

Lieder Project

The “Lieder Project” is a program of German Art Song re-imagined as chamber music with saxophone, with spoken word voice-over in German and English.

Art song with piano is a form of chamber music, unlike the grander forms of oratorio or opera. The repertoire includes some of the most intimate and beautiful expressions of German Romantic classical music. Unfortunately, the art song recital, at least in the US, has accrued considerable cultural baggage. One pays attention mostly to the qualities of the voice. We have experimented with disassembling the Lied into its chamber music and poetic components, in an attempt to give both parts equal attention.

There is an American jazz tradition of rendering vocal standards on the saxophone, with excellent results, and it occurred to us to apply this to the lieder of Johannes Brahms. The alto saxophone can duplicate much of the range and expression of the mezzo or baritone voice.

All that is missing are the words - but of course, the words are of critical importance. Brahms set words by great (and not so great) poets, as well as traditional folk verses, sacred texts, and poems in dialect - all of which had intensely personal significance for his creative process. When the poetry is rendered into “singable English”, however, the results are almost invariably silly, or embarrassingly wrong. Even when translated into reasonable poetic form, the Romantic style often sounds dated to our ears. And yet, they work perfectly in German.

In an attempt to re-invigorate this art form, we have recruited five Washington area poets to create contemporary English poems. These are intended to be responsive in some way both to the music and the text. The poems have revealed themselves so far as quasi-translation, ironic, spiritually akin, or simply contemporary. They are to be recited in jazz style, as vocal semi-improvisations, interspersed phraseologically, or antiphonally. Typically, we perform a song twice, once with the original German, and again with a contemporary English poem. In addition, we have experimented with combining contemporary German poems, English translations, and music.

We have found the results to be very exciting and full of potential.

Carl Banner
Washington Musica Viva

Poets, Poems and Processes

No matter how slowly or quickly the words of the poems and lyrics spool out in performance, they seem to slip by our ability to grasp all their nuances. So here we are presenting for each poet—Karren Alenier, Anne Becker, Laura Costas, Craig E. Flaherty, Bernadine (Dine) Watson—first the original German text of the lieder they

chose, then a straightforward English translation, next the poet's version and finally a short description of the processes that led them to the new creation.

Karren Alenier:

Feldeinsamkeit (Allmers)

*Ich ruhe still im hohen grünen Gras
Und sende lange meinen Blick nach oben,
Von Grillen rings umschwirrt ohn Unterlaß,
Von Himmelsbläue wundersam umwoben.*

*[Und schönen weiße] 1 Wolken ziehn dahin
Durchs tiefe Blau, wie schöne stille Träume;
Mir ist, als ob ich längst gestorben bin
Und ziehe selig mit durch ew'ge Räume.*

I rest quietly in the tall green grass
And for a long time send my gaze aloft,
Surrounded by the unceasing whirr of crickets,
Enfolded wondrously by blue sky.

The lovely white clouds drift by
Through the deep blue, like beautiful, silent dreams;
I feel as though I am long dead
And drift blissfully along through eternal space.

Isolated at the border (K. Alenier)

how I got here tears me apart
this side hunger and that plenty
this side impasse and that fresh start
I'm an immigrant nobody

yes the sky is blue and sunny
this side and also the other
count me dead for lack of money
the coyote is not brother

I got here by years of abuse
father husband regime street thugs
I want to live is my excuse

never had the urge to do drugs

yes the sky is blue and sunny
this side and also the other
count me dead for lack of money
the coyote is not brother

scaling the wall a woman hanged
the coyotes could not save her
I worry about being banged
Asylum out of reach a blur

yes the sky is blue and sunny
this side and also the other
count me dead for lack of money
the coyote is not brother

Mondenschein (Heine)

*Nacht liegt auf den fremden Wegen,
Krankes Herz und müde Glieder; -
Ach, da fließt, wie stiller Segen,
Süßer Mond, dein Licht hernieder;
Süßer Mond, mit deinen Strahlen
Scheuchest du das nächt'ge Grauen;
Es zerrinnen meine Qualen,
Und die Augen übertauen.*

*Night lies on the unfamiliar roads;
a sick heart and tired limbs...
ah, like a quiet blessing, there flows down,
sweet moon, your light;
Sweet moon, with your rays
You drive away the night horror;
Away runs my pain,
And my eyes brim over with tears.*

