Emerging Literary Translators — 2020

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Norwich City of Literature

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‘Stories from all over the world, from different languages, places and viewpoints, have never been so welcome or necessary. We take huge pleasure in nurturing talented translators at the very beginning of their careers, and feel enormous excitement at the words they’ll make travel and the stories they’ll gift to us’

— Peggy Hughes, Programme Director,
National Centre for Writing

Foreword

This year's Emerging Literary Translators' anthology features an excerpt from a drama, written in the heart of Europe, set in the aftermath of the Second World War, which explores the 'weaponising' of language. It vividly illustrates the importance of doing exactly the opposite, which is where literary translators come in.

We live in a world which increasingly requires global responses from all of us to the climate crisis, to the threat of pandemic illness, to the growing gulf between rich and poor. Literary translators, whose work in connecting us to other cultures guides us towards a sense of what unites rather than divides us, are essential to the development of a global community capable of making a constructive response to these issues.

We are proud to present this anthology of new work by our talented cohort of emerging literary translators, in which humour is very often the weapon of choice for the individual trying to assert themselves against bureaucracy, whether this be the vast mechanics of government and religion or the narrower hierarchies of schoolroom and workplace. There is also salvation in storytelling. A Polish orphan receives an A grade for writing 'nonsense'. A feckless Russian boy is seduced by a riddling snake. A black hole assumes the role of literary critic.

These translations celebrate not only the imaginative brilliance of the original authors but the creative talents of the translators themselves, who have crafted new works from the original texts. Their work is not merely a technical tour de force but pushes the boundaries of contemporary writing in English. They demonstrate the vigour of the contemporary literary translation scene and should make us optimistic for the future.

Sarah Bower
National Centre for Writing

Emerging Translator Mentorships 2020

Chinese to English

Yan Chen

Mentor

Jeremy Tiang

Yan Chen is an MSt candidate in Comparative Literature and Critical Translation at Oxford and a Rhodes Scholar for China. Her work as a theatre dramaturg and translator has been seen at American Repertory Theater, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Hartford Stage and more. Her writings and translations have been published in *Playbill, HowlRound, Critical Stages, Stage and Screen Reviews,* and *TheTheatreTimes.com,* where she is also an editor. Yan holds a Master's degree in Dramaturgy and Theatre Studies from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Nanjing University.

Introduction

Yan Chen

In December 2014, a young author writing under the nom-de-plume 'Mister Slow of Joondalup' shot to instant fame on the Chinese Internet with a short story titled 'A Clergyman's Christmas Eve', a riotous, biting satire on the uneasy marriage between localised Christianity and political pragmatism in contemporary China that garnered over 10 million views on Weibo, China's most influential social media platform. Since then, Joondalup's short stories have been published in leading Chinese literary magazines including *Frontiers*, *Huacheng*, and *Hong Kong Literature*, and his short story 'Erlkönig' came up third in China's Top 10 Short Stories of 2018, ranked by the Chinese Fiction Institution, although much of his work remains unpublishable in Mainland China. Originally from China, he currently lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Hilariously Kafkaesque, Joondalup's work captures the surreality of modern Chinese history and politics through depicting people ordinary in station and extraordinary in their violently vigorous attempts to wrestle with what life and fate has assigned them. Ensnared in outrageous situations, his humans find themselves forced to the edge of humanity, and the irreverence of black comedy seamlessly bleeds into the tragedy of the common person, downtrodden but rebellious.

In 'The Qinghai-Tibet Subway, 1990', the local government of a hinterland county in China's Qinghai Province mobilizes its impoverished townspeople to build a subway on the world's highest and largest plateau (average elevation: 4,500 kilometres). The narrator, a young, irreverent cop-with-a-conscience, takes us through a town whose inhabitants range from a gatekeeper of power whose reckless optimism is only matched by his bumbling incompetence and denial of facts, to engineers and symphony orchestra musicians who, sentenced to hard labour during the Cultural Revolution, must now play along with a political vanity project of absurd heights. Their story encapsulates what the Yuan Dynasty poet Zhang Yanghao wrote, ‘In times of prosperity, it is the people who suffer; in times of decline, it is the people who suffer.’

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From *The Qinghai-Tibet Subway,* 1990

Mister Slow of Joondalup, translated by Yan Chen

Descended from reformatory farm wardens, Mayor Ma was a man in his forties who saw alcohol as his sole purpose in life. For him, working meant drinking. Every time he headed out to the local tavern for yet another night of binge drinking, he had a hired hand parked outside with a wheelbarrow, ready to catch him after he got good and drunk.

