

Editor's note:

In some cases the translated poem is headed by the original author; in other cases the translator has the main title, sometimes because the translation is a deliberately looser 'version'. The poems appear in the format in which they were sent.

Güven Turan

Translated from the Turkish by **Ruth Christie**

Poem to Snow on the Way

I don't like the sky's whiteness.
Snow must surely fall
On the heels of this perpetual rain.
Snow from mountains lopped of trees,
Bringing depression and lethargy,
Like morning drowsiness descending
On indolent divans and balconies.
Snow which will mask
Thickets and thorns
Stained by the hunters with blood,
Will erase the tracks of death
And donate new killings:
A frozen goldfinch, a nightjar.
Feathers will multiply in the bridal beds.

A carnivorous animal. It smells the air. A rusty smell that licks and scorches the nostrils. The air I breathe is damp and makes us shiver. It smells of snow. It buries its nose in its armpits. In the season of following tracks and of warm steaming blood, it stretches and makes the hair on the back of the neck stand on end.

Screams all night.
The northern blast moaned like animals in pain.
In trackless fields
Where mud no longer bubbles,
They set traps for bold sparrows;
With the same old scarecrows.
Now is the time to produce the well-oiled guns
From their fading cases of dried-up skins.

The porous firewood smokes and sizzles with damp. Echoes of rain. In the metal pipe.
The room rings with sound like days when endless herds pass by. Now night is for love-making.

Tomorrow the pheasants retreat;
The crested birds arrive, the mallard ducks,
The tiny fieldfare: under the leafless poplars
And oaks the hunters lie in wait;
Green laurels half-open.
We continue the chase
Without end.

Now the mountains are tired. The mist comes down to linger for days and can't be shaken off. Rain rends the clifftops. Frost works its way into the deepest cracks. The first snow whirls into the heart of the valley, and in secluded places silence spreads further than autumn's uproar.

Samaine Bouinou

Translated from the French by **Fred Johnston**

At The Bus Shelter

Cold wind and rain on the bus-shelter,
Wind-blow and rain-rap on the roof.

Light and aloneness in the bus-shelter,
It is late, night falls, there's a wet bench
A street light, grey road, dripping rain.

And . . . a huge perspex-faced photo of a street, rain,
Everything in it dark as midnight, a perfect place to write:

Every man is entitled to a roof over his head.

How much was spent on this poster-street in its rain,
A street without a shelter?

{*Sous l'abri Bus* appears in Samaine Bouinou's collection, 'Poésie Libre,'
published by *Éditions des Écrivains*, Paris, 2003.

Hervé Chesnais

Translated from the French by **Fred Johnston**

Morning

New light, then, through an east window; life opening its eyes. Give me mornings, let me grasp the peace of those drowsing hours. What I wait for has no name.

{From Surface et autres fragments, by Hervé Chesnais. Published in la page blanche - novembre/décembre 2003, numero 29, edited by Pierre Lamarque.}

Mark Leech

from the Spanish of **Carlos Pezoa Veliz**

Nothing

There was a poor devil who always wandered
round a big town I used to live in,
young, blond and tall, grimy and scruffy,
his head always down, as if he'd lost something.
One winter day, some hunters passing
with their hounds, singing as they went,
found him dead in the stream
by my garden. They found nothing
in his papers. The cops took turns
asking questions of the night porter.
He knew nothing about the dead man,
nor did neighbour Perez, nor neighbour Pinto.
A girl said he was a nutcase
or some tramp who didn't eat much;
a joker, overhearing these interviews,
tried not to laugh... Bunch of idiots!

A labourer chucked him in the grave,
then rolled a cigarette, put his hat back on
and made his way home. Behind the workman
nothing was said. Nothing was said

Platforms

from the Spanish of **Jorge Teiller** by **Mark Leech**

You like to arrive in the station
full of the ticking of the platform clock,
the ticking in the stationmaster's office
as the evening dozes
worn out by the trip
and the rails disappear
into soot and shadow.

You like to wait in the empty station
when you can't get rid of memories
like the clouds of steam
round the contours of trains,
and you like to feel the wind blow by
whistling like a tramp
fed up of walking down the tracks.

The clock tick-ticks. You see again
the towns whose names you never learned,
the town where you'd like to arrive
like a child on his birthday
or on journeys back from holiday
when for those waiting relatives
you were just a schoolkid smelling of beer.

The clock tick-ticks. The stationmaster
plays solitaire. The clock repeats
that night is the only train
stopping in this town;
you love to stand and hear it
while the sleepers disappear
into soot and shadow.

