

# NEW VERSE REVIEW



A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry

Translations

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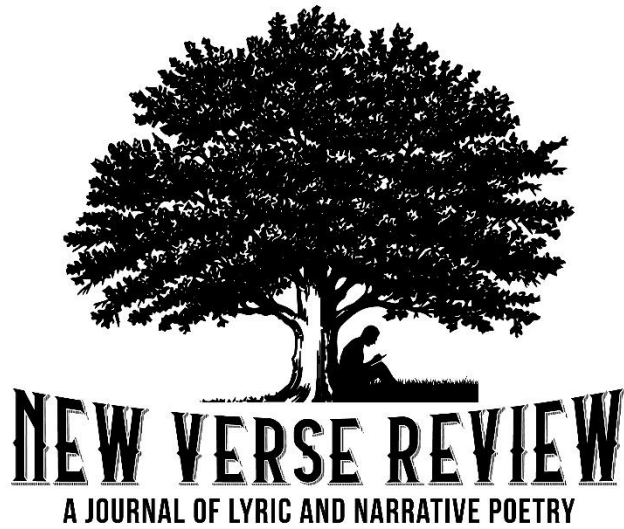
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***New Verse Review: A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry*** features work that renews the ancient affinities among poetry, song, and story.



New Verse Review 3.2:  
Translations  
-  
Spring 2026

Issue Edited by D. A. Cooper and Mary Grace Mangano

## ***A Note from the Editors***

When we encounter problems of understanding or other issues caused by language differences, it is common for us to employ a simple metaphor: the barrier. Like a fence or a wall, an unknown language keeps us out. Ignorance of a foreign tongue doesn't just prevent us from understanding individual words and phrases, it denies us entry into another culture, another way of thinking, another world. As there is no one who understands all human languages, the language barrier is something that, sooner or later, stops us all. Making it through this heavily defended barrier is possible, but only by following in the footsteps of a guide who has the experience and expertise needed to find the crossing points that lead to the other side of the wall.

This special translation-themed issue of *New Verse Review* features formal poetry from around the world. Even someone with a rudimentary knowledge of world literature will know that the poetic traditions of the world have employed form of one kind or another for millennia at least, but, in modern times, the elevation of free verse in the West and the cultural dominance of the United States have pushed "formless" poetry into every corner of the globe. Like many of those who enjoy reading and writing poetry in form, we have long wondered what our counterparts are up to in other languages; who is keeping the flame of form burning outside of the anglosphere?

For this special issue, we reached out to literary translators doing excellent work in a wide variety of languages with a request that, admittedly, would be difficult to accomplish. We didn't just want to be guided through formal poetry from around the world, we wanted to feature only the work of living poets. Before they could even engage in their craft, these translators had to find poets in their languages who are currently writing in form. After completing that first difficult task, they faced the challenge of taking excellent poems from one language and rendering them into beautiful English poetry. This challenge, as Stephen Sartarelli pointed out in the translator's note to his translation of Umberto Saba's *Songbook* (Canzoniere), "is one of the most daunting a literary translator ever has to face." The translators whose work is featured in this issue accepted that challenge and brought considerable talent and skill to their work.

In this issue, we are featuring poetry written in 15 languages, by 19 poets, rendered into English by 19 different translators, sometimes alone, and

sometimes as translator teams. You will encounter the familiar and expected—from the Italian sonnet to the Japanese tanka—as well as the unfamiliar and unexpected—from the Swahili mashairi to the Armenian haiku. We hope that you will enjoy exploring this collection as much as we have, and be grateful for those translators who have taken the time to guide us across seemingly inaccessible barriers into beautiful new worlds.

Sincerely,

**D. A. Cooper and Mary Grace Mangano**

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# ***Alemu Tebeje and Chris Beckett***

## **A translation from the Amharic of “At a crossroad in Addis Ababa” by Kebedech Tekleab**

*(to an old lady I do not know)*

By the crossroad's kerb  
you bare your head,  
giving in to the dread  
of a day without food,  
so let your dignity go  
and your soft neck show,  
laying your shemma down  
on an empty belly ground.

**Note:** the shemma is a traditional Ethiopian handwoven cotton shawl which has come to signify the dignity with which an elderly woman covers her body. To take it off in public, in order to beg, is very shocking.

## **A translation from the Amharic of “Generosity and greed” by Kebedech Tekleab**

Like a round injera, I cut his love  
in two. But half is not enough for me,  
so I eat what I meant to give. I take  
from the hungry, give back to the needy.  
I pity, I give; I am stingy, I keep.  
I see pity and greed because of him.  
I say, let earthly injera be bountiful  
like manna falling from the sky.

**Note:** the first of Kebedech Tekleab’s poems in Amharic is written in regular 6 syllable lines with an interlacing end-rhyme scheme. The second is in mostly rhyming 12 syllable lines, except lines 2 and 3 which are half lines. We have used 5 and 4 beat lines to convey a similar effect, with half or internal rhymes. We have also added an extra line because the Amharic is so packed! It is in fact a *q’ene* poem, what Ethiopians call *wax and gold*, where the love interest is hidden beneath an everyday moral dilemma. The original poem does not mention love at all, but suggests it through the injera (the unleavened pancake-like bread which is the basis of every meal and often a metaphor for love) and the reference to *him* in the 6th line. We decided we had to make the connection explicit or lose the sense for a non-Ethiopian reader.

# ***Hiwot Tadesse and Chris Beckett***

## **A translation from the Amharic of “One day” by Bedilu Wakjira**

Back when we could never spare a minute,  
we thought *one day* was where we'd meet.  
If we were still here when the clouds had flown  
and winter slept, when a new day dawned  
with no more curses on our heads, only the sun...  
we would laugh at Time and beat the bastard  
at his own game: so we made a date!

But what can I do now?  
You gave me a *one day* rendez-vous,  
so however tired of life I grow,  
I have to stick around for you.

