

Wisława Szymborska

Chwila

các bản dịch tiếng Anh

1.

Moment

*I walk on the slope of a hill gone green.
Grass, little flowers in the grass,
as in a children's illustration.
The misty sky's already turning blue.
A view of other hills unfolds in silence.
As if there'd never been any Cambrians, Silurians,
rocks snarling at crags,
upturned abysses,
no nights in flames
and days in clouds of darkness.
As if plains hadn't pushed their way here
in malignant fevers,
icy shivers.
As if seas had seethed only elsewhere,
shredding the shores of the horizons.
It's nine-thirty local time.
Everything's in its place and in polite agreement.
In the valley a little brook cast as a little brook.
A path in the role of a path from always to ever.
Woods disguised as woods alive without end,
and above them birds in flight play birds in flight.
This moment reigns as far as the eye can reach.
One of those earthly moments
invited to linger.*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak.)

2.

Among The Multitudes

*I am who I am.
A coincidence no less unthinkable
than any other.
I could have different
ancestors, after all.
I could have fluttered
from another nest
or crawled bescaled
from another tree.
Nature's wardrobe
holds a fair supply of costumes:
spider, seagull, fieldmouse.
Each fits perfectly right off
and is dutifully worn
into shreds.
I didn't get a choice either,
but I can't complain.
I could have been someone
much less separate.
Someone from an anthill, shoal, or buzzing swarm,
an inch of landscape ruffled by the wind.
Someone much less fortunate,
bred for my fur
or Christmas dinner,
something swimming under a square of glass.
A tree rooted to the ground
as the fire draws near.
A grass blade trampled by a stampede
of incomprehensible events.
A shady type whose darkness
dazzled some.
What if I'd prompted only fear,
loathing,
or pity?*

*If I'd been born
in the wrong tribe
with all roads closed before me?
Fate has been kind
to me thus far.
I might never have been given
the memory of happy moments.
My yen for comparison
might have been taken away.
I might have been myself minus amazement,
that is,
someone completely different.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh)

3.

Clouds

*I'd have to be really quick
to describe clouds -
a split second's enough
for them to start being something else.*

*Their trademark:
they don't repeat a single
shape, shade, pose, arrangement.*

*Unburdened by memory of any kind,
they float easily over the facts.*

*What on earth could they bear witness to?
They scatter whenever something happens.*

*Compared to clouds,
life rests on solid ground,
practically permanent, almost eternal.*

*Next to clouds
even a stone seems like a brother,
someone you can trust,
while they're just distant, flighty cousins.*

*Let people exist if they want,
and then die, one after another:
clouds simply don't care
what they're up to
down there.*

*And so their haughty fleet
cruises smoothly over your whole life
and mine, still incomplete.*

*They aren't obliged to vanish when we're gone.
They don't have to be seen while sailing on.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh)

4.

Negative

*Against a grayish sky
a grayer cloud
rimmed black by the sun.*

*On the left, that is, the right,
a white cherry branch with black blossoms.*

*Light shadows on your dark face.
You'd just taken a seat at the table
and put your hands, gone gray, upon it.*

*You look like a ghost
who's trying to summon up the living.*

*(And since I still number among them,
I should appear to him and tap:
good night, that is, good morning,
farewell, that is, hello.*

*And not grudge questions to any of his answers
concerning life,
that storm before the calm).*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh)

Negative

*In the dun-colored sky
A cloud even more dun-colored
With the black outline of the sun.
To the left, that is, to the right
A white cherry branch with black flowers.
On your dark face, light shadows.
You have sat down at a small table
And laid your grayed hands on it.
You give the impression of a ghost
Who attempts to summon the living.
(Because I'm still counted among them,
I should appear and knock:
Good night, that is, good morning,
Farewell, that is, hello.
Not being stingy with questions to any answer
If they concern life,
That is, the storm before the calm.)*

(BD: Joanna Tizerciak.)

5.

