

UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

Volume 2
Issue 1 *Volume 1, Issue 1 (Spring 2006)*

Article 4

3-2006

Translitic Poems

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Recommended Citation

Sandvik, Ron (2006) "Translitic Poems," *UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/universitas/vol2/iss1/4>

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Translitic Poems

Part of the journal section "Essays, Studies, and Works"

Ron Sandvik, "Translitic Poems"

Manifesto

I am an Iowan, a child of the prairie, an American, and so as the joke goes obviously I'm a monoglot. One might ask, "Why the fascination with languages you clearly don't speak, and have no ambition of learning?" The truth is I don't know. It just is.

My family didn't start out speaking English. They were mostly farmers and small business owners who wrested the prairie into productive farmland who lost their polyglottism during WWII. In the same way Arab-Americans seem to always be suspect today, Germans, Norwegians, and Swiss, made it their business to find ways to show patriotism, to blend in, and to keep a low profile in those days. If they had accents, the burden to prove social validity was on them. Maybe the madness would pass. Maybe it didn't. Maybe it was atmospheric, the times, the geography, or some inescapable hazard immigrants must navigate.

It seems my entire family censored their language around that World War II. They held their mother tongues, made sure the kids went to school, and spoke the best English they could in public. Elders who couldn't speak without thick accents exiled themselves to their farms, their kids went to town to do the family business in English.

Beautiful little nursery songs were choked back, we jettisoned larger family histories, and folklore became rusty, inoperable and forgotten. My own grandfather traded up his mythology from Thor and Eric the Red to Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour. Thus, with the efficiency and diligence that we subdued the vast wild prairie, we hammered, chiseled and finally removed the hyphens from our Americanism. By the time of McCarthyism, we had safely melted, ceded, and submitted a little further into the pot like so many other immigrants. So it is I came to be an Iowan, an American, and a monoglot.

When flipping channels on the TV, sometimes I annoy my bi-lingual wife by lingering on the international news channel a little too long. Whatever they are saying on SCOLA, it's different and beautiful. These people aren't exotic, nor better, or worse, just beautiful and different every time. Any language differences are, to me, little wild flowers-the very sort that made up the once-vast prairie, which is now an archipelago of fenced-in areas. For me, language is a landscape that can be subtle or spectacular, and always bears watching, exploration, and wonder. Imagine my delight when I stumbled upon the translitic form of poetry. Here was my chance to play with any language in the world without burden.

I approach the translitic poem with a stack of poetry translations in languages with which I don't have any familiarity. It's nice to have the language set in a roman font, with a few cognates to cling to. Theoretically, you

could translit Cuneiform tablets, Hieroglyphs, pictographic languages such as Chinese or Japanese, Cyrillic, Navy Semaphore flag training films, or sign languages. But that's a little crazy even for me.

The more removed from my experience, the better. Ironically, German and Norwegian work well for me since I don't understand them. In my case, Spanish and Italian are out because I may actually understand enough meaning to defeat my purpose. The purpose of this poetic form is not writing to understand the meaning, but rather to create something that didn't exist before. Mainly, through free association, I try to follow the form of the other poet, and try to approximate sound. Sometimes I revise and try to make some expanded meaning, a refined sense of what I'm writing. Other times the early take is the good take, because this is a translitic, it's a wildflower. It just is.

Translition is about not controlling meaning, or understanding. It is an acceptance that you will never apprehend everything that there is to know. How do you feel when you look at or hear another language you don't comprehend? Are you confused? Suspicious? Annoyed? Offended somehow? What would you tell these people with the beautiful language you don't understand? Are you somehow anxious? Translition, for me, is coming to the realization of how vast the ocean is and how small our boat might be.

After the *translition* is written, then I read the translation. Sometimes there are points that come close in meaning or gesture, often centering on cognates. Other times I am so far from the writer's intent as to take pleasure in it. As each poem progresses, sometimes I leave the translition as it is in a more literal sense. Other times, like other poets and artists, I keep revising and making new versions, chasing the line, looking for whatever it is that dodges ahead of me.

To sift syllables of another tongue, is to project, to imagine, to hope-that's all I'm doing. It's a tiny five-milliwatt prayer sent out into the cosmos. It's an act of understanding and incomprehension. It's middle-aged man, admiring wildflowers on a prairie. It is an escape attempt. It is a child holding a small, dented metal globe and wondering. It's a joke at my own expense. What I like about translition most is, just like the prairie, it just is.

Read Sandvik's Translitic Poems

Stein Mehren, Norwegian Poet	Ron Sandvik	Nadia Christensen
Verksted	Jerk's Head (Translitic)	Workshop (English Translation)
Et stort tre er styret i høsten og veltete røtter synker ned i jorden som et forstenet lynnedslag mens de langsomt åpner et hull i verden av biller og yrende kryp	It started traffic stirring, I hasten a belt of beer, rotten, stinking need i jump in some men are forced to wind-slag men, die lonesome aptly in this hell, my burden Ad-builder, friend of creeps	A giant tree fell down this autumn and upturned roots sink into the ground like a petrified streat of lightning as they slowly open a hole in the world of beetles and swarming vermin
Panser-prismer. Hver bille er en solstråle kuttet i nøyaktige biter, sluppet i skapelsens oppløsning, og felt ut i panser og krystall	Pansy-prissy. Have your fill and end soul-less Cut it, not like these biters, sluppets i scalpel opposing dogs, felt cheap i'm a pansy or crystal	Armour-prisms. Each beetle is a sunbeam cut in precise little peices, dropped in dissolving Creation, and

