

# Troths to Ghosts

*To read a poem in translation is to pledge troth to a ghost,  
a wispy, intangible presence residing in another world  
you can never touch without crossing over to it.*



A Motley Selection of Poems Translated from Catalan, Danish, French,  
German, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish

Bertolt Brecht, Jean Gebser, Heinrich Heine, Günter Kunert, Christine Lavant, Christian  
Morgenstern, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hans Dieter Zimmermann  
Salvatore Quasimodo  
Fernando Pessoa  
Tomas Tranströmer



George Lang

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## ***Contents***

|                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Icons</i> , Gabriel Ferrater                                         |
| <i>Distraught Dream</i> , Henrik Nordbrandt                             |
| <i>Not Nonsense Verse, But Verse about Nonsense</i> , Henrik Nordbrandt |
| <i>Real Danish Summer</i> , Henrik Nordbrandt                           |
| <i>Headstone</i> , Ivan Goll                                            |
| <i>Strange Seizure</i> , Anne Hébert                                    |
| <i>Maple Leaf</i> , Albert Lozeau                                       |
| <i>Azure</i> , Albert Lozeau                                            |
| <i>Ode</i> , Jean-Aubert Loranger                                       |
| <i>Moments</i> , Jean-Aubert Loranger                                   |
| <i>Cadieux's Lament at Calumet Falls</i> , Anonymous                    |
| <i>In the Eyes of a Dumb Beast</i> , Rainer Maria Rilke                 |
| <i>Haï Kai</i> , Rainer Maria Rilke                                     |
| <i>Jealous over Pasternak</i> , Rainer Maria Rilke                      |
| <i>Sweet Song</i> , Rainer Maria Rilke                                  |
| <i>Afterwards</i> , Bertolt Brecht                                      |
| <i>Everything Blooming</i> , Jean Gebser                                |
| <i>Underneath</i> , Günter Kunert                                       |
| <i>A Lamb of the Lord</i> , Christine Lavant                            |
| <i>Soft Yellow Buttercup</i> , Christian Morgenstern                    |
| <i>Night Is the Seamstress of Stars</i> , Hans Dieter Zimmermann        |
| <i>Blessed Brume</i> , Salvatore Quasimodo                              |
| <i>Dying Ray of Sun</i> , Salvatore Quasimodo                           |
| <i>Sensei, the Serene</i> , Fernando Pessoa                             |
| <i>A Shepherd of Thoughts</i> , Fernando Pessoa                         |
| <i>Strangest of All Strangeness</i> , Fernando Pessoa                   |
| <i>Beheld</i> , Tomas Tranströmer                                       |
| <i>Tracks</i> , Tomas Tranströmer                                       |



## ***Notes***

***Icons***

As we lay enlaced before  
a window which gave to a grove  
of olives (two bare seeds  
within a fruit summer burst open,  
infused with heat), we had no  
memories. We were the memory  
we now have. We were icons  
of ourselves to be revered  
by true believers of afterwards.

***After Gabriel Ferrater***

*Aleshores, quan jèiem  
abraçats davant la finestra  
oberta al pendís d'oliveres (dues  
llavors nues dins un fruit que l'estiu  
ha badat violent, i que s'omple  
d'aire) no teníem records. Érem  
el record que tenim ara. Érem  
aquesta imatge. Els ídols de nosaltres,  
per la submisa fe de després.*

☞ *Danish* ☞

***Disraught Dream***

A burst of dust obscured the sun,  
spilled down the mountain slopes  
to my love  
and her lover's  
winter lair.

A footbridge swayed under  
my steps as I stumbled  
on without direction.

Just as far over that span  
have I come as since childhood,

so death will be met in its place  
somewhere between me now  
and those gray shafts on the opposite shore.

(This all lasted less than an instant  
– what remains of being.)

***After Henrik Nordbrandt, Drøm om fortvivlelse***

En støvet sky gik for solen  
og lagde bjergsiden ned  
til et vinterleje  
for min elskede  
og hendes elsker.

En bro gungrede under mine fødder  
men mine skridt  
havde ingen retning.  
Der var lige så langt over broen  
som jeg var kommet fra min barndom.

Så døden måtte findes  
et sted mellem mig og de grå pile  
på den modsatte bred.

Det hele varede mindre end et minut  
men resten af verden.

***Not Nonsense Verse But Verse about Nonsense.***

Danishness is beautiful  
& so much fun.

Since it's typically Danish  
Danishness is all the more fun.

Not to mention Danish seriousness,  
which is serious  
in a typical Danish way

that makes it so serious  
& o so Danish.

