to use.
I want to talk to the stones,
But I don’t know which sounds to use.

I really am so tired.
I want to talk to that girl
But I don’t know which heart to use.
I want to talk to the shadows
But I don’t know if I should use darkness or light.

I really am so tired.
When the plants and the animals talk
They understand silence,
But when I talk to you
It doesn’t matter if I use blood or tears
You only hear wind.

…the troubles of the speaker centre around being able to speak but not being heard or understood.

Chen Cang (陈仓)

两棵在说话
他们的语言
忧郁的时候是落叶
爱慕的时候是小花

两块石头在说话
他们的语言
消极的时候是青苔
积极的时候是反光

我想和那棵树说话
但我不知道用什么字
我想与石头说话
但我不知道用什么声音

我真的好累
我想和姑娘说话
但我不知道用哪颗心
我想和影子说话
但我不知道用黑色还是用白色

我真的好累
植物与动物说话的时候
不用声也能听懂
但是我与你说话的时候
无论是用血还是泪
听起来都是风

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I chose to translate this poem because I found the way Guillén used humour to highlight the hypocrisy of wealthy Europeans and Americans who used Cuba as their playground, and looked down on the locals, interesting. I particularly enjoyed the references to important figures and battles in the fight for Cuban independence, like José Martí, who died fighting the Spanish and whose body was never recovered, and Cacarajícara, the site of a significant Cuban victory in the fight for independence, again from Spanish colonial rule. The way Guillén implores the hypothetical ordinary Cuban reader to stand up to the self-important Westerners with a reminder of the atrocities they have been responsible for is powerful and thought-provoking. I wanted to keep a sense of Guillén’s rallying of the reader to keep a sense of Guillén’s rallying of the reader, which I think is well reflected through my translation of ‘Bueno, ¿y qué?’ as ‘Well, so what?’; I also wanted to capture Guillén’s portrayal of the indignance and irrational condescension of the Westerners, and thought the translation of ‘se subleva’ as ‘outraged’ did this. I tried to keep the structure and flow of the poem mostly the same because the way tension is built, particularly in the fourth stanza, with the repetition of lines beginning with ‘and’, feels integral to Guillén’s rallying of the reader to remain strong.
'葬花吟' portrays how a sickly girl compares herself to a flower, ultimately coming to a pessimistic epiphany that life is perhaps not as wonderful as it is often said to be. The poem was written by this fictional girl in one of the most renowned Chinese novels, '红楼梦' (1792), usually known in English as 'Dream of the Red Chamber'. Cao uses the form of a 古体诗, a type of pre-Tang Dynasty poem, to encapsulate the depressed or even nihilistic thoughts of the narrator, which I found quite difficult to translate as the poem has a relatively rigid structure of two clauses per line, with seven characters per clause. Although I mimicked the double-clause feature by dividing the descriptions of each line into two main clauses, with additional punctuation to ensure it made sense in English, I decided not to have seven words per clause, as adding or subtracting words in an English sentence would damage the description's fluidity. Through doing this translation, I realised that ancient Chinese poems tend to omit particular parts of speech, such as in the line '知是花魂与鸟魂', where there is no distinguishable subject. Although I could not do the same in the translation, this gave me the opportunity to move around subjects and objects, especially as the original poem does not have a rhyme scheme. The greatest challenge in translating this poem was understanding it, as the narrative constantly alternates between third and first person, the 'mourner' and 'girl' being the first-person narrator. Thus I maintained how the poet utilises the narrative, for the transition from third to first person could be interpreted as a representation of how the girl's thoughts gradually seep through, as a form of free indirect discourse conveying the strength of her curiosity.

Marco Cheung

Highly Commended
18-and-under

葬花吟
Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹)

花飞花落花满天，红消香断有谁怜？
游丝软系飘春榭，落絮轻沾扑绣帘。
闺中女儿惜春暮，愁绪满怀无处述。
手把花锄出绣阁，忍踏落花来复去。
柳丝榆荚自芳菲，不管桃飘与李飞；
桃李明年能再发，明年闺中知有谁？
三月香巢已垒成，梁间燕子太无情！
明年花发虽可啄，却道人去梁空巢也倾。
一年三百六十日，风刀霜剑严相逼；
一朝春尽红颜老，花落人亡两不知！

未若锦囊收艳骨，一抔净土掩风流。
质本洁来还洁去，强于污淖陷渠沟。
尔今死去侬收葬，未卜侬身何日丧？
试看春残花渐落，便是红颜老死时；
一朝春尽红颜老，花落人亡两不知！
Funeral of the Flower

Flowers: they wilt, scatter, and drift through the clouds, but who is to pity their withering lives?
Pearls of spider silk land softly on the pavilion, as pollen wanders through the window.
The girl in her bedroom; she fears the dawn of Spring, her sorrow trapped within her.
She escapes her bedroom, a hoe in her hands, as her feet trample grievously on the yielding petals.
Weeping willows and elm pods prosper alone, while plum trees and peach blossoms await their mortality;
Even were plums and blossoms to reincarnate the next year, who will replace the girl in the bedroom?
In March, swallows build their sweet nests around her room, until they leave heartlessly in August;
Yet a year later, they return to pollinate, and the girl who once lived here is no longer remembered.
One year, three-hundred-and-sixty days, howling gales clash against slanting hail;
Like an aimless wanderer, she wonders: when will they blossom again?
So zestful when they bloom, yet so intangible when they wilt; the flowers’ gravedigger mourns,
I lean against the hoe, guilty tears burning wounds in tree branches where petals once descended.
Silently, cuckoos wait for sunset, for when they return home with their backs against the mourner;
A green light shines on her as she dreams, silver ropes knocking on the window pane, her bed still cold.
Vestiges of the past stifle my consciousness, half-pathetic, half-raging.
When Spring arrives as company, it is doomed to leave and leave me lifeless in the absence of goodbyes.
Yesterday evening I heard a wall outside: was it the soul of a flower or the spirit of a bird?
With the finality of souls and spirits, the bird’s drumming is soundless, the flower futile.
I wish for a pair of wings, for me to accompany these petals wherever they go until the edge of the clouds.
Within the borders of the sky, where will I find my grave?
Perhaps bones belong to coffins, where a handful of pure soil may smother the traces of human sin.
We are born to this world pure and shall depart this world pure, without contamination.
Today I bury you, but when will it be my turn?
They mock my sanity for grieving for you, but I ponder: who will mourn for me?
Witness the seconds of Spring vanish and flowers languish, for that is when beauty withers;
One morning Spring will end and my beauty will decay; maybe just like the wilting of the flower, life is indeed pointless.

