

Creative Translators



Photo: Kate Lo

Poetry and prose produced by translators who attended a creative writing workshop organised by the NWTN with Alison Layland and Ros Woolner at the Oppidan Social Centre, Manchester on 22 January 2022.

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An image paints a Thousand Words

Impossible combinations – word play

Colourless green ideas sleep furiously as vivid grey words squirm hollowly and harsh pink feelings wobble spikily.

Kirsty Olivant

Extended-metaphor word portraits

Ash Tree – Mum

Your seed was planted there, and as a sapling you grew close to your elders, barely noticed before you were two years old. You have branched out, but not too far, in viewing distance of your roots. Your short stature helps you keeping grounded and your wrinkled bark contrasts with the flexibility of your green eyes and the soft light brown fingers on your head.

Rustling or whistling depending on the wind, you bend easily, trying not to break.

The Sun shines through your aging wigs, your choices give you a curious shape, turned towards the light, but not venturing too far.

Laurence Bisot

Back in the saddle...

Back in the saddle after maternity leave, no longer with a well-oiled brain. A carbon copy announces an incoming job and I take the handlebars. The cogs start turning and I switch up a gear, aware of the looming deadline. Suddenly, an unknown term slams on my brakes and I search the hub of knowledge that is Internet but come to a fork in the road. This term or that term? I'm sure someone spoke of it last week. Which is it to be? I don't have much more time to ponder as the computer crashes and my heart accelerates as the finish line gets further away...

Kirsty Olivant

As Others See Us

Presenting a character who is unlike yourself

Garbage

The last time I saw her, we were outside M&S. I'd just dropped my empty coffee cup in the bin when she started laying into me again. To be honest, it's exhausting. Life's hard enough right now – do I really need to be stressing about a little bit of plastic? I mean, what difference did she think one cup would make anyway? I tried to make a joke of it, told her I couldn't carry one of those hippie refillable jobbies because I needed both hands free: one for my phone and one to slide round her waist. But she shook me off and did that thing where she's walking next to me but you can see the entire Pacific Ocean between us.

Ros Woolner

A Place in My Heart

Writing with a strong sense of place

Boyhood memories of Shropshire

In the 1970s, most families spent their Saturday afternoons shopping, gardening or playing/watching sport. My parents, however, loved peace and quiet, especially that to be found in the countryside, and often on a Saturday lunchtime, once all the chores were done, we would load a picnic into the car and head west into rural Shropshire, in my Dad's turquoise Austin A40 (one of the last off the production line, apparently...), with my Mum in the passenger seat, clutching a selection of Ordnance Survey maps and acting as his navigator.

The afternoon would usually start with a short visit to a sleepy country pub, with barely a handful of customers (how on earth did it make a living?), and we would then embark on an exploration of the narrow, hedge-lined country lanes that criss-cross that part of Shropshire. Somehow, my parents always seemed to be drawn back to the old railway track, long since abandoned, that led from Cleobury Mortimer to Ditton Priors (why do English villages always have such idyllic names?), along which military personnel had once conveyed trainloads of torpedoes to be stored deep underground, away from the threat of enemy bombing raids.

The military were long gone but had left signs at the roadside saying "No Trespassing / By Order of the Admiralty", which even my law-abiding parents ignored as we walked along the overgrown single-track railway, beside its rusty rails, in search of an inviting picnic place overlooking the sluggish river that flowed beside it. The sun always seemed to shine on such days, and for me at least, they were timeless and carefree, apart from the vital consideration of getting home by 5.25pm, in time to watch Batman. Surprisingly, my parents usually cooperated in this endeavour – even though American superheroes were definitely not "their thing" – and despite my father's sedate driving, we normally made it home in time for me to watch the Caped Crusader's latest daring adventure, gallantly supported by his ward, Dick Grayson, AKA "Robin". And the irony of rushing home from sleepy rural Shropshire to immerse myself in the urban perils of Gotham City was completely lost on me....

Mike Hanson

Grannie's house

Every time we left my Grannie's house to drive back to London, I would sob for the first half hour of the journey home. Even as a young child, I had a sense of Grannie being fragile, an unlikely survivor who was living on borrowed time. And I adored her, and I adored her high-ceilinged mock-Tudor house, which seemed to me an extension of her.

Waking up in the little yellow spare room was almost tangibly delicious. I loved the sumptuous duvet, the fresh flowers and paper cup set out on the sink. It was the very essence of thoughtful hospitality, something that made me think of the weekend hunting parties I had read about in novels, although I later understood my Grannie to have grown up in relative hardship on the West Coast of Scotland. I would timidly go into Grannie's room to be scooped up into her bed, where we would watch Superman on the telly, with the powdery smell of Anaïs Anaïs emanating from her dressing table.