Receiver

*I dream that i'm woken
by the telephone.
I dream the certainty
that someone dead is calling.
I dream that i reach
for the receiver.
Only the receiver's not how it used to be,
it's gotten heavy
as if had grabbed onto something,
grown into something,
and wrapped its roots around it.
I'd have to rip the whole Earth
out with it.
I dream my useless
struggles.
I dream the quiet,
since the ringing's stopped.
I dream i fall asleep
and wake up again.*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak.)

6.

The Three Oddest Words

*When I pronounce the word Future,
the first syllable already belongs to the past.*

*When I pronounce the word Silence,
I destroy it.*

*When I pronounce the word Nothing,
I make something no non-being can hold.*

(BD: S. Baranczak and C. Cavanagh.)

7.

The Silence of Plants

*Our one-sided acquaintance
grows quite nicely.
I know what a leaf, petal, ear, cone, stalk is,
what April and December do to you.
Although my curiosity is not reciprocal,
I specially stoop over some of you,
and crane my neck at others.
I've got a list of names for you:
maple, burdock, hepatica,
mistletoe, heath, juniper, forget-me-not,
but you have none for me.
We're traveling together.
But fellow passengers usually chat,
exchange remarks at least about the weather,
or about the stations rushing past.
We wouldn't lack for topics: we've got a lot in common.
The cast shadows based on the same laws.
We try to understand things, each in our own way,
and what we don't know brings us closer too.
I'll explain as best I can, just ask me:
what seeing with two eyes is like,
what my heart beats for,
and why my body isn't rooted down.
But how to answer unasked questions,
while being furthermore a being so totally
a nobody to you.
Undergrowth, coppices, meadows, rushes -
everything I tell you is a monologue,
and it's not you who listens.*

*Talking with you is essential and impossible.
Urgent in this hurried life
and postponed to never.*

(BD: Staislaw Barahczak and Clare Cavanagh.)

The Silence of Plants

*A one-sided relationship is developing quite well between you and me.
I know what a leaf, petal, kernel, cone, and stem are,
and I know what happens to you in April and December.*

*Though my curiosity is unrequited,
I gladly stoop for some of you,
and for others I crane my neck.*

*I have names for you:
maple, burdock, liverwort,
eather, juniper, mistletoe, and forget-me-not;
but you have none for me.*

*After all, we share a common journey.
When traveling together, it's normal to talk,
exchanging remarks, say, about the weather,
or about the stations flashing past.*

*We wouldn't run out of topics
for so much connects us.
The same star keeps us in reach.
We cast shadows according to the same laws.
Both of us at least try to know something,
each in our own way,
and even in what we don't know
there lies a resemblance.*

*Just ask and I will explain as best I can:
what it is to see through my eyes,
why my heart beats,
and how come my body is unrooted.*

*But how does someone answer questions
which have never been posed,
and when, on top of that
the one who would answer
is such an utter nobody to you?*

*Undergrowth, shrubbery,
meadows, and rushes...
everything I say to you is a monologue,
and it is not you who's listening.*

*A conversation with you is necessary
and impossible,
urgent in a hurried life
and postponed for never.*

(BD:Joanna Trezeciak.)

8.

Plato, or Why

*For unclear reasons
under unknown circumstances
Ideal Being ceased to be satisfied.
It could have gone on forever,
hewn from darkness, forged from light,
in its sleepy gardens above the world.
Why on earth did it start seeking thrills
in the bad company of matter?
What use could it have for imitators,
inept, ill-starred,
lacking all prospects for eternity?
Wisdom limping
with a thorn stuck in its heel?
Harmony derailed
by roiling waters?
Beauty
holding unappealing entrails
and Good —
why the shadow
when it didn't have one before?
There must have been some reason,
however slight,
but even the Naked Truth, busy ransacking
the earth's wardrobe,
won't betray it.
Not to mention, Plato, those appalling poets,
litter scattered by the breeze from under statues,
scraps from that Great Silence up on high...*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczac)

Plato, Or Why on Earth

*For reasons unclear,
and in circumstances unknown,
the Ideal ceased to be content with itself.
It could have gone on and on with no end,
carved away from darkness, chiseled out of light,
in its dreamy gardens above.
So why on Earth did it seek excitement
in the bad company of matter?
Why did it need enthusiasts
among the non-starters, born losers,
with no prospects for eternity?
Wisdom on crutches
with a thorn deep in its heel?
Harmony torn apart
by stormy waters?
Beauty
with aesthetically displeasing intestines
and Good
—why with a shadow
if it used to be without?
There had to be a reason,
inconsequential as it seemed,
but it won't be betrayed even by the Naked Truth,
busily sifting through
its earthly attire.
And to top it all off, Plato, those intolerable poets,
the gust-borne shavings off the monuments,
scraps of the grand highland Silence...*

(BD: Justyna Kostkowska.)