葬花吟 portrays how a sickly girl compares herself to a flower, ultimately coming to a pessimistic epiphany that life is perhaps not as wonderful as it is often said to be.
Culturally, Norway’s history as a mediator for peace and reconciliation dates back to the Cold War, setting the stage for historic agreements such as the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords, the civil wars in Mali and the ongoing efforts between FARC EP and the Colombian government. This is in part what made 2011’s attacks so dissonant. On 22 July 2011 a lone wolf terrorist detonated a bomb outside the Government Quarter’s office blocks in Oslo, killing eight people and injuring a further 209, before driving 38km north to Utøya Island and the AUF (the Labour Party Youth) summer camp and committing a mass-shooting, killing 69 people. Afterwards, thousands took to the streets, holding up roses in memory of those who died. The 22 July Commission’s Gjørv Report described what occurred as ‘the most shocking and incomprehensible acts ever experienced in Norway’. Many survivors and victims’ family members continue to suffer with PTSD and prolonged grief even now, including difficulties holding down a job and building new relationships. It has been referred to frequently as the day Norway lost its innocence and was changed forever. In Ruset’s poem, he repeats the word ‘forvandlet’ meaning to ‘transform’ or ‘convert’. In English both have an aspect of ongoing mutability; a chest of drawers can be ‘transformed’ by a bold choice of colour, or a barn ‘converted’, though the physical dimensions of both might remain unaltered. The etymology of ‘forvandlet’ in Norwegian shares the English word ‘for’ with the Greek ‘and’ meaning ‘one’ or ‘man’ – so a kind of ‘for-one-ing’. Single or multiple things are ‘changed’ immutably into this one thing. Working closely with Endre Ruset, I inserted the adverb ‘forever’, keeping the labio-dental fricative sounds of ‘f’ and ‘v’ through the word ‘forever’ as well as preserving his desire to painfully echo responses to the events.

\[
\text{Det grønne teltet forvandlet til} \hspace{1cm} \\
\text{Endre Ruset} \hspace{1cm} \\
\text{Reproduced by kind permission of the poet}
\]

\[
\text{The green tent forever changed into} \hspace{1cm} \\
\text{Harry Man (First)}
\]
When Kurobe Setsuko (1932-2004) was awarded the twentieth annual Japan Poets Club Award for her 1986 collection ‘Maboroshido’ ('Door of Illusions'), she was in a coma caused by a cerebral haemorrhage. It was not her first (she had suffered one in 1972), but it was to be her last. Though she lived 19 more years, she never regained consciousness. While Kurobe's output encompassed both lineated and prose poetry, it is perhaps the latter that best showcased the technique of 'deformation' that the poet and psychiatrist Nakano Kaichi argued set her work apart: part of the fascination of Kurobe's poetry lay in charting the sudden associative leaps by which she transformed the rudiments of sense data into fantastical, uneasy wholes. I admire the way Kurobe's 'Heya' ('Room') transforms hesitation, imagination and process into its constitutive virtues – it is a poem that does not start from a pretence of mastery over its subject matter, but co-creates that subject with the reader through an incremental poetics of space. The voice is precise yet self-revising – or perhaps it is self-revising *because* of its need to precisely locate itself in Euclidian space. Yet, within that voice there is also room for perplexity, an openness to things in flux. Crafting this kind of voice in translation was my biggest challenge. James Underhill has written that a poetic voice arises from 'the dynamic interaction' of 'formal elements'. This resonated with my approach; I paid attention to the effect of sound patterning (particularly repetition and alliteration) on both breath and mood, giving play to speech rhythms that performed their own dark expansions and contractions. Something suggestive also happened when I put the poem in a text box: both compact and digressive, open and closed, it seemed to teem with the contradictions of its own occult insights.

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It was pitch black when I came in. I held my hands out in front of me, blundered into (I think) a dish. I considered the dish: round (with rough edges) and cold (hard) as it flinched from my fingertips. Ping. Empty. I imagined it skittering darkly, slowly away. Next, I saw the table in my mind. It was four-cornered (square), grey (the grey of sand), and fixed to the spot under my hovering hand. It had not been moved in a long time. Drops of water punctuated its crude, endless plain. I had no idea where the tumbling dish might have fallen. It was then I felt it. Felt the room. What it meant to feel that way escaped me. Is there anything as ambiguous as a room? There are rooms with banisters and bookcases, just as there are rooms with portraits, cornered. Just as there are rooms with dark insinations under decades-old paint. But there are also empty rooms. At the end of the day, rooms have nothing to themselves. This is all they are: spaces to be filled. They can hit you like a breeze, though. I think I have been here once or twice before. No: quite a few times more than that. It is something I know, rather than something I remember. This room is a rectangle (with more than four sides) and straight (in a crooked way), it is hollow and pointed, it is open and closed, it is the shape of the dark and the depth of the dark, and it breathes the same dark silent breath. That I share this breath with the restless dark is certain to me now. And when I hold it, hold my breath and stand stock still, I sense it. I know it is somewhere down there, watching me, waiting for me. That dish.
Jean-Claude Awono is a highly regarded performance poet from Sa’a in Cameroon and has presented his poetry at festivals across Africa, Europe and China. I first came upon his work last year when working in Yaoundé, the capital, as part of my research into literary translation in Africa, and I fell in love with his use of language and the performative nature of his work. For a translator, this poem resonates because it explores the very structure of language and the significance and power of ‘a name’. However, this single word was challenging, for ‘nom’ can also be translated as ‘noun’. The reason for my choice was that name can effectively have that dual meaning, whereas ‘noun’ limits the sense to a grammatical one alone. Other such dual meanings include ‘palais’, meaning ‘palate’ and ‘palace’. I distributed the two meanings elsewhere, keeping the physical relationship to speech with ‘lips’, and translating ‘cime’ instead as ‘crown’, inferring both superiority and royalty. There are two additional lines in my translation. The first was added to take account of the distinct French and English sentence structures, but I also enjoyed creating these new punchy rhythmic lines that incorporated the type of repetition used in the source text while remaining in keeping with Awono’s style. The second additional line towards the end was created both for rhyme and rhythm; a direct translation lost the source text poetry, and I felt this extra line brought the poem to a poetic close. Awono also uses alliteration and assonance throughout, and if I was unable to reproduce a sound in the exact location, I would instead replicate it elsewhere. Note, for example, ‘sceptre’/’sépare’ and ‘speech’/‘spectre’, and ‘front’/’nom’ (and loosely ‘sang’) alongside ‘shown’/’flows’/’grows’.

For a translator, this poem resonates because it explores the very structure of language and the significance and power of ‘a name’.

