



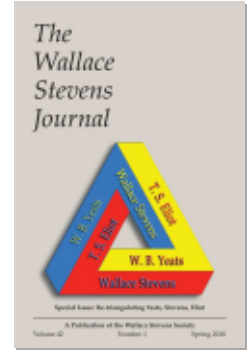
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Bir Karakuşa Bakmanın On Üç Yolu by Wallace Stevens
(review)

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Reviews

Bir Karakuşa Bakmanın On Üç Yolu.

By Wallace Stevens. Translated into Turkish by Gökçenur Çelebioğlu. Istanbul: Yitik Ülke, 2017.

Taking its title from “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” Gökçenur Çelebioğlu’s *Bir Karakuşa Bakmanın On Üç Yolu* is the most comprehensive Turkish translation of Wallace Stevens to date. Compared to previous translations, the book features a rich selection from the early, middle, and late poetry—from *Harmonium* to *Opus Posthumous*. It also presents first-ever translations of major poems such as “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” and “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” together with shorter and sometimes less canonical poems from *Ideas of Order*, *Parts of a World*, *Transport to Summer*, *The Auroras of Autumn*, and *The Rock*. The demanding task of covering such a large body of work, combined with the linguistic distance between Turkish and English, adds to the already substantial challenge of translating a poet as difficult as Stevens. *Bir Karakuşa Bakmanın On Üç Yolu* represents a well-balanced attempt to adopt Stevens’s poetic idiom to Turkish while retaining some sense of the foreignness and at times the strangeness of his original verse.

A poet himself, Çelebioğlu joins a line of Turkish poet-translators who have engaged with Stevens’s aesthetic abstraction and poetic thought since 1956, when the first translations of individual poems—part VII of “Sunday Morning” (“Yaz Sabahlarından Birinde”) and “A Postcard from the Volcano” (“Dünyaya Bir Posta Kartı Geldi”)—appeared in the anthology *Çağdaş Amerikan Şiirleri* (*Contemporary American Poems*) by Özdemir Nutku and Tarık Durmuş K. In heavily paraphrasing and rewriting the originals, however, these earliest attempts radically departed from the actual sense of Stevens’s work. It was in the 1960s, a period that marked a turn toward abstraction in Turkish poetry, that more accomplished translations were produced. In 1965, one of the major figures of the avant-garde “Garip” and “İkinci Yeni” poetry movements, Melih Cevdet Anday, translated several poems, including “Gubbinal” (“Acaip Cicek”) and “The Reader” (“Okur”), for *Yeni Ufuklar*, an influential literary magazine of the period. A year later, Cevat Çapan, a prominent translator of English and Greek poetry, translated another set of poems, including “Re-statement of Romance” (“Yeniden Aşk Demek”) and “God Is Good. It Is a Beautiful Night” (“Tanrı İyi. Güzel Bir Gece”), in his anthology of world poetry, *Çin’den Peru’ya* (*From China to Peru*), in which Stevens was placed alongside such figures as W. B. Yeats and Federico García Lorca. But it was not until the publication in 1970 of Talat Sait Halman’s *Wallace Stevens: Şiirler* (*Wallace Stevens: Poems*) that readers could get a broader sense of Stevens in Turkish. Poet-critic, translator, and coincidentally the first Culture Minister of Turkey, Halman brought together forty poems, including “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” “Poetry Is a Destructive Force,” and “Of Mere Being,” most

of which had been published in established literary magazines such as *Varlık* and *Türk Dili*. Nearly three decades later, in 1997, Aslı Biçen's first translation of *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (*Mavi Gitarlı Adam*) was published by the (now defunct) press *Iyi Şeyler*. More recently, the celebrated poet Ülkü Tamer's translations of Stevens's poems, among them "Variations on a Summer Day" ("Bir Yaz Günü Üstüne Çeşitlemeler") and "Hieroglyphica" ("Hiyeroglif"), came out in two small magazines, *Geceyazısı* and *Mavi Yeşil*.

Owing to its generous selection and its inclusion of long poems, Çelebioğlu's book fills a substantial gap in existing Turkish translations of Stevens, though some significant poems such as "Anecdote of the Jar," "The Comedian as the Letter C," and "Esthétique du Mal" remain to be translated. Because a number of poems included in the volume have been translated previously—there are now, for instance, three Turkish versions of "Vacancy in the Park"—we can see how successfully Çelebioğlu handles the difficulties of translating Stevens. Take the ambiguous use of pronouns and similes, which dominates that poem's semantic structure:

It is like a boat that has pulled away
From a shore at night and disappeared.

It is like a guitar left on a table
By a woman, who has forgotten it.

It is like the feeling of a man
Come back to see a certain house.

(CPP 434)

In the repeated lines "It is like . . ." the pronoun has no clear antecedent; "it" might be alternatively referring to "March" evoked in the beginning of the poem, to the "disappeared" object of line two, or perhaps to the "Vacancy" of the title itself. Indeed, in the earliest Turkish translation, Anday not only replaced the vague pronoun "It" with "March" but also de-emphasized the rhetorical effect of the simile by removing it from stanzas two and three. Conversely, the latest version of the poem reflects a greater awareness of Stevens's strategic use of figurative language; the imagery in Turkish is built upon the translation of the simile with the introduction of "gibi" (like) at the end of each line:

Gece, kıyıda sürüklenmiş
Ve kaybolmuş bir sandal gibi.

Bir kadının masanın
Üstünde unutup gittiği gitarı gibi.

