

The background features a large white cross shape centered on a solid orange background. The cross is formed by four white rectangular blocks meeting at a central point. The arms of the cross extend towards the edges of the page. The text is positioned in the upper right quadrant, within the orange area.

**Emerging
Literary
Translators
— 2024**

‘Year on year NCW’s Emerging Translator Mentorships programme proves to be such a special opportunity for its participants in myriad ways. Not only do we see foundational one-to-one relationships blossom between mentors and their mentees, leading to real practical skills development, but we witness peer networks springing up, industry knowledge gained and ultimately, confidence being built. It’s a programme designed with both professional and personal evolution in mind, moving participants from a place of theory into practice; perhaps a fledgling job towards an established career. I hope you’ll enjoy the work here from this year’s talented cohort, all now on an exciting new trajectory themselves.’

Holly Ainley
Head of Programmes & Creative Engagement

Foreword

Translation is often thought of as a lonely profession, but that's never been my experience of it. As translators, we are constantly in dialogue with the voices of others—of our authors and their characters, of our editors and above all of the wider translation community. One of the privileges of working on this mentorship programme is seeing that community emerge and develop, both between the mentors and mentees and amongst the cohort of mentees themselves.

This seems fitting because translation itself is always somehow about connection, about bridges between people, cultures, worlds. This year's anthology brings together texts from nine different languages, translated by our fantastic emerging translators, which explore connections and dislocations—the ways in which we reach for one another and elide each other, often in the same moment. In an extract from an Italian novel, for example, two characters seek comfort in one another, but even as they do so, the text slyly points to how little each knows of the other. Two extracts from extended poetry sequences in Norwegian are woven through with the voices and silences of an extended family negotiating migration and grief. Meanwhile, in a Japanese novella, a husband realizes his terminally ill wife doesn't want to come home, but finds intimacy in the act of cutting her fingernails.

Sometimes these connections and dislocations are geographical—we see a Haitian grandmother returning 'home' for the first time in two decades, and debating with her daughter in Montréal how possible it is to return. At other times they're linguistic: a Swiss-Croatian poet reminds us how integral mistakes and mishearings

are to both everyday and poetic language, and playfully reclaims the invasive question 'speak German?'

Translated literature refracts the world back at us, and the texts in this anthology are startlingly contemporary. A camgirl's odyssey through Warsaw winks at conspiracy theories and teases out questions of gender and sexuality. A short story set in a Palestinian refugee camp, meanwhile, sees the narrator desperately seeking their father in a short but impactful extract.

Other pieces imagine an ominous future through the eyes of their protagonists. We see Adam just trying to get through his first day at work, in a 2043 Singapore which is increasingly controlled by AI. A Korean novel imagines a yet more distant future: a barren 23rd century of omnipresent virtual reality in which the 'real' is simultaneously cherished and expected to be perfect.

To misquote one of this year's samples, translation can be a garden we try to maintain or the ground that knows the sound of our footsteps. The texts in this anthology offer us ways to re-imagine the world and our own place within it.

Annie Rutherford
Emerging Translator Mentorships Programme Manager

Emerging Literary Translators 2024

Victoria Issa Yacoub – Arabic <i>Mentor: Sawad Hussain</i>	06
Sean McDonagh – Italian <i>Mentor: Elena Pala</i>	10
Charlotte Goff – Japanese <i>Mentor: Polly Barton</i>	14
Joheun Lee – Korean <i>Mentor: Clare Richards</i>	18
Rilla Melati Bahri – Malay <i>Mentor: Jeremy Tiang</i>	22
Alex Mepham – Norwegian <i>Mentor: Khairani Barokka</i>	28
Nasim Luczaj – Polish <i>Mentor: Sean Gasper Bye</i>	34
Khadija Aidoo – Québec French <i>Mentor: Sarah Ardizzone</i>	38
Tayiba Sulaiman – Swiss German <i>Mentor: Jamie Lee Searle</i>	42

Arabic to English

Victoria Issa Yacoub

Mentor

Sawad Hussain

Victoria Issa Yacoub is a Jordan-based writer and translator, working between Arabic and English. She is passionate about children's literature, poetry, and narratives on migration and women. She translated a novel from English into Arabic titled *Dalia*, by Jordanian writer Sara Badawieh. Her works in progress include a novel by Israa Kalash and short stories by Ziad Khaddash.

Introduction

Victoria Issa Yacoub

Drowned in Laughter is a 2019 collection of short stories by Palestinian writer Ziad Khaddash. He writes about real people he encountered and continues to encounter in his daily life. He writes about the everyman, the disenfranchised, and those driven outside the margins of their homeland. This collection encapsulates the rich tapestry of Palestinian storytelling, presenting universal themes through a culturally specific lens.

Ziad Khaddash was born in Jerusalem in 1964, and currently resides in the Jalazone refugee camp in Ramallah. He writes short stories and works as a creative writing teacher in public schools. He has twelve short story collections to his name, and he was the recipient of the Appreciation Award for the State of Palestine in 2015.

The short story excerpted here, *They Were All My Father*, is set against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation in Palestine. Ziad Khaddash brings forth a poignant narrative that explores the intricacies of life as a refugee within one's own country. In this evocative story, Khaddash delves into his personal experiences, navigating the challenges imposed by conflict and displacement.

The narrative unfolds within the harsh reality of a winter blackout, with the author skilfully weaving together the threads of familial bonds, identity, and the frightening presence of armed soldiers.