Seriousness & fun  
are themselves typical.

But not as typical as Danishness.

Danishness  
is the height of typicality.

--such a beauteous thing!

***After Henrik Nordbrandt Danskhed***

Danskheden er skøn

Og så sjov!

Det er så typisk dansk ved danskheden  
at den er så sjov.

For ikke at tale om den danske alvor.  
Den er så alvorlig  
på den typisk danske måde  
der gør den så typisk alvorlig

så typisk dansk.

Alvor og sjov

er typisk nok hver for sig

men ikke så typiske som danskheden.

Danskheden  
er det mest typiske af alt.

Danskheden er sådan en skøn ting.

### ***Real Danish Summer***

Real Danish summer will be what this sonnet  
is about, since whatever surrounds us should fit  
into not thirteen or fifteen but fourteen lines,  
everything in its proper place, form and content fused,  
just as I am myself at one with this summer day,  
itself at one with Danishness. Well and perfectly true,  
except this poem wouldn't be itself if it didn't  
point out that nothing can be one with anything else.  
There must be spaces between. Still Danish summer  
is when and where I could best do without myself.  
I would have let nature speak in simile on my behalf  
had not that mown lawn's likely words made it risky.  
There is a tall, red chimney, the crematorium's.  
What solace to be at long last free of oneself!

### ***After Henrik Nordbrandt, Den rigtige dansk sommer***

En rigtig dansk sommer skal være temaet for denne sonnet:  
For det må da være rigtigt at det, som omgiver en, ikke skal siges  
i tretten eller femten linier, men i fjorten: Sådan vil jeg mene  
alting kommer på sin plads, så form og indhold bliver ét  
sådan som jeg selv er ét med sommeren  
som er ét med danskheden  
der er det helt rigtige: Men det ville ikke være dette digt  
hvis det ikke påpegede, at ingen kan være ét med noget andet.  
Plads skal der være: En rigtig dansk sommer  
er nok der hvor jeg bedst kunne undvære mig selv.  
Og jeg lod gerne naturen tale på mine vegne, om ikke det vulgære  
grønne havde gjort det for pinligt:  
Midt i det står en høj rød skorsten: Den hører til krematoriet.  
Hvilken trøst langt om længe at blive fri for sig selv!

☞ *French* ☞

***Headstone***

I lasted only as long as spume  
the lips of waves spew onto a beach.  
Born under no star into moonless gloom,  
my name was but a sputter, a screech.

***From Ivan Goll's Epitaph in Père Lachaise:***

*Je n'aurai pas duré plus que l'écume  
Aux lèvres de la vague sur le sable  
Né sous aucune étoile un soir sans lune  
Mon nom ne fut qu'un sanglot périssable.*

### ***Strange Seizure***

To trap the polar sun  
fields of snow were set  
as far as the eye could see.

Snares of frost laid out  
blocks of indigo ice dislodged  
millennia of pristine snow upturned  
to arrange the end of the world.

One dusk before it swung  
beneath the snow-bound brink  
at the quick of the Arctic rim  
the sun was captured and cast  
into limpid glacial freeze.

For a long spell its yellow heart  
throbbed in that gel  
like a magnificent moon  
in a pitch-black sky  
emitting eerie frigid rays  
while frozen hordes implored  
the inhuman saffron orb  
forthwith to quit the globe.

### ***After Anne Hébert***

#### ***Étrange capture***

*Du côté du pôle arctique  
On a remué le champ de neige  
À parte de vue, désirant prendre au piège le soleil.*

*On a tendu des filets de givre  
Roulé des blocs de glace indigo  
Brassé des millénaires de neige vierge  
Tout un appareillage de fin du monde.*

*À l'heure du couchant  
Avant qu'il ne bascule*

*Derrière l'horizon neigeux  
Le soleil fut appréhendé  
Au plus vif du cercle polaire  
Mis en cage dans un glacier transparent*

*·  
Longtemps on a pu voir son coeur jaune  
Battre à travers le gel  
Émettre d'étrange rayons froids  
Comme une lune maléfique  
Dans la nuit noire  
Tandis que tout un peuple transi  
Suppliait l'inhumaine boule safran  
De quitter tout-le-champ la carte du monde.*

### ***Maple Leaf***

As they thrash in the breeze the maples moan.  
One that I know stands not quite alone

on a slope where gloom and silence cloak  
a footpath running beside an ancient oak.

From its broad boughs splashes of scarlet flow  
to the fresh sound of water burbling below.