9.

A Little Girl Tugs At The Tablecloth

*She's been in this world for over a year,
and in this world not everything's been examined
and taken in hand.
The subject of today's investigation
is things that don't move themselves.
They need to be helped along,
shoved, shifted,
taken from their place and relocated.
They don't all want to go, e.g., the bookshelf,
the cupboard, the unyielding walls, the table.
But the tablecloth on the stubborn table
- when well-seized by its hems -
manifests a willingness to travel.
And the glasses, plates,
creamer, spoons, bowl,
are fairly shaking with desire.
It's fascinating,
what form of motion will they take,
once they're trembling on the brink:
will they roam across the ceiling?
fly around the lamp?
hop onto the windowsill and from there to a tree?
Mr. Newton still has no say in this.
Let him look down from the heavens and wave his hands.
This experiment must be completed.
And it will.*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak)

10.

A Memory

*We were chatting
and suddenly stopped short.
A lovely girl stepped onto the terrace,
so lovely,
too lovely
for us to enjoy our trip.
Basia shot her husband a stricken look.
Krystyna took Zbyszek's hand
reflexively.
I thought: I'll call you,
tell you, don't come just yet,
they're predicting rain for days.
Only Agnieszka, a widow,
met the lovely girl with a smile.
(BD: Stanislaw Barahczak and Clare Cavanagh.)*

11.

Puddles

I remember that childhood fear well.

I avoided puddles,

especially fresh ones, after showers.

*One of them might be bottomless, after all,
even though it looks just like the rest.*

I'll step and suddenly be swallowed whole,

I'll start rising downwards

then even deeper down

towards the reflected clouds

and maybe farther.

Then the puddle will dry up,

shut above me,

I'm trapped for good - where -

with a shout that never made it to the surface.

Understanding came only later:

Not all misadventures

fit within the world's laws

and even if they wanted to,

they couldn't happen.

First Love

*They say
the first love is the most important.
That's very romantic
but it's not the case with me.
There was something between us yet there wasn't.
It transpired and expired.
My hands don't tremble,
when I stumble upon small mementos
or a stack of letters wrapped in twine
—not even a ribbon.
Our only meeting after all these years
is a conversation between two chairs
at a cold table.
Other loves
still breathe deeply within me.
This one lacks the breath to sigh.
But still, just the way it is,
it can do what the rest are not yet able to do:
unremembered
not even dreamt of
it accustoms me to death.
(BD: Joanna Trzeciak.)*

First Love

*They say
the first love's most important.
That's very romantic,
but not my experience.
Something was and wasn't there between us,
something went on and went away.
My hands never tremble
when I stumble on silly keepsakes
and a sheaf of letters tied with string
— not even ribbon.
Our only meeting after years:
two chairs chatting
at a chilly table.
Other loves
still breathe deep inside me.
This one's too short of breath even to sigh.
Yet just exactly as it is,
it does what the others still can't manage:
unremembered,
not even seen in dreams,
it introduces me to death.*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak.)

13.

