

## **Sonnets by Edna St. Vincent Millay**

### **Even in the moment of our earliest kiss**

Even in the moment of our earliest kiss,  
When sighed the straitened bud into the flower,  
Sat the dry seed of most unwelcome this;  
And that I knew, though not the day and hour.  
Too season-wise am I, being country-bred,  
To tilt at autumn or defy the frost:  
Snuffing the chill even as my fathers did,  
I say with them, "What's out tonight is lost."  
I only hoped, with the mild hope of all  
Who watch the leaf take shape upon the tree,  
A fairer summer and a later fall  
Than in these parts a man is apt to see,  
And sunny clusters ripened for the wine:  
I tell you this across the blackened vine.

### **I know my mind and I have made my choice**

I know my mind and I have made my choice;  
Not from your temper does my doom depend;  
Love me or love me not, you have no voice  
In this, which is my portion to the end.  
Your presence and your favours, the full part  
That you could give, you now can take away:  
What lies between your beauty and my heart  
Not even you can trouble or betray.  
Mistake me not—unto my inmost core  
I do desire your kiss upon my mouth;  
They have not craved a cup of water more  
That bleach upon the deserts of the south;  
Here might you bless me; what you cannot do  
Is bow me down, who have been loved by you.

## **What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why**

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,  
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
Under my head till morning; but the rain  
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
For unremembered lads that not again  
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.  
Thus in winter stands the lonely tree,  
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,  
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:  
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,  
I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.

## 1. Gute Nacht

Fremd bin ich eingezogen,  
Fremd zieh' ich wieder aus.  
Der Mai war mir gewogen  
Mit manchem Blumenstrauss.  
Das Mädchen sprach von Liebe,  
Die Mutter gar von Eh'—  
Nun ist die Welt so trübe,  
Der Weg gehüllt in Schnee.

Ich kann zu meiner Reisen  
Nicht wählen mit der Zeit,  
Muss selbst den Weg mir weisen  
In dieser Dunkelheit.  
Es zieht ein Mondenschatten  
Als mein Gefährte mit,  
Und auf den weissen Matten  
Such' ich des Wildes Tritt.

Was soll ich länger weilen,  
Dass man mich trieb hinaus?  
Lass irre Hunde heulen  
Vor ihres Herren Haus;  
Die Liebe liebt das Wandern—  
Gott hat sie so gemacht—  
Von einem zu dem andern.  
Fein Liebchen gute Nacht!

Will dich im Traum nicht stören,  
Wär schad' um deine Ruh'.  
Sollst meinen Tritt nicht hören—  
Sacht, sacht die Türe zu!  
Schreib im Vorübergehen  
Ans Tor dir: Gute Nacht,  
Damit du mögest sehen,  
An dich hab' ich gedacht.

## 1. Good Night

I came here a stranger,  
As a stranger I depart.  
May favored me  
With many a bunch of flowers.  
The girl spoke of love,  
Her mother even of marriage—  
Now the world is so gloomy,  
The road shrouded in snow.

I cannot choose the time  
To begin my journey,  
Must find my own way  
In this darkness.  
A shadow of the moon travels  
With me as my companion,  
And upon the white fields  
I seek the deer's track.

Why should I stay here any longer  
So that people can drive me away?  
Let stray dogs howl  
In front of their master's house;  
Love loves to wander—  
God made it that way—  
From one to the other,  
My dearest, good night!

I don't want to disturb your dreaming,  
It would be a shame to wake you.  
You won't hear my step,  
Softly, softly the door closes!  
I write in passing  
On your gate: Good night,  
So that you may see  
That I thought of you.

## 2. Die Wetterfahne

Der Wind spielt mit der Wetterfahne  
Auf meines schönen Liebchens Haus.  
Da dacht' ich schon in meinem Wahne,  
Sie pfiff den armen Flüchtling aus.

Er hätt' es eher bemerken sollen,  
Des Hauses aufgestecktes Schild,  
So hätt' er nimmer suchen wollen  
Im Haus ein treues Frauenbild.

Der Wind spielt drinnen mit den Herzen  
Wie auf dem Dach, nur nicht so laut.  
Was fragen sie nach meinen Schmerzen?  
Ihr Kind ist eine reiche Braut.

## 2. The Weathervane

The wind plays with the weathervane  
On my lovely darling's house.  
And I thought in my delusion,  
That it mocked the poor fugitive.

He should have noticed sooner  
The symbol displayed on the house,  
So he wouldn't ever have expected  
To find a faithful woman within.

The wind plays with the hearts inside  
As it does on the roof, only not so loudly.  
Why should they care about my grief?  
Their child is a rich bride.

### 3. Gefrorene Tränen

Gefrorene Tropfen fallen  
Von meinen Wangen ab:  
Ob es mir denn entgangen,  
Dass ich geweinet hab'?