An open slash in the limbs makes a frame  
through which a beam pierces, igniting a flame

The fabric of its swaying summit seems spun  
from the dying fires of the crimson sun.

Among golden leaves below in a bed  
there is one which flashes bright blood-red.

Twilight then mutes the luster of things, throws  
ambient shadows shading to rose.

The blue-white moon heaves into sight,  
spills trickles of silver into vast, pure night,

transparent splendor nothing can rival:  
after setting sun, night autumnal.

### ***After Albert Lozeau (Érable rouge)***

Dans le vent qui les tord les érables se plaignent,  
Et j'en sais un, là-bas, dont tous les rameaux saignent !

Il est dans la montagne, auprès d'un chêne vieux,  
Sur le bord d'un chemin sombre et silencieux.

L'écarlate s'épand et le rubis s'écoule  
De sa large ramure au bruit frais d'eau qui coule.

Il n'est qu'une blessure où, magnifiquement,  
Le rayon qui pénètre allume un flamboiement !

Le bel arbre ! On dirait que sa cime qui bouge  
A trempé dans les feux mourants du soleil rouge !

Sur le feuillage d'or au sol brun s'amassant,  
Par instant, il échappe une feuille de sang.

Et quand le soir éteint l'éclat de chaque chose,  
L'ombre qui l'enveloppe en devient toute rose !

La lune bleue et blanche au lointain émergeant,  
Dans la nuit vaste et pure y verse une eau d'argent.

Et c'est une splendeur claire que rien n'égale,  
Sous le soleil penchant ou la nuit automnale !

## Azure

I stare and fill my eyes with your light,  
O sky devoid of trace of cloud,  
pleasure unutterable, unavowed,  
as azure beams converge in my sight.

This blue swells like a river inside,  
a freshet rising up to the brim.  
Immensity, without boundary or rim,  
floods my humble soul, bearing it pride,

opening within, by sheer vibration,  
a space made mine through contemplation,  
who am a mere atom in vacuous space.

This deep blue, this torrent of eternity,  
rolls on and spills into inner infinity,  
as, dazzled, I watch myself evanesce.

## *After Albert Lozeau (Lumière)*

*Je regarde, et j'emplie mes yeux de ta lumière,  
Beau ciel où pas un seul nuage n'apparaît,  
Et j'éprouve un plaisir indicible et secret  
À sentir converger l'azur sous ma paupière.*

*Le bleu me glisse au coeur, frais comme une rivière  
Qui, sans me déborder, toujours s'élargirait,  
Et l'immense infini que rien ne contiendrait,  
Vague à vague, s'étale en mon âme humble et fière.*

*Tout l'espace est en moi, qui vibre clairement;  
Je l'ai bu du regard de moment en moment,  
Et pourtant je ne suis qu'un atome en l'espace.*

*Le ciel bleu descendu dans mon infinité  
Roule comme un profond torrent d'éternité,  
Dans lequel, ébloui, je me mire et je passe!*

## *Ode*

For a sail that haze  
wipes from the slate of blue,  
a vaulting cloud aloft,  
its clouds washing down to sea,  
a beacon, a distant sprit of shore,  
why such a sad song.  
Much more than space, silence  
weighs heavy on the horizon.

And if the ebbing tide  
leaves in port a sail or two,  
why yearn for the open seas,  
why lament you cannot soar?  
Inconsolate, you always  
recall departures,  
yet off the stern ever swell  
distance and despair.

Night, which cloaks your soul,  
slowly slips across the sky.  
In the west the last hopes of day  
dim out and disappear.  
In vain you trace  
on dusk dissolving  
relentlessly into night  
renunciation of your acts.

Beyond the garden the sea  
soughs like a grove in a forest.  
The old port lights up afar  
twinkling strings of beads.  
Hiding over the horizon  
the day stands sentinel.  
Who knows what its light will bring  
or dreams dark now allows.

For if, when lamp turns off  
even darker lips slide  
across your eyes,  
if shadow brings  
like a searchlight beam

deeper knowledge  
of loneliness than before,  
what hope can dawn hold out?

Can morning keep  
within the beacon's sweeps  
some hint of beams etched  
forever into blue?  
After barren sleepless nights  
why should daybreak bring surcease:  
all that locked in night  
emerging gloriously into day.