# *Taline Voskeritchian and Christopher Millis*

## **A Translation from the Armenian of Three Poems by Krikor Beledian**

rocks are going to  
collapse in your eye  
the sea extends to your hands  
breezily both salt and thirst  
while the southern winds  
hunt after the trees

the double-faced sea  
and the earth turned upside down  
skylarks at the break of day  
waves moving through sky  
or the passage of Shan  
toward the inaudible night  
the rhythm's crescent  
(7)

perhaps you cannot  
live in your language without  
living somewhere else

and how do you live  
somewhere else without living  
the strange native tongue?

I neared your body  
as words verge upon the breath  
verged upon your flame  
(10)

o with meager words  
perhaps not one syllable  
flame rips you open

the languorous wind  
barely flows down the river  
what did you know of the light?

you've given your breath  
to language and with that death  
alone do you live  
(168)

(Sarkis Khatchents-Printinfo, Yerevan, 2021)

**Note:** Beledian does not title his haikus. The numbers at the end of each haiku indicate the page on which the haiku appeared in *Traces of Light*.

# *Victoria Moul*

## **A Translation from the French of “The circular horizon” by Souleymane Diamanka**

I sought for the circular horizon of the islands  
I found only a sky closed off by illusions  
I sought the horizon arching in desire  
And the muses in the night making their incursions

The artist and the public like opposites attract  
A clean breath of air amid all the pollution  
Like an archaeologist, his ear to the earth  
Searches for treasure as some kind of solution

I walked until day over a dead volcano  
At each of my steps the sound of eruption  
I exchanged glances and each glance bore a dream  
But one by one their eyes were averted in revulsion

This is how it happens that hopes have come to die  
Dazzled by the glare and fire of seduction  
The freest of souls breaks the rules of engagement  
But even the eagle has a fear of restriction

On the road to oneself or on the way to India  
Each interpretation grants certain assumptions  
The world speaks of art as you speak of your exes  
Like a house lying empty after an eviction

It's a natural instinct, the heart wants to help  
Without a discount voucher or advertised reduction  
To encounter the world, you bring people together  
If you want results, you have to make connections

Life has no price, it is the perfect setting  
Far from the roar of neon, the dance of corruption  
The heart of a lover, the skill of a craftsman  
The distance covered depends on the momentum

Philosophy sits weeping, stifled in her rags  
Singled out and mocked for stumbling elocution  
Whether we let her drop or stop to leave a comment  
So many communities so far from a communion

Once upon a time was the final tale of all  
Witnessing the words designed for mutilation  
Luxury vulgarity, indecency's ascension  
The poor taste of Rome in the days of the centurions

They sign contracts the way you'd seal a deal  
VAT submissions, working out deductions  
I sought the circular horizon of the islands  
I found only a sky closed off by illusions.

## **A Translation from the French of “October leaves, October pages” by Souleymane Diamanka**

It's snowing in my garden  
Snowing autumn leaves  
It's raining at half speed  
As if upon the sea.

Pens and feathers by the ton  
On my garden, once so sober:  
It's raining leaves of autumn  
And pages of October.

The forest now is slipping off  
Her lovely umber gown  
It's raining in another clef  
The snow is coming down

After drinking down  
The ink of inspiration  
I've come to read upon the ground  
What the wood has written

In my garden snow  
Falls like flakes of light  
It's raining in slow motion  
As on the mountain height

The sun shines in my garden  
And the great trees understand  
I came to carve these words  
In marble and in sand

In my garden burns  
Like a bar of incense  
A divine haze  
Which scents all the world

The world of flowers, the world of beasts  
From earth up to the sky  
As if prayers themselves now seek  
Creatures to be said by

It's raining October leaves  
Upon my calendar  
The brightness of a star  
Shone for you as it leaves

The wind blows in my garden  
As on the ocean wild  
Where the blue surge unburdens  
The storm-wind's ancient child

The wind blows in my garden  
As through an empty space  
Where life begins again  
And far away escapes

In my garden life is good  
Eternity is everyday  
The breath of the tall trees make us move  
But as they stay, we stay

It's raining feathers by the ton  
In my garden, once so sober  
It's raining leaves of autumn  
And pages of October

## *A. E. Stallings*

### **A Translation from the Greek of “As Ever, Centaurs” by Yiannis Doukas**

Many nations she has ruled,  
Victoria, beneath her crown,  
And customs, peoples, she has schooled,  
Before this square of ill renown.

Enough: myths fade, and it's no joke  
Reviving them. At the Lapiths' feast,  
Wine the seducer, at a stroke  
Made wedding, farce; our nature, beast.

Find the culprit in the crowd,  
Barren lady, heirless queen,  
Seeking the meal he is allowed:  
The chickpea, and the shriveled bean.

O Theseus, king and immigrant,  
Whose city is this that you rent?

**Note:** This sonnet, written in the depths of the Greek economic crisis, also seems to prefigure the refugee crisis of a couple of years later. Victoria Square (named after Queen Victoria) is a central square in Athens in what was once a prosperous bourgeoisie area lined with neoclassical mansions, but which is now a shabby, run-down neighborhood, peopled with a mix of economic migrants, Greek pensioners, and refugees. The square is dominated by a monumental bronze statue of “Theseus Saving Hippodamia,” by Johannes Pfuhl (1908), in which Theseus is saving the Lapith bride Hippodamia from a drunken centaur. (Centaurs could not hold their drink, and wine served at the wedding famously led to rape and pillage.) Theseus was the son of the king of Athens, a city of sanctuary, but was raised outside the city, and returned to it as an immigrant, before being recognized as King.

## A Translation from the Greek of “Erechtheion: A.D. 2012” by Yiannis Doukas

The flesh, and blood of flesh, and then the fly  
Who lays her eggs thereon, and I compliant:  
Beyond the Propylaea, I did not pry,  
Faithful, ever faithful, ever client.

I found them all, I saw them there, of course,  
Thin, half-clothed in drapery, and keeping  
The temple up, and somehow by sheer force  
Holding on to life. And there a sleeping

Bat was hanging underneath the ceiling.  
I held two punctured coins, and for their sakes,  
I eyed the figures curiously, appealing,  
“Who knows the contagion? What makes

Us people who bow down to this disease,  
In any body, mine or yours, or these?”