Ei Tränen, meine Tränen,  
Und seid ihr gar so lau,  
Dass ihr erstarrt zu Eise  
Wie kühler Morgentau?

Und dringt doch aus der Quelle  
Der Brust so glühend heiss,  
Als wolltet ihr zerschmelzen  
Des ganzen Winters Eis!

### 3. Frozen Tears

Frozen drops are falling  
Down from my cheeks.  
How could I have not noticed  
That I have been weeping?

Ah tears, my tears,  
And are you so tepid  
That you freeze to ice  
Like cool morning dew?

Yet you burst from the wellspring  
Of my heart so burning hot,  
As if you wanted to melt  
The entire winter's ice!

#### 4. Erstarrung

Ich such' im Schnee vergebens  
Nach ihrer Tritte Spur,  
Wo sie an meinem Arme  
Durchstrich die grüne Flur.

Ich will den Boden küssen,  
Durchdringen Eis und Schnee  
Mit meinen heissen Tränen,  
Bis ich die Erde seh'.

Wo find' ich eine Blüte,  
Wo find' ich grünes Gras?  
Die Blumen sind erstorben,  
Der Rasen sieht so blass.

Soll denn kein Angedenken  
Ich nehmen mit von hier?  
Wenn meine Schmerzen schweigen,  
Wer sagt mir dann von ihr?

Mein Herz ist wie erstorben,  
Kalt start ihr Bild darin;  
Schmilzt je das Herz mir wieder,  
Fliesst auch ihr Bild dahin!

#### 4. Numbness

I search the snow in vain  
For the trace of her steps.  
Where she, arm in arm with me,  
Crossed the green meadow.

I want to kiss the ground,  
Penetrate ice and snow  
With my hot tears,  
Until I see the soil.

Where will I find a blossom,  
Where will I find green grass?  
The flowers are all dead,  
The turf is so pale.

Shall then no momento  
Accompany me from here?  
When my pains cease,  
Who will tell me of her then?

My heart is as if dead,  
Her image frozen cold within;  
If my heart ever thaws again,  
Her image will also melt away!

## 5. Der Lindenbaum

Am Brunnen vor dem Tore  
Da steht ein Lindenbaum;  
Ich träumt' in seinem Schatten  
So manchen süßen Traum.  
Ich schnitt in seine Rinde  
So manches liebe Wort;  
Es zog in Freud' und Leide  
Zu ihm mich immer fort.

Ich musst' auch heute wandern  
Vorbei in tiefer Nacht,  
Da hab' ich noch im Dunkeln  
Die Augen zugemacht.  
Und seine Zweige rauschten,  
Als riefen sie mir zu:  
Komm her zu mir, Geselle,  
Hier find'st du deine Ruh'!

Die kalten Winde bliesen  
Mir grad' ins Angesicht;  
Der Hut flog mir vom Kopfe,  
Ich wendete mich nicht.  
Nun bin ich manche Stunde  
Entfernt von jenem Ort,  
Und immer hör' ich's rauschen:  
Du fändest Ruhe dort!

## 5. The Linden Tree

At the well by the gate  
There stands a linden tree;  
I dreamed in its shadow  
Many a sweet dream.  
I carved in its bark  
Many a word of love;  
In joy and in sorrow  
I was always drawn to it.

Again today I had to travel  
Past it in the depths of night.  
There even in the darkness  
I closed my eyes.  
And its branches rustled,  
As if they called to me:  
Come here to me, friend,  
Here you'll find peace!

The cold winds blew  
Right into my face;  
The hat flew off my head,  
I didn't turn around.  
Now I am many hours  
Distant from that place,  
And I still hear it whispering:  
You'd find peace here!

## 6. Wasserflut

Manche Trän' aus meinen Augen  
Ist gefallen in den Schnee;  
Seine kalten Flocken saugen  
Durstig ein das heisse Weh.

Wenn die Gräser sprossen wollen  
Weht daher ein lauer Wind,  
Und das Eis zerspringt in Schollen  
Und der weiche Schnee zerrinnt.

Schnee, du weisst von meinem Sehnen,  
Sag', wohin doch geht dein Lauf?  
Folge nach nur meinen Tränen,  
Nimmt dich bald das Bächlein auf.

Wirst mit ihm die Stadt durchziehen,  
Muntre Strassen ein und aus;  
Fühlst du meine Tränen glühen,  
Da ist meiner Liebsten Haus.

## 6. Flood Water

Many a tear from my eyes  
Has fallen in the snow;  
Its cold flakes absorb  
Thirstily the burning woe.

When it's time for the grass to sprout  
There blows a mild wind,  
And the ice will break apart  
And the soft snow melt away.

Snow, you know about my longing,  
Tell me, where does your course lead?  
If you just follow my tears,  
The brook will soon receive you.