Stumbling out, he’d pitch headlong into the wheelbarrow, and the work hand would roll him home, slow and steady, the squeaky single wheel chirping softly amid the silently falling snow. Between the darkness and the bars of light cast down by the streetlamps, his heaving shape would emerge and sink, emerge and again sink, like some ponderously heaving whale journeying in an ocean of night, passing farther and farther towards the hazy edge of sight. Now you see him; now you don’t.

‘Hey! Listen up!’

A rude bark cracked the tranquil reminiscence, and I forced my eyes back into focus. The fathead, all a-flutter, hovered undesirably close and clear.

‘July 1st is this close at hand, and you had to let this happen! Not enough on our damned hands eh?’ He was dangerously close to blowing up.

Mayor Ma’s recent conference trip to Beijing had spawned a grand master plan: Bitter River County, he declared, was going to build its own subway. The subway was a distant rarity at the time, limited to Beijing and Tianjin. Even Shanghai’s was still under construction.

Mayor Ma was aiming for a miracle, plain and simple: he wanted the whole thing not just underway but finished in time for July 1st, the date of the Party's founding anniversary.

'This subway here on Mount Granddad! Must! Be up and running! By July 1st! We're people of the plateau! We gotta…be brave and…and pave! This county of ours is way up high! Four kilometres high! At this height, it counts as a subway! In the inlands, this'll be one of them roller coasters! We're gonna fly over to the Village of Hazhai, and we're going through the sky!'

Mayor Ma's proposal was less preposterous than it sounded. Our county seat, you see, was essentially one street that stretched two hundred metres long—roughly the length of a Beijing subway train. Theoretically, our train wouldn't have to budge an inch. You get on at the front, walk the length of the car, get off at the back—congratulations, you've just seen the whole town. Besides, I'd seen photos of Beijing's subways. *Their* platforms were clean enough to eat off of. Mayor Ma's plan, now, was to dig a tunnel through the heart of Mount Granddad, the mountain separating the mines from the town, and christen it a 'subway'. The finished product could be more accurately described as an overground commuter cart on rails. Oh, and by the way, bring your own stools—there would be no seating provided in the mine carts. You give a shout at this end of the mountain, someone yanks the cables on the other side, and off to work you go. That was all it was, really, but propaganda purposes demanded a far fancier name, hence the title of the project: 'The Citizen-Serving Subway Construction Project of Bitter River County'.

Despite all the buildup, though, the announcement fell rather flat, mainly because everyone was too busy asking, 'What on earth is a "subway"?'

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French to English

Anna Leader

Mentor

Sarah Ardizzone

Anna Leader's passion for translation stems from growing up in multilingual Luxembourg with an American mother and an English father. She studied Comparative Literature at Princeton University. Anna translates poetry and prose from French and German and is this year's winner of the Harvill Secker Young Translators' Prize.

Introduction
Anna Leader

At the end of the Second World War, two women—both Belgian citizens, one German by birth—accuse each other of collaborating with the Nazis. Of stealing food from sick prisoners. Of sleeping with German guards. Neither woman can move on with her life until the case is settled.

La vérité m'appartient, a play by Luxembourg poet, novelist, and playwright Nathalie Ronvaux, was awarded Luxembourg's national literary prize in 2013 and was performed at the Théâtre des Capucins in 2016. It is a gripping portrayal of a superintendent's investigation into two accounts that contradict each other at every turn. Ronvaux's sparse, taut dialogue may surprise readers who expect more flourishes from French; I have sought to preserve her concision and precision in my translation. Within the play, there are also different textual textures, as documents and letters that are read by off-stage voices are directly inspired by actual case files from post-war investigations of collaboration in Belgium.

Questions about language loom large in Luxembourg; a country with four official languages. *La vérité m'appartient* reflects this preoccupation with linguistic and cultural loyalties. In the following excerpted scene, Mia argues that her voluntary adoption of Belgium and the French language supersedes her connection to her German mother tongue. She insists, 'I don't think speaking a language—in this case, German—makes me guilty of all these alleged misdeeds!' It may not automatically make her guilty of collaboration, but her lapse into German during a key soliloquy does complicate the work of investigator and translator alike.

As this year's winner of the Harvill Secker Young Translators' Prize, I have been translating this play under the wonderful mentorship of Sarah Ardizzone, whose keen-eared attention to sound and rhythm has challenged and inspired me to think out of the box for translation solutions.

From *La vérité m'appartient*

Nathalie Ronvaux, translated by Anna Leader

Leclercq, *with a strong French accent*: Guten Tag, Frau Merkelsberg!

Mia: Be careful, Superintendent. Someone might suspect you of ties to our German enemies. That sort of thing could turn people against you!

Leclercq: You think so?

Mia: There's no telling what life has in store.

Leclercq: Which you ought to know better than most.

Mia: I'm not arguing with that.

Leclercq: Don't you miss using your language?

Mia: I'm not sure what you mean. I use French every day.