A name is sewn into flesh
Not shown on the forehead
A name flows
In the blood
It grows
In the poem
And lying at the heart of all words
A name heralds the meaning that dawns
And steers the poem
From within its speech
Raising its spectre
From the belly of the text
And never will it part
From the body of words
But in the crowds of sounds
In the surges of years
It appears
Its reign extends
The length of the uttering
Departing the lips
It abandoned the crown
And joins the people
In the collusion of laughter
The distance between name and blood
Thereafter
Won’t darken the door again

Le nom se porte dans la chair
Jean-Claude Awono

Et non sur le front
C’est dans le sang qu’il coule
C’est dans le poème
Que grandit le nom
Et assis au cœur des mots
Il énonce le sens de l’aube
C’est de l’intérieur du parler
Que le nom gouverne le poème
Depuis le ventre du texte
Qu’il brandit son sceptre
Rien ne le sépare
Du peuple des mots
C’est dans la foule des sons
Dans la houle des ans
Qu’il prend corps
Son règne se propage
Le long du dire
Le nom a quitté le palais
Il a abandonné la cime
Et rejoint le peuple
Dans la complicité du rire
Entre le sang et le nom
La distance a fóutu le camp

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Ter Balkt's work was rooted in his experience of growing up in Twente, in the east of the Netherlands. This region combines idyllic, rolling landscapes with more densely populated cities, where cotton once was king. Ter Balkt was familiar with both the countryside and city, but particularly identified with the way of life he knew on his grandparents' farm where he felt completely unified with nature.

I loved ‘The Hares' at first reading and was especially drawn to its imagery, sound and compact storytelling.

The poem is more serene in tone than the epigraph from ‘Auguries of Innocence' might lead us to expect, yet I also sensed some of the same spirit of truth-telling and empathy we find in Blake's verse. Ter Balkt said that 'a poem is an electron stream of language, sound, meaning and sparks'. I felt it was crucial to pay attention to all these elements in my translation, but decided it was less important to retain the precise line lengths of this unrhymed, cadenced sonnet than to work with its movement. I have taken some small liberties with the poem – mainly in the second quatrain where in the Dutch the ships sail towards the edge of the forest, evoking the borderline between nature and culture, rather than simply 'forests'. This choice was forced by the flow of the line, and yet I think the deeper meaning is not lost, as my translation retains other elements of the nature-culture opposition – and their secret marriage – in phrases such as ‘gilt-bronze skies of autumn'. The final tercet of the poem gave me the most difficulty – not so much in terms of its translation, but because I wanted to balance the sentence structure against the rhythms and sounds to create a final tercet that feels as resolved, in a dual sense, as the original.

The Hares
H.H. ter Balkt

Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.
WILLIAM BLAKE

I came through the fields of nothingness
where the hares raced and the presses –
standing against tiled walls – preserved
drawers filled with linen and gold-bronze powder,
quite possibly the secret cargo
of the small ships sailing on the wall tiles,
blue sails hoisted, towards coasts and forests
where ship, hare and hunter are united.

The gilt-bronze skies of autumn
taut between airy forest fringes
go rollicking round like the plucky hares.

Because they fear neither fox nor hunter –
o cities standing guard – their lustre shall
endure, under the lindens, through the ages.
‘Pero falá’ first appeared in the Asturian-language journal Formientu. As its title – literally ‘But Speak’ – suggests, it is an exhortation to speak Asturian, a minority language of Spain not yet granted official status, but very much alive in its written and spoken forms.

Its lack of official status means that Asturian literature receives less attention than languages like Catalan, Galician or Basque, both within and outwith Spain. Translating this poem, which is also an impassioned affirmation of the richness and beauty of the language, felt like an opportunity to introduce Asturian to Anglophone readers. With this in mind, I decided to produce a poem which retained an abundance of Asturian vocabulary. The bilingual source text, which juxtaposes Spanish terms with their Asturian counterparts, became a trilingual translation. Leaving so much of the text ‘untranslated’ inevitably means less of the source meaning is carried over into my version, but I have tried to compensate for this loss through an abundance of form. I use italics to differentiate the Spanish terms, which are arranged together with the ‘translated’ English text on the left-hand side of the page, whereas the Asturian words are scattered across the page to their right. The reader of the translation may not be able to follow the poem’s titular imperative, but they can at least immerse themselves in the sound world of the Asturian language by reading the ‘word cloud’ as an independent entity, if they wish. I have also tried to help guide the reader through the poem’s bilingualism, where possible. For example, while I have left the title in Asturian, I have changed it to ‘Fálala’, the last word of my translation. This translated-untranslated title is glossed for the reader in the poem’s last lines: ‘but, above all, speak it, but, above all, fálala.’

Robin Munby
Asturian has some beautiful words: fesoria, llambiotada, migayes…

Don’t say in Spanish that the stars brillen, that birds vuelen, that you want to go de marcha; the stars rescamplan, birds esnalan and you’re off out de folixa, or a correla if you like.

If your stomach’s rumbling, don’t eat bogavante, almejes or rape, dine on bugre, ormasueles pixín, amasueles bugre,
or you know how it is.

“If you’re going outside, your nan’ll shout, always fretting over cold and frost. Go to a drink freshly poured, or a fervinchu sidra, chigre, or if you’re feeling off. Argue with football fans, Sporting or Uviéu, doesn’t matter which, there’s nothing can’t be sorted over a few cachaes tute, and a game of tou meter. Don’t run, go at Don’t jump, take the easy route eat a bollu xira, bolu xira, or dance the But, above all, be at home in your feel it, immerse yourself in it but, above all, speak it, but, above all, fálala.
Reading ‘Matelots’ by Corbière, I can almost smell salt. The poem opens the Breton section of Corbière’s ‘Les Amours jaunes’ (1873) and rails against romanticised depictions of sailors, offering an alternative portrayal of these sea-tossed wanderers. Here, Corbière repeatedly contrasts landlubbers and sailors, suggesting that the latter are impossible for earthbound people to understand. He stresses their physical vigour, apparent in fights and sex, and depicts the dangers of a life at sea. This extract is from the last third of the poem, and sets the reader right amid the bustling dialogue of returning sailors. Despite their various injuries, the sailors’ speech is vigorous, full of lively exclamations, jokes, and boasts, including the swaggering assertion that ‘they no longer make hulls of my ilk’! The language is fast-paced, interspersed with dashes and suspension points. One of the difficulties I had in translating this passage, then, was how to convey Corbière’s vitality, and particularly his colloquialisms and specialised marine vocabulary. It was a challenge to render phrases such as ‘hachis d’abordage’, which I initially translated as ‘Ground meat from boarding’. This translation didn’t feel right, however: it wasn’t clear that it was the sailors who were depicted as ground meat, and I wasn’t sure that ‘boarding’ conveyed the sense of attack from other ships. ‘Hacked up by pirates’ seemed both clearer in terms of semantics and truer to Corbière’s rough-and-ready poetry. Finally, it was difficult to capture certain puns, as in the assertion that a fiancée waits ‘vaguely’ earlier on in the poem (in French, ‘vaguement’ puns on ‘vague’, meaning ‘wave’). I added in my own sly, hidden pun in this extract, speaking of ‘tiny bites’ in the couplet about the changing appetites of sailors, punning multilingually on the colloquial French term for the male sexual organ (‘bite’).