**Note:** In 2012, during the economic crisis, Greek police rounded up hundreds of alleged sex workers and gave them compulsory HIV tests; 30, who tested positive, were charged with a felony for intentionally causing bodily harm. The humiliation of the vulnerable women was captured in “Ruins: Chronicle of an HIV Witch Hunt,” a film by Zoe Mavroudi. This poem conflates the women with the Caryatids of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis, weathered women of stone who hold the temples entablature on their heads. The Propylaea, the massive entrance gates to the Acropolis, housed the altar of Hygia, the goddess of health, possibly placed there as a votive during the 5th century plague of Athens that devastated the city during the Peloponnesian war.

These sonnets are taken from Doukas’s *Stendhal Syndrome* (2013, Athens), published by Polis, a book of ekphrastic sonnets that simultaneously engages with the Greek economic crisis of 2009-2019.

# *Michael Weingrad*

## **A Translation from the Hebrew of "Demon" by Rita Kogan**

I dug a pit in a forest glade  
to entrap a demon there.  
I took whetstone to a dull blade  
and honed it sharp as fire.  
At midnight I went out to gather  
oleander and nettles,  
My harvest done, I plucked their leaves  
and stripped their petals.  
The pit was covered over with rushes,  
the oleander steeped;  
the one who spoke falsely will wish his  
promises had been kept.  
For when he comes to me at night  
he will stumble and be caught.  
I'll serve that false one deadly brew,  
And make my demon true.

# ***George Szirtes***

## **A Translation from the Hungarian of "Satyagraha" by Vörös István**

Is Gandhi's path still good to go,  
his lack of fear still in your heart?  
What's your answer, yes or no?

To kill the fear or let it grow,  
to brazen it or fall apart?  
Is Gandhi's path still good to go?

Reject the battlefield and so  
preserve the weak from being slain?  
What's your answer, yes or no?

Might non-violence stem the flow?  
Will things remain as at the start?  
Is Gandhi's path still good to go,

or is his lonely path too slow  
for one life to attempt again?  
What's your answer, yes or no?

And should I tread the path I know  
would any other still complain?  
Is Gandhi's path still good to go?  
What's your answer? Yes or no?

## **A Translation from the Hungarian of "Aquarium" by Anna T. Szabó**

Round and round the dark aquarium  
Swim the dead that you have known,  
Who every night run out of breath,  
And break to the surface, racked and blown.

But what will quench their thirst for life  
Once your vigilant flame dies down?  
You glimpse their faces in quick light  
And, like them, sink again and drown.

## **A Translation from the Hungarian of “Hungarian Landscape” by Virág Erdős**

a blob of spit and fag ends by a puddle  
a field of bottle-caps greets the joyful dawn,  
in deepest Golgotha a brewery,  
a furious clatter, bin spilled on the lawn

a heap of rotting ham between two windows  
inside, momma and papa going at it like blazes,  
a crisis concerto in the council house  
under whose wall an ancient pisshead lazes

he starts trembling as soon as the shop opens  
whatever thoughts were weighing him down, they're gone,  
he buys a bottle, takes it, opens it, gobs it,  
his lips shimmer like mud pools in the sun,

strange little graffiti glisten there like jewels  
*Arnie is nuts* and – look there! – *Jesus rules*.

## ***D.A. Cooper and Mary Grace Mangano***

### **A Translation from the Italian of “The Sonnet” by Aldo Nove**

To see a thousand-year-old form that bears  
witness over centuries—in order  
to say that they’ve remained like gusts of air,  
so wonderful, so marvelous before their

demise, bursting with light, and held within  
a sonnet—moves me, and it makes me feel  
just how much history I’ve never known  
and that the more I miss the more congealed

my heart becomes. I write for people who  
will discuss the mystery that binds  
us all to everything and nothing too:

The world’s inside a sonnet, breaking through,  
but fleetingly. It mimics, in my mind,  
a pathway that leads *us* to what is true.

## **A Translation from the Italian of “The Day We’re Reaching Toward” by Aldo Nove**

Stay with us, O Lord, this evening  
stay before the dark arrives,  
stay with us, the half-alive,  
in this never-ending evening,

stay with us and teach us, Master,  
what will happen if tomorrow  
comes. Do not leave us in that sorrow,  
creeping toward us ever faster,

holding us in non-time days,  
whatever month this is, O Lord,  
stay. The darkness is so dense

around us, lavish, without form,  
just like the callous compromise:  
the Cross, the day we’re reaching toward.

## *Seiji Hakui*

### **A Translation from the Japanese of Three Tankas About Flowers and Rain by Ryosuke Yabuuchi**

1.

There in this world  
are fingertips that think of rain  
when they feel the cold of  
a flower they pick up.

2.

I want a snake  
and a path dark and narrow,  
a rainy path where everything blossoms.

3.

Rains, cherry blossoms,  
and conversations with you,  
all peeling off like scales.

From the collection *Weathering of the Heart*.

**Note:** The original versions of these poems in Japanese are available [here](#).



## *Dick Davis*

### **A Translation from the Persian of “The Empty Alleys of the World” by Khaledeh Forugh**

These ancient mountain slopes are poets, even so,  
Escaped now from themselves, contemporaries we know,  
These ancient mountain slopes, the winds' assault by night,  
They've traveled here from many, many years ago.  
Home to the sleepers in the cave they're full of life  
Within the empty alleys of the world they wander to and fro  
And they were there, confronting Moses' heart,  
As they were passers-by of weeping Farhad's woe.  
They nourish myths, their poems are ambiguous,  
They're visible, high summits thrust up from below;  
They've burned within themselves, they're lost within themselves  
Though lost beyond all loss they're near at hand, and though  
Their voices seethe with silence, still  
The last word's always theirs, both now and long ago;  
They are the high imaginings of God  
These ancient mountain slopes are poets, even so.

**Note 1:** In both Moslem and Christian tradition, the “sleepers” refers to a group of young men who, in order to escape religious persecution, hid in a cave where they slept for 300 years before waking and emerging from their hiding place.