A Little on the Soul

*Periodically one has a soul.
Nobody has it all the time and forever.*

*Day after day, year after year
can pass without it.*

*Sometimes only in rapture
and in fears of childhood
it dwells within longer.
Sometimes only in the astonishment,
that we have become old.*

*It rarely assists us
in strenuous pursuits,
such as moving furniture,
carrying suitcases
or tromping through a road in tight shoes.*

*While filling in forms
and chopping meat
it usually takes the day off.*

*In a thousand of our conversations
it participates in one,
and not even necessarily in one,
preferring silence.*

*When our bodies start aching more and more,
it silently leaves the ward.*

*It's fussy:
it doesn't see us immediately in a crowd,
it sickens at our attempts at mere advantage
and the shrill clamor of business.*

*Joy and sorrow
are not all that different to it.*

*Only in the combination of them
does it stand up.*

*We can rely on it,
when we are certain of nothing,
and when everything seizes us.*

*Among all material objects
it likes best clocks with pendulums
and mirrors, which work fervently,
Even when nobody looks.*

*It doesn't say where it comes from
and when it will disappear next,
But it clearly awaits such questions.*

*It looks like,
as much as we need it,
also it
needs us for something too.*

(BD: Rick Hilles and Maja Jablonsk.)

A Few Words On The Soul

*We have a soul at times.
No one's got it non-stop,
for keeps.*

*Day after day,
year after year
may pass without it.*

*Sometimes
it will settle for awhile
only in childhood's fears and raptures.
Sometimes only in astonishment
that we are old.*

*It rarely lends a hand
in uphill tasks,
like moving furniture,
or lifting luggage,
or going miles in shoes that pinch.*

*It usually steps out
whenever meat needs chopping
or forms have to be filled.*

*For every thousand conversations
it participates in one,
if even that,
since it prefers silence.*

*Just when our body goes from ache to pain,
it slips off-duty.*

*It's picky:
it doesn't like seeing us in crowds,
our hustling for a dubious advantage
and creaky machinations make it sick.*

*Joy and sorrow
aren't two different feelings for it.
It attends us
only when the two are joined.*

*We can count on it
when we're sure of nothing
and curious about everything.*

*Among the material objects
it favors clocks with pendulums
and mirrors, which keep on working
even when no one is looking.*

*It won't say where it comes from
or when it's taking off again,
though it's clearly expecting such questions.*

*We need it
but apparently
it needs us
for some reason too.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.)

14.

Early Hour

*I'm still asleep,
but meanwhile facts are taking place.
The window grows white,
the darkneses turn gray,
the room works its way from hazy space,
pale, shaky stripes seek its support.
By turns, unhurried,
since this is a ceremony,
the planes of walls and ceiling dawn,
shapes separate,
one from the other,
left to right.
The distances between objects irradiate,
the first glints twitter
on the tumbler, the doorknob.
Whatever had been displaced yesterday,
had fallen to the floor,
been contained in picture frames,
is no longer simply happening, but is.
Only the details
have not yet entered the field of vision.
But look out, look out, look out,
all indicators point to returning colors
and even the smallest thing regains its own hue
along with a hint of shadow.
This rarely astounds me, but it should.
I usually wake up in the role of belated witness,
with the miracle already achieved,
the day defined
and dawning masterfully recast as morning.*

(BD: Clare Cavanagh và Stanislaw Bbaranczak.)

15.

In the park

- Hey! the little boy wonders,
who's that lady?
- It's a statue of Charity,
something like that,
his mother answers.
- But how come that lady's
so-o-o-o beat up?
- I don't know, she's always
been like that, I think.
The city should do something about it.
Get rid of it, fix it.
Well, don't dawdle , let's get going.

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak.)

16.

A word on statistics

*Out of every hundred people,
those who always know better:
fifty-two.*

*Unsure of every step:
almost all the rest.*

*Ready to help,
if it doesn't take long:
forty-nine.*

*Always good,
because they cannot be otherwise:
four -- well, maybe five.*

*Able to admire without envy:
eighteen.*

*Led to error
by youth (which passes):
sixty, plus or minus.*

*Those not to be messed with:
four-and-forty.*

*Living in constant fear
of someone or something:
seventy-seven.*

*Capable of happiness:
twenty-some-odd at most.*

*Harmless alone,
turning savage in crowds:
more than half, for sure.*

*Cruel
when forced by circumstances:
it's better not to know,
not even approximately.*

*Wise in hindsight:
not many more
than wise in foresight.*

Getting nothing out of life except things:

thirty
(though I would like to be wrong).
Balled up in pain
and without a flashlight in the dark:
eighty-three, sooner or later.
Those who are just:
quite a few, thirty-five.
But if it takes effort to understand:
three.
Worthy of empathy:
ninety-nine.
Mortal:
one hundred out of one hundred --
a figure that has never varied yet.

