

They Won't Catch Any Prey Here:
Poems by Hryts'ko Chubay and Kateryna Babkina
Translated from Ukrainian by Oksana Rosenblum



Another NTM premiere: a gorgeous selection of poems from two beloved Ukrainian poets, Hryts'ko Chubay and Kateryna Babkina, translated by the accomplished Oksana Rosenblum. Hryts'ko Chubay is practically unknown to the Western reader, while Kateryna Babkina is a young poet who is already known in the West, especially in Europe. These tremendous poems in two very different voices grab the reader and don't let go. We are so happy they found their way to NTM, and we're so excited to share them with you.

We'd love to hear what you think! Find us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](#), tag us using #NTM2018 and #TranslateMonth2018, join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. And celebrate your favorite translations from all over the world this September and beyond.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Translator's Note

Ukrainian poetry has been experiencing an upheaval during the last ten years, in part due to the sad political events taking place in the country and the region. A number of powerful voices of poets working across a variety of styles and genres emerged time and again, including those of Serhiy Zhadan, Marianna Kiyanovska, Kateryna Kalytko, and more.

Hryts'ko Chubay is practically unknown to the Western reader. Yet his poetry has imparted a strong influence on Ukrainian avant-garde tradition. The poem *Speak, Be Silent, and Speak Again* has not been previously translated into English. It is an emotionally-charged piece that juxtaposes the nature with the psychiatric experiences Chubay was forcefully subjected to within the punitive system of the former Soviet Union.

Kateryna Babkina is a young poet who is already known in the West, especially in Europe. Her delicate poems combine a sense of enjoyment of the transitory moments with the gravity and complexity of Ukrainian struggles for a better future. The two poems that I selected have not been translated before.

— *Oksana Rosenblum, translator*

Hryts'ko Chubay

From the collection *Speak, Be Silent, and Speak Again, 1975*

I have been silent too long

you know how difficult it was for me in the dusk
 searching for decent words with my humid lips
 when around me – bad names of the rivers
 (and once they were so good!)
 which slow down their rhythm in unison with the hospital's rhythm

 and clouds reflected in the rivers' depth today at dusk –
 like experienced psychiatrists
 dressed in white

 through the river's corridors
 they sail off into darkness
 while chatting in Latin

splashes of fish and diagnoses

bitter poems

bitter color of roses

the names of medications

that make us so calm

among the embittered trees – among the acacia

when their black seed will resonantly spring out

from the ginger pods

and like a flock of frightened birds

it will fly high over us

to painfully hurt the defenseless moon

the names of medications

that will help us tonight

to patiently listen to the dying screams of the moon

they will help us to see poetry

even in the moon's painful writhing

in its laborious wheezing

- stop them

halt

I am dying for real

in my prime high above the slow river

today I am no longer able to shed light on the faces

of those who kill me while making jokes

who are they?

where does this greed

for bloody entertainment come from?

try to move them somehow

bring them *La Gioconda*

in a bullet-proof box

or craft a tin moon for them –

let them aim at it as much as they want

every Sunday

with their entire families

everything becomes genuine right before autumn

everything becomes obvious right before autumn

when again from the depth

from under the roots of the old and incredibly welcoming acacias

a bulldozer shovels Pythagoras's bones

and again as each year at this time

troubled parents bend over

his smiling skull

and then rush to take their children by the hand

and bring them to school

to make them learn the Geometry of Kindness the fastest possible way

despite the fact that every parent knows

that Geometry of Evil and Good has the same rules

and the quiet and hoarse voice

of the old teacher whose clothing is soiled with chalk
is muffled every autumn by
the humongous wind orchestra of
yellow and red leaves
now the gentle boys who play hooky
entertain themselves while drawing a moon circle
whose face is pale from anger
with a compass on the asphalt

then they take a ruler – and the cold winds
blow straight from east to the west
and the boys can see how the fragile girl's soul
is flying away with the wind – their classmate's soul
which has been diligently doing her homework under the dim light
of owls' eyes
among the broken desks and woven baskets
for forty days after her death