You will flow through the town with it,  
In and out of the busy streets;  
When you feel my tears burning,  
There is my sweetheart's house.



## 7. Auf dem Flusse

Der du so lustig rauschtest,  
Du heller, wilder Fluss,  
Wie still bist du geworden,  
Gibst keinen Scheidegruss.

Mit harter, starrer Rinde  
Hast du dich überdeckt,  
Liegst kalt und unbeweglich  
Im Sande ausgestreckt.

In deine Decke grab' ich  
Mit einem spitzen Stein  
Den Namen meiner Liebsten  
Und Stund' und Tag hinein:

Den Tag des ersten Grusses,  
Den Tag, an dem ich ging;  
Um Nam' und Zahlen windet  
Sich ein zerbroch'ner Ring.

Mein Herz, in diesem Bache  
Erkennst du nun dein Bild?  
Ob's unter seiner Rinde  
Wohl auch so reissend schwillt?

## 7. On the River

You who thundered so cheerfully,  
You clear, untamed river,  
How quiet you have become,  
Give no word of farewell.

With a hard stiff crust  
You have covered yourself,  
Lie cold and unmoving,  
Outstretched in the sand.

In your covering I inscribe  
With a sharp stone  
The name of my sweetheart  
And the hour and day, as well.

The day of the first greeting,  
The day on which I left;  
Around name and figures winds  
A broken ring.

My heart, in this stream  
Do you now recognize your image?  
And under its crust  
Is there also a raging torrent?

## 8. Rückblick

Es brennt mir unter beiden Sohlen,  
Tret' ich auch schon auf Eis und Schnee,  
Ich möcht' nicht wieder Atem holen,  
Bis ich nicht mehr die Türme seh'.

Hab' mich an jedem Stein gestossen,  
So eilt' ich zu der Stadt hinaus;  
Die Krähen warfen Bäll' und Schlossen  
Auf meinen Hut von jedem Haus.

Wie anders hast du mich empfangen,  
Du Stadt der Unbeständigkeit!  
An deinen blanken Fenstern sangen  
Die Lerch' und Nachtigall im Streit.

Die runden Lindenbäume blühten,  
Die klaren Rinnen rauschten hell,  
Und ach, zwei Mädchenaugen glühten.—  
Da war's gescheh'n um dich, Gesell!

Kommt mir der Tag in die Gedanken,  
Möcht' ich noch einmal rückwärts seh'n.  
Möcht' ich zurücke wieder wanken,  
Vor ihrem Hause stille steh'n.

## 8. A Look Backward

It burns under both my feet,  
Even though I walk on ice and snow;  
I don't want to catch my breath  
Until I can no longer see the spires.

I tripped on every stone,  
As I hurried out of the town;  
The crows hurled chunks of snow and ice  
On my hat from every house.

How differently you received me,  
You town of inconstancy!  
At your sparkling windows sang  
The lark and nightingale in competition.

The bushy linden trees bloomed,  
The clear streams murmured brightly,  
And, oh, two maiden's eyes glowed—  
Your fate was sealed, my boy!

Whenever that day enters my thoughts,  
I want to look back once more,  
I want to turn back again  
And stand still before her house.

## 9. Irrlicht

In die tiefsten Felsengründe  
Lockte mich ein Irrlicht hin;  
Wie ich einen Ausgang finde,  
Liegt nicht schwer mir in dem Sinn.

Bin gewohnt das Irregehen,  
's führt ja jeder Weg zum Ziel;  
Uns're Freuden, uns're Wehen,  
Alles eines Irrlichts Spiel!

Durch des Bergstroms trockne Rinnen  
Wind' ich ruhig mich hinab,  
Jeder Strom wird's Meer gewinnen,  
Jedes Leiden auch sein Grab.

## 9. Will o' the Wisp

Into the deepest mountain chasms  
A will o' the wisp lured me;  
How to find a way out  
Doesn't worry me much.

I'm used to going astray,  
And every way leads to the goal.  
Our joys, our sorrows,  
Are all a will o' the wisp's game!

Through the mountain stream's dry channel  
I wend my way calmly downward.  
Every river finds its way to the ocean,  
And every sorrow to its grave.

## 10. Rast

Nun merk' ich erst wie müd' ich bin,  
Da ich zur Ruh' mich lege;  
Das Wandern hielt mich munter hin  
Auf unwirtbarem Wege.  
Die Füße frugen nicht nach Rast,  
Es war zu kalt zum Stehen;  
Der Rücken fühlte keine Last,  
Der Sturm half fort mich wehen.

In eines Köhlers engem Haus  
Hab' Obdach ich gefunden.  
Doch meine Glieder ruh'n nicht aus:  
So brennen ihre Wunden.  
Auch du, mein Herz, in Kampf und Sturm  
So wild und so verwegen,  
Fühlst in der Still' erst deinen Wurm  
Mit heissem Stich sich regen!