Leclercq: I was thinking of German...

Mia: German is my parents' language. Russian is my grandparents' language. French is mine.

Leclercq: And yet you have perfect German. Which, it would seem, put you on excellent terms with the German guards.

Mia: Yes, I speak perfect German. Just as my parents spoke perfect French, and my grandparents spoke French and German. And during the war, I made perfect use of it—correct.

Leclercq: Indeed.

Mia: If speaking German is a crime, then yes, I'm at fault. But I don't think speaking a language—in this case, German—makes me guilty of the accusations against me!

Leclercq: You were on good terms with the guards, then?

Mia: If that's what you want to call it!

Leclercq: It would seem that your cell door was left open in the Brussels prison. Which is quite unusual for a prisoner.

Mia: Yes, my cell door was left open. So were the doors of the other calfactorines working in the kitchens. So no, I don't think it was unusual!

Leclercq: And at night?

Mia: At night, my door was double-bolted. Like every other prisoner's!

Leclercq: It's my understanding that you never mixed with the Belgian prisoners at Ravensbrück. It seems that you preferred to spend time with the German prisoners.

Mia: Nationality means very little in a camp. A prisoner is a prisoner. What matters more is clinging to the scrap of humanity that can survive in a place like that.

Leclercq: You never mentioned that you were detained at Breendonk before the Brussels prison.

Mia: What does it matter?

Leclercq: Well, curiously, your husband, who only spoke French, didn't have your luck. He was sent directly to Mauthausen.

Mia: Yes. And shot soon after. So no, clearly he didn't have my luck.

Leclercq: How do you explain the fact that you weren't sent directly to Ravensbrück? The Germans pressed the same charges against you both. And you were more politically active than your husband.

Mia: So ask the Germans that question. An opportunity for you to use the language!

Beat.

Leclercq: When you passed letters and packages, did you ask for money?

Mia: No.

Leclercq: Did you ask for food or other goods?

Mia: No.

Leclercq: I have testimony here which states, and I quote, 'Merkelsberg passed messages several times, but always for money. When I saw her again at Ravensbrück, she was on very good terms with the Germans and she wasn't dressed like a prisoner.' This same witness claims she was present when a train arrived and you said this about Mannopper, and I quote: 'If she shows her face here, I'll make sure she's sent to the gas chamber!'

Mia: Why would I have said that? It was impossible for Mannopper to turn up at the camp!

And to answer your questions:

No. I never performed services for money or food.

I never wore German uniform. Unlike Madame Mannopper's son.

And that vile comment? I never made it.

These questions are pitiful and grotesque and they're exhausting me.

What do you know about life in the camps?

Beat. No reaction from the Superintendent.

Throughout my imprisonment, I never did anything but good. Even if the good I could do was limited.

And if I had to speak German and keep contact with the guards to save a few lives, well then, those few people I could help were worth it.

Yes, it was worth it.

Even if now that I'm home, people who used to be my friends—before the war—call me a Boche and a Hun.

Don't try to understand what you can never understand.

Bait me. Insult me. Call me every name you can think of.

But don't pretend to know how I feel.

I know who I am. I know what I did. And I know why I did it.

I have nothing more to add.

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Polish to English

Marek Maj

Mentor

Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Marek is a translator from Warsaw, with dual Polish and British citizenship. He enjoys reading both twentieth century and contemporary Polish writing that takes risks with language. Following the mentorship, Marek's aim is to introduce Anglophone readers to a Polish author by translating a book-length work of prose.

Introduction

Marek Maj

Filip Zawada was born in 1975 in Wrocław. *I Trampled a Black Cat by Accident* is his debut novel. It was published by Znak publishing house in the spring of 2019. Filip had previously written two novellas, but originally came to prominence as a poet – his first poetry pamphlet was published when he was just 21. He has also worked as a musician, photographer, actor, and was, at one point, Poland's champion archer.

I Trampled a Black Cat by Accident is narrated by an 8 or 9-year-old (he's not sure) boy named Franciszek, who lives in an orphanage run by nuns in the Polish countryside. His best friend is a stray black cat that the children 'adopt', and that Franciszek secretly christens Satan. He also attends the village school, where he bewilders his teachers by being in turns brilliant and impudent, and is sometimes picked on for being a 'bastard'. In the background, Filip also crafts a grotesque, but not cruel, picture of life in provincial Poland, where friendly lorry drivers, silent priests, mud sculptors, and drunk nuns driving combine harvesters all feature.

I enjoyed working on Filip's novel most of all because of its successful combination of tones – a single chapter can contain moments of black humour, pathos, and philosophical reflection. I also appreciated it for its unusually convincing portrayal of a child's inner world, and precise prose style.