The Donkey in a Shirt

from the Spanish of **Andres Sabella** by **Mark Leech**

Fibre by fibre
the zebra
appears.

The sun mistakes her
for a sheet of music,
then finds in her
the key to his flames.

The wind gabbles
like a madman:
"It's a guitar
with lots of strings..."

Fibre by fibre
the zebra
disappears

Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)

Translated from the Russian by **Julian Farmer**

Untitled

For me, there was a voice. It called soothingly.
It said, 'Come here.
Leave your remote and sinful homeland.
Leave Russia forever.

I shall wash the blood from your hands,
and remove black shame from your heart;
I shall mask the pain of insult and defeat
under a new name.'

But unmoved, and quietly,
I covered my ears with my hands,
in case these unsuitable words
should defile my mournful spirit.

Tom Day

French Horn

A free translation of **Montale's** 'Cor Anglais')

Wind that sounds watchful tonight,
calling to mind the sharp distrustful knife;
instruments of the clearing amid the shadowy wood
ringed in thorns
lines of light stretching across
like kites adorning the sound-proofed sky
- wind-borne clouds, clear as bells these
kingdoms on high! At roof level Eldorado's
doors are left ajar –
and the mutable colour of the blue-black sea
which spangle by spangle
casts off on the land a trumpet
of angelic spume;
wind that dies and is born
that grows slowly pitch-dark,
caressing in essence some timeless horn or harp,
sounded pure to you
tonight.

Catherine Mazodier

Ravalement 1 : Piochage

Les chocs sur la carcasse
des murs heurtés meurtris
unravel my plexus
my newel,
freeing from my ribcage
les esclaves du langage
tapis dans l'escalier.

Ravalement 2 : Peinture

Clarté lactée
des voiles
les murs s'emballent :
a brush of wings
coating my back
with whitewash

Greg Delanty

More translations from the Irish of **Seán Ó'Ríordáin** (1916-1977)

The Old harp of Ordinary Things

Chuck, chuck, chuck – it dawned on me,
the hens being beckoned,
that the words chuck, chuck, chuck are a poem
straight from antiquity.

You can pluck like Orpheus
on the old harp of ordinary things.
That echo was heard
in many a head.

There's an ageless solitude in the cat
nesting without shame,
the chummy cat lustfully
lounging on the hearth.

I fall back like a child
on my elfishness
as my legs stiffen dead,
asleep with pins and needles.

There's life in that waking,
in that awful ticklesome tremor,
the pookas of folklore
as I imagined them as a kid.

There, I've touched three strings
on the old harp of ordinary things:
the ordinary hen cluck, a curled cat on a hearth
and the leg pinned asleep with pins and needles.

Saint Finbarr's Island

(from a sequence, 'An Island and Another Island')

A showery afternoon in Gougane,
fog corroding a cliff.
I looked on the island for a sign,
found it in the trees.

Awry stunted branches rose about me,
entangled in each other.
They writhed every-which-way
like a body burning alive,

or like writing penned on parchment
and crazily scribbled over.
I saw a stumpy snoz, knee, hump and spawg.
Finally I made out the gadge of Gandhi.

O Fin, I see in the twisted branches
that the godly man and the worldly man
fought it out there
in your sanctum stumptorum.

When the fog of our flesh lifts
a weird beauty will show in the striae.
Your form will be measured for itself
in the empty skeletal frame of light.

The trees exult in their own form,

in the slantwise way they look,
in everything stunted crooked,
abhorring anything soft and upright.

The writing of the trees is masculine.
There's not a breast or curve in any character.
The imprint of the monk is everywhere.
Finbarr is in the loop of every limb.

Everyone's version of god's freedom
is his own island.
Christ flows through each vein.
It's in the turn of everybody's words.

This blueprint of each person's island
is the island home of Finbarr,
Christ flowing through each vein
and the weird gnomeness of limbs.

O Language Half On My Side

Who tied this bond between us,
O language half with me?
If you won't fully have me, what's the use?
I'm not much good at giving line.

There's another one after me.
She says, 'You're mine'.
I'm caught between the pair of you
and am torn in two.

I need to be always around you,
taken solely by you
or else I'll be robbed of your refuge
and robbed of myself.

A half a mind never grinds properly.
I have to give in to you totally
even though I'm not at home with you entirely,
O language half with me.

A Dithering Wind

I met the wind on the way home.
I turned on my heel and went with her.
She switched direction and left me trekking on,
addled, caught between two winds.