but today the wind above the town's roofs
blows her west together with the pages
torn from her geometry textbook
together with the helicopter seeds of an ash-tree
down there where young children are running
making faces and spitting out curses
trying to aim a stone
exactly at the figure that floats in the air

the wind blows her away further and further –
this gentle emigrant from the republic of young body
so that high in the sky she can

swim competing with the planes
together with the moon's soul gentle as hers
that soul left the kingdom of her body spotted with blackness
she left it for good
the body will diligently mirror the echo
of our nocturnal chatter
so at times it will seem to you
that the moon is alive –
perhaps a little bit more silent
and that everything between you has been like this for a long time –
that nobody dies or suffered and did not conceal one's spite –

especially since our poets
have ever the same cheerful and cheeky voices:
- here it is - our moon –
looking like the yellow face of Mao Zedong
at the moment when in front of him on warm spring nights
the trees open their green leaves
like *hóngweibīngs* - their phrase books!

- here it is – our most contemporary moon –
round pornographic photo
of a group sex scene

I have been silent too long
you know however
how hard it was for me to stay in the dusk
searching for the decent words with my humid lips
when the trail of the dead moon is glittering
upon the slow river
like a gun with the last bullet in a shaking hand

when the clouds reflected in the river's depth right before the morning
are experienced psychiatrists
dressed in white

through the river's corridor
they slowly sail out of darkness
talking in Latin

splashes of fish and diagnoses

spiteful swishing noise of the hungry birds' wings

names of medications
which will help us who lack any contact with women
to gently stroke the crests of the midnight rats
will help to never trust
the deceitful words about love –

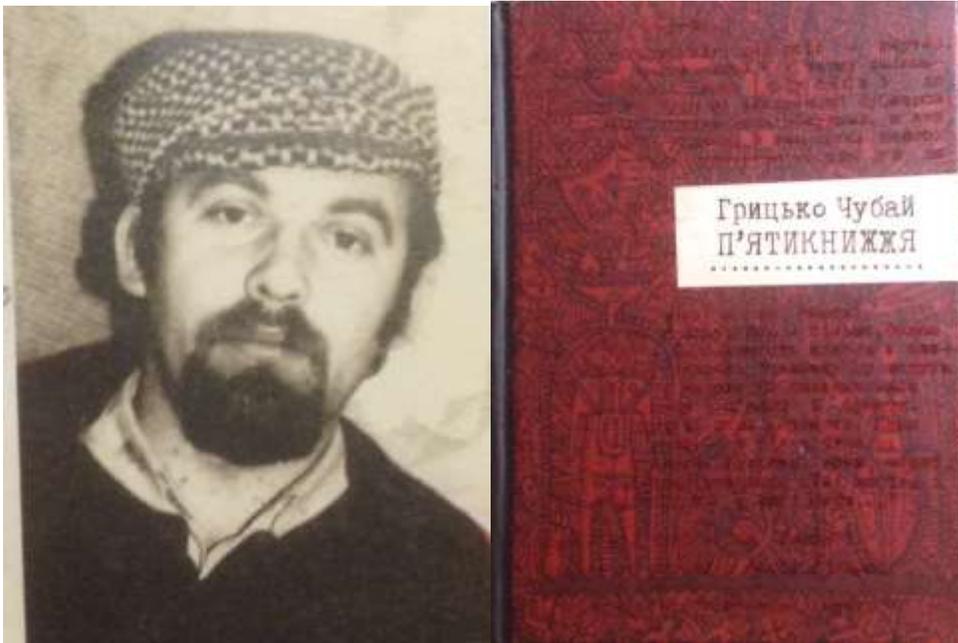
so as not to be fooled among the naked trees
so as not to allow oneself to be undressed among the naked trees
and even in the warmest season always hope that You
Or you or you or you or you
having leafed through the yellowed albums of your old hopes
you won't forgive us the fact
that we have not become like you
and you will send time and again the fussy paparazzi
to chase us
they will awkwardly run uphill in their camouflage
tripping on stumps

they will surround us in the evening
among the riverside willows

- smile at us, moon!
- smile at us as before!