Later, we would go down to the kitchen, whose cupboards were stuffed with pills, vitamins and Weight Watchers biscuits, and Grannie would produce an inhumanly large breakfast while her black Lab and King Charles spaniel snuffled around our feet. And from there the day would unfold in a series of delights – the unveiling of a bag of treats, magazines and presents, a walk with the dogs around the leafy streets of suburban Bristol, and best of all, time spent exploring the attic. Up the wide, sweeping stairs, following the trail of decorative plates, past the wedding photos of relatives looking impossibly young and beautiful, and into the treasure trove in the roof. Here I would lose myself among toys from my father's childhood, fading photographs, handwritten letters and the miscellaneous artefacts of family life in the mid-20th century. I was hungry for all of it – glimpses of the boy my father had been before I existed, holding history in my very hands. I was particularly fascinated by the schoolbooks my Grannie had kept from her teaching days, which made me feel like a tourist in another age.

I could have stayed up there forever, but after a while I would be called down, perhaps for another lavish meal only an hour after the last one – Grannie always eating only a tomato sandwich with copious amounts of salt – and I would sit and listen to her sardonic stories about her bridge partners and their failings, or her brother's refusal to order anything but an omelette from the Chinese takeaway, or her comically hellish holiday with her sister-in-law. While she spoke, she would sip an "illegal" whisky or gin, apparently banned by her heart doctor - though she once told me, somewhat unreliably, that she had never been drunk. And her wicked humour would escape its prim Scottish bonds as she made my mother and I gasp

and giggle with the naughtiness of it all. “Is that a pencil in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?” she once asked me when I was a schoolgirl of about 17.

Rebecca Lockhart-Morley

Lyme Regis

Here’s the end of the road but the beginning of the landscape;

I read about it, then saw it and knew it: I’m home.

The town’s sprawl up the hill doesn’t count; all ends here.

The curving beach, and then the curving Cobb coming

To meet the coast, but no, deciding for the sea;

Again pointing due East, tapering in the waves,

Timeless wall guarding the time keeping limestone cliffs.

Roman foundations can’t match dinosaurs’ history,

But as erosion reveals the old beasts remains,

The sinuous stone wall will survive in my mind.

Laurence Bisot

Elche

As the plane flies over on its descent into Alicante–Elche airport, I see the city of Elche sprawling below like an oasis with its more than 400,000 palm trees – two per inhabitant and declared World Heritage by Unesco – in the midst of the dry and dusty Valencian Community. Through the city centre snakes the Vinalopó ‘river’ – more of a stream than a river throughout the summer months but swelling to almost fill its brightly painted concrete bed when the torrential rains fall in autumn. The banks of the river are bustling with life as runners train for the city’s half marathon, a sporting event that few outsiders know originated here. The runners overtake people walking their dogs and are in turn dodged by cyclists heading for the nearby hills. In the city’s parks, children play as their parents sit at a café close by, sipping coffee or something stronger. Excited chatter can be heard as people emerge from their afternoon slumber, the siesta still being observed by many, particularly at weekends.

In summer, the city becomes a ghost town as residents flock to their second homes ten miles away on the coast, only returning for the festival in mid-August. A week of parades, music, drinking and dancing until the not-so-small hours, culminating in the *Alborada*, an hour-long fireworks display for which the city’s lights are turned off in time for the grand finale – the biggest firework of all in the form of a colossal palm tree. This is in honour of the Imperial Palm, which stands tall with its seven trunks in the city’s most frequented park. Nearby is a restaurant serving local dishes such as *arroz con costra* – a rice dish containing a variety of meats and topped with eggs, which tastes much nicer than it sounds. Tourists bask in the Mediterranean sunshine, sipping sangria on terraces and tasting tapas. Locals meet for lunch and then *tardeo* – the quite recent practice of partaking in the odd G & T mid-afternoon before heading to a nightclub (which should perhaps be renamed). It’s a great way to escape the searing heat as temperatures in summer can reach 43 degrees and the streets provide little shade.

Kirsty Olivant

The Music of Language

Adapting traditional poetic forms and making them your own

Clearances

Remember, love, the things we have today,
The joy that comes from living off the land:
The satisfaction wrought by our own hand,
A bond that makes us wish that we could stay.
But no, they've come to drive us all away.
Sometimes it seems that nothing goes as planned
We can't explain, but try to understand.
Fate gripped us, dragged us, took us for its prey,
Although we fought to stand our ground a while.
We'll look back on this day and quietly grieve,
Then curse the dark events that made us leave.
It hurts to think of all we might have had –
But think we must, allow a rueful smile.
The future calls – let's hope and not be sad.