## 10. Rest

Now I first notice how tired I am  
As I lay myself down to rest;  
Walking kept me going strong  
On the inhospitable road.  
My feet didn't ask for rest,  
It was too cold to stand still,  
My back felt no burden,  
The storm helped to blow me onward.

In a charcoal-burner's tiny house  
I have found shelter;  
But my limbs won't relax,  
Their hurts burn so much.  
You, too, my heart, in strife and storm  
So wild and so bold,  
Feel first in the silence your serpent  
Stir with burning sting!

## 11. Frühlingstraum

Ich träumte von bunten Blumen,  
So wie sie wohl blühen im Mai;  
Ich träumte von grünen Wiesen,  
Von lustigem Vogelgeschrei.

Und als die Hähne krächten,  
Da ward mein Auge wach;  
Da war es kalt und finster,  
Es schrien die Raben vom Dach.

Doch an den Fensterscheiben,  
Wer malte die Blätter da?  
Ihr lacht wohl über den Träumer,  
Der Blumen im Winter sah?

Ich träumte von Lieb um Liebe,  
Von einer schönen Maid,  
Von Herzen und von Küssen,  
Von Wonne und Seligkeit.

Und als die Hähne krächten,  
Da ward mein Herze wach;  
Nun sitz' ich hier alleine  
Und denke dem Traume nach.

Die Augen schliess' ich wieder,  
Noch schlägt das Herz so warm.  
Wann grünt ihr Blätter am Fenster?  
Wann halt' ich mein Liebchen im Arm?

## 11. Dream of Spring

I dreamed of many-colored flowers,  
The way they bloom in May;  
I dreamed of green meadows,  
Of merry bird calls.

And when the roosters crowed,  
My eye awakened;  
It was cold and dark,  
The ravens shrieked on the roof.

But on the window panes—  
Who painted the leaves there?  
I suppose you'll laugh at the dreamer  
Who saw flowers in winter?

I dreamed of love reciprocated,  
Of a beautiful maiden,  
Of embracing and kissing,  
Of joy and delight.

And when the roosters crowed,  
My heart awakened;  
Now I sit here alone  
And reflect on the dream.

I close my eyes again,  
My heart still beats so warmly.  
When will you leaves on the window turn gree?  
When will I hold my love in my arms?

## 12. Einsamkeit

Wie eine trübe Wolke  
Durch heit're Lüfte geht,  
Wenn in der Tanne Wipfel  
Ein mattes Lüftchen weht:

So zieh ich meine Strasse  
Dahin mit trägem Fuss,  
Durch helles, frohes Leben  
Einsam und ohne Gruss.

Ach, dass die Luft so ruhig!  
Ach, dass die Welt so licht!  
Als noch die Stürme tobten,  
War ich so elend nicht.

## 12. Solitude

As a dreary cloud  
Moves through the clear sky,  
When in the crown of the fir tree  
A faint breeze blows,

So I travel my road  
Onward with sluggish feet,  
Through bright, happy life,  
Lonely and unrecognized.

Oh, that the air should be so still!  
Oh, that the world should be so light!  
When the storms still raged,  
I was not so miserable.

### 13. Die Post

Von der Strasse her ein Posthorn klingt.  
Was hat es, dass es so hoch aufspringt,  
Mein Herz?

Die Post bringt keinen Brief für dich.  
Was drängst du denn so wunderbarlich,  
Mein Herz?

Nun ja, die Post kommt aus der Stadt,  
Wo ich ein liebes Liebchen hat,  
Mein Herz!

Willst wohl einmal hinüberseh'n  
Und fragen, wie es dort mag geh'n,  
Mein Herz?

### 13. The Post

From the highroad a posthorn sounds.  
Why do you leap so high,  
My heart?

The post does not bring a letter for you,  
Why the strange compulsion,  
My heart?

Of course, the post comes from the town,  
Where I once had a dear sweetheart,  
My heart!

Would you like to take a look over there,  
And ask how things are going,  
My heart?

## 14. Der greise Kopf

Der Reif hatt' einen weissen Schein  
Mir übers Haar gestreuet;  
Da glaubt' ich schon ein Greis zu sein  
Und hab' mich sehr gefreuet.

Doch bald ist er hinweggetaut,  
Hab' wieder schwarze Haare,  
Dass mir's vor meiner Jugend graut—  
Wie weit noch bis zur Bahre!

Vom Abendrot zum Morgenlicht  
Ward mancher Kopf zum Greise.  
Wer glaubt's? und meiner ward es nicht  
Auf dieser ganzen Reise!

## 14. The Old-Man's Head

The frost has spread a white sheen  
All over my hair;  
I thought I had become an old man  
And was very pleased about it.

But soon it melted away,  
And now I have black hair again  
So that I am horrified by my youth—  
How long still to the grave!