Suzannah V. Evans

Matelots
Tristan Corbière

On en voit revenir pourtant: bris de naufrage, Ramassis de scorbut et hachis d’abordage… Cassés, défigurés, dépayés, perclus:
– Un œil de moins. – Et vous, en avez-vous plus ? – La fièvre jaune. – Et bien, et vous, l’avez-vous rose ?
– Une balafre. – Ah, c’est signé !…C’est quelque chose !
– Et le bras en pantonne. – Oui, c’est un biscaïen, Le reste c’est le bel ouvrage au chirurgien.
– Et ce trou dans la joue? – Un ancien coup de pique.
– Cette bosse? – À tribord?…excusez: c’est ma chique.
– Ça? – Rien: une foutaise, un pruneau dans la main, Ça sert de baromètre, et vous verrez demain:
Je ne vous dis que ça, sur! quand je me sens ma crampe...
Allez, on n’en fait plus de coques de ma trempe!
On m’a pendu deux fois…–

Et l’honnête forban
Creuse un bateau de bois pour un petit enfant.
– Ils durent comme ça, reniflant la tempête
Riches de gloire et de trois cents francs de retraite,
Vieux culots de gargousse, épaves de héros!…
– Héros? – Ils riraient bien!– Non merci: matelots!
– Matelots! – Ce n’est pas vous, jeunes mateluches,
Pour qui les femmes ont toujours de coqueluches...
Ah, les vieux avaient de plus fiers appétits!
En haussant leur épaule ils vous trouvent petits,
À treize ans ils mangiaient de l’Anglais, les corsaires!
Vous, vous n’êtes que des pelletas militaires…
Allez, on n’en fait plus de ces purs, premier brin!
Tout s’en va…tout! La mer…elle n’est plus mariée!
De leur temps, elle était plus salée et sauvage.
Mais, à présent, rien n’a plus de pucelage…
La mer…La mer n’est plus qu’une fille à soldats!…
– Vous, matelots, rêvez, en faisant vos cent pas
Comme dans les grands quarts…Paisible rêverie
De carcasse qui geint, de mât craqué qui crie…
– Aux pompes!…
– Non: fini! – Les beaux jours sont passés:
– Adieu, mon beau navire aux trois mâts pavoisés!
Tel qu’une vieille coque, au sec et dégréée,
Où vient encore parfois clapoter la marée:
Âme-de-mer en peine est le vieux matelot
Attendant, échoué…– quoi: la mort?
– Non, le flot.

Île d’Ouessant. – Avril.
Reading ‘Matelots’ by Corbière, I can almost smell salt. The poem opens the Breton section of Corbière’s ‘Les Amours jaunes’ (1873) and rails against romanticised depictions of sailors, offering an alternative portrayal of these sea-tossed wanderers.

Some do come back, though: shipwreck’s debris, Hacked up by pirates, riddled with scurvy... Broken, disfigured, adrift, with a limp: 
– One eye down. – And you, do you have one I could pinch?
– Yellow fever. – What about you, do you have it in pink?
– A scar. – Oh, it’s signed!...That’s something, I think.
– Arm out of whack. – Yes, that was musket-fire.
The rest is thanks to a surgeon I admire.
– And that hole in your cheek? – An old pike blow.
– That lump? – To starboard?...oh sorry, it’s my tobacco.
– That? – Nothing: a fuck-up, I caught a bullet with my hand,
It works as a barometer, tomorrow you’ll understand:
Sure as day! Whenever I feel a twinge...
Admit it, they no longer make hulls of my ilk!
They hanged me twice... – And the honest crook
Whittles a wooden boat for a child with his hook.
– They survive like that, sniffing storms out at sea,
Rich in fame and three hundred francs’ annuity,
Old cartridge ends, shipwrecks of heroes!...
– Heroes? – how they’d laugh!...- No thank you: matelots!
– Sailors! – You’re not it, young sailor boys,
For whom the women make so much noise...
Ah, the old ones had prouder appetites!
They shrug their shoulders at your tiny bites.
At thirteen, they were eating Englishmen, these pirates!
You, you’re nothing but military pelletas...
Come on, they don’t make them like that anymore, so praiseworthy!
Everything ends...everything! The sea...is no longer seaworthy!
In the old days, it was saltier and wilder.
But now nothing is purer and milder...
The sea...the sea is nothing but a soldiers’ cocotte!...
– Dream on, you sailors, as you pace your lot
As if on deck...A peaceful revere
Of moaning hulls, cracked masts at sea...
– To the pumps!... – No: it’s over! The old days are gone:
– So long, my gorgeous ship, with your masts still looking on.
Like an old hull, derigged, on the strand,
Where sometimes a wave still nudges the sand,
The old sailor is a sea-soul, suffering inside,
Waiting, aground...– for what: death?
– No, the tide.

Isle of Ushant. – April.
I began translating the poetry of Maria Wine, doyenne of Swedish modernism, out of my own poetic curiosity. Nowhere could I find her translated into English, but for a few pages of a preface in her husband’s final book: ‘Journeys in Dream and Imagination’ by Artur Lundqvist, in whose shadow she has fallen completely. So, with permission from the Artur Lundqvist Maria Wine Foundation in Perstorp, I began to translate the opening poems from her first collection and I found that they were magical, mysterious and palpable eighty years after their publication in 1943. This was my first attempt at translation and it was a steep learning curve ascended gently. I went about each poem line by line with several different dictionaries. Thank goodness Swedish modernism had not yet begun splitting the sense of sentences over the white space of the page; if it had been like Mallarmé, with verbs hanging on their own and fragments of clauses, it would have been impossible! But the sense more or less formed a complete whole on each line and I could work methodically, building my understanding of the verse. I tried to translate with high fidelity to the meaning of Maria Wine’s words, opting for more literal a translation, without versioning the sense into something 21st-century. I tried to treat her text with as little promiscuousness as possible. And the Swedish she uses seems perfectly adapted to this kind of translating. It is a language of fundamental elements: dawn, night, light, darkness, forest, sea, land, rain, snow, stones. These nouns can be placed easily like stepping stones, but there were trickier ones. Wine often writes ‘vacker kvinna’: ‘beautiful woman’, but what should be translated of that, what part of its meaning? And when we go after its meaning, we find it splits apart: what is the meaning of a beautiful woman in 1943, what is the meaning of a beautiful woman in the year 2021, and what is its meaning to Maria Wine? I have found no solution; I am enjoying the problem greatly!

Arthur Allen

---

I have barely had time to build your name
Maria Wine

I have barely had time to build your name with the white pebbles of the beach before the endless waves of sea have washed it away – could I just as easily rip your name from my heart.

But the heart is not a wave that comes and goes. The heart is a mill that grinds and grinds.

Knappt har jag hunnit att bygga ditt namn
Maria Wine

Knappt har jag hunnit att bygga ditt namn med strandens vita småstenar innan havets tidlösa vågor har sköljt bort det — kunde jag blott lika lätt riva ditt namn ur mitt hjärta.

Men hjärtat är ingen våg som kommer och går. Hjärtat är en kvarn som mal och mal.