From *I Trampled a Black Cat by Accident*

Filip Zawada, translated by Marek Maj

23

Do you have something first and final? Something you'll never forget, even when you lose your memory? Something you can trust your whole life, because you don't know what will come after it?

Conundrums like that are a cretinous invention, because you never know what they're supposed to mean, until someone reveals the answer.

'For tomorrow, I want you to write ten sentences on how you understand the quotation: "What is the way of the wind?" (Ecclesiastes 11:5).'

The Bible is full of these word games. They're only there to prove to you that you're dumb, and you're not fit to be a saint, or not good enough to sit with the great and the good in heaven. Because what is the way of wind? There isn't one. The only reason why the wind can be the wind is that it has no way to travel along. We're all afraid of the wind at night, because it has no eyes, and yet it always strikes the window, or shakes the trees so hard that you don't know when they'll fall. It's the wind that'll bring about the end of the world, as there's no better conductor for something that will engulf everything. Life has taught me that first thoughts are bad, and you have to write something that means you won't spend another afternoon standing in a corner.

'The wind is our good friend, because thanks to it seeds from the trees of our Lord are spread across the hole wide world and you never know where they will land. One day perhaps a boabab will even start to grow outside our palace, and we'll all be happie like never before. We'll nail a sign to the baobob, to show the way we have found, thanks to the wind.'

Each person has access to only part of the truth.

C for the mistakes, and A for the nonsense.

77

As I was getting into bed last night, I heard someone in the street shout very loudly: 'We used to have booze-ups here, we used to have booze-ups heeeere!'. Sometimes he managed to sing those few words to the same tune as the Polish national anthem. And he kept bellowing like that for several hours, at least. 'We used to have booze-ups here, we used to have booze-ups here.' In the morning, I persuaded the other kids to sing a new song for the sisters called *We used to have booze-ups here*. Everyone liked the idea very much, and right after prayers, once the sisters had sat down at the table, I began to chant the first line, and was soon joined by all the other children. Some of them hadn't learnt our anthem yet, so they sang a bit out of tune, but still I think it worked out pretty well. Anyway, after we finished, you could see the song had made an impression, because the sisters were speechless, and when that happens, it means you've done something that a person simply cannot ignore. Later on, at breakfast, someone began humming the tune to themselves, but that was actually quite rude behaviour, because you shouldn't talk or hum while eating, out of respect for the people who prepared the food.

After breakfast, the sisters called an assembly in the dayroom. In answer to my darling sister Izabela's question, 'what does the word "booze" mean?', the following answers were given:

– The name of a beautiful princess

– A stubborn donkey (because apparently there used to be one there, but nobody understood this)

– A fair, but without a merry-go-round

– A weird tree, or rather a bush, without any leaves

– Three don't knows

Apparently, so we wouldn't get confused, all the answers were correct.

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Swiss Italian to English

Elena Pala

Mentor

Howard Curtis

Elena is lucky enough to do what she loves, that is, playing with words in different languages on a daily basis. Based in Scotland, she translates from Italian and French, and her somewhat convoluted career spans a PhD in Linguistics from Cambridge University and two CIOL Diplomas in Translation, but also four years in a London advertising agency. She enjoys translating just about everything.

Introduction
Elena Pala

Alexandre Hmine has worked as a national and regional journalist in Switzerland and has taught Italian in secondary schools since 2004. His debut novel *La chiave nel latte* (The key in the milk) won the Studer/Ganz Prize in 2017 as well as the Swiss Literature Prize in 2019.

Narrated in the first person, this semi-autobiographical novel tells the story of a Moroccan boy who is left in the care of an elderly Swiss widow by his unmarried teenage mother to avoid scandal back home. Growing up in the 1980s in a little village in the Ticino mountains (Switzerland), the boy must grapple with all the challenges that come with being different from everyone else around him. Not that he feels any particular attachment towards Moroccan culture – he doesn’t really fit in anywhere.

The novel is a collection of impressionistic memories, vivid sketches and snapshots from the narrator’s life arranged in rough chronological order. We follow the boy through his first school years, his passion for football, his brushes with racism and prejudice, the first experiences with girls, his love of literature at university.

Several languages intertwine in the narrative, each with a precise function: Italian is the narrator’s language and the language of the authors he falls in love with at university; the Ticino dialect is for the old widow and the people in the village; Arabic is the language of a family he feels completely disconnected from; French is the bridge language he uses to communicate with them while still marking his distance.

The common thread throughout the novel, however, remains the unshakable love of his adoptive mother Elvezia, the old widow who took him in as a baby. She is the character who looms larger than anyone else (even the narrator himself) in the book: Elvezia, Helvetia, Switzerland.

From *The Key in the Milk*

Alexandre Hmine, translated by Elena Pala

No one keeps to the lanes, including us. Our taxi driver leans out of the window to complain, stops and starts, honks repeatedly, waves his arm to direct the other drivers. The red light seems just a recommendation.