**Note 2:** Farhad is a figure in the romance “Khosrow and Shirin,” by the poet Nezami (1141-1209). A mason in love with Shirin, the wife of King Khosrow, he wounds himself with his own tools when he hears the false news that she has died, and commits suicide.

## **A Translation from the Persian of “W for War (3)” by Fatemeh Shams**

*In memory of Aziz and the children of war in Kobane*

How hard it was to stay alive  
In the war, the bullets' rain,  
When everywhere they looked  
Were death and darkness and pain

They had to pack and leave  
And travel to who-knows-where  
To a geography unknown,  
That was anywhere but there

Behind them their lost home  
Was black with ash, ahead  
A hard uneven road  
And the flood of those who fled

His shoulders carried a child  
His arms were around another,  
Behind them ran a third  
Like a mound that dust-clouds smother

Their mother was following them  
A mountain of silence and dread,  
Eye to eye with the war, tears flowed  
Like pomegranate juice, blood-red.

Ah, but the war was brutal  
Destroying her hopes with fear,  
Stealing her children's joy  
With its thuggish, violent sneer.

Three children-one didn't smile,  
Three children-one had a fever,  
They were homeless and silent now  
Like a poem unheard forever

By the side of the road, bewildered  
By the kindness of the sun,  
Perhaps someone would come  
And see him there, someone...

War came in the shape of a man,  
Death came in the form of the sun  
His eyes were fixed on the sky, frozen  
Forever, and seeing no one

And then he saw nothing forever,  
And forever now he kept  
His silence, and closed his infant eyes  
On the crimes around him, and slept.

**Note:** This is the third of three poems dealing with war. Kobane is a mainly Kurdish town in the north of Syria that was besieged by ISIS forces in 2014. The capture of the town and its surrounding villages caused the flight of an estimated 400,000 refugees.

Both translations were originally printed in *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women* (Penguin, 2021). Reproduced with permission.

## ***Carla Galdo***

### **A Translation from the Polish of “Ash Wednesday” by Krzysztof Kuczkowski**

*Rend your hearts, and not your garments. (Joel 2:13)*

They've said so much to one another, yet  
he still surprises her with newness, words  
leaping from his mouth like seeds from pitted plums  
smelling of cyanide and violet,  
bearing the sweetness of October days,  
announcements of love's end upon a cross  
and of the bitter ash of last year's palms.

They've said so much to one another, yet  
they've got much more to tell, such as the tales  
of how to learn from wounds, from openings,  
from secret passages that must be walked  
with widened eyes, in order not to lose  
one's way. Today they walked like this through snow,  
led by the bitter ash of last year's palms.

They've said so much to one another, yet  
the most important journey still remains.  
Quite slowly they prepare to leave, although  
they know not the day nor the hour. Time is discreet,  
master of cheerful mercy: promising  
nothing, it makes a subtle English exit,  
then seems to say “you see, it didn't hurt.”

They've said so much to one another, yet  
there are subjects which they diligently avoid.  
They rarely speak of time, that it still hurts,  
and that the span from man to Elohim  
is not the same as that from God to man  
and that the cross is closer still to us  
than we are to the cross. They fear blunt nails.

They've said so much to one another, yet  
they have forgotten more—this is a gift  
that pleases them. They are like wayward children  
whose parents sign them up for the first grade  
and walk with them to school, so they're not lost  
along the many roads, although the parents  
died years ago, and now the school is gone.

Originally published as “Środa Popielcowa” in *Głosolalia*, by PIW, Warsaw, 2025.

## ***Boris Dralyuk***

### **A Translation from the Russian of an Untitled Poem by Julia Nemirovskaya**

A humble little spirit dwells within me.  
How does it not feel cramped here? Hard to say.  
Hedgehog of twilight, fur of the nocturnal,  
it bats its lashes, gilds the break of day.

I sense it in my chest, can't help but smile—  
it's rummaging for something in my heart.  
The tiny paws may scratch a bit. Oh well,  
its gift is worth the pain, so let it smart.

It gives me life—pulls in the thick, sweet substance  
of food and wine, the moon with streaks of light.  
With it inside, even the stomach-turning  
sheer nothingness of nothing brings no fright.

# *Rhina Espaillat*

## **A Translation from the Spanish of “Angel of Stone” by César Sánchez Beras**

*for Alfred*

Facing the stone, a hammer in his hands,  
a melancholy man strives to undress  
beauty herself, and make those sorrows less  
that wound the shining marble where he stands.

Facing the rock, he begins work: a yearning  
toward that primeval matter, the first clay;  
alchemy—genius grieving—is the way,  
the key that guides him to the last returning.

And in this game with room for only two,  
in which the endless work that God must do  
becomes the shared obsession of all men—

too long a labor for one life alone—  
man wrests the angel forth out of the stone,  
and captures death in granite once again.

**Note:** This poem was written for Alfred Moskowitz, the translator’s late husband.

## **A Translation from the Spanish of “The Other God” by César Sánchez Beras**

God has another face—I picture it—  
not that huge mask of daggers and of thorns;  
he must have eyes whose mercy’s infinite,  
like the sad child who walks my street some dawns.

God must have skin of deeper hue, I’m sure,  
than that dry marigold of livid light;  
his hands, I’m certain, have a warmth more pure  
than the old man’s who found my door last night.

God must yearn, more than anything, to pass  
on foot across all rivers, roam the wild,  
and leave that world of stones and of stained glass;

as myriad angels do, God must—God can—  
walk on my street, looking like any child,  
come to my door and knock, like an old man.

## **A Translation from the Spanish of “Clocktower” by César Sánchez Beras**

This clock that never shows the precise hour  
is like my soul, whose truth cannot be found;  
belies, in the uprightness of his tower,  
the ring of shade, the wound that girds him round.

This old clock tells the time a life ago,  
regards mankind as it regards the rain,  
is like Quixote bested by the foe,  
wielding his lance—his wooden dream—in vain.

He scans the world—I see him—from on high,  
numbers the seconds one by one, as by  
his alchemy they’re turned to yesterday...

And although passers-by look up and sneer,  
his round eye also marks the passing year  
for those who never look, or look away.