Çocukluğunun geçtiği evi görmek için
Geri dönen bir adamın hissettikleri gibi.
(298)

Significantly, Çelebioğlu's translation also indicates an attempt to preserve the ambiguity entailed by Stevens's rhetoric, which he accomplishes by incorporating the pronoun "It" as an absent referent within the linguistic structure of his Turkish version, thereby allowing the reader to decide what "It" refers to. The choice is important, since, as several critics have pointed out, the absent referent evoked in "Vacancy in the Park" accords with the famous "the nothing that is" of "The Snow Man" (CPP 8)—also featured in this volume—marking the thematic and conceptual continuities between Stevens's early and late poetry.

The emphasis on linguistic detail brings me to the issue of lexical choices, generally handled with care throughout the collection. Take, for instance, the phrase "watery syllable" from the first section of "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" (CPP 10), translated as "ıslak seslem" (49). Whereas a predictable choice for the translation of "syllable" would be "hece," the translator opts for "seslem," which, apart from meaning "syllable," is also a musical term referring to harmonic intonation—a choice that anticipates the "choirs of wind" and "choirs of welcome" in the poem's second section (CPP 11). A similar attention to diction applies to other poems, such as "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," where Stevens's style and imagery are impressively channeled into Turkish, and culturally specific references are supported with footnotes where necessary. In other cases, however, lexical choices result in semantic alterations that call for brief reflection. For example, in Çelebioğlu's version of sections I and II from "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," both "difficulty" and "ennui" (CPP 330) are translated as "sıkıntı" (170–71), a choice that does not account for the semantic difference between the two words: perhaps "güçlük" or "zorluk" would have more clearly differentiated "difficulty" from "ennui." Another example in which interpretive choices have a puzzling effect is the translation of the title "Large Red Man Reading" ("Dev Kızılderili Okuyor"): here, "Red Man" appears as "Kızılderili" (Native American), a cultural identity not specified or seemingly implied in the original. But perhaps the most glaring problem of the volume is that a number of poems (i.e., "Variations on a Summer Day" and "Things of August") have been translated only partially with no explanation accounting for the incomplete versions.

A demanding aspect of English-Turkish translations derives from the radically different structure of Turkish with respect to word order and syntax. Turkish is a verb-final language; its regular sentence order (SOV) is highly dissimilar to that of English. This typological distance between the two languages poses a great challenge to the translator, especially in the case of Stevens's poetic language with its frequent use of enjambments and continuous lines often pointing to a lack of closure. This characteristic of Stevens's verse is most apparent in long poems like "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" and "Sunday Morning." In order to adapt Stevens's lines to Turkish, the translator needs to flip the initial word order, which in turn makes it hard to convey the original sequence in which the images and metaphors are introduced. To address this, Çelebioğlu makes creative use of inverted sentence structures (see, for instance, section XI of "An Ordinary Evening"), and sometimes cuts run-on sentences to maintain Stevens's original sequence.

As for the musicality of words, throughout the volume we find a sensitive treatment of Stevens's concern with lyrical form, which manifests itself most visibly in the case of "The Man with the Blue Guitar." While it is nearly impossible to capture the poem's iambic rhythm in its entirety in Turkish, Çelebioğlu manages to keep line lengths as close as possible to the originals. He also keeps most of the rhymes, and inserts additional ones to compensate for those he glosses over, as in "eğildi" / "göverdi" of the very first couplet (95). The use of inverted sentences also enables the translator to preserve some of the rhymes—for instance, in section IV of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," where the translation of the rhyme "are" / "guitar" (CPP 136) as "olanlar" / "gitar" (98) comes close to capturing the interplay between "things as they are" (reality) and "the blue guitar" (the instrument of poetic imagination). On other occasions, however, the change of rhyming patterns fails to register the link between the "blue guitar" and "things as they are" (see, for instance, sections I, VI, and XXVIII). Notably, here the translation of Stevens's dialogue between the poet-speaker and the audience is skillfully integrated into the Turkish text with the adaptation of the "dedi" / "dediler" (s/he said / they said) pattern—a folk form characteristic of Anatolian "müracâ'a poetry." It is precisely with respect to such aesthetic features that Çelebioğlu's translation of the poem surpasses Biçen's earlier version.

Ultimately, *Bir Karakuşa Bakmanın On Üç Yolu* is a highly accomplished and genuinely ambitious presentation of Stevens to Turkish readers. Even though Stevens's poetry entered into Turkish as early as the mid-fifties, public reception has so far been limited. With its expansive range of selections and beautiful physical design, Çelebioğlu's new translation has the potential to attract a broader audience and to elicit new forms of readerly attention, as several online reviews have already indicated. As such, the book is not only a welcome addition to the expanding body of translated poetry into Turkish, but also an important contribution of this canonical American poet to the sphere of world literature.

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The Songs We Know Best: John Ashbery's Early Life.

By Karin Roffman. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

Most devoted readers of John Ashbery know the strange story of his first poems to see print: how a prep-school classmate submitted Ashbery's work to *Poetry* as his own, a fact their author discovered, to his intense chagrin, only when he read them in the magazine. Or, at least, most of us thought we knew this story. In Karin Roffman's gripping account of the poet's formative years, however, the incident forms part of a still stranger tale. The poetry thief, a boy by the name of Bill Haddock, haunted Ashbery during their time at Deerfield Academy like a demonic doppelganger out of a Patricia Highsmith novel, alternately befriending and tormenting him, spreading rumors that he was "an