I look at the cars – old wrecks, almost all French makes – Moroccans out for a walk, the beach clubs. Then I look ahead, to where the ocean meets the sky.

She stares into the distance muttering my name: she can't see me but senses my presence. I have a great-grandmother.

'*Eji!*' she says.

It means come here. I move closer. She can sense it. She puts down the rosary beads on the bedside table. She tries to grab my fingers. I sit next to her and offer her my hands. She starts touching them gently in a slow rotating motion.

I see her glassy eyes, her toothless mouth, the hairs on her chin. She looks older than Elvezia.

How old could she be?

She stops to feel my hands with the tips of her fingers for a few seconds, then starts stroking them again more vigorously, occasionally even with the back of her hands. And she speaks, even though she knows I can't understand her.

She stops, waiting for me to say something. Waiting...

She starts speaking again, this time so feebly, so haltingly that even the other family members would find her impossible to understand.

I study her tired body and listen, waiting for someone to come and rescue me.

The palm trees form a funnel. In the middle, a pale sun that looks stuck in there.

The preparations for the evening are in full swing, a frantic to-ing and fro-ing from the bedroom to the bathroom and back again. My mother and aunts rummage through the wardrobe and drawers, helping each other find the perfect outfit.

They want my opinion too.

'Suina?'

She's asking if she looks beautiful. I answer yes, *suina, très suina*.

My aunt lies down on the side of the bed and finishes painting her nails ruby-red. She's wearing a white bathrobe and her hair is wrapped in a light blue towel, except for a few wet strands that she tried in vain to push back in. She's very curvy, nothing to envy the showgirls you see on TV. But she's not wearing a bra now, so the curve on her chest is not very marked.

I'm lying on the bed I've been given, playing Nintendo. I have to save people jumping out of a burning building.

I move the stretcher.

My aunt gets up, tightens the bathrobe belt and fetches her makeup bag from the wardrobe.

'*Tu gagnes?*' she asks.

I let a few people die, answer *oui, bien sûr* and teach her how to say 'winning' in Italian. *Vincere*. She giggles and repeats:

'*Vinshere, vinshere*'.

As she leans over to put the makeup bag on the pillow, I take a peek at her cleavage.

They're ready: stylish, bejewelled and perfumed. Before they leave they come over to say goodnight and kiss me quickly on the cheek.

I follow them to the living room. Then I hear their high heels clattering down the stairs and a few incomprehensible words between my mother and the porter.

I climb on the sofa, move the curtains slightly and look down. A beige Mercedes is waiting in the middle of the street.

The flashing lights go off and the car starts.

The TV has only one channel. In Arabic.

La chiave nel latte
Alexandre Hmine

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Korean to English

Rachel Min Park

Mentor

Deborah Smith

Rachel Min Park is a translator from California, USA. She received her BA in Comparative Literature from UC Berkeley, and her MA from Korea University. She is a co-winner of a translation grant from LTI Korea, and has translated various academic essays. She is particularly interested in translating works (both fiction and non-fiction) by labour activists.

Introduction

Rachel Min Park

Song Kyung-dong is a South Korean poet, essayist, and labour activist. In 2014, he was sentenced to prison for organising the Hope Bus protests, in which hundreds of buses swarmed an industrial site to prevent layoffs and improve working conditions. *Dreamers Are Dragged Away* marks his first essay collection. Tracing his childhood and family life to his experiences working various manual labour jobs, this collection provides insight into how Song, commonly known as the 'poet of the streets' and as a 'proletarian poet,' came to be involved in his activism fighting on behalf of not just labourers, but all the precarious lives in the world. Song details the personal experiences that shape his own writing, as well as how poetry and activism coalesce. His prose is fittingly sharp, brutal—almost violent—to recount the commensurate violence of the modern world inflicted by the twin forces of neoliberalism and capitalism. However, his writing never condescends or romanticises the working class as a fixed object, but rather, emphasises the need for human dignity and solidarity above all else.

Perhaps the trickiest aspect of translating Song's text is his use of worker's slang or terminology specific to South Korea, such as 'hambajip' (함바집), 'gongguri' (공구리), and 'gongppang' (공빵). What was once concise in the Korean then becomes necessary to lengthen and an exercise in finding clever glosses—another challenging feat as Song's language tends to be sharp and concise. My mentor, Deborah, has also been incredibly illuminating in helping me adjust the register of my translation, to better capture the tone of the scenes where Song describes the daily lives of labourers.