Moonlight in the 21st Century (K. Alenier)

night hitching we flee on foreign roads
broken hearted feet throbbing
yet cool air fingers us points the way
a reflective moon provides lamp
a moon as delicious as a dish

of luminescent fireflies lighting
what in the dark frightens us
our tears glisten with that brilliance

night hitching we run scared of shadows
machines of war rumble and hover
even our children know not to cry
a waxing moon brightens our getaway
there's no cow jumping our satellite
we pray the man in the moon might say
he will protect our trembling families
our tears glisten for that promise

night hitching we flag down a neighbor
his truck crammed but he welcomes us aboard
we bond before we cross the border
vowing to sing I see the moon
but the moon won't target me
all along the highway our soldiers
signal Godspeed your turbulent dodge
our tears glisten in the moonlight

For both poems, I read the German first since I studied a little German when I was in college. Next, I read the rough translation.

I worked on Mondenschein first and pretty much stuck to the mood and elements of that poem (including using eight lines as the original poem in German does) but I brought it into the 21st century by putting myself into the environment of the poem as a Ukrainian fleeing from the Russian invaders. I expanded the poem from one verse to three. I felt repetition was an important feature to connect the three versions and provide musicality. One more thing I wanted to start the poem with something that stood out and therefore embraced the slang term *hitching*. I made another surprising move in stanza two when I wrote *there's no cow jumping* not the moon but *our satellite*. The final surprise comes in the words *Godspeed your turbulent dodge*. This seems surprising because *Godspeed* and *dodge* seem to be plucked from another time despite my title "Moonlight in the 21st Century." Contradictions abound in war, especially Putin's unprovoked war to land grab.

In a way, the second poem takes its cue from how I conceived the first. Both poems have dark subject matter. This time when I put myself in the environment of the poem, I saw myself as a desperate migrant on the southern border of the United States but, in this case, my character revealed as female (the first poem is more likely male but this is not clear). By stanza three the narrator speaks of abusers who include a husband and stanza five mentions the narrator fears *being banged* (raped). Like the original German, my poem is in quatrains and has an alternating line rhyme scheme. I saw the second stanza of

the original poem as a candidate for a repeating verse such that my poem is in ballad format but not in iambic pentameter. –Karren Alenier

Anne Becker:

Therese (Keller)

*Du milchjunger Knabe,
Wie schaust du mich an?
Was haben deine Augen
Für eine Frage getan!*

*Alle Ratsherrn in der Stadt
Und alle Weisen der Welt
Bleiben stumm auf die Frage,
Die Deine Augen gestellt!*

*Eine Meermuschel liegt
Auf dem Schrank meiner Bas':
Da halte dein Ohr d'ran,
Dann horst du etwas!*

Therese

You milk-young boy,
why do you look at me so?
What a question
your eyes have asked!

All the councilmen in the town
and all the wisemen in the world
Would be struck dumb by the question
that your eyes have posed!

A seashell lies
upon my cousin's cupboard;
Press your ear to it;
Then you'll hear something!

Questionanswer (A. Becker)

O milk-cheeked boy, your lips
still milk moistened, deeper
and more brazen your *eyequestion*

than the one *mouthspoken*.

Not even truthful lying
politicians and wise women
across the breadth of the world
could *lipshape* this dangerous request.

But milksoft little man come
into my house by the ocean, listen
through the seashell on my desk
to my blazing *bodyanswer*.

Es liebt sich so lieblich (Heine)

*Die Wellen blinken and flieBen dahin,
Es liebt sich so lieblich im Lenze!
Am Flusse sitret die Schaferin
Und windet die zartlichsten Kranze.*

*[Das knospet und quillt und bluht,
es liebt sich so lieblich im Lenze!
Die Schafrin seufzt au [tiefer Brust] :
>>Wem geb ' ich meine Kranze?<<*

*Ein reiter reitet den FluB entiang,
er gruBet so bluhenden Mutes,
Die Schaferin schaut ihm nach so bang,
fern flutteret die Feder des Hutes.*

*Sie weint und wirft in den gleitenden FluB
die schonen Blumenkranze.
Die Nactigall singt von Lieb' und KuB,
es liebt sich so lieblich im Lenze!*

Lovely to Love in the Spring

The waves flash and flow in;
Love is so lovely in Spring!
By the river the shepherdess sits
And weaves delicate crowns of wreaths.

The budding, the streaming, the wafting and blossoming—
Love is so lovely in Spring!
the shepherdess sighs from deep in her bosom:
"To whom shall I give my wreaths?"

A horseman rides along the river:
he greets her with radiant cheer,
the shepherdess gazes at him shyly,
and far in the distance the feather flutters in his cap.