*After Jean-Aubert Loranger.*

*Pour une voile que la brume  
Efface au tableau de l'azur,  
Pour une nuage au firmament  
Don't se décolore la mer,  
Pour une côte où brune une phare,  
Pourquoi la plainte nostalgique,  
Puisqu'à l'horizon le silence  
A plus de poids que l'espace?*

*Si le reflux de la marée  
Oublie les voiles dans un port,  
Pourquoi le grand désir du large  
Et pleurer l'impossible essor?  
Tes yeux garderont du départ  
Une inconsolable vision,  
Mais à la poupe s'agrandit  
Le désespoir et la distance.*

*La nuit que ton âme revêt  
S'achemine vers le couchant.  
Voir à l'horizon s'effondre  
Ce que peut le jour d'illusion,  
Et c'est bien en vain que tu greffes  
Sur la marche irrémédiable  
De la nuit vers le crépuscule  
Le renoncement de tes gestes.*

*La mer bruit au bout du jardin  
Comme l'orée d'une forêt,  
Et le vieux port s'allume, au loin,*

*L'alignement de ses lumières.  
Qui vient de dire ce que vaut  
À l'horizon le jour enfoui  
Comme au bivouac sans relève  
Et le rêve qu'édifie l'ombre.*

*Et si la lampe qu'on éteint  
Fait retomber sue tes yeux clos  
Une plus obscure paupière,  
Si l'ombre fait surgir en toi  
Comme le feu d'un projecteur  
Une connaissance plus grande  
Encore de la solitude,  
Que peux-tu espérer de l'aube.*

*Et les matins grarderont-t-ils  
Dans l'espace où le phare a tourné  
Une trace de ses rayons  
Inscrite al jamais dans l'azur?  
Pour tes longues veillées stériles  
Voudris-tu l'aube moins pénible:  
Glorieuse issue dans la lumière  
De ce que la nuit vient de clore.*

*Moments in the Manner of Old Chinese Poems*

I

Dawn frames a landscape  
through a window sash.  
Light dissolves the solid  
volumes of the room,  
soaks up shadows.

Smooth and steady  
as a potter throwing clay  
the pendulum taps out  
the still nebulous  
coming shape of day.

This pervading silence  
is a hot-house in which  
my woe will ripen.

Can I have awaited dawn  
so long to no avail?  
O let there loom  
for me a threshold  
toward something other.

V

This little booth is round,  
lit from within,  
and surrounding night  
sticks like soot  
smudging its panes.

I write within this booth,  
a giant lantern  
with a smouldering wick.  
Pinned into my dream  
I am tucked in by silence.

*After Jean-Aubert Loranger, Moments*

*I*

*L'aube encadre un paysage  
Au châssis de la fenêtre.  
La lumière absorbe l'ombre,  
Elle désolidifie  
Le volume de la chambre.*

*Je suis au petit début  
Imprécis d'une journée  
Que la pendule tapote,  
Doucement, comme une glaise  
Pour lui faire un avenir.*

*Le grand silence m'enclot  
Comme une serre chaude  
Où ma peine doit mûrir.*

*Il ne se peut pas, que j'aie  
Attendu l'aurore en vain.  
Il faut qu'il ait, pour moi,  
Le commencement, aussi,  
De quelque chose.*

*V*

*Le petit kiosque est rond,  
il est allumé  
par le milieu, et la nuit  
d'autour colle aux vitres  
comme une noirceur de suie.*

*Et j'écris dans dans le kiosque,  
lanterne géant  
qui aurait beaucoup fumé.  
Parqué en mon rêve,  
je suis bordé de silence.*

*Lament of the Voyageur Jean Cadieux at Calumet Falls, ca. 1709*

By this boulder near Calumet Falls  
I languish alone as Death calls.  
Dear Echos, but you hear my sigh  
on this last portage I ply.

Frail birds, your sweet melodies  
are music at my obsequies.  
Had I wings like yours I would fly,  
not in my grave putrefy.

Alone through the woods I'd hurried.  
For the fate of my friends I'd worried.  
Had they drowned in the chute?  
Did the Iroquois catch them on route?

One day coming back from a jaunt,  
I saw smoke coming up from my haunt.  
My first thought: something's amock.  
Once again the Iroquois've struck.

In an instant I hit the dirt  
and crept through the bushes alert.  
But the faces I spied at my hearth  
were French. Joy flooded my heart.

[....]

Now I expire alone. My knees quake,  
my voice falters. My friends break  
camp, while that great Voyageur,  
Death, stays on for my massacre.

A wolf sneaks up to my home.  
The jerky he scents is my own.  
Scat from here, beast, away by God,  
else your hide feel the blast of a wad.

A raven comes to perch on my eaves.  
He preys on whatever grieves.  
Carnivore, I cry, though I lie supine,  
there is much better meat than mine.