From *Dreamers Are Dragged Away*

Song Kyung-dong, translated by Rachel Min Park

It was my first encounter with that thing called censorship. They confiscated the illustrations that our friends in the art class had diligently drawn over two months' worth of meetings, and placed our poems on the literature teacher's desk. She, who had always recited poetry to us with a dreamy voice, who had waxed lyrical about literature's eternal fragrance, was no longer on our side. We couldn't understand why we were suddenly her enemy, why she pelted us with angry, hateful words as the tears streamed down her face. The thought of getting her fired or somehow deceiving her had never even crossed our minds. We were mere high school kids who wavered, like most our age, between pessimism and slight romanticism; kids who didn't even realise just how young we really were.

The violent questions made their fundamental misreading vividly clear.

'What exactly does 'blood' mean here? Why did you write that the water of the 'Gwangju River' is scarlet? That you wanted to 'grow a pair of wings and leave this earth'?'

The need for so many abstruse questions was beyond us, but we slowly came to a vague understanding of why we were there.

'Haven't you kids heard of the Gwangju incident?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then why in the *hell* would you do something like this?'

In other words, it became apparent that our crime was not only ours, but that of our generation.

I felt sick all throughout summer, and the sickness lingered even into that long winter. Careening down a dangerous path in my continuous attempts to punish myself, I had found salvation in literature—the one space left that had allowed me to love myself. When that space was snatched from me with no plausible reason, I was flung out to the edge of a precipice, plunged into darkness. I didn't know how to express any love for my life. I hadn't yet realised that my fate was not innately determined, but constructed within social relations—that in order to change my fate, I would have to go beyond my own self and endeavour to change the structure of society.

A long time had to pass before I was able to rediscover the literature that I had lost. In that time, I had to undergo much more censorship and many more beatings, and meet the other wretched of the earth—to know the sadness and pain they embraced in their daily lives.

One by one, I gathered those wounds until they fused together and calcified, like stalagmites, to become a solid foundation for a language. The moment I believed I could now create 'literature that is not literature,' I was compelled to start writing again. It was not that I had made a deliberate decision to become a poet, it was that words burst out of my eyes. Words poured out of my mouth. Words reached out from within me like a hand desperately grasping. This world transformed my body into a typewriter and started punching out its words, so that my body no longer belonged to me alone. It scored my flesh with its structures and wounds, so that this articulation of wounds became not my story, but ours.

I now know that there are other vibrant youth who, as I did back then, dream of poetry and music. I pray for them, that their literature will not be founded upon wounds.

Kkumkkuneun ja japyeoganda by Song Kyung-dong,
Silcheon munhaksa (2011)

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Norwegian to English

Megan Turney

Mentor

Kari Dickson

Megan Turney holds a MA(Hons) in Scandinavian Studies and English Literature from the University of Edinburgh. She is currently studying for a MA in Translation Studies at the University of Manchester, whilst working as a freelance copy-editor, Norwegian to English translator, science-fiction book reviewer, and library assistant.

Introduction
Megan Turney

Tor Åge Bringsværd is a prolific Norwegian author; it is truly a crime against literature that his books have not been translated yet. Bringsværd, alongside Jon Bing, essentially introduced science fiction (SF) into Norway in the 1960s. Together, they translated an abundance of popular foreign SF into Norwegian, and contributed a significant number of their own works, in the form of short story collections, novels and anthologies, to the genre too.

In my experience, SF is often quite a misunderstood genre, but it is one that has played a crucial part in the development of international literature when it comes to expressing fear and criticism of contemporary socio-political events. Yet, to agree with the Swedish science fiction author Sam J. Lundwall, 'we find hundreds of eminent science fiction works hidden beyond insurmountable language barriers, hidden beyond all those British and US works which [are] all too easily available'. Given that the genre emerged from a desire to explore the unknown and to contemplate our very existence, it then only seems right that we should now turn to more translated SF to traverse even wider, unconventional realities, narratives and perspectives.

When asked what I wanted to translate during the mentorship, I (unsurprisingly) leapt at the opportunity to work on any of Bringsværd's texts. I eventually settled on the 2011 novel *Slipp håndtaket når du vrir*. Inspired by the layered narrative frames and various adventures through increasingly bizarre societies of *Gulliver's Travels*, Bringsværd transforms this concept and absolutely makes it his own; comical, moving, and eccentric, with the addition of a few black holes, numerous alternate dimensions, and a talking dog. I hope that I have managed to capture the charm of this novel in its opening extract, and that you will enjoy reading it as much as I loved translating it.

From *Leap into the Dark*

Tor Åge Bringsværd, translated by Megan Turney

Here (I)

What is a black hole? It's a rift, a tear in the enormous cosmic web that we call *the universe*. The hole is such a colossal concentration of mass, and thus has such a powerful gravitational field, that if something were to fall into it, it would essentially be impossible to get back out.[1] In theory, a black hole can appear anywhere, at any time. Still, I'm more than happy to admit that I had my doubts when I, in a pub somewhere in City-L, met a man who was adamant that he had found one of these paradoxes of nature in his own home.