# ***Richard Prins***

## **A Translation from the Swahili of "Skin" by Jacob Ngumbau Julius**

When it comes to skin, time is ever crucial  
The moment you begin, go get your hands full  
Be sure you have a plan, haste is never gainful  
Don't wait for skin to stiffen, stretch it while it's raw

Unfurl it from the middle, spread it in the open  
Don't let the trees be veils, lay it beneath the sun  
So that no edges crackle, grip it with less tension  
Don't wait for skin to shrivel, stretch it while it's raw

Let us keep in mind the warnings I have listed  
Keep an eye on time, while the leather stretches  
Lizard or buffalo hides, each one has its toughness  
Don't wait for skin to dry, stretch it while it's raw

Some are tougher than others, cut them so they vary,  
You may be stooped over, tugging till you're weary,  
Or sitting back at leisure, pulling without a worry,  
Don't wait for skin to wither, stretch it while it's raw

Everything I have said, don't dismiss it, fellows  
Or you will know regret, chewing your nails alone  
Take command and stretch, that's the secret code  
Don't wait for skin to parch, stretch it while it's raw

## **A Translation from the Swahili of “Lion and Cat” by Jacob Ngumbau Julius**

A lion on the plain, he's not one to be skittish  
Beasts are what he craves, a slayer in the bushes  
No creature that is tame alarms him in the slightest  
When Lion replies to Cat, he only degrades himself

Wherever he appears, his claws are always hidden  
Like a menial creature, that is his decision  
Showing off in the corner gives him no vexation  
When Lion replies to Cat, he only degrades himself

Traipsing down the path, not one to be hastened  
Always permitted to pass, with undulating motion  
Whoever asks Who's that? better keep their distance  
When Lion replies to Cat, he only degrades himself

When he chooses battle, it's no game for kittens  
Or any other quarrel, like stirring up commotion  
That will be a marvel, and surely never happen  
When Lion replies to Cat, he only degrades himself

As lizards cling to walls, that's where cats are safe  
And rats inside their holes may jeer all they like  
Let no one join the circle of what a lion craves  
When Lion replies to Cat, he only degrades himself

# *Shelley Fairweather-Vega*

## **A Translation from the Uzbek of Two Poems from *We Computers* by Hamid Ismailov**

Hamid Ismailov's novel *We Computers*, released in English in Fairweather-Vega's translation by Yale University Press in 2025, is a serious and also very funny meditation on artificial intelligence, poetry, history, and authorship. The book includes work by French, Turkmen, Uzbek, American, Persian, and other poets across the centuries, as well as original verse written by Ismailov himself, pressed into service of the novel's plot. Here are two such poems: written in Uzbek by Ismailov, but posing as the work of different characters in his novel.

First, a poem written by a boy named Shamsuddin in our novel, who will grow up to be the master poet Hafez of Shirazi. According to *We Computers*, Shamsi was a teenage apprentice to a baker who liked to gather his workers for competitive poetry recitations in the evenings after work. Young Shamsi had poetic ambitions, but not quite enough talent to win the prize with this poem that evening. (pp. 194-196)

Baking bread, baking bread is hard on the beginner...  
Hay and straw and rotten grass are strewn around the vineyard  
In between them, if you ever look behind the leaves  
And spy a bunch, a pile, a clump, a single grape deceives,  
You may realize that the fruit is withered, hanging battered,  
Then your mind is muddled up, and all your thoughts are scattered.

Stoke the fire in the oven, heat the tandir, brother.  
The most vital, interesting job may be another,  
Yet now, to work! and maybe later we'll return to that.  
Take the dough we kneaded well. Spread it on the mat.  
Pummeled through and through, the dough is ready and it's risen.  
Not too much now, sister, let us treat this with precision.

Chunk of dough, chunk of dough, fluffy chunk of dough,  
You can use it for a brick to build a bungalow,  
Twisted, molded in my hands exactly to your shape—

Plop! The rolling pin thunks down, its single eye agape.  
They are always ready and prepared for what you ask.  
But a job like baking bread's a very tricky task.

Look, the tandir's black, and then it's heated up red-hot,  
Find the poker quickly, or this whole affair is shot!  
Use the mitt to cover your hand, or choose not to wear it,  
Stick the poker in barehanded, and just grin and bear it.  
Stand on this side if you want to stoke the flaming fire.  
Shape the loaves, roll them out, oil them, perspire.

One loaf in, one loaf out, that's the when and where.  
Quickly as a punching fist the mitt shoots through the air.  
People baking bread have faces reddened by the flames,  
One with the baker, body and soul, sharing all his aims.  
Now I wait impatiently for the flames to taper...  
Just then, from my fire sails a single sheet of paper...

O Nasrin, my own, my lovely Arab girl so true,  
I recall my loaves of bread when I look at you.  
Do you see this patir loaf, saved from the fires of hell?  
Just like that, the two of us will pull our job off well,  
We've already bitten our bread into a crescent moon  
Waiting for us, every night, or it will be, soon...

Next, an original ghazal, composed in haste by Ismailov's own stand-in in the novel, Abdulhamid Ismail, as he attempts to "translate" an ancient Chagatai-language ghazal by Alisher Nava'i for his bewildered French colleague, into "a modern language you can understand." Compounding the joke, of course, is that the modern language is Uzbek, not French, rendered into English by the latest in this long line of translators. (p. 188)

The Persian term for "God" derives from a phoneme of phenomenology,  
Forwarding the development of every system and epistemology.

The first occurs when its substantive circumstance emerges,  
A crown of tropes bestowed by the demiurge semasiology.

An embrace of every subject in the language of functionality  
is that same emanation, or a certain dichotomology.

Starting with sharpened blades, we have the scholarly operandi:  
Then second and third, etc., we arrive at isomorphology.

The intentional circumstances of comprehensive dialogicity  
Represented by linguists lacking the audience's lexicology.

There's danger in examining every defect in lost unity,  
A language begun in no-min-ality is foreign pharmacology.

Nava'i has never discovered any unity of speech and truth,  
Hallaj is the man we put in charge of complex linguotheology.