Khaddash's prose unveils the complexities of existence in the face of adversity, providing readers with a deep reflection on the impact of occupation and the resilience of the human spirit.

Working on this excerpt and others under the guidance of my mentor Sawad Hussain was pure joy. I learned how to deal with humour, colloquialisms, and cultural references while preserving the register, style, and tone of the source text. I'm deeply grateful for Sawad's invaluable guidance and support.

From *They Were All My Father*

كلها كانت أبي

Ziad Khaddash, translated by Victoria Issa Yacoub

One winter, a blackout and thousands of soldiers descended upon the refugee camp. A second after the clock struck midnight, I saw you watching me shivering on the rooftop overlooking the square. The loudspeakers spat out a voice with a deformed accent, announcing the implementation of a law that summoned men over the age of sixteen.

Rows of human silhouettes silently amassed. The headlights of military vehicles drenched the lumps, scorching them with their brightness. Among these colossal forms were names etched in the shadows: my father, your father, my uncle, your uncle, my neighbour, your neighbour, my granddad, your granddad.

'Where is my dad, where is he? I can't see him,' uttered the darkened rooftop on behalf of my frozen mouth.

'There! He is twenty soldiers away,' your darkness replied, but I remained unconvinced.

'No, no. This is not my father. This is your granddad,' I countered, scepticism lingering in my tone.

The lumps of humanity inched closer, amidst the clamour of lights and soldiers. A question descended suddenly from the rooftop.

'Where is my father?'

A soothing sentence, akin to a comfortable slumber, rose up between us. Our dual realms of darkness played with it, tossing it from roof to roof like a ball made of socks.

This—this human mass is my father.

Email: vix78j@gmail.com

X: @vickyj78

Website: victoriaissa.com

Italian to English

Sean McDonagh

Mentor

Elena Pala

Sean McDonagh is a literary translator from Birmingham, living in Milan. He translates from Italian and is studying Irish. A former member of the ETN committee, he has attended the Warwick Translates Summer School, and his translations and reviews have appeared in *MAYDAY*, *Literary Hub*, *Exchanges*, *Asymptote*, and *Morocco Bound Review*.

Introduction

Sean McDonagh

Fausta Cialente was one of the first self-declared feminist Italian writers. Her early work anticipated modern feminism by decades; however, distribution was limited by the Fascist censorship following her refusal to cut depictions of a lesbian affair from *Natalia* (1931). Contributing to the anti-fascist movement from Egypt, Cialente returned home after the war, and after a long silence, she began publishing again in 1961, eventually winning the prestigious Premio Strega in 1976. Whether due to censorship or her expatriation and the statelessness that influenced her work, her critical recognition came late. Consequently, there has been limited international exposure to this exceptional Italian writer.

A Very Cold Winter (1966), a Premio Strega finalist, is set in post-war Milan, where a large family finds a home in a cramped loft, and Camilla, abandoned by her husband, shoulders the responsibility as they endure an incredibly severe winter. The season stretches throughout the novel with beautiful but unsettling descriptions that sit like the heavy snow weighing down the loft's dilapidated roofs. In these harsh but intimate conditions, the characters co-exist and persevere, strained by desires for the future and scars from the past. The narrative seamlessly flows between characters' thoughts, placing us inside these intimate quarters and the struggle that unites and divides them. By the time spring comes, much will have passed, and as the season of rebirth begins, much will have irrevocably changed.

Reading this book, I was completely absorbed by the captivating visual descriptions, deeply authentic characters, and dramatic narrative that builds towards a heart-breaking tragedy. In this extract, two characters taken into the family suddenly find themselves in an intimate situation. Both have experienced tragedy and rejection from society, especially Regina, Camilla's daughter-in-law, who survives her husband, a partisan, and was cruelly rejected by her own family as a single mother.

From *A Very Cold Winter*

Fausta Cialente, translated by Sean McDonagh

Suspicion hovered above Regina's head like a hawk with spread wings: was it, or was it not, a feeble excuse to have come in at such an hour in search of cigarettes? But that hawk came down immediately, and it was without any claws. Enzo's hands had firmly pulled her towards him, his arms were holding her tightly, and with a sigh, he whispered weakly into her hair: 'Si, Regina, be a good girl. Let me stay with you a while.'

They said nothing more about warming up since that was exactly what they were doing, and set as they were, their faint mutual warmth could only increase and expand, comforting them from the terrible cold, from the terrible snow. The ice was glistening on the window pane like a precious stone. Within the silence, they could hear the gutter dripping, a mouse that was nibbling away in some dark hole. He had forced her to place her head against his shoulder (being quite a bit taller than her), and for a moment Regina had resisted, but then, she had let herself go, like a 'good girl,' as he had suggested. Confusingly, she was now feeling that for some time she had been awaiting something similar, but she would never have imagined that it might happen without preamble, without words, and the two of them dressed so barely despite the cold.

'You know,' he murmured, 'I always thought, you and I, we're like two wreckages... This was bound to happen.'

[...]

Enzo then thought: we have both drifted and drifted, and then, just like wreckage, we end up colliding into each other—but he didn't say this. It was an out-of-place description that probably would have hurt Regina, and besides, his thoughts were drowning in the nascent crescendo of desire, together with that more precise and generous thought with which he was already justifying himself: the desire to help her forget about 'that poor guy' towards whom, without meaning to perhaps, she was harbouring resentment. While, if he could have read

Regina's thoughts, he would have discovered above all her concern of coming across as easy, someone who couldn't really be trusted: with a baby girl not even six months old, and well, that already she was forgetting about 'that poor guy.'