She weeps and throws into the gliding river
those lovely wreaths of flowers.
Love is so lovely in the Spring!

Sapphische Ode

*Rosen brach ich nachts mir am dunklen Hage;
SuBer hauchten Duft sie als je am Tage;
Doch verstreuten reich die bewgeten Aste
Tau, der mich naBte.*

*Auch der Kusse Duft mich wie nie beruckte,
Die ich nachts vom Strauch deiner Lippen pfluckte.
Doch auch dir, bewegt im Gemut gleich jenen,
Tauten die Tranen.*

Sapphic Ode

By night I picked roses from the dark hedge;
They breathed a sweeter fragrance than by day;
But the movement of the branches richly
Showered me with dew.

I was also captivated as never before by the fragrance of your kisses,
Which I picked by night from your rosebush lips;
But you, too, moved just as they did in your mind,
And shed a dew of tears.

Rose and Thorn Are One (A.Becker)

*How lovely to love in the Spring
the rose and the thorn are one
lovely in love in the Spring
rose and the thorn are one
horse's hooves sing to each beat
breath circles the neck in a wreath*

by road and by field repeat
dust clouds rise with each hoof
beat, pale grass pounded flat
nostrils, cartilage and velvet flare
and chuff, repeat like a purring cat
reins dropped, saddle's lost
arrogant rider overthrown, cannot
stand on his feet in the dust
and the stones of the path.

This is the run of the river, horse's hooves
racing liquid deeps, sing with each beat
the waves and the ripples repeat, repeat
the light of the sun catches their peaks
night sky, trembling stars, rush by in
green water, drumming of hooves,
great banging star in the breast
fire rushes under the skin, shivering
comets and stars in the river
satiny, shiny cover holding
the beast together, petal of rose
and the thorn are one
spring of the haunches, great
arch of the muscular neck
not seeing with eyes
but earvision, buzzing through
the mane and the tail, green comets,
shoot over the road, black comets spray
over the fields, nostrils flare, everything
must be dared in this one wild
ride through the day and the night

of the Spring, the solitary
animal Spring.

With the word *milchjunger*—*milkyoung*—immediately I was drawn into Gottfried Keller's song "Therese." Rather than change it into something entirely different, I wanted to make it more of the body, more mine. From "milkyoung" (a terrific image in itself) "milk-cheeked" came to my mind's eye. I could see that young man. Now it was simply a question of a little tweaking, a little more body imagery, to nudge Therese from her snarky banter with her young man to a bolder challenge. And "Question/Answer" was born.

"Es liebt sich so lieblich"—"So Lovely to Love"—by Heinrich Heine, I chose because he fooled me with his ironic, satiric and sarcastic ersatz romantic poem. It begins conventionally enough, "Lovely to love in the spring," with a description of a river of sparkling water beside which a shepherdess weaves a crown of flowers. But turns dark as we see that the horseman on the other bank merely greets her and rides on. A poem not about the power of love—but its impotence. I also went to Hans Schmidt's "Sapphic Ode" for the image of the rose and the thorn to signify love. Now I heard the galloping beat of a horse's hooves, jettisoned the rider, and left the girl to oblivion. With the focus on the horse, my poem, "Rose and Thorn Are One," could be one of power. —Anne Becker

Laura Costas:

Im Kirchhöfe Op. 105#4 (In the churchyard) (Detlev von Liliencron)

*Der Tag ging regenschwer und sturmbewegt,
Ich war an manch vergessenem Grab gewesen,
Verwittert Stein und Kreuz, die Kränze alt,
Die Namen überwachsen, kaum zu lesen.*

*Der Tag ging sturmbewegt und regenschwer,
Auf allen Gräbern fror das Wort: Gewesen.
Wie sturmestot die Särge schlummerten,
Auf allen Gräbern taute still: Genesen.*

One storm-driven rainy day
I wandered among forgotten graves,

Weathered stones and crosses
Faded wreaths, illegible names

One storm-driven rainy day
On every grave froze a single word: "Was"

As stormy dead the coffins slept
Dripped from every stone another word: "Healed"

Recovered (L. Costas)

I will care for your bones, said dreaming black earth mother, but your language is another matter. At each passing of her black moon daughter she will press up a little more against the sunken, cornered stones of forgetful men. Today, the scant written shoulders stand haphazard. Tomorrow? Tight with the weather, mama flows without a plan.