From *We Computers: A Ghazal Novel* by Hamid Ismailov; translated by Shelley Fairweather-Vega. Published by Yale University Press in the Margellos World Republic of Letters series in August 2025. Reproduced by permission.

## Contributors

**Chris Beckett** is a British poet and translator who grew up in Ethiopia and is now based in London. His collections are *Ethiopia Boy* (2013) and *Tenderfoot* (2020), both from Carcanet, plus with Alemu Tebeje the first ever anthology of Ethiopian Amharic poetry in English, *Songs We Learn from Trees* (Carcanet, 2020). His website is <https://www.chrisbeckettpoems.com/>.

**César Sánchez Beras** is the author of poetic, dramatic, and narrative texts. He has received the Salomé Ureña Annual Poetry Prize [2004, 2019, 2025], the Cristóbal de Llerena Annual Theater Prize [2017, 2024], 2nd Place in the Casa de Teatro International Competition [2019], the Alianza Cibaëña Poetry Prize [2016], the Universidad Central del Este Poetry Prize [2014], the Letras de Ultramar Children’s Literature Prize [2014], the Delia Quezada Annual Children’s Literature Prize [2013], the Aurora Tavárez Belliard Annual Children’s Literature Prize [2004], 1st Place in the National Décima Competition [1993], and 1st Place in the National Décima Competition of the Center for Educational Studies [1991]. He holds a Doctorate in Law from the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo and a master’s degree in education from Framingham State College. He is a member of the Dominican Writers’ Union.

A prolific poet, novelist, essayist, and literary critic, **Krikor Beledian** is the pre-eminent writer of contemporary Western Armenian literature. He studied philosophy and esthetics at the Sorbonne, and is the author of more than forty volumes, which have been published in the Middle East, Europe, Armenia, and the United States. Beledian grew up in the Beirut neighborhood of Hayashen, which was home to the waves of refugees from the Armenian genocide. In his poetry, Beledian braids his native Western Armenian with non-Armenian poetic forms—mainly the mantra in *Mantras* (Yerevan, 2010) and the haiku in *Traces of Light* (Yerevan, 2021). Beledian’s haikus, while loyal most of the time to the metric requirements of the form, reveal another kind of disruption: the haiku, says Beledian in the Afterword to the volume, tries to “find a solid ground for the unstable situations of expulsion, immigration, if not exile.”

**D.A. Cooper** is a poet and translator from Houston, TX. He enjoys translating poetry from Italian as well as from other languages of the Italian peninsula. His translations from Milanese, Sicilian, and Venetian have been published in a variety of journals. His original poetry has recently appeared in *Forgotten Ground Regained*, *Modern Age*, and *Wayfare*, among others. He is an associate editor at *New Verse Review*.

**Dick Davis** is Professor Emeritus of Persian at Ohio State University. His publications include volumes of poetry and verse translation chosen as books of the year by *The Sunday Times* (UK) 1989; *The Daily Telegraph* (UK) 1989; *The Economist* (UK) 2002; *The Washington Post* 2010, and *The Times Literary Supplement* (UK) 2013 and 2018.

**Souleymane Diamanka** is a Senegalese poet who moved to Bordeaux in France as a child. His recent collections include *Habitant de nulle part, originaire de partout* (Seuil, 2021), *De la plume et de l'épée* (Seuil, 2023) and *50 sonnets pour mes 50 printemps* (Multikulti, 2025). With a background in slam poetry, his earliest work is also available as an album (*L'Hiver peul*, 2007).

**Yiannis Doukas** was born in Athens in 1981. He studied Greek Philology, Classics and Digital Humanities. He earned his Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Galway, where he worked on intertextuality in Late Greek Epic and its digital representation. So far he has published three books of poetry: *At Inner Borders* (Polis, 2011, Diavazo journal Debut Poetry Collection Award), *The Stendhal Syndrome* (Polis, 2013, G. Athanas Award of the Academy of Athens) and *thebes memphis* (Polis, 2020). He has also written the lyrics for two songs by Thanos Mikroutsikos, included on *In the Fog of the Times* (2017), his final album. His work has been featured in numerous anthologies, such as *Austerity Measures* (edited by Karen Van Dyck, Penguin, 2016), and has been translated into Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian and Spanish.

**Boris Dralyuk** is the author of *My Hollywood and Other Poems* (Paul Dry, 2022). An award-winning translator and critic, he teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Tulsa and is editor-in-chief of *Nimrod*.

**Virág Erdős** was born in Budapest in 1968. She writes poems, short stories and plays for both adults and children. Her recent poetry books include: *Hősöm* (My Hero) (2020), *Erdős Virág könnyei* (The Tears of Erdős Virág) (2022), *Eltérő tartalom* (Different Content) (2024), and *Kalocsa* (2025). As well as writing for the page, she often performs her work, often appearing for opposition causes as a fierce critic of the Orbán government. She has worked with and directed musicians performing her lyrics, and her poems and plays have been translated into various languages. She has won various prizes for her work.

Dominican-born **Rhina P. Espailat** has published twenty-four full-length books, four chapbooks, and two CDs comprising her own poetry, essays and short stories in both English and her native Spanish, as well as numerous translations, from and into both languages, of work by other authors. Her work appears in numerous journals, anthologies and websites, and has received many national and international awards. Among the authors whose work she has translated are Robert Frost, Richard Wilbur, Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay, as well as San Juan de la Cruz, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Miguel Hernández, Federico García Lorca, César Sánchez Beras, Juan Matos, Julia Alvarez, Jose Marmol, and many others from Europe, Latin America, English speaking authors, and the large and active Caribbean diaspora in the United States. Espailat is a founding member of the Fresh Meadows Poets, the Powow River Poets, the Melopoeia musical trio, and the musical quintet known as The Diminished Prophets, and has earned a great many national and international awards, including the T. S. Eliot and Richard Wilbur Awards, several from the Poetry Society of America, the New England Poetry Club, the Robert Frost Foundation, the Ministry of Culture of the Dominican Republic, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Salem State College.