- let it happen that this time as well
they won't catch any prey here

About the author



Hryts'ko Chubay (1949-1982) was a Ukrainian poet and translator, one of the leaders of the Lviv underground avant-garde movement in the 1970s, and a rare example of avant-garde free verse poetry in Ukrainian literature. His posthumous poetry collections include *Speak, Be Silent, and Speak Again* (Hovoryty, movchaty, i hovoryty znovu; 1990), *Jeremiah's Lament* (Plach Ieremii; 1999), and *The Pentateuch* (Pyatyknyzhzhia; 2015).

Kateryna Babkina

From the collection *Pain-killers and Sleeping Pills*, 2014

Everything good tends to be over in the blink of an eye -
You just squeeze it in your palms for a moment, no time to give it a name -
And already August comes, like a heavy butterfly
It throws itself against the glass all the same,
Quivering on a sturdy hook, a silver fish
That does not hurry to fulfil one's wish.
Blue jewelry box hides so many miracles about this summer,
But we have not unveiled those yet, have not unpacked on time.
Warm sweaters at night, and cold big flowers,
Ripe apples, and those hours
When one does not feel like talking, or perhaps still does
But it is unclear why or what it means to us.
Those who stayed in this summer, take their leave quietly, like shadows;
They walk through blasted fields, ruined cities.
Whirlpools behind them sparkle in the air, like glitter.
They disappear in those sprinkles, and we learn
To live and breathe right here, accepting this is happening with us for real.
Just a few days left for sheer nonsense –
Sticky water-melon juice and tears, planes and highways leading south.
What will happen to us after is really not that important,
Since the students are ready with their warm long skirts,
And the heaters are being installed on the terraces of restaurants.

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She dreams of whales and small northern birds,
Shiny railway tracks and someone else's backpacks;
Ripe clementines with their Mediterranean roundness,
Scattered among the night leaves;
And of all her lovers who so unluckily gathered
In one place.
She longs for wineglasses, dresses, and funny events,
White yachts sliding on the water, striking returns,
Blue melancholic rainfalls, songs, and ocean tides,
And also, for someone to protect her at all times
From the negative and uncertain effects.
Let her shine on you as no one ever could,
When she is getting a light or hails a taxi,
When she accidentally drops her change and the keys,
And drives you mad by ignoring your calls at night.
Let your heart jump out of your chest
From knowing all her troubles, hopes, and pains.
Or perhaps, when you see the angle of her head,
Or smell the freshness of the grass field ahead.
Let her travel in your stream of blood,
Under your tongue, in your head, in your lungs.
Whether you die or disappear, stay right where you are,
Until everything that is certain – promises, distances, snowy dusks,
Remains in-between.

About the author



Kateryna Babkina (born 1985) is the author of four poetry collections, including *Mustard* (Hirchytsia, 2011), *Pain-killers and Sleeping Pills* (Znebolivul'e ta snodyne; 2014), and *Conjuration for Love* (Zahovoreno na liubov; 2017), a novel *Sonia* (Sonia, 2013), and a collection of stories *Happy Naked People* (Shchaslyvi holi liudy; 2016). Her work has been translated into English, Swedish, Polish, German, French, Spanish, Romanian, Russian, and published in *Esquire Ukraine*, *Le Monde*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Kenyon Review* (USA), and a German-Polish magazine *Radar*.

About the translator

Oksana Rosenblum, comes from a diverse background that includes research for arts and history projects, grant writing, and ethnic music. Born and raised in Ukraine, Oksana grew up reading Ukrainian poetry. She studied Cultural Anthropology at the University of “Kyiv-Mohyla



Academy”, Jewish studies at the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, and Jewish Visual Art at the Jewish Theological Seminary in NYC. Since 2005, she has been working as a visual researcher in the field of Jewish art and history. Her projects included visual research for the newly created museums of Jewish History in Warsaw and Moscow. Oksana’s poetry translations from Ukrainian into English have been published by *Kalyna Language Press* and *The Wagon Magazine*. More info at

<https://2arudra.wixsite.com/oksanarosenblum>.