'Listen, let's go to bed,' he whispered, aroused, detaching his lips from hers. 'Otherwise we'll really catch a cold.'

Inside the room with an almost marital appearance, he was calmly exercising a marital right that fate seemed to have decided upon almost without consulting them. But were they the only man and woman in the whole universe to lie in the same bed, holding each other with endearing tenderness? Were they not instead part of an immense concert? Darkness had fallen, and since the shutters weren't closed, the white of the snow undulating outside the windows festively accompanied the hesitant inception of their caresses, inviting them to proceed, and to tune their instruments.

The little girl in the soft crib continued to sleep. Perhaps the paternal image was already etched onto her features, but that would not be seen until later, and, in any case, it would have only a relative importance. She didn't know about the two of them, and even in the act of forgetting the sweet maternal bosom, she would acquire her first, tenuous independence. While those two, despite the bitter experiences of which they were woven, the wounds barely scarred over, the reciprocal compassion, they were now annihilating the past (since life is far more cunning than death). Blood ran quicker in their veins, the laboured breathing of love truly warmed the room. Then they rested, side by side, holding each other by the hand, and before they were able to sleep, they listened in silence to the coursing of the hushed winter night.

Email: seanpjamcdonagh@gmail.com

X: @SeanMcDTransl8r

Website: seanmcdonaghtranslator.com

Japanese to English

Charlotte Goff

Mentor

Polly Barton

Charlotte Goff is an Edinburgh-based Japanese-English literary translator. She is drawn to texts which question social expectations around gender roles, family and relationship ideals, and what life 'should' look like. Favourites include works by Yamazaki Nao-Cola, Sayaka Murata, and Junko Takase. These issues are central to her ongoing work in the Violence Against Women and Girls sector.

Introduction

Charlotte Goff

Nao-Cola Yamazaki (they, them) has described wanting to 'write things no one else can say, in words anyone can understand'. This is at the heart of *Beautiful Distance*, in which they explore complex and often taboo subjects, including illness and death, in simple yet elegant prose.

The story follows an unnamed, middle-aged office worker as he visits his terminally ill wife in hospital. He sits by her side and does small things for her—cutting her nails, combing her hair—cherishing this time, thinking about their life before she grew ill, and continuing to hope for a future with her even as the prospect grows more distant.

In one sense a quiet love story, this is, in another, a fierce challenge to social norms in Japan. We see the protagonist try to balance work with spending time with his wife, and criticize a work-culture that offers bereavement leave whilst making it difficult to spend time with someone before they die. We see him grow irritated with the colleagues who ask intrusive questions, the nurse who speaks to his wife as though she is a child, the mother-in-law who thanks him when he visits. He questions the stories people tell themselves about death—inwardly railing against those who try to fit his wife's story into their own stereotypes.

With Polly, I've been concentrating on the protagonist's voice. How would he phrase his offer to cut her nails? How is he feeling when he gives her a 'wry' smile? How does his inner monologue conceive of his wife's illness? We have honed in on these and a thousand other questions, and it has been a joy to pay such close attention to a text that I love.

From 美しい距離, or *Beautiful Distance* Nao-Cola Yamazaki

Translated by Charlotte Goff

'W-Would you like me to cut your nails for you?' I struggle to come out with it, and my voice is a little hoarse.

'Yes please,' she smiles.

It's a simple enough exchange once I manage to get the words out, and I wish I'd asked sooner.

I take some nail clippers and plastic tape from my briefcase and stick a little tape to each side of the clippers, to stop the cut nails flying everywhere. Taking her slim right hand in mine, I trim the ends of her nails. The little white crescents stick to the tape. I become absorbed in the sound: snip, snip, snip. It feels surprisingly satisfying.

Why does this feel so good? How have I never realized how good it could feel, just to cut the nails of the person you love?

'I bought some wood at the DIY store the other day.' I try speaking in time with the snipping.

'Some wood? What for?' She looks sceptical.

'I thought it might be hard to walk when you come home, so it could help if you had a railing to hold onto... I got a saw and an electric screwdriver, too.'

'Didn't have you down as a carpenter.' She's smiling now.

'I can do DIY!' I give a wry smile.

'Home, huh...' She stares up at the ceiling, her hand still clasped in mine.

'Do you want to come home?'

'... Yeah.'

She nods, but her face says she doesn't.

Right, I think. So thinking about the future isn't going to cheer her up. Nor will talk of coming home. I wonder what kind of thing could...

[...]

Whenever I tell people about my wife, they want to know what she's been diagnosed with, what stage her illness has reached, how long she has left.

'I don't suppose you know how long you have together?'

I've had questions like this thrown at me from more people than I can count. Everyone is curious about death. They want to know how long a stranger has left to live. It comforts them somehow, being able to pity the person at death's door.

But we're all moving towards death. It starts seeping into babies' cells, even, right from the moment they are born. Everyone has a life expectancy. We don't have an eternity to live, only what remains of our allotted time. Maybe it's like in that story about the god of death, who gives us each a candle. The candles are all different lengths, gradually burning out, but there's no way of knowing how long each one is. Even when we're struck down by some illness, none of us can see exactly how much time we have. Everyone has only so long, and no-one knows how long.

Most people living in Japan nowadays don't think like this, though. We're all born equal, they tend to think, and so we all start out with the right to live to the average life expectancy. But certain people lose that right, and the countdown starts early for them. It can be for different reasons:

'Lived irresponsibly.'