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I used a free translation approach, prioritising the meaning over literal translation while ensuring, of course, that the plot remained unchanged. I did, however, feel it important to use the same stylistic devices as the authors where possible. I felt that the skipping rhythm and bounce created by the authors’ consistent metre established a friendly, child-like atmosphere for the poem and this was therefore the translation focus above other stylistic devices, resulting in some necessary sacrifices. Nonsense words created the biggest challenge, e.g. ‘Zwuderich’, translated as ‘Dwimble’ to make the character seem diminutive (rhyming with ‘thimble’). This also maintained the alliteration of the sound ‘dw’ in ‘dwarf Dwimble, translated from ‘Zwerg Zwuderich’. An inversion method was used in translating Dwimble’s titular pet name ‘Unkürzbare’ (‘unshortable’), where instead of being unable to make Dwimble smaller, he is now so small that we are able to pocket him, hence ‘Pocketable’. Finally, one transcreation problem specific to German was the word ‘Zwuder-ding’, being a compound of the character’s partial name and the word ‘thing’. Inventing compound words is more common in German than in English. Therefore, nonsense words were used as a workaround, translating ‘Zwuder-ding’ (with the root ‘Zwuder-’ from ‘Zwuderich’ and the German word for ‘thing’) as ‘Dwimblypoo’. This maintained the name root, and added a child-friendly insult as a suffix to achieve the intended purpose of a thinly veiled insult, which was far more important to the story than the words used.

Christina Lucassi
First-time entrant commendations

Open

Christina Lucassi
cont...

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Have you ever heard of little dwarf Dwimble?

Have you ever heard of little dwarf Dwimble?
He's just twice as big as a tiny thimble.
Now, some people call him the Pocketable,
The teeniest, weeniest one possible:
The smallest of dwarves that you ever did see.
As friendly and helpful, polite as can be.

Aww, look at the little dwarf sliding on roots.
He's carefully balanced on bushes and shoots.
Never once putting a foot out of place,
Never unbalanced as he moves with grace.
It's cold in the forest, but look at his hat:
He'll stay nice and warm in a berry like that!

Now, Dwimble had never been one to complain
But he had a problem, and it was a pain.
He wanted to help, but try as he might
No-one would let him because of his height.

But, as Dwimble walked through the forest one day
He happened to meet a large bear on his way.
He offered him help anytime, anywhere;
If the bear had a problem, he would be there.
Dwimble would help any way that he could
Whenever was needed, as any friend should.

I'll gladly advise you. Together, you'll see,
We'll soon make your problem as small as can be.
Our problems are never as big as we think,
My best help will solve it as quick as a wink!

But strangely, the bear, with a shake of his head,
Just turned to dwarf Dwimble and rudely said:
"Now what do you want then, Dwimblybum?"
I don't think you're even as tall as my thumb,
And all of my problems are bigger than you!
So tell me now really: what could you do?
I'll tell you what, Dwimble, since you are so tall,
If a tick ever bites me, I'll give you a call!

With that, the dwarf left, feeling lonely and blue.

Then, as Dwimble walked through the forest that day
He happened to meet a sly fox on his way.
He offered him help anytime, anywhere;
If the fox had a problem, he would be there.
Dwimble would help any way that he could
Whenever was needed, as any friend should.

Fox, my dear friend, I would gladly help you,
Your wife and your fox cubs, the whole motley crew.
If you'd like my help, please just ask me and then
I'll even work out how to build a fox den!"

But sadly, the fox, with a shake of his head,
Just turned to dwarf Dwimble and rudely said:
"My problems are mine and they are mine alone.
And they're far too big for someone half-grown.
I'll tell you what, Dwimble, since you are so tall,
If my whiskers break, I'll give you a call!

Until then: adios, dwarf Dwimblypoo.

With that, the dwarf left feeling lonely and blue.
I chose this poem as I wanted to translate a contemporary French poet whose English translations I had never read. I had heard of Laâbi and greatly admire his battle for justice and cultural freedom. I liked the syntax and succinct, unpretentious style of this particular poem and the peaceful, melodic emotion it evoked in me of a peaceful death or the idea of the death of the poet, perhaps, as he loses the ability to think/see clearly with the advent of old age. I found it beautiful and moving. I tried to retain the simplicity of the original poem, the brevity of the lines and the tree/bench/field (nature) imagery. The slow, methodical rhythm, which almost feels like the poem itself is nodding off, like the poet, was another aspect I tried my best to retain. I enjoyed the difficulty of translating ‘m’absenter’, ‘écourté’ and ‘vieillies’, which I found didn’t translate easily into English. I loved and wanted to retain the enjambement of the ‘feu/des passions’ and ‘litanie/des questions’. I loved the ‘champ de la vision incohérente’ image and hope that the judges liked my choice of ‘senseless’ to translate it – I was debating between that and ‘blurred’, but decided the latter just didn’t encapsulate the incoherent, incomprehensible nature of the French image. I was happiest with my choice of ‘receding’ and ‘truncated’, which is such a harsh word that perfectly evokes the poet’s life being cut short and prepares the reader for the tree image at the end.

I liked the syntax and succinct, unpretentious style of this particular poem and the peaceful, melodic emotion it evoked in me.
My introduction to the prize on the Stephen Spender Trust website explores how and why I chose the poems in the Spotlight booklet. In this commentary I would like to share the voices of the young people who submitted.

It was a rewarding experience to engage with the South Asian community of the UK via the Urdu Spotlight Prize. Community work like this, highlighting and promoting a language such as Urdu, goes a long way towards repatriation in a socially-charged landscape.

My grandmother explained to me that, pre-electricity, the chief guest was denoted by where the ‘shamma’ was put – they were the focus. Through this image, Iqbal implies that knowledge should be revered and esteemed: the ultimate goal. Yet this contextual meaning is lost in translation.

The third poem that seemed to draw the contestants was Sara Shagufa’s ‘The Birds’ Eyes Open’, a haunting, metaphysical poem by a female poet who was little known, certainly not as well known as she should be, until about ten years ago. Here is a verse translated by one entrant who, although not officially commended, made a memorable contribution:

The chirping of a bird is my birthday Distance and trees shake hands And then the bird’s eye is opened

My introduction to the prize on the Stephen Spender Trust website explores how and why I chose the poems in the Spotlight booklet. In this commentary I would like to share the voices of the young people who submitted.

It is also important to note that many poets were very active politically, including Allama Iqbal and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. One of the most inspiring and inspiring poems of all time, ‘Speak’ by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, reflects this political engagement. I believe that it is the spirit of this poem, its vocation to rouse and to inspire, that made it the second most translated poem in the competition. And to translate it across generations, across borders, is also a political act. As Amman Ali Hussain Shaheen, another of our commended translators in the 14-and-under category, taught me:

What I found interesting about this poem was that Iqbal wrote this poem for his friend Sheikh Abdullah, who was an activist, striving to get freedom for Kashmir. A poem that could motivate the freedom fighters and fill up their hearts with enthusiasm and love for independence.