In the swampy woods he made his redoubt  
there lies at least one Iroquois scout  
with much more succulent flesh and bone.  
My stinking cadaver, pray leave it alone.

Nightingale, fly to my loyal mate.  
Let her break to the children my fate.  
They have my love. I've kept my faith.  
Forget poor Jean, this wraith.

So now as I give up the ghost  
I count on the Saviour uttermost.  
O Holy Virgin, I implore your charms.  
Allow that I die in Your arms.

*After Anonymous (La complainte de Cadieux, Coureur de bois, ca. 1709)*

Petit Rocher de la Haute Montagne,  
Je viens finir ici cette campagne!  
Ah! doux échos, entendez mes soupirs,  
En languissant je vais bientôt mourir.

Peits oiseaux, vos douces harmonies  
Quand vous chantez, me rattach' à la vie :  
Ah! si j'avais des ailes comme vous,  
Je s'rais heureux avant qu'il ne fut deux jours!

Seul en ces bois, que j'ai eu de soucis,  
Pensant toujours à mes si chers amis.  
Je demandais : Hélas! sont-ils noyés ?  
Les Iroquois les auraient-ils tués ?

Un de ces jours que, m'état éloigné,  
En revenant je vis une fumée.  
Je me suis dit : Ah! Grand Dieu qu'est ceci ?  
Les Iroquois m'ont-il pris mon logis ?

Je me suis mis un peu à l'ambassade,  
Afin de voir si c'était embuscade.  
Alors je vis trois visages français,  
M'ont mis le coeur d'une trop grande joie !

[....]

Mes genoux plient, ma faible voix s'arrête.  
Je tombe ... Hélas, à partir qu'il s'apprêtent :  
Je reste seul ... Pas un qui me console,  
Quand la mort vient par un si grand désolé !

Un loup hurlant vient près de ma cabane  
Voir si mon feu n'avait plus de boucane.  
Je lui ai dit : Retire-toi d'ici,  
Car, par ma foi, je perc'rai ton habit !

Un noir corbeau, volant à l'aventure,  
Vient de percher tout près de ma toiture.  
Je lui ai dit : Mangeur de chair humaine,  
Va-t'en chercher autre viande que mienne.

Va-t'en là bas, dans ces bois et marais,  
Tu trouveras plusieurs corps iroquois.  
Tu trouveras des chair, aussi des os.  
Va-t'en plus loin, laisse-moi en repos !

Rossignolet, va dire à ma maîtresse,  
À mes enfants qu'un adieu je leur laisse,  
Que j'ai garde mon amour et ma foi,  
Et désormais faut renoncer à moi !

C'est donc ici que le mond' m'abandonne  
Mais j'ai secours en vous Sauveur des hommes !  
Très Sainte Vierge, ah! m'abandonnez pas.  
Permettez-moi d'mourir entre vos bras !

***In the Eyes of a Dumb Beast***

In the eyes of a dumb beast  
I glimpsed deep peace  
nature's impartial feast  
offered without surcease.

To fear all creatures respond.  
Yet animals know how  
on the hunt to browse  
on the here and now  
which tastes of nothing beyond.

***After Rainer Maria Rilke (Vergers n° 54)***

*J'ai vu dans l'œil animal  
la vie paisible qui dure,  
le calme impartial  
de l'imperturbable nature.*

*La bête connaît la peur ;  
mais aussitôt elle avance  
et sur son champ d'abondance  
broute une présence,  
qui n'a pas le goût d'ailleurs.*

***Haï-Kaï***

No tree says flowers  
are lighter to bear than fruit  
—only a lover.

***After Rilke***

*C'est pourtant plus lourd de porter des fruits que des fleurs  
Mais ce n'est pas un arbre qui parle  
—c'est un amoureux.*

☞ *German* ☞

*Jealous over Pasternak*

We touch from afar. But how? With airborne  
brushes our beating wings stir each other.  
A poet lives alone. Sometimes there comes another  
who also bears that which he has borne.

*After Rainer Maria Rilke*

*Wir rühren uns, womit? Mit Flügel-Schlägen,  
mit Fernen selber rühren wir uns an.  
Ein Dichter einzig lebt, und dann und wann  
kommt, der ihm trägt, dem, der ihn trug, entgegen.*

### ***Sweet Song***

How should I hold my Self so it  
not brush against yours? How should  
I lift myself over you on to other things?  
If only I could press myself down  
into some lost dark place,  
a strange, still abode where  
your own depths do not resound.  
Everything that touches us, you and me,  
draws us together like the stroke of a bow  
which makes two strings sing one voice.  
What instrument are we strung upon?  
Who holds it in his hands?  
Such sweet song!