Were you abandoned by time, forgetful men? Forget your corners, and leap from your narrow seams; your names are as common as drops of rain. Has been, is now, will be, that's it. You can't read as you dream.

Meine Lieder

*Wenn mein Herz beginnt zu klingen
Und den Tönen löst die Schwingen,
Schweben vor mir her und wieder
Bleiche Wonnen, unvergessen
Und die Schatten von Zypressen -
Dunkel klingen meine Lieder!*

My Songs

When my heart begins to make music
and the vibrating loosens wondrous tones,
there hover before me, here and there,
pale ecstasies, unforgotten,
and the shadows of the cypresses;
dark is the sound of my songs.

Absence (L. Costas)

Swing, my pale heart; swell and redden and unforget. Begin.
Too lit to be seen amid Creation, sing.

I will claim to hear you, name you, own you in the velvet cypress darkness.

Psychic silence, supreme completion, too late and too soon, ring.

My appreciation of the sound of the original German text put things in motion for me—text as text on the page rather than text in the music. I love how the sounds knock together and rhyme in *Meine Lieder*, transmitting the music of the content in short syllables and double-length consonants. The trudging meter in the *Kirchhofe* text asked for the earth to represent herself and push back against those heavy footsteps. When I listen to the *Lieder* sung, I find it remarkable that these details and urges practically disappear into the mix, and the conversation between voice and piano complete the foreground almost entirely.

—Laura Costas

Craig Edward Flaherty:

Sonntag (Op. 47 no.3) (Johann Ludwig Uhland)

*So hab' ich doch die ganze Woche
Mein feines Liebchen nicht geseh'n,
Ich sah es an einem Sonntag
Wohl vor der Türe steh'n:
Das tausendschöne Jungfräulein,
Das tausendschöne Herzelein,
Wollte Gott, wollte Gott, ich wär' heute bei ihr!
So will mir doch die ganze Woche
Das Lachen nicht vergeh'n,
Ich sah es an einem Sonntag
Wohl in die Kirche geh'n:
Das tausendschöne Jungfräulein,
Das tausendschöne Herzelein,
Wollte Gott, wollte Gott, ich wär' heute bei ihr!*

Sunday

For a whole week now
I haven't seen my love;
I saw her on a Sunday,
standing at her door:
my loveliest girl,
my loveliest sweet,
would to God I were with her today!
Yet I'll still be able

to laugh all week;
I saw her on a Sunday,
as she went to church:
my loveliest girl,
my loveliest sweet,
would to God I were with her today!

English Translation © Richard Stokes

secret love (Craig E. Flaherty)

winter sunday afternoon
home bible class

some stomp the doormat others scrape
the snow he taps his feet on the wrought
iron banister always fifteen minutes early
with six bakery hermits white string
bowed around the box

he wears l'homme aftershave by yves saint
laurent the scent animates his greenest
of green three-quarter length felted wool
anorak she thinks the green of creation
when the word was spread upon the earth
in sacred trust

"here let me take that to the bedroom"
says to herself not to lay it down but embrace
his perfume and like holy verses gently swing
the drape the heft of the highlands foot to
foot and lovingly line the edge of my pillow
mingle with the memories of his voice god's
voice resounding soothing whatever dark
corners piques irritants they might have

after they rehearse their faith scour
their beliefs she serves his coat to him careful
not to catch a thread on his golden bible
perfect attendance lapel pin she honors him
with a "see you soon"

with the closing click of the lock she savors
the scent of paris promising herself all the next

and another sunday afternoon

Denn es gehet dem Menschen

*Denn es gehet dem Menschen wie dem Vieh;
wie dies stirbt, so stirbt er auch;
und haben alle einerlei Odem;
und der Mensch hat nichts mehr denn das Vieh:
denn es ist alles eitel.
Es fährt alles an einen Ort;
es ist alles von Staub gemacht, und wird wieder zu Staub.
Wer weiß, ob der Geist des Menschen aufwärts fahre,
und der Odem des Viehes unterwärts unter die Erde fahre?
Darum sahe ich, daß nichts bessers ist,
denn daß der Mensch fröhlich sei in seiner Arbeit,
denn das ist sein Teil.
Denn wer will ihn dahin bringen, daß er sehe, was nach ihm geschehen
wird?
Liturgical, translated by Martin Luther*

For that which befalleth the sons of men

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts;
as the one dieth, so dieth the other;
yea, they have all one breath;
so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast;
for all is vanity.
All go unto one place;
all are of dust, and all turn to dust again.
Who knoweth the spirit of man [...] goeth upward
and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?
Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better,
than that a man should rejoice in his own works,
for that is his portion.
For who shall bring him to see what shall happen after him?