'Skipped his health checks.'

'Not careful enough with their diet.'

'Heavy smoker.'

They only talk about how long these people have—the people whose countdown has started—and imagine they're in a different group from everyone else, whose countdown is yet to start.

[...]

My wife, I'm sure, is still facing forwards, toward life. She's trying to move in the direction of light, and not to let herself be swept away by this singular current.

Email: charlottegoff24@gmail.com

Korean to English

Joheun Lee

Mentor

Clare Richards

Joheun Lee (Jo) is a literary translator from Korea. A long-time fan of K-pop and many other subcultures, she is drawn to works on related topics and speculative fiction, especially by women and queer writers. A UX designer by day, Jo now lives with her partner and three cats in Shanghai.

Introduction

Joheun Lee

The Forest Called You by Amil (Jihyun Kim) is a queer coming-of-age love story about Yichae and Soop—a superstar idol and her diehard fan—in a future in which a pandemic and climate change have forced people to withdraw into a virtual world. The two meet while filming Yichae’s new music video and are instantly drawn to each other. Though Yichae is pressured to be the ‘perfect idol’ and struggles to understand who she really is, Soop embraces Yichae not for her looks but for her inner strength.

The sample gives us a glimpse of the technologically advanced yet environmentally barren 23rd century, where ‘real idol’ Yichae is competing with virtual idols and strives to achieve the ideal look. It also highlights the irony of the wealthy social class who enjoy virtual prosperity yet feel empty, yearning for real things, while effectively exposing the physical and psychological exploitation so prevalent in the idol industry of today.

While the book delves into the darkest social issues, *The Forest Called You* is ultimately a speculative love story between two women on a journey of self-discovery, who build safe havens for one another as they defy social norms. Upon first reading, I immediately fell in love with this story and dreamed of translating it one day. Thanks to the mentorship and Clare’s guidance, this part of the magnificent tale could find the vivid voice in English it deserves.

From *The Forest Called You*

Amil, translated by Joheun Lee

'You're an idol, remember? You need to stay slim. A real beauty.'

'I know,' Yichae spat indifferently. She'd heard those words countless times now.

Mikyeong was right. Idols had to watch their weight. She had to be a real beauty, whose bare-eyed witnesses without the VR device would praise how pretty she was. That was the point of being an idol. Yichae had debuted knowing full well what was expected of her.

In the virtual world, ordinary people spruced themselves up. Chubby people transformed themselves into slimmer bodies and ugly faces became beautiful. Short people became taller, a missing leg would be replaced with a virtual one, and those who were socially awkward morphed into eloquent speakers. In virtual reality, anyone could hold daily fashion shows when only ragged pajamas filled their wardrobes, could go on a world tour for several months without so much as stepping outside their homes, and hook up with nice-looking dates when they were alone in real life. Even when the dust storms and contagious diseases made it almost impossible to meet up face to face, in virtual reality, you could find, chat with, and hug whoever you liked. If meal substitutes saved humanity from starvation by providing food to eat, virtual reality cured people of their misery with all the possibilities it offered. In virtual reality, anyone could do anything.

Not that it could cure the widespread ennui they felt.

Fake food, fake beauty, fake exchanges, fake senses—people were sick of their lives chock-full of lies and instead obsessed over the real. They wanted real food made of real vegetables, real meat, real fruits, and real spices, wanted to see real flowers on a real meadow by a real lake while breathing in real air, and wanted to meet a real person and feel real warmth and real love. But those real things were too expensive, dangerous, cumbersome, filthy, or otherwise non-existent. Hence the emergence

of entertainment, allowing them to watch at a safe distance instead.

Idols were one part of this entertainment.

'Remember, you're competing against virtual idols,' Mikyeong said patiently. 'Dancing, singing, looks, they're perfect in every way. People love real idols like you because you're real but still perfect, perfect like those virtual idols. If you're any less than that, the fans are gonna leave.'

'I know, unni, I know,' Yichae quickly retorted to stop her nagging. 'I'm trying, okay? I'm doing everything you're telling me to do. I was watching the "Love from Four Seasons" music video when you called me. I told myself, I'm Yichae, I'm Yichae, I have to shine just like that, I can shine.'

'Er, as you were shoveling ice cream down your throat.'

'I know, I know!'

Yichae's voice grew louder in irritation. She was annoyed at herself more than anything.

'I don't know. I felt like the more I watched the video, the more and more stressed out I got. It's like that girl isn't me, and I'll never be able to keep up with her. It's her that people like. But to me, she doesn't look like the real me at all. The real me is...'

Out of nowhere, a tear rolled down her cheek.

Strange. Maybe it was the alcohol acting up. Yichae felt a sorrow she hadn't before noticed swelling in her chest. Who, what is the real me? She tried to find the words to explain, but nothing came to mind.

But one thing was for sure.

No one liked the real Yichae anymore.

X: @joheunlee

Website: joheunlee.com

Malay to English

Rilla Melati Bahri

Mentor

Jeremy Tiang

Rilla is a children's book author and two-time winner of the Anugerah Persuratan. She was commissioned to translate *The Crane and the Crab*, written by Singapore's sixth president, the late S. R. Nathan, in 2016.

Rilla is presently building a translation portfolio focusing on under-represented Young Adult literature in Malay.

