

# HARRIMAN INSTITUTE TRANSLATION CONTEST

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## TWO POEMS BY MARIA STEPANOVA


A black and white portrait of Maria Stepanova. She has dark, curly hair and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her hands are resting on her cheeks, with fingers spread. She is wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored top. Several rings are visible on her fingers. The background is dark and out of focus.

Photo by Andrey  
Natotsinsky.

**T**he Harriman Institute held its first Translation Contest to celebrate the Harriman residency of Maria Stepanova in Spring 2022. The 48 entries were judged by Ainsley Morse (Dartmouth College), Matvei Yankelevich (World Poetry Books), and Ronald Meyer (Columbia University). Contestants were given the choice of two poems from Stepanova's *Holy Winter* (2021). The judges awarded first prize for the best translation of each poem; namely: (A) Я просыпаюсь на белом, пустом и белом; and (другая A) Огни гаснут, наши девочки расходятся по палаткам.

Nareg Seferian (Virginia Tech) and Alexander Droznin (Harvard University) were awarded first prize.

### Nareg Seferian

*Virginia Tech*

*School of Public and International Affairs*

I get up on the white – empty and white – island, the bed you left me in.  
And I get it – you left me. And I get it – I am myself the island.

Whoever said no man is an island was not left alone in an empty bed,  
Where white linen marks winter, falling in between the lines,  
Where there is simply white between you and me –  
    tracks of invisible gaps running underneath,  
    boulevards with no one strolling about,  
    empty parks,

And where there is no linen uniting us together,  
    nor silken threads to hold on to,  
    nor shots of words gently passing between us.

Whoever is wrapped up in his own skin and whoever else has run  
away from confinement

    – not desiring to be a part  
        of the archipelago  
        of the federal republic  
            seizing the embrace  
                of the zone  
                of territorial union –

they bare their island nature like something to be ashamed of.  
I see the cliffs on their coast.

The god of love pierced me with his stake,  
The god of dreams did not hold on to me in his cradle.  
Coming to the rescue – the god of alcohol,  
Hugging from the inside, tilling his vineyard.

### Alexander Droznin

*Harvard University*

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures*

Lights out, our girls part ways to their tents,  
Clean the weapons, check the ammo,  
All as it should be. You ask me how I am —  
I am fine, ready for battle.  
What's the point in crying: over spilled milk,  
A pierced shield, a life suspended  
Like a plush monkey on a string  
Bouncing up and down and back and forth.  
Your place is empty, dark; your sleeping bag  
Folded, gathering dust, like you were never there.  
You say that soldiers also weep —  
Like that one in Asia Minor who wept for his boy  
Who went alone to spy on Greek ships  
And came back with his head cut off?  
You ask me how I am? I have forgotten about you.  
I don't bother asking how you are — a young husband, a young son,  
A new country, a new passport, a new war,  
Past experience in a war zone,  
Snipers firing on your past friends.  
As a young girl, you seemed awkward to me.  
Now both those girls have other troubles.  
Faster than it takes to assemble and disassemble a rifle,  
The memory of me will gather and disperse  
Under your severed right breast  
Tomorrow morning, when we take our positions  
And you will earn your posthumous medal.  
And I will enter into our posthumous immortality. ■