This stirring quality is reflected in the following passage from Amman’s commended translation:

Speak out, this little time is plenty Before the demise of tongue and body For the truth is still preserved Speak out your heart!

This same poem was translated by our winner in the 18-and-under category, Sarah Jilani. I highly recommend watching her video interview with me (available on the Trust’s YouTube channel), because it shows how the preservation of the Urdu language can be simple, motivated by love within a family.

I am proud of this outcome. It has made me very happy to know that the poem ‘Speak’ lives on in fresh translations, to inspire more generations.

For the truth is still preserved

I was very pleased that some of our young translators were brave enough to take on this mysterious, perhaps even odd, poem, and do it justice. It was the same case for the poem ‘Demolition’ by another female poet, Nahid Rana, about whom extremely little is known. In fact, poetry in the subcontinent has a tradition of being lost in translation. In fact, poetry in the subcontinent has a tradition of being lost in translation. In fact, poetry in the subcontinent has a tradition of being lost in translation. The poem raises a few questions which are devoid of interrogation marks. I decided to retain the same pattern in my translation without disrupting the flow of the poem.

I was very pleased that some of our young translators were brave enough to take on this mysterious, perhaps even odd, poem, and do it justice. It was the same case for the poem ‘Demolition’ by another female poet, Nahid Rana, about whom extremely little is known. In fact, poetry in the subcontinent has a tradition of being lost in translation. In fact, poetry in the subcontinent has a tradition of being lost in translation. The poem raises a few questions which are devoid of interrogation marks. I decided to retain the same pattern in my translation without disrupting the flow of the poem.

I have turned my attention to the winner in our 14-and-under category, Faaiz Adil, who translated ‘If It Is Grief’ by Ahmed Faraz. It is a radical act that creates ripples beyond the obvious.
Conversations were had with family members, seeking out their knowledge of Urdu and Urdu poetry.

It has made me very happy to know that the poem ‘Speak’ lives on in fresh translations, to inspire more generations.

There are some sublime moments of feminist poetry in Zehra Nigah’s ‘The Evening’s First Star’, as translated by Shaheera Kuchai in the 14-and-under category:

That night was like a riot too
I was in the orbit of the world

It was very difficult to choose certain translations over others, and even though Shaheera Kuchai did not make it to the final list of winners and commendees, I found her translation memorable for many reasons.

For our 10-and-under entrants, who all translated a riddle by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum, I am also sure that there were ripples. These were apparent in a Creative Translation in the Classroom workshop that I facilitated for Year 4 students at St Christopher’s School, Oxford. During the workshop, one child in the class, who usually struggles with reading, was so inspired by seeing the Urdu text that he started to draw. The riddle is a form of children’s poetry from the subcontinent that was traditionally well loved, but sadly is not being brought into contemporary children’s poetry as much as it could be.

Our very young translators managed to solve this puzzle-poem, which personifies a rainbow as a fairy. It is a poem of hope and joy, while being a work of eco-poetry at the same time. The poem was even more resonant because the rainbow has become such an important symbol in the UK over the past year.

I thank the Stephen Spender Trust for undertaking this important work, and it was an honour and a privilege to be part of this project. I thank every young translator who sent us their poems, and I thank their families too. Together, we made some noise for Urdu and I congratulate every single one of you!

The Urdu Spotlight Prize is curated in partnership with the Rekhta Foundation. The majority of the poems presented here can be found on their website at rekhta.org.

Eik pari he rung rungeeli si
Kuch subz he kuch neeli si
Kuch laal si he kuch peeli si
Baarish me na-ha kur aati he
Aati he rung jamaati he
Phir pul bhurr me chh-op ja-ati he
Poocho to uss ka naam he kiyaa?
Duniya me uss ka kaam he kiyaa?
A fairy is bright,
A little bit green,
There is some blue,
And a little bit of red,
There is some yellow.
The rain is to bathe in when she comes,
Then she is coloured and enchants us.
In a moment, she hides and goes.
So ask what her name is!
This world is hers – work is what she commands!

There is a fairy with many colours,
A little bit is green, a little bit is blue,
A little bit is red, and there is a little bit of yellow in her,
The rain comes and showers on her,
Her job is complete.
Soon after the rain is gone,
She comes and sees an entry to a hiding place,
Then, in a moment, she goes in to hide inside and what she does is done.
Ask her name – what is it?
The world is hers now that her work is done.
Commended 10-and-under Urdu Spotlight

Deiminas Grudzinskas

There is one fairy I like
Translated from the original riddle
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

There is one fairy I like, there is a bright fairy to colour,
It is a little bit green and a little bit blue,
It is a little bit red and there is a little bit of yellow.  
When it rains you see it will becomes a rainbow.

Commended 10-and-under Urdu Spotlight

Ashwaq Nassa

A fairy is bright
Translated from the original riddle
by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum

There is a fairy on its own,
A little but green, a little bit blue,
A little but red is there, and some yellow,
When the rain finishes she comes out,
She comes on her own – seeing her is clear,
Then on her own, in a moment she can
Become a wonderful rainbow!
I felt it important to get the translation 'Ranjish' correct as this word and sentiment are at the heart of the poem. After discussing this with my parents and understanding how the poem is about a person's one-sided sentiment, I felt the word 'grief' was best suited.

The first example that required some research on meaning and which word would fit best was the key word 'Ranjish', which appears in the title of the poem. My research showed that this word can mean indignation, grief, unpleasantness (between persons), strained relations, estrangement, displease and toil. Each word has a slightly different meaning and I felt it important to get the translation 'Ranjish' correct as this word and sentiment are at the heart of the poem. After discussing this with my parents and understanding how the poem is about a person’s one-sided sentiment, I felt the word ‘grief’ was best suited.

My second example is the phrase 'ḳhush-fahm'. A literal translation of this phrase is something like 'misguided' but I felt that the word 'hope' would better fit with the tone of the poem. My final example is 'bhujana'. This is used with a word meaning 'candle flame' and it means 'to extinguish the candle flame'. The English translation to me sounded strange but my mother explained that the sentiment of love in Urdu poetry is often portrayed by a candle flame so it’s a metaphor that is often used.

If it is grief let it torture my heart
Please come even if it is to abandon me again
Give some regard to how much I love you
Please come someday to console me.

Even if we have not had much interaction
Please come for the sake of custom and society
How many people can I tell my sadness at being apart
If you are mad at me, come just for the sake of this world
For a long time, I have been deprived of company
Come again, my beloved if only to make me cry.

Even now I have some hope
So come even if it’s to extinguish the candle flame.
Clouds
Translated from the original anonymous poem by Shehla Shibli

Black clouds will come
The clouds will pour the rain down.
People will shower in the rain
Black clouds will come.