Introduction

Rilla Melati Bahri

In the last decade, Singapore has seen a slow but steady demand for local Malay literature from the reading public. In recent years, efforts have been made by the National Arts Council to encourage the publication of Malay fiction for Young Adults. *Arca di Muzium* is one of four books that was published recently, and its arrival is timely to fill this void. The author cleverly blends Singapore's clean, 'utopian' image as perceived by the outside world with a futuristic yet soulless AI-dominated one. This caught my eye and I decided to translate it because of its very engaging plot. The story starts with Adam on his first day of work at the Singapore Muzium of Crime. The year is 2043 and Singapore no longer has any prisons. Changi Prison has been converted into a commercial premise and all the crimes that have happened in Singapore are now museum exhibits. While giving a commentary about the murderous crime committed by Adrian Lim, Adam notices that one of the visitors, Bantam, is missing. Upon checking, Bantam, who is detected as still being present within the museum grounds, has mysteriously been turned into a sculpture trapped inside a glass case in a diorama! Following this, each of the visitors' life stories and Adam's are exposed through a series of nerve-wracking events as they become trapped in a museum controlled by a non-human intelligence system. Under Jeremy's guidance I developed the confidence to sharpen my translator's voice and work to finetune my weaknesses, to which I had previously been oblivious. Jeremy also comes with a lot of industry contacts and has given me excellent tips on how I can work to extend and build my connections with publishers and editors in the UK and US. Finally, I am grateful to Farihan Bahron for allowing me to use his book in my journey with NCW.

From *Arca Di Muzium*

Farihan Bahron, translated by Rilla Melati Bahri

Adam pushes his way through his tour group. Like Moses parting the Red Sea with his staff, he hurriedly moves to the back of the gallery. Everyone moves to the side to give way to him. Adam is not satisfied. He does a headcount again.

Still 11 people.

Aduh! Where is Mr Bantam? Did he go to the toilet? Why didn't he inform me? It's only the first day, the first tour group, the first exhibit, and already this!

Adam can feel his heart racing.

'Why don't you ask the security guard to look for him? Don't you have security cameras everywhere? Just activate your tracking device, end of story!'

That suggestion comes from a very disgruntled visitor named Olan. A few visitors nod their heads in agreement.

The irritation in Olan's voice is giving unnecessary stress to Adam who is already very nervous. Adam does not want the muzium to question his ability to host the tour group. It is his first day at work. He is not going to risk being negatively appraised.

Olan continues complaining, 'Those microchips implanted in our necks, they're very powerful you know! There was once when I drove my car into some ulu road, and then, suddenly the car made a turn on its own and put me back on the right track. You can never get lost!'

'I agree Mr Olan. Shall we wait another minute or two, ok? Maybe Mr Bantam went to the toilet. Let's wait for him before we continue our tour.'

Olan rolls his eyes.

One minute passes.

Five minutes passes.

Bantam does not appear.

Adam is anxious. He has no choice. He presses a button on his watch to contact the museum's security guards and requests for Bantam's tracking device to be activated immediately.

Adam scans his tablet again.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

A red light on Adam's tablet begins to blink. Adam is confused. The tracking device shows that Bantam is still in the same area, the Premillennial Era Crime Gallery. However, according to the digital map shown, Bantam is already way ahead. In fact, Bantam is now at the fourth exhibit! *Oh hello, look who's the boss! Everyone else is only at the first exhibit and there you are, leaving everybody behind!*

Adam bites his lips.

The day's itinerary must be reworked again. Adam plans to cover the second and third exhibit later once Bantam has been found. For now, Adam asks his group to follow him quickly to the fourth exhibit.

The fourth exhibition is set in a small room that displays a replica of a crime scene that had occurred in 1975. This replica is constructed in a glass box and placed in the middle of the room. Adam can remember the room's layout very well because the exhibits are displayed as dioramas. Quite unique. There are a few figures that are arranged and painted to look like a group of robbers known as 'The Swimming Trunks Gang' by the media.

But even now, when they are already at the fourth exhibit, Bantam is nowhere to be seen. The blinking red light on Adam's tablet begins to flash intermittently indicating that the tracking device is stubbornly telling them that Bantam is there.

Beep.

Beep.

Beeeeeeeeeeppp.

'Where is Bantam?'

'Oh, where is this old man?'

'Obviously he didn't hear the bell!'

'Ya lah! He's still not here!'

'Eeeeeeeekkk!!!'

Julia screamed.

'Bantaaaamm!'

'Where?'

'There!'
Julia points at the diorama in the middle of the room.
'There!!! Inside the glass box!'

Email: rillamelati@gmail.com

Instagram: [@rillamelati](https://www.instagram.com/rillamelati)

Website: minimonsters.com.sg



Norwegian to English

Alex Mepham

Mentor

Khairani Barokka

Alex Mepham is a writer and translator of Scandinavian languages based in York, UK. Alex has translations of Gunvor Hofmo's poems appearing in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and Alex's own work was awarded the 2023 Northern Debut Award for Poetry by New Writing North.

Introduction

Alex Mepham

The translations presented here are extracts from two poetic sequences, eight of which comprise Priya Bains' *With the Rest of My Hands*. These sequences explore a family's rules, pain and love, and how they make sense of migration, rituals and grief. These sequences give life to a big extended family, hearing from parents, sons and daughters, uncles, aunts and grandparents. These poems are both an embrace and a confrontation, full of sights, smells, colours, objects and stories. The entire collection is written in a language both lived in yet distant, cautious yet raw, gentle yet searing.