Translation © Richard Stokes, author of *The Book of Lieder* (Faber, 2005)

sing into the darkness (Craig E. Flaherty)

the animals bray protest
squeal snort until their lips

give up hope of another
graze another forage any
claim for peace as their
otherness shudders
in a bed of dust

dies iraes dies iraes
gregorian dirge
feel the breath falter
at the end of the phrase
drop down away
where the breath scrambles
for comfort into the hollow
of the throat

the moon coaxed blossoms
of midnight open their parts
to shiver in the breaths of
dies iraes the path overlaid
with shards of scattered
darkness succumbs
to the shadows of shades
no telling if it tilts to abyss
or rises to resurrect
the scales of judgment
shift the fullness and failures
of time held in the balance

I miss you
I forgive you
I love you forever
I keep this face open
as I sing into the darkness

I unfasten the last latch
In my breathlessness I hear
you too singing the world
to ashes

Sonntag (process)

Sunday, church, secret love - what's not to
wonder about the spirituality created by
unspoken affections - a web of silent loves.
Like the conversations among trees - silent,

inaccessible, unifying. As if nature were
god's unsigned valentine to the people
of earth that we would be careful not to
tear the decorative lace.....and how we
carry ourselves, carefully, through
the weekly rituals.

Denn es gehet (process)

First, the text, Ecclesiastes 3:1 -22 then I
listened to Brahms music - in the piano
accompaniment a circular musical idea
in the bass reminded me of an organ
composition by Richard Purvis, *Dies Iraes*.
The first part of my poem restates the text
and as the words gathered I found myself
taken into the darkness of the poem
calling out.....to anothera deeply
spiritual moment. –Craig E. Flaherty

Bernardine (Dine) Watson:

Mit vierzig Jahren (Friedrich Rückert)

Mit vierzig Jahren ist der Berg erstiegen,
Wir stehen still und schaun zurück;
Dort sehen wir der Kindheit stilles liegen
Und dort der Jugend lautes Glück.
Noch einmal schau, und dann gekräftigt weiter
Erhebe deinen Wanderstab!
Hindehnt ein Bergesrücken sich ein breiter,
Und hier nicht, drüben gehts hinab.
Nicht athmend aufwärts brauchst du mehr zu steigen,
Die Ebene zieht von selbst dich fort;
Dann wird sie sich mit dir unmerklich neigen,
Und eh' du's denkst, bist du im Port.

At Forty Years

At forty years, the mountain has been climbed,
we stand still and look back;
there we see our childhood lying quietly,

and there the noisy happiness of youth.
Look once more, and then, strengthened again,
Heft your walking-stick!
Stretching before you is a mountain ridge - a broad one -
and not here, but farther along, it begins to go downward.
Without breathing, you need to climb farther upwards,
for the plain will pull you forward itself;
then it will slope downward imperceptibly with you,
And before you think about it, you will be in port.

At Forty Years: A Different Perspective (B. Watson)

It was not my climb to forty years
that left me breathless
gasping for my very life,
but pictures on the evening news
that day in 1991
when policemen beat a Black man senseless in LA
they say a traffic violation was the cause.

No matter the brutality
I stood as still as stone and stared
my eyes obliged to take the horror in
looking neither left nor right
and certainly not behind me
to my younger years
since I would find no solace there.

Remember 1955?
I was a child
but so was Emmett Till when
lynched that year.
I shiver still
to think of Birmingham in 1963
four little girls my very age
bombed to death in Sunday School
this terror followed by more bloody Sundays
then I even know.

Oh
I could go on and on
reliving all the pain again
from age to age, year to year
of course, there's been some happiness along the way
but on this day, please
hand to me my walking stick

I glimpse the mountain ridge ahead
a broad and jagged road
that goes as far as I can see
no port in sight.

Dein blaues Auge

*Dein blaues Auge hält so still,
Ich blicke bis zum Grund.
Du fragst mich, was ich sehen will?
Ich sehe mich gesund.*

*Es brannte mich ein glühend Paar,
Noch schmerzt das Nachgefühl;
Das deine ist wie See so klar
Und wie ein See so kühl.*

Your Blue Eyes

Your blue eyes keep so still
That I can gaze upon their very depths.
You ask me what I want to see? --
I see my own well-being.
A glowing pair burned me once;
The after-effect still hurts.
Yet your eyes are like the sea so clear,
And like a lake, so cool.