Rain will pour down, tip tip tip
Rain will sing, tip tip tip

We will sing and dance
Black clouds will come

Birds will sing songs
Birds will tweet songs

Frogs will also join in
Black clouds will come
Faiz wrote this poem for his friend Sheikh Abdullah... A poem that could motivate the freedom fighters and fill up their hearts with enthusiasm and love for independence.

My main reason for choosing this poem was its historical background and my love for such an inspirational poet as Faiz Ahmed Faiz. When I found it hard to select an appropriate poem, I read the biographies of different poets. Though all of them seemed impressive, what I personally liked about Faiz Ahmed Faiz was his commitment to learning and achieving excellence in every aspect of his life: to be a poet, playwriting or serving one's homeland. What I found interesting about this poem was that Faiz wrote it for his friend Sheikh Abdullah, who was an activist striving to get freedom for Kashmir. A poem that could motivate the freedom fighters and fill up their hearts with enthusiasm and love for independence. The most challenging words to translate, for me, were 'Kaffu' and 'Dahany'. I could not use the literal meaning of these words, so I searched for synonyms and used the words that went best. Since the style adopted by the poet was very motivating and the poem has the power to inspire youngsters, making word choices in English that could deliver the same meaning and effect was very difficult. I tried to use rhyming words as much as I could, such as 'soaring' and 'flaring'.

Speak Up

Speak out, for your words (lips) are free
Your stiff body remains yours
Speak out, for your life still remains yours

Look
In the blacksmith's forge
Flames are soaring
Iron is flaring

How the shackles are unbolting
And unlinked chains are spreading

Before the demise of tongue and body
For the truth is still preserved
Speak out your heart!
A Child's Prayer

May my wish leave my lips as a prayer,
May my life be that of a candle flame, dear god
May the world's darkness fade with this spirit of mine
May every place light up by the shine of mine
May my home be beautified by this spirit of mine

The way a garden is beautified with flowers

May my life be that of a moth, dear god
May I love the flame of knowledge, dear god
May my work be supporting the deprived
May I love those who are hopeless and needy
My dear God! Protect me from evil!
Guide me on the straight path

I chose this poem because I was familiar with it as my parents grew up reciting it in their schools. I heard it very often but did not always understand what it meant. The beauty of translating this poem was that I discovered its true meaning and found that it was not just a poem, but a prayer. Some words were in complex Urdu that I did not understand, so I talked to my family to find out the meanings and this really connected me to my culture. I tried my best to retain the rhyme scheme, but it was challenging as words in Urdu do not sound like English words. It is a short yet powerful poem, really emphasising the power of words and hope.
I found the translation of the phrase ‘جسم تو’ rather challenging, as it was difficult for me to come up with an appropriate translation. There were many words that could have been used in varying combinations: ‘perfect figure’, ‘lean body’, etc. However, in the end I decided to use ‘fine body’, as I thought this was the closest match to ‘جسم تو’ and best conveyed the meaning of the Urdu phrase. The most difficult part of translating this poem was actually translating the word ‘جول’. The word itself is an incredibly powerful and integral part of the poem, and is composed of strong consonants. Its direct translation into English would be the word ‘say’, however this seemed weak in comparison...Instead, I chose to use the word ‘speak’.

‘say’. Instead, I chose to use the word ‘speak’, which is again monosyllabic like ‘جول’ and ‘say’, thereby allowing me to keep a similar metre. Most importantly, the initial ‘sp’ sound in ‘Speak’ contains the plosive ‘p’ which helps to retain the power of the plosive sound from the letter ‘جول’. However, by translating ‘جول’ as ‘speak’ rather than ‘say’, the sequence of words had to be adjusted. Rather than adding a direct translation for the word ‘جول’, I opted to replace it with a colon. Had I translated ‘جول’ as ‘say’, ‘جول’ would have been translated as ‘that’. However, this would not have made sense with ‘speak’. Although adding a colon altered the rhythm of the poem slightly, this was justified by the way in which the colon drew further emphasis to ‘speak’, allowing the message of the poem to be truly conveyed.
Often, literal translation into another language causes a loss of poetic beauty, as was the case here. After much deliberation and searching for synonyms, I was able to come up with a translation...

'Time' by Javed Akhtar

One difficulty I came up against when translating this poem was finding an apt translation for the lines 'يہ جگ زمین کی دوڑ چل چل چل - چل' which translates as 'forming and breaking'. The phrase 'نہایت ہیں' means earthquakes. Inserting the literal translations of these words did not at all sound correct. Often, literal translation into another language causes a loss of poetic beauty, as was the case here. After much deliberation and searching for synonyms, I was able to come up with a translation (see poem overleaf). In the end, I was pleased with it, as the 'tremors' and 'turbulence' have a similar semantic field. Also, the alliteration of 't' created a rather nice flow and feel to the line, which is present throughout the poem in Urdu. Another aspect that required much consideration during the translation was the line 'یہ وقت چھوڑ چڑ چل: چل چل چل چل', which translates as 'this'. However 'what is this time?' sounded incorrect, as if asking about current times, or about what is happening right now. Whereas in the original poem, 'یہ وقت' refers more to the phenomenon of time, something which did not come across in the direct translation. I thus felt the use of the word 'this' was unsuitable, and so it was omitted, necessitating a change in word order. When deciding how to translate this line, I not only had to consider the meaning of 'یہ وقت', but also its function. 'یہ وقت' draws emphasis to the concept of 'time', encouraging us to reflect on it. Therefore, in my translation, I opted to use a colon. This caesural pause allows readers a moment to reflect on what time is, which is arguably the essence of the poem.

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Demolition

A weak wall and a weak dwelling
a strange man composed from unbaked earth
makes an offering to the rains
and is drowned by the flood

A weak wall and a weak dwelling
a strange man composed from unbaked earth
crumbles one day from exhaustion
and is distanced from his tribe.

The beauty of this composition rests in its simple, yet hard hitting message on the fragility of existence and defeat in the hands of destiny, which leaves one feeling rather philosophical.

The beauty of this composition rests in its simple, yet hard hitting message on the fragility of existence and defeat in the hands of destiny, which leaves one feeling rather philosophical. The short composition did not present any challenges as regards rhyme, metre or the use of metaphors, elements that often pose difficulties in translation. The last two lines were marked by a few rhyming words such as ‘chuar’ (crumble) and ‘duur’ (distanced). These however could not be rhymed in their English translation due to the absence of adequate equivalents. The poem is also marked by repetition of the first three lines in the stanza, making the task of translation easier. I noticed the words ‘kachchī dīvār’ (wall), ‘kachchā makān’ (house) and ‘kachchī miTTī’ (earth), which I realised implied feminine (wall and earth) and masculine (house) genders for the same meaning of the word (unbaked). This was an interesting observation that seemed quite unusual and not practised in English for inanimate objects. I additionally tried using multiple synonyms for the same word, which created challenges in translation. This presented a test, for example, while translating the words ‘kachchī’/‘kachchā’, which I interpreted with the context of the word in mind (adjective to describe the noun). One of the noticeable features of the poem was the absence of punctuation marks throughout its length, an aspect that I decided to retain as in the original.
This is one of the finest and most poignant compositions of Sara Shagufta, which makes the reader sigh at its embedded melancholic strain.