(*BD: Trzeciak, Joanna.*)

A Contribution to Statistics

*Out of a hundred people
those who always know better
— fifty-two
doubting every step
— nearly all the rest,
glad to lend a hand
if it doesn't take too long
— as high as forty-nine,
always good
because they can't be otherwise
— four, well maybe five,
able to admire without envy
— eighteen,
suffering illusions
induced by fleeting youth
— sixty, give or take a few,
not to be taken lightly
— forty and four,
living in constant fear
of someone or something
— seventy-seven,
capable of happiness
— twenty-something tops,
harmless singly, savage in crowds
— half at least,
cruel
when forced by circumstances
— better not to know
even ballpark figures,
wise after the fact
— just a couple more
than wise before it,
taking only things from life
— thirty
(I wish I were wrong),
hunched in pain,*

no flashlight in the dark
— eighty-three
sooner or later,
righteous
— thirty-five, which is a lot,
righteous
and understanding
— three,
worthy of compassion
— ninety-nine,
mortal
— a hundred out of a hundred.
Thus far this figure still remains unchanged.

(BD: Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak.)

17.

Some People

*Some people flee some other people.
In some country under a sun
and some clouds.
They abandon something like all they've got,
sown fields, some chickens, dogs,
mirrors in which fire now preens.
Their shoulders bear pitchers and bundles.
The emptier they get, the heavier they grow.
What happens quietly: someone's dropping from exhaustion.
What happens loudly: someone's bread is ripped away,
someone tries to shake a limp child back to life.
Always another wrong road ahead of them,
always another wrong bridge
across another oddly reddish river.
Around them, some gunshots, now nearer, now farther away,
above them a plane sort of circles.
Some invisibility would come in handy,
some grayish stoniness,
or, better yet, some nonexistence
for a shorter or a longer while.
Something else will happen, only where and what.
Someone will come at them, only when and who,
in how many shapes, with what intentions.
If he has a choice,
maybe he won't be the enemy
and will let them live some sort of life.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.)

Some People

*Some people fleeing some other people.
In some country under the sun
and some clouds.*

*They leave behind some of their everything,
sown fields, some chickens, dogs,*

mirrors in which fire now sees itself reflected.

*On their backs are pitchers and bundles,
the emptier, the heavier from one day to the next.*

*Taking place stealthily is somebody's stopping,
and in the commotion, somebody's bread somebody's snatching
and a dead child somebody's shaking.*

*In front of them some still not the right way,
nor the bridge that should be
over a river strangely rosy.
Around them, some gunfire, at times closer, at times farther off,
and, above, a plane circling somewhat.*

*Some invisibility would come in handy,
some grayish stoniness,
or even better, non-being
for a little or a long while.*

*Something else is yet to happen, only where and what?
Someone will head toward them, only when and who,
in how many shapes and with what intentions?
Given a choice,
maybe he will choose not to be the enemy and
leave them with some kind of life.*

(BD: Joanna Trzeciak.)

18.

Photograph from September 11

*They jumped from the burning floors —
one, two, a few more,
higher, lower.*

*The photograph halted them in life,
and now keeps them
above the earth toward the earth.*

*Each is still complete,
with a particular face
and blood well hidden.*

*There's enough time
for hair to come loose,
for keys and coins
to fall from pockets.*

*They're still within the air's reach,
within the compass of places
that have just now opened.*

*I can do only two things for them —
describe this flight
and not add a last line.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)