From the sunset to the dawn  
Many a head turns white.  
Who can believe it? And mine  
Has not on this whole journey!



## 15. Die Krähe

Eine Krähe war mit mir  
Aus der Stadt gezogen,  
Ist bis heute für und für  
Um mein Haupt geflogen.

Krähe, wunderliches Tier,  
Willst mich nicht verlassen?  
Meinst wohl, bald als Beute hier  
Meinen Leib zu fassen?

Nun, es wird nicht weit mehr geh'n  
An dem Wanderstabe.  
Krähe, lass mich endlich seh'n  
Treue bis zum Grabe!

## 15. The Crow

A crow has accompanied me  
Since I left the town,  
Until today, as ever,  
It has circled over my head.

Crow, you strange creature,  
Won't you ever leave me?  
Do you plan soon as booty  
To have my carcass?

Well, I won't be much longer  
Wandering on the road.  
Crow, let me finally see  
Loyalty unto the grave!

## 16. Letzte Hoffnung

Hie und da ist an den Bäumen  
Manches bunte Blatt zu seh'n,  
Und ich bleibe vor den Bäumen  
Oftmals in Gedanken steh'n.

Schaue nach dem einen Blatte,  
Hänge meine Hoffnung dran;  
Spielt der Wind mit meinem Blatte,  
Zittr' ich, was ich zittern kann.

Ach, und fällt das Blatt zu Boden,  
Fällt mit ihm die Hoffnung ab;  
Fall' ich selber mit zu Boden,  
Wein' auf meiner Hoffnung Grab.

## 16. Last Hope

Here and there on the trees  
There's a colored leaf to be seen.  
And I stop in front of the trees  
Often, lost in thought.

I watch a particular leaf  
And pin my hopes on it;  
If the wind plays with my leaf  
I tremble from head to foot.

Oh, and if the leaf falls to earth,  
My hopes fall along with it.  
I fall to earth as well  
And weep on the grave of my hopes.

## 17. Im Dorfe

Es bellen die Hunde, es rasseln die Ketten;  
Es schlafen die Menschen in ihren Betten,  
Träumen sich manches, was sie nicht haben,  
Tun sich im Guten und Argen erlaben;

Und morgen früh ist alles zerflossen.  
Je nun, sie haben ihr Teil genossen  
Und hoffen, was sie noch übrig liessen,  
Doch wieder zu finden auf ihren Kissen.

Bellt mich nur fort, ihr wachen Hunde,  
Lasst mich nicht ruh'n in der Schummerstunde!  
Ich bin zu Ende mit allen Träumen.  
Was will ich unter den Schläfern säumen?

## 17. In the Village

The dogs are barking, the chains are rattling;  
The people are sleeping in their beds,  
Dreaming of things they don't have,  
Refreshing themselves in good and bad.

And in the morning all will have vanished.  
Oh well, they had their share of pleasure  
And hope that what they missed  
Can be found again on their pillows.

Drive me out with your barking, you vigilant dogs,  
Don't let me rest when it's time for slumber.  
I am finished with all my dreams.  
Why should I linger among the sleepers?

## 18. Der stürmische Morgen

Wie hat der Sturm zerrissen  
Des Himmels graues Kleid!  
Die Wolkenfetzen flattern  
Umher im matten Streit.

Und rote Feuerflammen  
Zieh'n zwischen ihnen hin;  
Das nenn' ich einen Morgen  
So recht nach meinem Sinn!

Mein Herz sieht an dem Himmel  
Gemalt sein eig'nes Bild—  
Es ist nichts als der Winter,  
Der Winter kalt und wild!

## 18. The Stormy Morning

How the storm has torn asunder  
The heavens' grey cover!  
The cloud tatters flutter  
Around in weary strife.

And fiery red flames  
Dart around among them;  
That's what I call a morning  
That really fits my mood!

My heart sees in the heavens  
Its own image painted—  
It's nothing but the winter,  
Winter cold and wild!

## 19. Täuschung

Ein Licht tanzt freundlich vor mir her,  
Ich folg' ihm nach die Kreuz und Quer;  
Ich folg' ihm gern und seh's ihm an,  
Dass es verlockt den Wandersmann.

Ach! wer wie ich so elend ist,  
Gibt gern sich hin der bunten List,  
Die hinter Eis und Nacht und Graus,  
Ihm weist ein helles, warmes Haus.

Und eine liebe Seele drin.—  
Nur Täuschung ist für mich Gewinn!

## 19. Illusion

A light does a friendly dance before me,  
I follow it here and there;  
I like to follow it and watch  
The way it lures the wanderer.

Ah, a man as wretched as I am  
Is glad to fall for the merry trick  
That, beyond ice and night and fear,  
Shows him a bright, warm house.

And a loving soul within—  
Only illusion lets me win!