'The Birds' Eyes Open' by Sara Shagufta

A bird flutters its wings at night
the night, tree and bird
three travellers in the darkness
come and stand in a straight line
the night gets entangled in darkness
night, what did you do to my shadow
the forest is small
and hence, might appear dense to you
It was for the bird's sleep that I turned dark
after comforting the bird each night
I return to my destination
is your destination the morning
when I died I was named the night
now my name means separation
when will you be born again
when this bird will be awake
the warble of the birds is my birthday
separation and the tree stretch their hands
and the birds' eyes open.

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Faiz Ahmed Faiz's powerful poem was brought to the world's attention by Iqbal Bano, who referred to it in a speech with regards to its message of resistance and defiance. In order to develop a translation which best captured the poet's intent, I had to consider his use of onomatopoeia and repetition, as well as the religious context. Verbs are duplicated, which aside from altering their meaning allows for onomatopoeia and emphasis. As such, I have translated one example of this as 'beat-beating earth'. This technique allows for an emotive quality, which serves to rally the audience to fight their oppressors. In addition to this the poet emphasises the importance of the struggle by emphasising its religious nature, employing images which reflect important concepts in Islamic eschatology.

The poet creates a sense of contrast by comparing the suffering of the present to the better times to come. This is achieved by the use of numerous temporal clauses, featuring such changes as the reinstatement of the rejected. Verbs in the future tense are found at the end of each, as is natural in Urdu, and by changing the lineation such that the words 'when' and 'will' alternately open each line, I allowed for this sense of patterned contrast to transfer over into my translation.

The Face of Your Lord

We shall see, oh yes, we shall see,
That promised day, which will be seen by us.
Which has been etched into the tablet of eternity.
When the enormous mountains of tyranny
Will be blown away just as a cotton wool is;
When we, the oppressed,
Will have our feet crushed on this endlessly beat-beating earth;
When the heads of our rulers
Will have the thunderclap-clapping lightning on them;
When from the Lord’s seat on earth every idol
Will be eliminated;
When we, the pure of heart, rejected from the sanctuary,
Will be reinstated on the rightful throne.
Every crown will be lifted.
Every throne will be brought down.
Only God’s name will continue;
Both who is unseen and is also present;
Both who is the view and is also the viewer;
When that ‘I am the Truth’ call will rise
That which is me and that which is you too.

The king will rule the Lord’s creation
That which is me and that which is you too.
Stephan Spender Trust: The Year in Review

The SST year always culminates in the award of the Stephen Spender Prize, and this year we were delighted to give prizes and commendations to more entrants than ever before, and to recognise translations from twenty-one languages amongst the winning and highly commended poems. Just as the prize grows, so our work with young people has increased hugely in scope and reach over the past year, facilitated by our new website, new creative translation facilitators and new partnerships.

Urdu Spotlight

In early 2021 we launched a new training programme in creative translation, in partnership with the National Centre for Writing, New Writing North and Comma Press, co-funded by Arts Council England. We recruited and trained twelve translators and writers to design and deliver creative translation activities in schools. Selected from close to 100 applicants, our twelve trainees took part in a virtual course during the summer, developed and run by our education team of Stacie Allan, Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp and Rahul Bery. Based on SST’s ‘Decode-Translate-Create’ workshop model, the trainees learnt to design activities and workshops that transform the young participants into multilingual creators, able to access and interact with literature in multiple languages, and to use it as a springboard for their own creative writing. Autumn saw delivery in schools across our three target regions of Newcastle, Greater Manchester and Norfolk, and the workshops will continue into 2022.

Creative Translation in the Classroom (CTIC)

Our flagship education programme entered its third year in autumn 2021, with new partnerships with ten schools across Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, supported by funding from the Rothschild Foundation and Polonsky Foundation. Over the past 18 months we have transformed this project, conceived before the pandemic, into a blended programme of virtual and in-person, teacher- and translator-led activities and workshops for young people aged 8-14. A highlight of the CTIC year was the first iteration of our remote CPD strand for teachers, with a series of three webinars designed and delivered by SST with translation in schools expert Katrina Barnes. Meeting monthly from March to May 2021, this committed and creative group of teachers explored and tested approaches to creative translation and the Stephen Spender Prize. We continue to support this group through a network of teachers who are dedicated to increasing the use of authentic texts and creative translation in the Modern Languages classroom. The network now meets termly, either virtually or in person, and we aim to jointly develop and publish a guide to using authentic texts and creative translation that is accessible to all teachers.

In autumn we partnered with the Children’s Bookshow to bring creative translation to yet more schools in Buckinghamshire, with a visit to Milton Keynes by German author Kathrin Rohmann and SST translator Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp. With support from the German Embassy, Kathrin and Ruth performed to 250 primary school children and ran workshops with 60. The events focused on Kathrin’s book Apple Cake and Baklava, translated by Ruth, about migration and belonging.

Website and Virtual Resources

When the 2021 Stephen Spender Prize opened for entries in May we also launched our brand new website, presenting our increasingly dynamic and inclusive activity. As well as providing a submissions platform for the Prize, the site brings together information about our work with young people, and opportunities for people of all ages to get involved in our programmes. Throughout the year, and with support from the Foyle Foundation, we have been populating the site with our virtual resources, turning it into a one-stop-shop for all interested in creative translation. From our guide to poetry translation, aimed in particular at emerging translators, to our PowerPoints and worksheets for educators and young people, the SST website has become a trove of creative resources, and we look forward to the activities and encounters that this will generate in 2022 and beyond.

Partnerships with University of Oxford

The past year saw our partnership with the Queen’s College Translation Exchange (QTE) strengthen, as we supported the first year of the new Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators and QTE’s ambassador workshops in schools, which are inspired by the SST workshop model. We have also worked with the Oxford English Faculty on two projects: ‘Translating Berlin’ and ‘Prismatic Jane Eyre’. Both initiatives bring world-class research on international literature and translation to state schools across the UK, through workshops, resources and competitions for young people.

Advocacy for Languages

As language learning in UK schools continues to decline, along with the intercultural understanding that goes with it, SST advocates for language learning and multilingualism, and supports educators and activists who share our mission. This year our Director Charlotte Ryland co-founded the ‘Future of Languages’ forum, developing and sharing a bold vision for language learning across the country. Charlotte, Stacie (SST Education Coordinator), and other members of the SST team also presented creative translation at lectures and seminars including the national Festival of Education and the British Centre for Literary Translation Summer School, and published articles about SST’s work in the journals of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI). There is an energetic, supportive and creative group of educators and activists committed to finding a remedy for the decline in language learning across the UK, and we at SST are proud to be part of this.
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Stephen Spender Prize
For Poetry in Translation
2021