Return Baggage

*The cemetery plot for tiny graves.
 We, the long-lived, pass by furtively,
 like wealthy people passing slums.
 Here lie little Zosia, Jacek, Dominik,
 prematurely stripped of the sun, the moon,
 the clouds, the turning seasons.
 They didn't stash much in their return bags.
 Some scraps of sights
 that scarcely count as plural.
 A fistful of air with a butterfly flitting.
 A spoonful of bitter knowledge — the taste of medicine.
 Small-scale naughtiness,
 granted, some of it fatal.
 Gaily chasing the ball across the road.
 The happiness of skating on thin ice.
 This one here, that one down there, those on the end:
 before they grew to reach a doorknob,
 break a watch,
 smash their first windowpane.
 Malgorzata, four years old,
 two of them spent staring at the ceiling.
 Rafalek, missed his fifth birthday by a month,
 and Zuzia missed Christmas,
 when misty breath turns to frost.
 And what can you say about one day of life,
 a minute, a second:
 darkness, a light bulb's flash, then dark again?
 KOSMOS MAKROS
 CHRONOS PARADOKSOS:
 Only stony Greek has words for that.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)

The Ball

*As long as nothing can be known for sure
 (no signals have been picked up yet),
 as long as Earth is still unlike
 the nearer and more distant planets,
 as long as there's neither hide nor hair
 of other grasses graced by other winds,
 of other treetops bearing other crowns,
 other animals as well-grounded as our own,
 as long as only the local echo
 has been known to speak in syllables,
 as long as we still haven't heard word
 of better or worse mozarts,
 platos, edisons somewhere,
 as long as our inhuman crimes
 are still committed only between humans,
 as long as our kindness
 is still incomparable,
 peerless even in its imperfection,
 as long as our heads packed with illusions
 still pass for the only heads so packed,
 as long as the roofs of our mouths alone
 still raise voices to high heavens—
 let's act like very special guests of honor
 at the district-firemen's ball
 dance to the beat of the local oompah band,
 and pretend that it's the ball
 to end all balls.
 I can't speak for others—
 for me this is
 misery and happiness enough:
 just this sleepy backwater
 where even the stars have time to burn
 while winking at us
 unintentionally.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)

21.

A Note

*Life — the only way
to grow leaves,
catch a breath on the sand,
rise on wings;*

*to be a dog,
or to stroke a dog's warm fur;*

*to tell pain
from everything that is not pain;*

*to inhabit events,
get lost in the sights,
look for the smallest among mistakes.*

*An exceptional chance
to remember for a while,
what was discussed
when the lights were out;*

*and to trip over a stone
at least once,
get drenched in some rain,
lose keys in the grass;*

and let the eyes follow a spark in the wind;

*and perpetually not to know
something important.*

(BD: The Polish by Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka.)

A Note

*Life is the only way
to get covered in leaves,
catch your breath on the sand,
rise on wings;*

*to be a dog,
or stroke its warm fur;*

*to tell pain
from everything it's not;*

*to squeeze inside events,
dawdle in views,
to seek the least of all possible mistakes.*

*An extraordinary chance
to remember for a moment
a conversation held
with the lamp switched off;*

*and if only once
to stumble upon a stone,
end up soaked in one downpour or another,*

*mislaid your keys in the grass;
and to follow a spark on the wind with your eyes;
and to keep on not knowing
something important."*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)

List

*I've made a list of questions
to which I no longer expect answers,
since it's either too early for them,
or I won't have time to understand.
The list of questions is long,
and takes up matters great and small,
but I don't want to bore you,
and will just divulge a few:
What was real
and what scarcely seemed to be
in this auditorium,
stellar and substellar,
requiring tickets both to get in
and get out;
What about the whole living world,
which I won't succeed
in comparing with a different living world;
What will the papers
write about tomorrow;
When will wars cease,
and what will take their place;
Whose third finger now wears
the ring
stolen from me — lost;
Where's the place of free will,
which manages to be and not to be
simultaneously;
What about those dozens of people —
did we really know each other;
What was M. trying to tell me
when she could no longer speak;
Why did I take bad things
for good ones
and what would it take*

*to keep from doing it again?
There are certain questions
I jotted down just before sleep.
On waking
I couldn't make them out.
Sometimes I suspect
that this is a genuine code,
but that question, too,
will abandon me one day.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)

Everything

*Everything --
a smug and bumptious word.
It should be written in quotes.
It pretends to miss nothing,
to gather, hold, contain, and have.
While all the while it's just
a shred of gale.*

(BD: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanaugh.)