The process of translating these poems has been incredibly rich, emotional and demanding. Through the invaluable mentorship of Khairani Barokka, and in conversation with Priya Bains herself, I have interrogated not only how to translate Priya's arresting poems in the most faithful way, but also questioned my own positionality as a translator and what active decisions I make in translation: What biases are there in my translation practice? Into what type of English do I translate? What do I leave opaque or ambiguous? What do I choose not to translate?

During this mentorship, I have also embraced the distinction between 'oversettelser' [translations] and 'gjendiktninger' ['re-poems', i.e., the creative re-creation of poems from one language to another], recognising that, especially with poems, the work of the translator is not intended to be a word-for-word bridge [1], nor a 'rendition' that is 'inspired' but distinct from the original work [2], but requires creative re-creation, sculpting a gjendiktning in respectful and honouring dialogue with the source poems.

My process of answering these questions is still ongoing, and I hope my responses do not remain static but develop as I engage in translating more texts in the future. Many sincere thanks again to Okka and Priya.

References

[1] Calleja, J. & Collins, S. (2019). She knows too much: 'Bridge Translations,' 'Literal Translations,' and Long-Term Harm. *Asymptote Journal*, April 2019. Retrieved 26 January 2024.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/jen-calleja-sophie-collins-she-knows-too-much/>

[2] Kareem, M. (2021). Western poets kidnap your poems and call them translations: On the colonial phenomenon of rendition as translation. In K. Bhanot & J. Tiang (Eds.), *Violent Phenomena*, (pp. 143-150). Tilted Axis Press.

Excerpt of 'The Uncles' from *With the Rest of My Hands*

Priya Bains, translated by Alex Mepham

the family is full of
people who don't bother anymore
aunties who refuse to get up
and uncles who stop drinking
a frosty evening in december
to stay home and write on scraps of paper:
milk bread mint yoghurt
or: hello daughter! may your day be a fanfare!
or: my tongue is a dried apricot
or: some days i just don't know what to say
or: where did you go? all these days all my hair
or: i curse you god you almighty you holy king
or: once my mother said that she wished i never came
home again
or: i never really looked into my father's eyes
or: i am coming home late, don't wait for me

Excerpt of 'Lily of the Valley
(after Mother)' from *With the
Rest of My Hands*

Priya Bains, translated by Alex Mepham

father says that in the dream / paths of energy stream
/ through his body / that when he wakes / he is still
transparent / almost shimmering with sunlight / father
says i am so busy / with everything around me / that all i do
is point: / table chair sky / mother father sister / that i walk
around and sing / about everything that surrounds us /
he says that when he wakes / he is flooded by everything
that floats / out of my mouth / sugar and bread / death
and sorrow / father says that i talk incessantly / like the
whole world is mine to own / but that sand flies through
him / that his body is red as rust / and thrown about by
the wind / that he has a stranger's hands / father says he
doesn't have any / grip on reality / that he is condemned
to live in sleep / but we know that his sleep is a drunken
sleep / as from the bottom of a well / he is hoisted up to
us / with impatient hands / and frenetic eyes / they can't
distinguish one from the other / he says that the sky /
is threatening to fall / each waking moment / but in the
dream / love is growing wild like ivy / out of my hands

Email: amepham.uk@gmail.com

Website: amepham.carrd.co

Polish to English

Nasim Luczaj

Mentor

Sean Gasper Bye

Nasim Luczaj is a writer and translator between Polish and English. Her translations of contemporary Polish poets have appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, and her own poetry has been published widely online and in print. She grew up in the Polish Carpathians and is currently based between London and Glasgow.

Introduction

Nasim Luczaj

Zaklinanie węży w gorące wieczory (*Snake Charming on Hot Evenings*) by Małgorzata Żarów takes place on a sweltering and momentous July day. The novel traces the stilettoed footsteps of camgirl Violet Love, who is making her way through Warsaw in a borrowed wedding dress, bottle of wine in hand. As is gradually revealed, she spent the previous night acting in a porn film on the outskirts of the city. Around dawn, she witnessed a mysterious explosion. Now all she wants is to get home. On her way, Violet encounters a cast of oddball characters, from clairvoyant cosmetologists to lemming-obsessed preppers. Each has different suspicions about the nature of the disaster. Through conversations held or overheard, the novel paints a picture of the collective sense of impending doom embedded in modern society, punctuated with Violet's online chats with her male clients.

The novel is dizzying—to read it is to follow the movements of a merry-go-round of conventions. This multitasker of a story oscillates between disaster fiction, references to *The Odyssey* and *Ulysses*, the kitsch and the grotesque, while releasing information like a thriller. The register is half poetic, half frantically plain. What emerges from this collision is a subtle critique of the loneliness and precarity of modern life, the gig economy, and attitudes to sexuality, addressed with playful openness seldom associated with Polish fiction.

Published in 2022, the novel is Żarów's debut. It was awarded the Gdynia Literary Prize and shortlisted for the Nike Award, Premio Grand Continent, and the Conrad Award.

The following passage takes place the morning after Violet's experiences at the film set and the explosion. Given the book's flirtatious release of information, all we know at this stage is that she's had a rough night.