## 20. Der Wegweiser

Was vermeid' ich denn die Wege,  
Wo die ander'n Wand'rer geh'n,  
Suche mir versteckte Stege,  
Durch verschneite Felsenhöh'n?

Habe ja doch nichts begangen,  
Dass ich Menschen sollte scheu'n,—  
Welch ein törichtes Verlangen  
Treibt mich in die Wüstenei'n?

Weiser stehen auf den Strassen,  
Weisen auf die Städte zu.  
Und ich wandre sonder Massen  
Ohne Ruh' und suche Ruh'.

Einen Weiser seh' ich stehen  
Unverrückt vor meinem Blick;  
Eine Strasse muss ich gehen,  
Die noch keiner ging zurück.

## 20. The Sign Post

Why then do I avoid the highways  
Where the other travelers go,  
Search out the hidden pathways  
Through the snowy mountain tops?

I've committed no crime  
That I should hide from other men—  
What is the foolish compulsion  
That drives me into desolation?

Signposts stand along the highways  
Pointing to the cities,  
And I wander ever further  
Without rest and look for rest.

Before me I see a signpost standing  
Fixed before my gaze.  
I must travel a road  
From which no one ever returned.

## 21. Das Wirtshaus

Auf einen Totenacker hat mich mein Weg gebracht;  
Allhier will ich einkehren, hab ich bei mir gedacht.  
Ihr grünen Totenkränze könnt wohl die Zeichen sein,  
Die müde Wand'rer laden ins kühle Wirtshaus ein.

Sind denn in diesem Hause die Kammern all' besetzt?  
Bin matt zum Niedersinken, bin tödlich schwer verletzt.  
O unbarmherz'ge Schenke, doch weisest du mich ab?  
Nun weiter denn, nur weiter, mein treuer Wanderstab!

## 21. The Inn

My way has led me to a graveyard;  
Here I'll stop, I told myself.  
You green mourning garlands must be the sign  
That invites weary travelers into the cool inn.

What, all the rooms in this house are full?  
I'm tired enough to drop, have taken mortal hurt.  
Oh, merciless inn, you turn me away?  
Well, onward then, still further, my loyal walking staff!

## 22. Mut

Fliegt der Schnee mir ins Gesicht,  
Schüttl' ich ihn herunter.  
Wenn mein Herz im Busen spricht,  
Sing' ich hell und munter.

Höre nicht, was es mir sagt,  
Habe keine Ohren;  
Fühle nicht, was es mir klagt,  
Klagen ist für Toren.

Lustig in die Welt hinein  
Gegen Wind und Wetter!  
Will kein Gott auf Erden sein,  
Sind wir selber Götter!

## 22. Courage

If the snow flies in my face,  
I shake it off again.  
When my heart speaks in my breast,  
I sing loudly and gaily.

I don't hear what it says to me,  
I have no ears to listen;  
I don't feel when it laments,  
Complaining is for fools.

Happy through the world along  
Facing wind and weather!  
If there's no God upon the earth,  
Then we ourselves are Gods!



## 23. Die Nebensonnen

Drei Sonnen sah ich am Himmel steh'n,  
Hab' lang und fest sie angesehen;  
Und sie auch standen da so stier,  
Als wollten sie nicht weg von mir.

Ach, meine Sonnen seid ihr nicht!  
Schaut ander'n doch ins Angesicht!  
Ja, neulich hatt' ich auch wohl drei;  
Nun sind hinab die besten zwei.

Ging nur die dritt' erst hinterdrein!  
Im Dunkel wird mir wohler sein.

## 23. The False Suns

I saw three suns in the sky,  
Stared at them hard for a long time;  
And they stayed there so stubbornly  
That it seemed they didn't want to leave me.

Ah, you are not my suns!  
Go, look into someone else's face!  
Yes, recently I, too, had three  
But now the best two have gone down.

If only the third would also set!  
I will feel better in the dark.

## 24. Der Leiermann

Drüben hinterm Dorfe steht ein Leiermann  
Und mit starren Fingern dreht er was er kann.  
Barfuss auf dem Eise wankt er hin und her  
Und sein kleiner Teller bleibt ihm immer leer.

Keiner mag ihn hören, keiner sieht ihn an,  
Und die Hunde knurren um den alten Mann.  
Und er lässt es gehen alles, wie es will,  
Dreht und seine Leier steht ihm nimmer still.

Wunderlicher Alter, soll ich mit dir geh'n?  
Willst zu meinen Liedern deine Leier dreh'n?

## 24. The Hurdy-Gurdy Man

Over there beyond the village stands an organ-grinder,  
And with numb fingers he plays as best he can.  
Barefoot on the ice, he totters here and there,  
And his little plate is always empty.

No one listens to him, no one notices him,  
And the dogs growl around the old man.  
And he just lets it happen, as it will,  
Plays, and his hurdy-gurdy is never still.