**Shelley Fairweather-Vega** is a professional translator in Seattle specializing in new prose and poetry from Central Asia. She is the translator of several novels by Hamid Ismailov, including, most recently, *We Computers*; essays and short stories by Uzbek and Kazakhstani writers, including in the anthology *Amanat*; and in 2025, *Castigation* by Sultan Raev, her first translation from Kyrgyzstan.

**Khaledeh Forugh** is a native of Kabul. She has an MA in Persian Language and Literature from Kabul University and a PhD from the National University of Tajikistan in Doshanbeh. She was a member of the Department of Persian Studies at Kabul University, and has published numerous books of poetry, a novel, and a volume of literary criticism. She left Kabul after the Taliban seized power in 2021 and is currently based in Norway.

**Carla Galdo** is a poet and essayist from Virginia who has written for *Well-Read Mom*, *First Things*, *Word on Fire*, *Humanum*, *Verily*, *Modern Age*, and others. She earned an MTS from the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, and an MFA in poetry from UST-Houston. She lives in Virginia with her husband and six children. Her website is <https://carlagaldo.com/>.

**Maria Grech Ganado** (b.1943) was born and lives in Malta. She has won National Book Prizes for four of her eight poetry collections in Maltese or English, has been published in English in the USA, UK, Australia, and Cyprus, as well as in translation in 15 other languages. In 2005, she co-organised an international seminar (RE-VISIONS) with LAF (Literature Across Frontiers) and Inizjamed in Malta. She has been given awards by the State (including the first Poet Laureate award), the University of Malta, and her hometown, Floriana. Maria has three children and three grandchildren.

**Seiji Hakui** is a Japanese poet based in Tokyo. His poems and translations have appeared in *The Road Not Taken*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Asahi Shimbun*, and elsewhere. He is the author of two books of formal verse published in Japan.

**Hamid Ismailov**, born in Kyrgyzstan and raised in Uzbekistan, is considered Central Asia's foremost living author, with a career spanning poetry, translation, and journalism as well as creative fiction. His novel *We Computers* was a finalist for the National Book Award in Translated Literature in 2025.

**Vörös István**, born in 1964, is one of the most celebrated Hungarian poets of his generation. Along with ten collections of poems, he has also written essays, reviews and short stories. He has been awarded Hungarian and Czech prizes such as the Füst Milan Prize and recently Prague's Premia Bohemica for his translations of Czech writers, among them Miroslav Holub, Ivan Wernisch, Petr Borkovec and Vladimír Holan. His own work has been translated into several languages, including English, French, Italian, Slovenian, Slovak, Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian and Czech.

**Jacob Ngumbau Julius** is a poet and writer whose work explores identity, memory, and lived experience, drawing from Swahili and East African cultural traditions. He was winner of the Safal Cornell Kiswahili Prize in Poetry for his collection *Moto wa Kifuu* (Fire of the Coconut Shell). Beyond poetry, he has participated in multiple translation projects involving English film and television series into Swahili, with a focus on preserving meaning, rhythm, and emotional tone. He has also worked as a voice artist in brand advertisements. Alongside literary work, he currently works as an accounts professional at a financial institution in Nairobi, balancing creative practice with professional life.

**Rita Kogan** was born in 1976 in St. Petersburg, Russia and immigrated to Israel in 1990. She lives in Tel Aviv. “Demon” is from her third book of Hebrew verse, *Machalat yabashah* (Mal de terre, 2022). She has also published a collection of short stories as well as Hebrew translations of classic Russian poets including Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, and Pushkin.

**Krzysztof Kuczkowski** is a prolific Polish poet and essayist, born in Gniezno in 1955. He was the founder and long-time editor-in-chief of the Polish literary journal, *Topos*. He is the author of several dozen volumes of poetry, including his most recent collection, *Głosolalia*. He has received numerous literary awards in Poland, as well as prestigious national commendations for contribution to Polish culture and letters, and a biographical film about him and his work, *Kładka Krzysztofa Kuczkowskiego*, was produced in 2022, and can be accessed online.

**Mary Grace Mangano** is a poet, writer, and teacher. Her essays and reviews frequently appear in *Comment*, *Plough*, and *Literary Matters*, and her most recent poems have been published in *Subtropics*, *THINK*, and *Rust & Moth*, among other venues. Mary Grace is an associate editor at *New Verse Review*. She received a 2025 Individual Artist Finalist award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and lives in New Jersey.

**Christopher Millis**'s poetry has appeared widely in the United States and Europe. The recipient of awards from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Massachusetts Arts Council, his books include *Impossible Mirrors*, *Diary of the Delphic Oracle*, and his translations from the Italian of Umberto Saba's *The Dark of the Sun*, for which he received a Fulbright Grant. Millis's translations with Taline Voskeritchian have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *Words Without Borders*, *Wasafiri*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Common*, and *International Poetry Review*. The former art critic for *The Boston Phoenix*, he is the author of four Off Broadway productions, including the libretto for Jean Erdman's dance opera *The Shining House* and *Garbage Boy*, first produced in 2006 by the New York International Fringe Festival. He has taught at Boston University, New York University, and Fordham University.

**Victoria Moul** is a poet, critic and translator living in Paris. She writes about poetry and translation weekly on her substack *Horace & friends*. Her most recent publications are *A Literary History of Latin and English Poetry* (CUP, 2022) and *Poems Beautiful & Useful* (Headless Poet, 2026).

**Julia Nemirovskaya** is a Russophone poet and prose writer. Born in Moscow in 1962, she immigrated to the United States in 1990 and teaches Russian literature and culture at the University of Oregon. She has published three collections of poems—*Moia knizhechka* (My Little Book, 1998), *Vtoraia knizhechka* (Second Little Book, 2014), and *Slyshnee* (More Audible, 2021)—as well as the novel *Lis* (2017). English translations of her poems have appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *Exchanges*, *Asymptote*, and other journals.

**Aldo Nove** is a poet, novelist and playwright. He began writing novels and short stories, and later he dedicated himself to poetry. His fourth collection of poetry, *Addio mio Novecento* (2014) was awarded the Cesare Pavese Prize. His latest poetry collections are *Poemetti della sera* (2020) and *Sonetti del giorno di quarzo* (2022), both with Einaudi. He lives and works in Milan.