From *Snake Charming on Hot Evenings*

Małgorzata Żarów, translated by Nasim Luczaj

I don't understand why, so early in the morning, in the middle of nowhere, I keep bumping into people, one after another, all men, though I'm not so sure about this one over here. I try the awfully hard manouvre of taking a look at him while not looking at him at all, because then he won't notice me. I fail. He raises his eyebrow, shaggy but sparse, and the way his gaze runs over me almost feels like a reptile, a bug sliding down my collarbone on its many skittering legs. He's thin, tall, and shrivelled up. He looks damaged, and not by the passing of time. Something must have happened. I reflexively clench the bottle. The phantom walks up to the bus timetable and reads it carefully, tightening his coat around him. He reads as if not reading at all, eyes dead still, and I feel my foot land on a trapdoor.

I raise the bottle to my lips. The wine flows inside me; I feel it go all the way down. I don't think this will end well. When I get on the bus, any bus, at least I'll get some rest, I don't really care where it takes me. Mr Lippstuck says that while moving ceaselessly forward you can only return by going round in circles. He probably nicked that from a quote and heedlessly attributed it to himself.

I lower my head. There's a pink stain on the very centre of my belly, as if the wine were spilling out of me, the excess oozing out through the belly button. I rub but it won't come off. It's seeped through the tulle on the corset and lodged itself underneath. The shape is a bit like Australia, if you turned it upside down. The phantom takes a seat on the other end of the bench. He's still got the sides of his coat pulled tight around him. The coat looks woolen. He's peering down, too, at his belly. He's wearing black shoes with long tips, and his legs are long and birdlike.

My attention starts to drift away, but then suddenly I hear a tinny voice coming from under his coat, spitting

out individual words. It's—Friday—the seventeenth—of July—the time—is—six—thirty—three—the temperature—is—twenty—one—degrees—clink. At first, this clink is tinnier than the other sounds, sort of like a cow-bell. The phantom's holding something under his coat, and whenever he presses it, the voice comes back: it's—Friday—the seventeenth—of July—the time. And again. And again. He lets the whole thing run all the way up to the clink, or he stops it halfway and presses, and plays it again. It's—Friday—the seventeenth—of July—the time—is—six—thirty—four. It's good to know these things.

He shakes his head, dissatisfied.

'Nonsense,' he mutters. 'All nonsense.' He listens to the announcement again, then turns to me and says: 'That's how they cover up all the traces.'

I think there's a stone in my shoe, though I don't know how that's possible, seeing as I'm basically on stilts, high above the ground. I give my leg a shake; maybe it'll fall out by itself. The phantom clears his throat, loudly, forcefully, and it sounds like something poisonous, like mercury in the throat.

'They have it all planned. That's how they cover it up,' he repeats, and now I know I'm stuck. He won't leave me alone.

'Cover what up?' I ask.

Suddenly he's sitting a good half metre closer, hunched, rapidly breathing onto me.

'The crime.'

Email: nasimluczaj@gmail.com

X, Instagram: [@nasimluczaj](https://www.instagram.com/nasimluczaj)

Website: nasimluczaj.com

Québec French to English

Khadija Aidoo

Mentor

Sarah Ardizzone

Khadija Aidoo recently graduated from the University of Oxford with a degree in French. Born and raised in London and with a Ghanaian background, her focus is on honouring the diverse narratives within Black literature. She is also committed to using translation to amplify the voices of Black writers.

Introduction

Khadija Aidoo

Marie-Célie Agnant was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and moved to Québec in 1970. After working as a translator and interpreter, she now dedicates her time solely to writing. Her poetry collection *Femmes des terres brûlées* was awarded the Alain-Grandbois Prize in 2017 by the Académie des Lettres du Québec.

I came across *La Dot de Sara* whilst exploring a wider scope of Afro-Québécois literature and was drawn to the way Agnant interrogates themes of home, solitude and displacement in contemporary postcolonial societies. Concerned with the condition of women and how their collective memory impacts on their culture and society, she presents this through an intergenerational female triptych.

Sara's Dowry follows the narrator, Marianna, on her journey from Haiti to Montréal, where her daughter, Giselle, is about to give birth. Marianna decides to remain in Québec, and plays a pivotal role in raising her granddaughter, Sara.

The characters in this novel are inspired by the real-life experiences of elderly Haitian women in Québec, interviewed by the author. This verité aspect, combined with Agnant's poetic style, makes for fresh and compelling reading.

In the excerpt I have chosen, Marianna is flying back to Haiti for the first time since the birth of her granddaughter, Sara, who is now twenty. Despite the years spent feeling like an outsider and yearning for her hometown of La Cité des Bois-Pins, she feels anxious. Will her return live up to her expectations? What does it mean to leave Sara and Giselle behind in Montréal?

I thoroughly enjoyed working on this under the guidance of my wonderful mentor Sarah Ardizzone and I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with the poetic universe of Marie-Célie Agnant.

From *La Dot de Sara*

Marie-Célie Agnant, translated by Khadija Aidoo

'A friend told me about one of her brothers who's been gone for over thirty-five years,' Giselle remarked yesterday evening, as we drank our last coffee but one together. 'Thirty-five years, can you imagine! He lives in a remote town in South America where he's never come across a single fellow countryman, never had a chance to speak his language, his mother's language, in over thirty-five years. Who is he now? He's never returned home, never visited his elders. See, many, many others, like him and like me, for different reasons and without having entirely forgotten it, don't know how to find their way back.'

'But Giselle, don't you think that's a kind of betrayal? Or abandonment? This way back we claim we've forgotten is like a garden. We have to maintain it, otherwise the undergrowth and brambles will start to grow if it's not constantly being used.'