<p>Stjerner og soler og kloder Fabelmagneter i kosmiske kretser. Innenfor hvert skall, ruller verden i solgyldne hinner av liv</p>	<p>Sterner dogs, older than Kurt Loder Fabel-magnet high cosmos keys, Cets with Retsin, info search, skulls, ruler's burden's Ovaltine dinners have lived</p>	<p>separated out into armour crystal</p> <p>Stars and sun and planets Fairytale-magnets in cosmic circles. Under each shell, worlds course in sun-golden membranes of life</p>
<p>Anleggsarbeid og nye veier overalt omkring oss Maskinene går natt og dag rundt den innerste flammende ilden Svaiende nordlys-barduner Stål og stjerner som glir gjennom hendenes frosne grep</p>	<p>And legs are plied in my pliers afterall I'm King-ass Masking any gaff I may make runts run interstate flammables idly Sven Allende cordless bar crooner Stalwart sojourner sane, glib, venomous, ends the frosty grip</p>	<p>Construction work and new roads all around us The machines run day and night round the innermost burning flame Swaying northern light-guywires Steel and stars that slide through the hands' frozen grip</p>
<p>...Løvet rusker i byene men lyset er et fargeløst og giftig regn der veienes gjørme speiler oss - dratte, forpinte ansiktstrekk som forsøker å nå inn til oss selv... I kokonger av sten og betong Stiger hver dags solbrus som en fødsel av vinger Det er trafikken, insektsvermene som forsøker å ruse live I en knust stjerne</p>	<p>...With Love, muskets and biting men list her at Fargo, lost but giving reggae her veins enomous tire tracks -drat, for a pint of anti-Star Trek some forsakers in the inn will ask themselves... I co-conquer a stenographer's belongings Rod Steigler's dog was a walrus Someone in a Ford Edsel gave me the finger That traffic is like insects or vermin Some forsake her Russian life, I adjust sternly</p>	<p>...The leaves rumple the cities but the light is a colourless, poisonous rain where the muddy roads reflect us - drawn, anguished expressions that try to get in to our selves... In cocoons of stone and concrete each day's sun-geyser rises like a birth of wings It's the traffic, the swarms of insects that try to surge life into a broken star</p>
<p>Men om natten singer stjernelyst, tørt og kaldt gjennom traernes lattermilde fingre Og byene ligger på jorden skjelvende, som store vingskadde fugler</p>	<p>Men of Manhatten Singers, stern analysts, part of the cult Geronimo trains little milky fingers Old gasoline lingers on the Jordan Shell gamers at some store sing of Caddies fully loaded</p>	<p>But at night the starlight tinkles, cold and dry through the droll fingers of the trees And the cities lie on earth trembling, like great birds with broken wings</p>
<p>From: <i>20 Contemporary Norwegian Poets-English & Norwegian</i>. Terje Johansen. St. Martin's. 1984.</p>		

**Ludwig Heinrich Christoph
Hölty**

Vermächtnis

IHR Freunde, hänget, wann ich
gestorben bin
Die kleine Harfe hinter dem
Altar auf,
Wo an der Wand die
Totenkränze
Manches verstorbenen
Mädchens schimmern.

Der Küster zeigt dann
freundlich dem Reisenden
Die kleine Harfe, rauscht mit
dem roten Band,
Das, an der Harfe
festgeschlungen,
Unter den goldenen Saiten
flattert.

Oft, sagt er staunend, tönen im
Abendrot
Von selbst die Saiten, leise wie
Bienton;
Die Kinder, hergelockt vom
Kirchhof,
Hörten's, und sahn, wie die
Kränze bebten.

Ron Sandvik

Vermin Acting (Translited)

Hire friends. Hang it, when icky
guests order beer.
Inclined Harps splinter the
Altar off.
Wander-wandie totally crazed.
Matches, verses and mad
swimming.

Her custard sight Dan
coinlicked Raisinbran
Inclined Harps rocked with
roadie's Band,
Los Angeles Harps fester, slice
lungs
Under golden Satan's
flatulence.

Oft, sagged or standing, toned
in Abbey rot
Vans sold by Satan, Leased by
Benetton
Rekindle huge locks round
churches
Portends, a sound we die crazy,
indebted.

Leonard Forster

Bequest (English Translation)

FRIENDS, when I am dead,
hang up the little harp
on the wall behind the altar,
where the funeral
wreaths of many dead maidens
glimmer.

The friendly sexton will show
the little harp to visitors and
rustle the red ribbon that is tied
to the harp and flutters beneath
the golden strings

'Often,' he will say, wondering,
'in the sunset the strings sound
by themselves softly, like the
hum of bees; the children,
drawn here from the
churchyard, have heard it and
seen how the wreaths quivered.'

From: *Vermächtnis* and its
Translation *Bequest* come
From: *The Penguin Book of
German Verse* Introduced and
edited by Leonard Foster. 1959.

Ludwig Heinrich Christoph
Hölty (1748-76), a member of a
group of poets at Göttingen
who followed Klopstock.

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