Strange old man, shall I go with you?  
Will you play your organ to my songs?

# Winterreise / Winter Journey

texts: Wilhelm Mueller

music: Franz Schubert, Op. 89 Nr. 1-24, Vienna 1827

translation: Celia Sgroi

## Translator's Note

You may ask yourself, with all the translations that already exist, why would anyone undertake to make yet another translation of "Winterreise" anyhow? I don't think it ever would have occurred to me if Emily Ezust hadn't been looking for translations for her website. The idea is to voluntarily provide song-text translations that are not bound by copyright that can be used by the general public or reprinted for nothing in concert programs. All the translator is entitled to is to have their name attached to the translation if it is used. In the event, my "Winterreise" translation did not end up on the song-texts website (someone else submitted one first), but I am still glad that I did it because I learned a great deal about "Winterreise," not to mention about the art of translation.

I am not a translator by profession. The few translations I have done before "Winterreise" were of technical items or interviews, things that did not require an enormous effort to "get things exactly right." In those cases, if the translator fudged a little or conveyed the sense of what was being said instead of the actual words, it didn't matter in the least. But translating a literary work is another question all together. There getting things exactly right is extremely important, and a great deal more effort and care were required. I had the luxury of being able to take as long as I wished to do the job I had undertaken. I am not satisfied with my "Winterreise" translation, but my respect for the job that translators of literary works do has increased enormously. God bless you all!

A year or more ago, when *lieder-I* was still in its infancy, I posted a query to *opera-I* asking what listeners of art songs were looking for in a translation of song-texts. The replies were very enlightening. For one thing, I discovered that many more listeners were entirely dependent on translations of song-texts than I had imagined. For another, most people who replied to my query said that they preferred to have line-by-line translations that were as faithful to the original text as possible. The majority of art-song enthusiasts wanted to be able to understand why a particular word in the song text



**Franz (Peter) Schubert (1797-1828)**

received particular emphasis, or why a line or a stanza received the treatment it had from the composer or performers. I tried to let those concerns guide me in doing my own translation of "Winterreise." Now you can decide whether I was successful. I think that in some cases I was, but I am painfully aware of the many instances in which I was not. Maybe next time ...

So, what did I have in mind when I made my "Winterreise" translation? First, I tried to provide line-by-line translations wherever possible and be as faithful as I could to the original text. Second, I wanted to confine myself to what the text actually said without injecting my own "interpretation" into the translation. And third, I wanted to provide a translation that would not sound silly to an American audience at the tail end of the 20th century. I wanted to eschew the self-consciously "poetic" without producing something that looked like bad prose arbitrarily made to look like poetry. No easy task, as it turned out. I made it a point not to look at other translations of "Winterreise" until I had completed a working translation of every poem because I didn't want to find myself cribbing from another translations, consciously or unconsciously. When I reached that point, I did consult about a half dozen translations. The one I liked the best is Richard Wigmore's, which appears in his book of Schubert song translations and is also used in the Hyperion Schubert Edition. Of course, my version does not correspond to his in every particular. What was most helpful in doing the translations was repeated listening to the songs themselves. Schubert knew what Müller was saying, and that was often of great assistance.

On the face of it, Wilhelm Müller's "Winterreise" poems don't appear to present an enormous challenge to the translator. The poems are generally simple and straightforward, quite naive and folksong-like, in fact. His vocabulary is fairly limited, his sentence structure is reasonably simple, and, as Fischer-Dieskau once observed somewhat dryly, the poems do not contain much in the way of serious intellectual content. However, it soon became clear to me that a translator can make a mess of a simple poem as easily as a complicated one, and awkwardness in a simple poem is even more glaringly evident than it would be in a poem that is more complex. Moreover, turning German into reasonably normal English while maintaining a line-by-line translation is an enormous problem. Things that still look quite normal in contemporary spoken or written German may look antiquated at best in contemporary English. At worst, they simply look bizarre. In addition, although Müller's vocabulary is limited, his use of words and images is very deliberate and

demanding something equally deliberate and careful from the translator. If the reader of a song-text translation is to have the greatest opportunity to understand what the composer was responding to when he set the poem, the poet's text has to be rendered as faithfully as possible. With this in mind, I would like to mention a number of specific difficulties I encountered while making my translation.