### ***After Rainier Maria Rilke***

*Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß  
sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie  
hinheben über dich zu andren Dingen?  
Ach gerne möcht ich sie bei irgendwas  
Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen,  
an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die  
nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen schwingen.  
Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,  
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,  
der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.  
Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?  
Und welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?  
O süßes Lied*

### ***Afterwards***

Afterwards, I strode alone  
into the full light of day  
and saw, with eyes of my own,  
the sheer joy of those at play.

About that secret hour,  
know only that within  
I feel a new-born power,  
beauty in lip and limb.

Greener, the trees and meadows,  
more fragrant the flower,  
fresher the water which flows  
down my skin as I shower.

### ***After Bertolt Brecht***

*Als ich nachher von dir ging  
An dem großen Heute  
Sah ich, als ich sehn anfing  
Lauter lustige Leute.*

*Und seit jener Abendstund  
Weißt schon, die ich meine  
Hab ich einen schönern Mund.  
Und geschicktere Beine.*

*Grüner ist, seit ich so fühl  
Baum und Strauch und Wiese  
Und das Wasser schöner kühl  
Wenn ich's auf mich gieße.*

### ***Everything Blooming***

Everything blooming  
is destined to die.  
Who sees it coming  
knows that it's nigh.

The tree feels still  
in the breezy air.  
We rarely conceive  
who we actually are.

Flowers think flower.  
creatures, creature.  
A clod in the fields  
should be our teacher.

### ***After Jean Gebser***

Alles Blühen  
meint schon den Tod.  
Nur die sich mühen,  
sind wirklich bedroht.

Still fühlt der Baum  
den zitternden Wind.  
Wir denken kaum  
was wir eigentlich sind.

Blume denkt Blume,  
und Tier denkt Tier.  
Des Ackers Krume  
ist gewisser als wir.

## ***Underneath***

The sun shone down, falling hot upon her.  
On me too it fell, who lay beside her.  
Waves broke, crept up to where we were,  
aroused by our naked splendor.

Flesh exposed upon such expanse of sand.  
A moment seized from what is endless.  
Two threads crossing upon a single strand.  
The sun above. Underneath, but darkness.

## ***After Günter Kunert (Frist)***

*Und Sonne war und fiel heiß auf sie nieder  
Und fiel auf mich der ich doch bei ihr war.  
Die Wellen gingen fort und kamen immer wieder  
Zurück voll Neugier zu dem nackten Paar.*

*Ein wenig Fleisch auf soviel Sandgehäufte  
Ein wenig Frist in ziemlich viel Unendlichkeit  
Ein wenig Leben und zwei Lebensläufe  
Darüber Sonne und darunter Dunkelheit.*

***A Lamb of the Lord***

From now on and forever  
I know Earth is truly warm.  
I give fire back to the nettle,  
to the hedgehog his thorn.

From now on the whole world  
is my protector, a pasture  
where breezes cradle, lull us,  
weave our breath's texture.

***After Christine Lavant***

Seit heute, aber für immer,  
weiß ich: Die Erde ist wirklich warm-;  
ich gebe der Nessel den Brand zurück  
und dem Igel die Stacheln.  
Seit heute ist alles mein Schutzpatron  
und die ganze Welt eine Weidenwiege,  
darin uns der Windstoß zusammenschaukelt  
und unsren Atem verknotet.

***Soft Yellow Buttercup***

O soft yellow buttercup field  
tinged green with red sorrel leaf,  
not even your copious yield  
affords full-blown relief.

O swelling boughs whose song  
blossoms like snow in the Spring,  
our hearts, alas, are strung along  
by dreams of you to which we cling.

***After Christian Morgenstern***

*Butterblumengelbe Wiesen,  
sauerampferrot getönt,  
– O du überreiches Sprießen,  
wie das Aug dich nie gewöhnt!*

*Wohlgesangdurchschwellte Bäume,  
wunderblütenschneebereift –  
ja, fürwahr, ihr zeigt uns Träume,  
wie die Brust sie kaum begreift.*

***Night is the Seamstress of Stars***

Night is the seamstress of stars  
whose sparkles she sews together  
without thread or needle or knot  
in a glittering stitchless seam  
tucking us in nearer to space.