'It's not that much bigger than a pinprick,' the man explained a short while later as he let us into his flat.

It was, indeed, very hard to see anything at all.

'Where is it?' I asked.

'Look at the bookshelf,' he whispered.

It was a big bookcase, shelves stretching from floor to ceiling, chock-full of books.

'The third shelf from the bottom,' the man indicated. 'Look.'

That shelf didn't seem quite as packed with books as the others.

'At first I thought I'd just lent a few out,' he said. 'It would take me hours to track them down, though. Besides, for someone as organised as I am… it started with just one or two a week. But soon enough, a book was going missing every day. And now, well…'

I leant in closer.

'Careful!' he yelled. 'Don't touch anything! I used to have a cleaner who came in to tidy up a bit every Tuesday… not anymore. I presume she was dusting over by the bookshelf… but I can't say for sure.' He threw his arms up in genuine bewilderment.

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1 A common misconception, widely believed until quite recently.

I stared. I put my glasses on – couldn't actually see anything in particular, but at least then I could have a look at some of the titles on the book spines.

'I've been trying to put the books that I'm not particularly bothered about over here,' he said. 'I mean, the ones I've already read and know that I'll never – anyway, take a seat, I'll make us a coffee.'

His name was Hugo, and he was a secondary school teacher.

I stayed there for around two hours. During that time, three Agatha Christies, one Dag Solstad and two prayer books disappeared. Unbelievable. Swoosh! Right in front of my eyes. I thought I'd managed to catch a glimpse of the hole once or twice, but I might have just imagined it. Perhaps in the same way that I thought I had also seen the books moving about a bit.

It was only once we saw that third Agatha Christie rustling on the shelf that we were certain.

'THERE!' we shouted in unison, just as The Thirteen Problems vanished.

We shook our heads and looked at each other for a long time.

'It doesn't make any sense,' said Hugo.

'No,' I replied. 'It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever!'

*

Clearly, we had moved onto something stronger than coffee. But not for one second did we forget to feed the little hole. It was slightly more visible now, and resembled a black, beating heart. And it wasn't long before it had gulped down the complete works of Knut Hamsun.

'I never liked him anyway,' said Hugo, as he topped up our glasses.

'Me neither,' I said. 'Can't stand him.'

'Can't exactly say that out loud to most Norwegians though,' Hugo mumbled as he chucked another tattered copy of *Growth of the Soil* into the insatiable hole.

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Russian to English

Siân Valvis

Mentor

Robert Chandler

Siân is a translator, based in Brazil and Europe. She is currently contributing to a volume of short stories by Teffi. Her adaptation of a Russian folktale, *Kolobok,* has just been published in this year's edition of *Cardinal Points*, a literary magazine (Brown University).

Introduction

Siân Valvis

Boris Shergin (1896-1973) was a Russian writer and folklorist from Arkhangelsk, northern Russia. The text I have chosen is the popular Russian folktale, 'The Magic Ring', taken from the 1936 collection of folktales that Shergin wrote and illustrated himself.

Shergin wrote in the Pomor dialect, specific to the coastal regions of northern Russia. This version of 'The Magic Ring' is therefore quite unique, and translating it into English was particularly challenging.

Written phonetically in an obscure dialect, the text was difficult to decipher at first. The tale itself is rich in magical and folkloric elements: there are Russian tsars and snake tsars, peasants and talking animals, and unexpected acts of kindness and cruelty.

I persevered, but my neat English version didn't seem quite right – it had lost the 'magic' of Shergin's original.

In the meantime, I attended a translation workshop run by Alison Entrekin, who is translating João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertão: Veredas* from Brazilian Portuguese into English. I soon discovered that – coincidentally! – this, too, was written in an obscure dialect, peppered with made-up words by the author.

After two days of analysing Portuguese neologisms, and crafting our own words in English, I felt a flicker of *inspiraction* – a new light! I got home, and rewrote 'The Magic Ring' in English – but this time in a mix of northern English dialects.

The story wrote itself. Having spent years studying in Sheffield, I was able to draw on my existing knowledge of the Yorkshire dialect. I also wove in elements of Geordie and Scots, creating a sense of 'other-land' and 'faraway-ness'.

Feeling inspired, and with much encouragement from Robert, I went further. I came up with neologisms, combining words with creativity, looking into the roots of words, opting for older Germanic and Anglo-Saxon words wherever possible, and using atypical syntax and short, powerful words and sentences.

Finally on a roll, it suddenly felt appropriate to put all of Skarapeya Snake's lines into rhyming verse. She turned out to be Geordie.