'No, Maman, I don't think it's a betrayal. I think it's more of a defence mechanism against suffering. We aren't all blessed with the poise to follow two paths at the same time. If you ask me, we should let our heart define its own country. Sara will be twenty soon. Where will your great-grandchildren be born? Maybe back there, maybe somewhere else, but most likely here. Our country should be the place where we feel the most at home. The place where, as you'd put it, the ground knows the sound of our footsteps.'

I slept for almost the entire flight. The plane is beginning its descent now and I can feel my peace of mind gradually dissolving. I try to breathe calmly, calmly, the way Sara taught me to treat my insomnia. I can see her smile now, her big, playful eyes.

The blissful return is beginning to unravel. Fight to keep hold of it. At the same time, I'm thinking about all those I left behind a long time ago and who are probably no more. I'm not feeling myself, as if I've been

mummified, wrapped up, protected against a storm for twenty years, the survivor of some strange journey. I dread the bad memories I'll be assailed by as soon as I set foot in the country, memories I can't control pulling faces at me and interfering with my overwhelming need for Sara and Giselle.

The dull thud on the tarmac startles me. The wheels grate. A little girl claps. Two people in front of me burst into tears. Long and harrowing sobs like a siren. A strange procession forms from one end of the plane to the other. I join it mechanically and walk towards the stairs. There's a rush of heat from the tarmac coming in through the open door of the plane and filling the cabin. The sun welcomes us with open arms. Palm trees sway as if they were weary but forced to stand under the sun. I suddenly feel as if I'm acting in a film on location somewhere I've never seen before in my life. I also have this odd sensation of becoming a little girl. For the first time in my life, I'm thinking 'Who am I now?' Deep down, an ironic voice answers: 'I don't know, not anymore.' As my fear mounts, I realize I'm a stranger to myself. Maybe I'm an adventurer, who's washed up here nobody knows how... Another harsher voice jolts me out of my spiralling panic: 'Over here, old lady!'

Email: khadijaaidoo@hotmail.com

X: @khadija_aidoo

Swiss German to English

Tayiba Sulaiman

Mentor

Jamie Lee Searle

Tayiba Sulaiman is a writer and translator from Manchester. She has a degree in English and German from the University of Oxford and is currently interning at literary agency Felicity Bryan Associates. She is a member of the Writing Squad and the 2021 winner of the Eugene Lee-Hamilton Poetry Competition.

Introduction

Tayiba Sulaiman

In Dragica Rajčić Holzner's poem 'Dubrovnik', there's an all-too-familiar line spoken by one of the city's boatmen. 'Sprechen sie deutsch', he says: 'Speak german'. His words have no punctuation, and so the sentence is blurred grammatically. It's both a question and a command.

Rajčić Holzner is a Swiss-Croatian poet, born in Split in 1959. Her first collection, *Halbgedichte einer Gastfrau*, was published in 1986, and in 2021 she won the prestigious Schweizer Literaturpreis for her poem *Glück*.

In her writing, grammatical mistakes break down standard linguistic order. Her offbeat, surprising style uses the cracks in the German language to navigate experiences of gender, immigration and war. These are poems that ask us whether we speak German, and draw attention to the ways fluency grants access to a linguistic world of bureaucracy, transactions, community and security.

Like the boatman in 'Dubrovnik', Rajčić Holzner's poems challenge us to speak German at the same time as questioning our ability to do so. Her writing calls on us to recognize that mistakes and mishearings make up an integral part of speech. Translating them made me especially sensitive to this. I found myself reading the poems aloud repeatedly, trying to see how their sound differed from my expectation of German and its rules. I wrote out the words phonetically to spot connections, and even read my translations into dictation software to try and find mistakes which didn't feel obtrusive or contrived.

Recreating Rajčić Holzner's style means leaning into playful inconsistency and searching for elusive slips of the tongue that real people might make, so that the question at hand becomes: speak English? In translation, these poems demand that we pay attention to another language full of gaps, slippages and misspellings: the same English that both native and non-native speakers use every single day.

From *Halbgedichte einer Gastfrau* (1986)

Dragica Rajčić Holzner, translated by Tayiba Sulaiman

Honest
only the others our
a little fascist
and
our concern is keeping things in there right full place
no, we don't care
about strangers affairs
and why should we
rooves above our own heads more important
what
that's not even true
We never act like we're gods
we've got enough to eat of course
but please just stop talking about hunger
it's ruining our appetite.

'Dubrovnik' from *Buch von Glück* (2004)

Dragica Rajčić Holzner, translated by Tayiba Sulaiman

Walls reenforced
Preferring forreign women
The boatmen advertise
A journey pretty pleas
To spend a day outside of
Speak german miss
Come with me miss
Beautiful and cheap
Fully cratered

Pine forest fires put out yesterday
You in your best years miss
Said the boatman
Your accent betrays you: a frenchwoman
You won't be disappointed miss
In croatian I said
Dovidenja.
And ran away like an inglishwoman.

From *Nacktes Leben* (unpublished)

Dragica Rajčić Holzner, translated by Tayiba Sulaiman

By chance I discovered
that I was a fox
only once all doubt was gone
did my doglife
disgust me
I mop up my tears
lapped up the last supper
how many times must I
go back and forth from this to that
for this
strange bird
to become a real woman

Email: tayibasulaiman@outlook.com

Instagram: @tayibasulaiman

National Centre for Writing
Dragon Hall, 115–123 King Street
Norwich NR1 1QE

+44 (0)1603 877177

info@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk
nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk

N National Centre
for Writing

Norwich
UNESCO City of Literature


unesco
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization


ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Supporting public, creating
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**