***After Hans Dieter Zimmermann*** (indirectly quoting Martin Heidegger)

*Die Nacht ist die Näherin der Sterne, wie die Kinder sagen; sie fügt zusammen ohne Naht und Saum und Zwirn; sie ist die Näherin, weil sie nur mit der Nähe arbeitet.*

***Blessed Brume***

Blessed brume rises off the ponds.  
So too will the air on fire close  
in on the unmoving heart.  
Beloved youth, it is late.  
I still cherish all things on earth  
under the skies' light  
in the shadow of the wind,  
the aura and every aspect of  
she who came to me not long ago,  
whose smile mirrors mine yet who  
took unripened vigor for love.  
Thus alone, I look back on  
that lost bounty, whole days,  
the water of grasses and woods  
splendid in distant breeze.  
On this lifeless island,  
abandonned by every heart  
which once heard my voice,  
I now remain immured.

***After Salvatore Quasimodo "In luce di cieli"***

Dagli stagni salgono nuvole beate;  
finirà anche il fuoco dell'aria  
nel fermo cuore.  
Cara giovinezza; è tardi.  
Ma posso amare tutto della terra  
in luce di cieli in tenebra di vento;  
e, su ogni parvenza, la donna  
che mi venne non è gran tempo,  
al cui riso mi specchio,  
che amore chiamava, sua verde salute.

Così solo, numeri di perduto bene  
mi narravo, e giorni,  
e, splendenti in remote aure,  
acque di selve ed erbe.

Nell'isola morta,  
lasciato da ogni cuore  
che udiva la mia voce,  
posso restare murato.

***Dying Ray of Sun***

Each of us stands alone on a plot of earth  
caught in a dying ray of sun:  
till day is suddenly done.

***After Salvatore Quasimodo***

*Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra  
traffito da un raggio di sole:  
ed è subito sera.*

☞ *Portuguese* ☞

*Sensei, the Serene*

Sensei, the serene  
hours we spend are  
not lost if we lose them  
like we lose the flowers  
we choose and cut  
to put in a vase.

*After Ricardo Reis (Fernando Pessoa)*

Mestre, são plácidas  
Todas as horas  
Que nós perdemos,  
Se no perdê-las,  
Qual numa jarra,  
Nós pomos flores.

### *A Shepherd of Thoughts*

I am a shepherd of flocks, which are thoughts,  
themselves sensations. I think with sights  
and sounds, hands and feet, nose, palate.  
Thinking of a flower is to see and smell it.  
To eat a piece of fruit is to learn its meaning.  
Which is why, sweltering in the heat of midday,  
so fully tasting fleeting things makes me sad.  
I stretch out tired on the grass, shut  
my burning eyes, my body weighing down on  
what is there. I know some truth. I'm happy.

### *After Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)*

*Sou um guardador de rebanhos.  
O rebanho é os meus pensamentos  
E os meus pensamentos são todos sensações.  
Penso com os olhos e com os ouvidos  
E com as mãos e os pés  
E com o nariz e a boca.  
Pensar numa flor é vê-la e cheirá-la  
E comer um fruto é saber-lhe o sentido.  
Por isso quando num dia de calor  
Me sinto triste de gozá-lo tanto,  
E me deito ao comprido na erva,  
E fecho os olhos quentes,  
Sinto todo o meu corpo deitado na realidade,  
Sei da verdade e sou feliz.*

***The Strangest of All Strangeness***

The strangest of all strangeness,  
more then dreamed by any poet,  
by any thinker thought up,  
is that things are just what they seem.  
Nothing to understand about them.

***After Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa)***

*É mais estranho do que todas as estranhezas  
E do que os sonhos de todos os poetas  
E os pensamentos de todos os filósofos,  
Que as cousas sejam realmente o que parecem ser  
E não haja nada que compreender.*

☞ *Swedish* ☞

***Beheld***

It was a funeral.  
I sensed the deceased  
read my thoughts  
better than myself.

The organ fell silent. Birds sang.  
A grave open to the sun.  
My friend's voice rang as far  
as the minutes' darkside.

I drove home transfixed  
by the glare of summer day,  
by rain and stillness,  
transfixed by the moon.

***From Tomas Tranströmer, Från juli 90***

*Det var en begravning  
och jag kände att den döde  
läste mina tankar  
bättre än jag själv.*

*Orgeln teg, fåglarna sjöng.  
Gropen ute i solgasset.  
Min väns röst höll till  
på minuternas baksida.*

*Jag körde hem genomskådad  
av sommardagens glans  
av regn och stillhet  
genomskådad av månen.*

## *Tracks*

2 am. Moonlight. Train stopped  
in the middle of a field, cold city lights  
flickering on the far brink of sight.

As if someone has sunk so deep into dream  
she'll never remember she was there  
once she gets back to her room.