Alison Layland

After "Remember me when I am gone away" by Christina Rossetti

Au fin fond d'une vallée

Au fin fond d'une vallée, tout au bout d'une forêt,
Un vieux chêne rabougri, à l'écorce racornie,
Attendait patiemment la fin de sa longue vie
Qu'il contemplait, serein, et sans aucun regret.

Le ruisseau qui, toujours, arrosait ses racines
Continuait son flot lent, ignorant même le temps,
Renouvelant sans siller son joyeux écoulement
Sans se préoccuper des rivières voisines ;

De ses enfants le chêne ne s'en souciait jamais,
Laisant à la nature le soin de leur croissance,
Ne vivant que pour lui et sa magnificence,
Pour sa propre grandeur et son seul intérêt.

Laurence Bisot

After "Au sommet d'une colline, au fin fond de l'Afrique" by Winston Perez

When I remember

When I remember how the money was spent
On journeys all around Europe, far and wide,
Turbulent flights between cities, a long train ride,
None of this haphazard spending do I resent,
Except perhaps for one bizarre time in Kent.
The people were friendly, it can't be denied,
But the awful weather left no place to hide.
Now I'm repaying the money I was lent,
Working hard to cover my everyday needs.
I do what I can, I do my very best,
Although a large proportion goes to the state –
Out of my account at an alarming speed.
Now I feel that it's time for a well-earned rest,
But the bank says otherwise – I'll have to wait.

Kirsty Olivant

After "When I consider how my light is spent" by John Milton

What You See...

Flash fiction or poetry inspired by a picture prompt

Spaced Out

When I imagined rowing to the moon
I pictured one small craft like those you find
on boating lakes, not twenty racing eights,
each with a cox to shout instructions through
a megaphone. *Square up!* ours yells. We pull
in sync, watch space drip off the blades like ink.

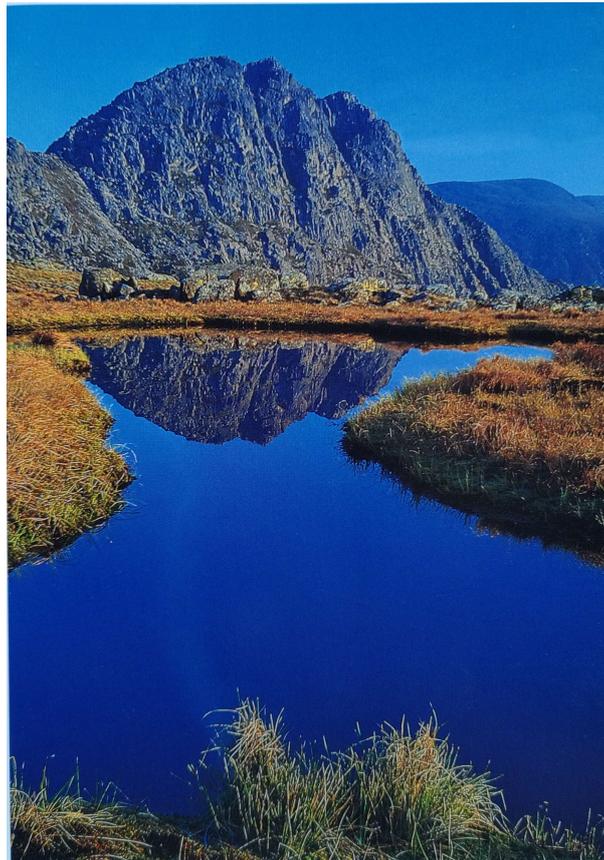
Starting from 'When I consider how my light is spent' (John Milton) and this picture postcard



Tryfan

The rugged mountain towers over the lake,
Its reflection so sharp it might even break
The surface of the water, midnight blue
And as cold as ice through and through.
A landscape for dreamers far and wide,
With plenty of places in which to hide
And escape from the troubles of every day,
Evade the loud noises and find their way,
Follow a path into their own mind
Where the dialogue heard is nothing but kind.

Kirsty Olivant



Tryfan and Llyn y Gaseg-Fraith by Dave Newbould

The pied yarnbomber

She loved knitting, the busy needles extensions of her hands. She loved cheering the neighbourhood with woollen garlands that appeared on railings and trees overnight. Her favourites, though, were the brightly coloured coats she'd knit in all shapes and sizes, then sit in wait on a bench, surprising random dog walkers with unexpected gifts.

Soon, people were coming from far and wide to see the town with the rainbow dogs. Donations of wool burst like stuffing from the postman's van.

She knitted more, and hung them on her garden fence, to be taken by the next morning as the motley pack grew.

The day she tucked her knitting needles away for good, she looked across the field and saw hundreds of hounds bounding away.

The time had come. Her best chunky-knit shawl flying behind her, she turned her face to the wind and ran with the pack.

Alison Layland



Very modern wolves (with tails) chasing very modern tales by Ruta Briede