**Richard Prins** is a New Yorker who has lived, worked, studied and recorded music in Dar es Salaam. He is the author of the chapbook *We May Eat Fruit* (Ghostbird Press, 2025) and *Brain Flavour: A Lyric History of Swahili Hip Hop* (No University Press, 2026). His forthcoming Swahili translations include a collection of poems by Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy *We Are Still in the Fort* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2026), and Katama Mkangi's novel *They Are Us* (University of Georgia Press, 2027), which received a 2023 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant and 2024 National Endowment For the Arts Translation Fellowship. His work also appears in *The Best American Essays 2024*.

Born in Mashhad, **Fatemeh Shams** left Iran in 2006 and settled in England. Her work and political activism forced her to exile since 2009. After completing her B.A. at the University of Tehran, she studied first at the Agha Khan University in London, and then at Oxford, where she was awarded a PhD in Iranian Studies. She has published two collections of poetry in Persian, and two in English. In 2012, she received the Zhaleh Esfahani poetry award in London for the best young Iranian poet. A selection of her poems translated into English won the Latifeh Yarshater Book Award in 2016. Her poetry has been featured in *Poetry Magazine*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Penguin Book of Feminist Writing*, among others. She is currently Associate Professor of Modern Persian Literature at the University of Pennsylvania.

**A.E. Stallings** is a US-born poet, translator, and essayist living in Greece. She has published four volumes of verse, and a selected poems (*This Afterlife*, FSG), and three volumes of verse translation, most recently *The Battle Between the Frogs and the Mice* (Paul Dry Books). She has also recently published a book on poets and the marbles of the Parthenon, *Frieze Frame*. A Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow, she is currently serving a term as the Oxford Professor of Poetry.

Winner of many major prizes, **Anna T Szabó** (also known as Anna Szabó T., and in Hungary as Szabó T. Anna) is a poet, writer and translator. She was born in Transylvania (Romania) in 1972 and moved to Hungary in 1987 where she studied English and Hungarian literature at the University of Budapest. She has published eight volumes of poetry for adults and nine for children, written three books of short stories, twelve plays, and has received several literary prizes. She is an elected member of the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts (part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). She lives near Budapest with her husband the novelist György Dragomán and their two sons.

**George Szirtes** (born 29 November 1948) is a British poet and translator from the Hungarian language into English. Originally from Hungary, he has lived in the United Kingdom for most of his life after coming to the country as a refugee at the age of eight. He has won a variety of prizes for his work, most recently the 2004 T. S. Eliot Prize, for his collection *Reel*, and the Bess Hokin Prize in 2008 for poems in *Poetry* magazine. His translations from Hungarian poetry, fiction and drama have also won numerous awards. In 2025 he was awarded the King's Gold Medal for Poetry.

**Hiwot Tadesse** is a translator both from and into Ethiopian Amharic, based in Addis Ababa. Among her many published works is an Amharic version of Hama Tuma's BBC award-winning short stories, *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor*; Jordanos Seifu Estifanos' ethnographic travel journal *Wayfarers*, and Bedilu Wakjira's much-loved long poem *Awnet malet new, yene lij / Truth, my child* (included in *Songs We Learn from Trees*).

**Alemu Tebeje** is a British-Ethiopian poet, translator and social worker based in London. His collections include *Greetings to the People of Europe* (bilingual edition, Tamrat Books, 2018) and *Abba Silaserwat* (Addis Ababa, 2022), plus the first ever anthology of Ethiopian Amharic poetry in English, *Songs We Learn from Trees* (Carcenet, 2020), shortlisted for the Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry.

**Kebedech Tekleab** is a poet, painter, and sculptor. As a student, she was forced to flee Ethiopia in 1979 and walk through the Ogaden desert, where she was captured by Somali soldiers and held in a concentration camp for ten years. Eventually, she arrived in the USA, where she studied art at Howard University in Washington, DC, and then worked as a studio artist and college professor. In 2008, she moved to Georgia to teach at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Currently, she is a tenured associate professor of art at the City University of New York, Queensborough Community College, New York. She has had exhibitions at institutions such as the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC; the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Centre in Skokie, Illinois; Columbia University in New York; and the American University Museum, Washington, DC. She has published two collections of poetry in Amharic.

**Taline Voskeritchian** has published widely in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East; her prose and translations have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *Bookforum*, *The Daily Star/International Herald Tribune*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and other publications. Voskeritchian's translations with Christopher Millis have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *Words Without Borders*, *Wasafiri*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Common*, and *International Poetry Review*. She is a co-producer of Վահէ Օշական՝ Միջնաբաբ (Vahé Oshagan: Between Acts), an experimental documentary on the modernist Armenian poet Vahé Oshagan, to which she also contributed as translator. She has taught at Boston University, the Museum School of Boston, American University of Armenia, and conducted translation seminars in Palestinian universities with the Palestine Festival of Literature.

**Bedilu Wakjira** is a prominent Ethiopian poet, writer and academic whose work has been extremely influential in modern Amharic literature. He studied linguistics in Addis Ababa, did his PhD in Norway and is currently professor of language and literature at Addis Ababa University. He has published short stories, essays and three collections of poems, including *Fekat Nafeqiwoch* (Those who long for spring) and *Yetesfa Kitbat* (The Hope Vaccine). His YouTube channel is: <https://www.youtube.com/@BediluPoetry>.

**Michael Weingrad** is the author of *Eugene Nadelman: A Tale of the 1980s in Verse*. He translates contemporary writing from Israel, and co-edited a special issue in English translation of the Jerusalem poetry journal *Yehee*. A professor of Jewish literature, he recently completed a scholarly book about Jews and fantasy literature. He also writes at *Screen Splits*, a Substack on the history of divorce in American film.

**Ryosuke Yabuuchi** is a Japanese tanka poet and math teacher based in Kyoto. He is the author of two tanka collections, *Weathering of the Heart* (2024) and *The Sea Snake and the Coral* (2018). Since 2020, he has served as a judge for the Kadokawa Tanka Prize, of which he was the winner himself in 2012.