Or somewhere someone has slipped so deep  
into sickness that his days all become a flickering  
swarm of points scattered thin on the brink of sight.

The train stands utterly still.  
2 am. Stark moonlight. Few stars.

## *From Tomas Tranströmer, Spår*

På natten klockan två: månsken. Tåget har stannat  
mitt ute på slätten. Långt borta ljuspunkter i en stad,  
flimrande kallt vid synranden.

Som när en människa gått in i en dröm så djupt  
att hon aldrig ska minnas att hon var där  
när hon återvänder till sitt rum.

Och som när någon gått in i en sjukdom så djupt  
att allt som var hans dagar blir några flimrande punkter,  
en svärm, kall och ringa vid synranden.

Tåget står fullkomligt stilla,  
Klockan två: starkt månsken, få stjärnor.

## Notes

**Gabriel Ferrater** was a major Catalan poet and scholar. He committed suicide in 1972. I have a second degree relationship with him, since his brother, Juan Ferraté, was my *Doktorvater*.

**Henrik Nordbrand** spent much of his life outside of Denmark, notoriously complaining that the weather there had sixteen months: "November, December, January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, November, November, November."

**Anne Hébert**. *Strange Seizure* was published in *Ellipse* 50 (1993), pp. 36-37, where I noted, "However elemental and starkly beautiful it may be, political allegory is easily read into Hébert's poem, though the poet herself has criticized this proclivity among Québec critics. I did try to keep the Promethean overtones of *Étrange capture* alive, but I know that some readers will insist that a people is not a horde."

**Albert Lozeau** (1878-1924). Émile Nelligan is usually taken to be Québec's Rimbaud, but Lozeau, who suffered from Pott's Disease, also deserves the epithet *poète maudit*. From *Ellipse* 38 (1987), pp 32-37.

**Jean-Aubert Loranger** (1896-1942). I had forgotten these old translations, which I only recently ran across again. I was struck by how both in terms of content and in wording my own poems have been subconsciously modeled on Loranger's work. Originally published in *Ellipse* 20 (1977), pp 22-29.

**Anonymous**. I have drawn the source text from Sister Jeanne d'Arc Lortie's *Les Textes poétiques du Canada français*, which suggests much of it stems from François Villon's *Ballade des pendus*, further evidence that this was not composed by the voyageur Cadieux himself, rather by someone with literary tastes. *Ellipse* 40 (1988), pp 24-27. For the song itself, see <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/petit-rocher-de-la-haute-montagne-emc>.

**Rainer Maria Rilke** as a French poet? In *Ellipse* 50 (2001, pp 82-93). with which journal I had collaborated since 1976, I made the following observation: "Alas, neither in Canada nor in Québec have there been many poets who produced an interesting body of work in two languages, at least not to my taste. So to help close this chapter of *Ellipse* (the final North Hatley/Shebrooke issue) let me adduce two poems, composed directly in French by Rilke himself. Those who know his poetry in German, especially the *Duino Elegies*, will recognize a strangely familiar voice."

The poem to Marina Tsvetaeva is his dedication of a copy of the *Duino Elegies* to her.

*Correspondance à trois: Rilke, Pasterak, Tsvetaeva* (Gallimard 1983), p 9.

**Bertolt Brecht** is usually thought of as an archetypical proletarian writer. Here he reveals a tender side.

**Jean Gebser** was a German-born philosopher who fled to Switzerland amid the carnage of WW2. Lama Anagarika Govinda described him as "one of the most creative and stimulating thinkers of modern Europe".

**Günter Kunert** was expelled from the DDR in 1979 after protesting the loss of citizenship of Wolf Biermann.

**Christine Lavant** was an Austrian poet whose life was a vale of tears. Fortunately for us, she discovered poetry after a mentor passed her a volume of Rilke. Christian mystics are these days few and far between. In her poetry it appears she was one.

**Christian Morgenstern** was a beloved albeit eccentric poet influenced by English nonsense verse, which facilitates the task of the translator into English, where his oddities may find an affinity.

**Hans Dieter Zimmermann** drew upon a well-known passage from Heidegger. I versified it.

**Salvatore Quasimodo** was a Sicilian poet who was associated with the Hermeticism movement.

**Fernando Pessoa** wrote under a number of heteronyms, of which two are Alberto Caiero and Ricardo Reis.

**Tomas Tranströmer** won the Nobel Prize in 2011. He collaborated with both Robert Bly and with Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber).

*[Text available at <https://alteritas.net/pastis/collections/5941-2/>]*