Your Blue Eyes: In this Shortsighted World (B. Watson)

Your blue eyes
so rare
so prized
so gazed upon
in this shortsighted world.

You ask me with a burning stare-
who can regard the bluest hues
and not be blinded by their glow?
think of the cool cerulean sea
the azure sky
the robin's egg
the purest turquoise spirit stone.

But brown eyes, I respond in truth,

predominate in humankind
from east to west
high to low
with hints of red and yellow
and yes, of blue
they represent the earthy warmth
of life itself, and
must be esteemed as such.

I read somewhere
of brown -eyed girls
so driven mad
so desperate to be prized
they pray that god
will turn their brown eyes blue

Is this what you want to see?

To respond to the German lieder I chose (At Forty Years; Your Blue Eyes), I first read the English translations several times, trying to absorb the feelings, attitude, and culture/background embedded in the words. Then I began to draft my poems based on the initial feelings and attitudes that arose in me from reading the lieder. My response, of course, was based on my own experiences, feelings, and cultural background. In my poems, I wanted to provide a perspective (on the poem's topic) that the authors (and readers of the lieder) may have never considered. I wanted to open up a whole new way of seeing the lieder's subject and possibly start a new dialogue. In responding to the lied, *Your Blue Eyes*, I reread Toni Morrison's book *The Bluest Eye*. The book brought up a lot of emotion in me that I tried to infuse into my poetic response to show that one person's "well-being" can be another's undoing. —Bernardine (D.) Watson

To give a sense of what more contemporary German poems are like we've included in the performance the work of two 20th Century poets, Ingeborg Bachman and Paul Celan. Again, first in the original German, then the English translation.

Reklame (Ingeborg Bachman)

*Wohin aber gehen wir
ohne sorge sei ohne sorge
wenn es dunkel und wenn es kalt wird
sei ohne sorge
aber*

*mit musik
was sollen wir tun
heiter und mit musik
und denken
heiter
angesichts eines Endes
mit musik*

*und wohin tragen wir
am besten
unsre Fragen und den Schauer aller Jahre
in die Traumwäscherei ohne sorge sei ohne sorge
was aber geschieht
am besten
wenn Totenstille*

eintritt

1956

from: Ingeborg Bachmann: *Werke Bd. 1*, hrsg. von Christine Koschel u.a.,
PiperVerlag, München 1978

Advertisement

But where do we go

don't worry, don't worry

when it gets dark and when it gets cold

don't worry

but

with music

what shall we do

cheerful and with music

and what shall we think

cheerful

when facing an ending

with music

and where do we carry

best of all

our questions and shudders of all the years

to the dream laundry, don't worry, don't worry

but what happens

best of all

when dead silence

enters

(English translation of 'Reklame' by Ingeborg Bachmann by Archer/ Wong)

Sprich auch du (Paul Celan)

Sprich auch du,

sprich als letzter,

sag deinen Spruch.

Sprich –

Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja.

Gib deinem Spruch auch den Sinn:

gib ihm den Schatten.

Gib ihm Schatten genug,

gib ihm so viel,

als du um dich verteilt weißt zwischen

Mittnacht und Mittag und Mittnacht.

Blicke umher:

sieh, wie's lebendig wird rings –

Beim Tode! Lebendig!

Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht.

Nun aber schrumpft der Ort, wo du stehst:

Wohin jetzt, Schattenentblößter, wohin?

Steige. Taste empor.

Dünn wirst du, unkenntlicher, feiner!

Feiner: ein Faden,

an dem er herabwill, der Stern:

um unten zu schwimmen, unten,

wo er sich schimmern sieht: in der Dünung

wandernder Worte.

Paul Celan, 1952, from: "Von Schwelle zu Schwelle", Paul Celan, *Gedichte*,
Bibliothek Suhrkamp 1996

Speak, You, Also (trans. M.Hamburger)

Speak, you also,

speak as the last,

have your say.

Speak –

But keep yes and no unsplit.
And give your say this meaning:
give it the shade.

Give it shade enough,
give it as much
as you know has been dealt out between
midnight and midday and midnight.

Look around:
look how it all leaps alive -
where death is! Alive!
He speaks truly who speaks the shade.

But now shrinks the place where you stand:
Where now, stripped by shade, will you go?
Upward. Grope your way up.
Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer.
Finer: a thread by which
it wants to be lowered, the star:
to float farther down, down below
where it sees itself gleam: in the swell
of wandering words.