**DIE WETTERFAHNE:** This poem is a killer, IMHO, and has done in many a translator in the past. The first major headache is the last line of the first stanza: "Sie pfiff den armen Flüchtling aus." The meaning is clear enough: "Auspfeifen" in this context means expressing disapproval by whistling or hissing. In the theatre, "jemanden auspfeifen" would mean to hiss or boo someone off the stage. Given that a literal translation would look like nonsense, the best solution would seem to be: "That it mocked the poor fugitive," which is what I used. However, that solution does not acknowledge the principal image that Müller creates in the first stanza of his poem. The wind turning the weathervane makes a sound that the wanderer interprets as mockery of his plight. That is what draws his attention to the weathervane in the first place, and he then elaborates on the weathervane as a symbol of inconstancy or fickleness in the following stanzas. (A similar image is invoked by Gottfried von Strassburg in his epic poem "Tristan und Isold," when, in the context of a trial by ordeal, he remarks that God is as fickle as a windblown sleeve.) The protagonist should have paid better attention to the symbol displayed so prominently on his erstwhile sweetheart's house. If he had, he would never have made the mistake of expecting to find a faithful woman living there. The other problem comes in the first two lines of the final stanza: "Der Wind spielt innen mit den Herzen/Wie auf dem Dach, nur nicht so laut." At least one translation I have seen had the inhabitants of the house up on the roof with the weathervane. I don't think that is what Müller had in mind. The image is actually clear enough. The people in the house change directions just as readily as the weathervane on the roof, but they are a bit more subtle about it. But there you are, faced with the same problem that cropped up in the first stanza: If you didn't give a literal translation of "auspfeifen" in the first stanza, he "nur nicht so laut" in the last one doesn't make much sense. So you either end up with yet another "interpretation" of the symbol or a reference to a noise that you didn't make the reader aware of in the beginning. A mess, no way to get around it.

**ERSTARRUNG:** The last stanza is very difficult to translate. The first line reads "Mein Herz ist wie erstorben"[dead] (instead of "erfroren" [frozen]) even though the sense of the

rest of the stanza rests on the images of freezing and thawing. My first impulse was to go with "frozen" in line one in defiance of what is actually written. Then I decided to interpret "kalt startt" in line 2 as "frozen," so that I could give a more accurate translation of line one. This may seem like much ado about nothing, but the original text of the stanza sets up a dichotomy that is very important. Even though being numb or frozen [with grief] may seem like a bad thing for the protagonist, giving up his grief [thawing] will signify the ultimate loss of the beloved. That is reflected in the image of the final stanza: My heart seems to be dead, the beloved's image is frozen within it. Should my heart ever thaw, my beloved's image will be lost forever. (The same image of freezing and thawing or ice and fire recurs in both "Wasserflut" and "Auf dem Flusse.")

DER GREISE KOPF: And what does "Der greise Kopf" mean? The adjective "greise" means "hoary [white with age], elderly, venerable." The text of the poem is very clear: The wanderer wakes up with snow on his head, making it look as if his hair has turned white and he has become an old man. Some translators use the title "The Hoary Head." Accurate? Surely. A bit silly sounding to a contemporary audience?. You bet. What was that again? The horny head? The whore-y head? The hairy head? Does anybody use the word hoary these days? I don't think so. (And not only that. For me personally, it has unpleasant associations with the "hairy hand," a case U.S. law students are baffled by in their first-year Contracts class.) My first idea was to use "The Gray Head" as the title, but snow is not gray (well, not in most places, anyway). Finally, I decided to use "The Old-Man's Head" (even though the word "greise" with a small "g" is an adjective and not the same as "Greise" with a capital "G", which is a word for an old man). However, now the translator is faced with the first two lines of the final stanza: "Vom Abendrot zum Morgenlicht/Ward mancher Kopf zum Greise." There "Greise" specifically means "old man," but what person in English would say "between sunset and dawn many a head becomes an old man"? So I translated it as "many a head turns white." It's like being in quicksand and sinking ever deeper with nothing in sight to hang onto. All I can say is that this is one instance in which I thought that sense had to prevail over literalness. Others may disagree...

TÄUSCHUNG: There are no enormous obstacles in this poem, but a couple of things are worth noting. The last two lines of stanza 2 can pose a bit of a problem. How to translate "Graus"? Fear, horror? Seems a bit strong to me. Why "Graus"? Well, it rhymes with "Haus." I went with "fear." I

don't like it, but what can you do? Then there is the final couplet. I confess that I took a bit of a liberty. "liebe Seele" means "dear" or "beloved" soul, not "loving," but I kind of wanted two syllables. You see, I had these two lines with the same meter and they rhymed, and, and ... "Nur Täuschung ist für mich Gewinn" means, literally, "only illusion benefits me," but "Only illusion lets me win" conveys the sense, and, and ... Well, you get the picture. I got carried away.

DIE NEBENSONNEN: Here again, the title poses some difficulties. It is often translated as "The Mock Suns" but I opted for "The False Suns" in order to stress both the hallucinatory character of the image and the falsity of the beloved. Nit-picking, I suppose, but it satisfied me better.

A final comment. In furtherance of the contrast between light and darkness that runs through the "Winterreise" cycle, Müller uses the word "hell" in a number of poems, and sometimes more than once in the same poem. Rarely does it receive the same translation twice. A versatile word!

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