From *The Magic Ring*

Boris Shergin, translated by Siân Valvis

Vanya lived wi' his mam. Times were 'bout as hard as could be. They'd nowhere to go, nowt to wear, and not a bean between 'em. Hahsomedivver, ev'ry month, Vanya went to town to pick up his mam's penshen. It were but a kopeck, all in all.

On 'is way, one day, wi' his loot to boot, he sees a *muzhik* – a peasant – gi'in' his wee dog what for.

'Oi, Mister!' says Vanya. 'What's tha toormentin' that thiere pup for?'

''S got nowt to do wi' you, son! I've half a mind to kill it – and mekk mesen some mincemeat. A pork chop for me tea.'

''Ere – let us buy it off you.'

They shook on a kopeck, and off Vanya went, wi' t' dog in tow.

'Mam! I've bought us a pup!'

'What y' done that for, ye ninny?! I'm starved halfway to deathlands 'ere, and this one buys hissen a dog!'

Month nextly, and what d'you know – TWO kopecks this time. On 'is way home, Vanya sees that same *muzhik* – this time, gi'in' 'is cat a good throllopin'.

'Oi, Mister! What d'you go round bashin' them beasts for?'

'Mind yer own beeswax! I've half a mind to kill it – an' sell it to a restaurant.'

''Ere. Sell it to us, would ye?'

They shook on two kopecks, and off Vanya went, wi' moggy in tow.

'Ma! I've brung us a kittlin!'

Mam really let him have it this time – didn't simmer down while nightfall.

Time came again to fetch mother's penshen. And lo, another raise – another kopeck.

Off he trots. *Muzhik's* got a snake this time. Gi'in' it what for.

'Oi, Mister! What's it wi' you an' torturin' animals, eh?'

'Well, it's a snake this time... Want it, or wha'?'

Muzhik let it go for three kopecks. Even wrapped it up in paper.

Then Snakey proclaimed in a voice most humanish:

'Vanya, Pet, don't you fret that you bet your money on me,
I'm Skarapeya, a long-tall swayer, I'm magical, you see,
Silky mover, slick manoeuvre – a slitherer extraordinary,
So Vanya, Pet, have no regret – you're all set with a friend like me!'

'Ey up, duck,' said Vanya, and off they went home.

'Ma, I've bought a snake.'

Poor old Mam. Mouth agape, jiggered halfway to death, she sprung on t' table. Wavin' her arms about, she was. Poor owd snake. Slithered soft – snucked herself under t' stove.

'Vanya, dear, listen here. I'll stay with you for now,
I'll use my nous to fix this house, and set you up, somehow...'

And so, they went on. White dog n' grey cat, Vanya n' mam, and Skarapeya Snake.

Mam didnae take to Skarapeya Snake, oh no. Wouldn't call her in for supper, and allus talked to her proper rude. Ne'er asked her name, or her kinsname, or owt. And if poor snakey went out t' porch for a rest, Van's old mam kept treadin' on her wiggler. Till one morn, Skarapeya didnae want to live wi' 'em no-more:

'Vanya, my boy, it gives me no joy, but your mam is driving us mad,
I'm leaving today, it's time anyway, to go and visit my dad.'

'Long the road slithered snakey, wi' Vanya just ahind her. In t' woods went snake, and in t' woods went Vanya n' all. Night fell. In the thicket dark, they found thisselves afore a tall city wall wi' gates.

Off they rolled, in a carriage all fancy, reet up to t' front door of a palace. There, they were met by a guard, who greeted 'em reet honourable.

Skarapeya turned solemn to Vanya.

'Here's a secret, mind you keep it:

My father is the famous Serpent King,
He'll offer you a gift, but here's the thing:
Take nothing from the coffers
Refuse all other offers
Just be sure to ask him for his ring.

That's the secret – mind you keep it…'

Skarapeya's old man weren't sure what to do wi' our Vanya.

'Aye, young man,' he said, 'you deserve my daughter's hand in marriage – if only we han't already got a suitor for her. Let us give you some money instead, eh?'

Our Vanya didnae take owt. Remembers to ask for the golden ring alone. They give it him – the magic ring – and even told him how to use it. And off Vanya went, wi' his magic ring in tow.

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The Emerging Literary Translator Mentorships are curated and run by the National Centre for Writing. Each year we support a new cohort of emerging translators into English, with a particular focus on languages whose literature is underrepresented in English translation. We have also pioneered the development of translation skills via non-language specific mentorships, in which the mentor need not necessarily translate from the mentee's source language. For the past two years this has enabled us, with the generous support of Tilted Axis Press, to develop our commitment to underrepresented writers by offering a specific mentorship for a UK-resident BAME translator.

The Emerging Literary Translator Mentorships were founded in 2010 by writer, editor and translator, Daniel Hahn.

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