

## **Recursive Machine Translation**

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### **Abstract**

Machine translation tools such as Google Translate are at best seen as useful approximators, rather than offering any literary potential. In this experiment and short methodological reflection, I use Google Translate to recursively translate Austrian poet Georg Trakl's celebrated WWI poem, 'Grodek', between German and English, until the two versions stabilise. I am attentive to places in which the poem and its renderings are simplified and/or literary value may be lost, but also places in which new or unexpected renderings emerge. This is a preliminary foray, but I propose that the method of recursive machine translation offers a new way to explore the translation of literary texts—a timely proposal, given the increasing applications of computer programmes and machine learning both within the humanities and throughout wider literary culture.

## **Recursive Machine Translation**

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While it is easy to decry machine translation tools such as Google Translate (hereafter ‘GT’) as perhaps crudely useful but lacking stylistic value, I wonder whether it might in fact be used to develop new approaches to literary translation, particularly with poetry. Using Austrian poet Georg Trakl’s celebrated poem *Grodek* on the horrors of World War I—a war fuelled partly by futurist dreams of new machines promising deliverance through oblivion, which, along with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war’s end, makes this selection both thematically and temporally apt—I explore how GT uses the internet as a vast database of preexisting translated documents to arrive at statistically likely translations of novel text input, and what happens when this process runs recursively on itself. My hypothesis was that because of the feedback loops already present in GT algorithms, by which many GT-translated texts are uploaded to the internet as new content and then used as part of GT’s vast set of extant translations in making translations of new inputs, and because of the statistical nature of its analyses, each successive translation of *Grodek* would become, in a certain way, ‘simpler’—that is to say, more basic in its vocabulary and syntax—and therefore its recursive translations would form a sort of homeostatic process, ultimately arriving at a ‘stable’ version of the poem in both English and German: one that, when translated back and forth, would no longer change.

So I set out to see what would happen. I have formatted my results to elucidate the process I followed. Starting with *0* as the original poem<sup>1</sup> in German, each successive translation is numbered, the even numbers in German and the odd numbers in English. Bold text in each poem signifies those sections of text that have changed from the previous version of the same language (changes from *2* to *4*, for example); these may be changes in diction, syntax, or a full lexical addition altogether. Text in square brackets signifies words that have been omitted from the previous version of the same language (omissions from *1* to *3*, for example).

I first conceived and ran this experiment in 2012, and the first of two sections describes the results of this initial trial. I revisited these results more recently, while using the technique elsewhere, with an eye to publish them; yet in looking over the proofs of the 2012 essay, however, I realised that it was six years old, and rather out of date. Were the results still the same? Were my conclusions valid? Any initial trepidation, however, turned quickly into excitement over the natural experiment lying in my hands: it occurred to me that repeating the same GT experiment in 2018—as described in the second section—might tell us something interesting not only

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<sup>1</sup> As my attentive reviewer pointed out, *0* is actually *not* the original poem, as published in the *Brenner Jahrbuch* in 1915 and subsequently republished in all scholarly editions of Trakl's works. *0* contains two errors: a missing 'n' at the end of 'blau' in line 3, and a missing 'e' between the 'h' and 'r' in 'nährt' in line 16. The former is not grammatically proper or sonically ideal but perhaps not so grave for meaning; the latter, however, changes the word entirely, from Trakl's intended 'nourishes' to 'approaches'. As my charitable reviewer wrote to me, 'This is a shame because the nourishing quality of the pain is a crucial element in the poem's thematic design. This slip also points – unintentionally – to the fact that the poem had already been subject to GT-like transformations long before GT got hold of it!' Indeed, when I followed up with the leader of the seminar I was participating in when I made the experiment for the first time in 2012, we tried to speculate on how this corrupted text could have emerged. They shared with me the online archive in the public domain from which they took the text [<http://www.literaturmische.de/Trakl/index-trakl.htm>], and it is, now at least, correctly rendered there; we thought it could have been due to an autocorrect error when copying to a new document, though when attempted now no such thing occurs, or that these errors had perhaps been there before and have since been corrected. My seminar leader described how they 'actually love that "nourishes" becomes "approaches" and to think about these words in relation to translation', though certainly also that it may be 'time to update that handout'. For our purposes here, as my reviewer speaks to, it is somehow fitting that there should already be errors, or mutations perhaps, in the source text—as GT is simply an extension of a much longer history of how copying, reproducing, and translating texts back and forth and onward bears inevitable errors and, sometimes, unexpected fruits.

about Trakl's style and the stylistics of machine translation, but also about how the GT algorithm itself and its internetted base of text might have developed since.

## 1.

The 2012 process produced some curious features (see Appendix 1). Most immediately notable were 'Hinrollt' (from **1**) and, later, 'Red Cloud' (from **4**)—phrases that, for whatever reasons, stopped being translated back and forth and remained constant between the two languages. For 'Hinrollt', this may have been due to the directional prefix 'hin' that modifies the verb 'rollt', though I can't say this is a particularly strange practice in German. As to why 'Red Cloud' would stay untranslated, the only reason I could see is that the capitalisation it suddenly gained in English may have signified it as a proper noun, thus remaining unchanged when brought back into German. Mutations like these may be seen as 'mistakes'—but might be even more readily taken as a reminder of the arbitrariness of the signifier, the contingency of sounds and symbols in any language that we as translators constantly grapple with, and that troubles any simplistic notion (if one ever existed) of a translation without ambiguity or equally valid alternatives: one might read 'Hinrollt' in the English as a proper noun, an atmospheric peer of 'Red Cloud' of obscure origin; one might read 'Red Cloud' in the German also as a proper noun, a foreign force of great power arriving triumphant from the sky.

The simplification hypothesis manifested in many ways. Comparative adjectives and adverbs were reduced to their simpler and then even their non-comparative forms: 'düstrer', 'more darkly', became 'düster' in **2**, just 'dark' by **3**, and thus, from **4**, simply 'dunkel'. Certain stylistically elided vowels in the original were replaced: already by **2**, 'goldnem' became 'goldenen', 'ungebornen' became 'ungeborenen'. And Trakl's hypnotising hypotactic



constructions were replaced with simpler, paratactic ones: ‘darin ein zürnender Gott wohnt’ was one of the first phrases to be lost in rearrangement. This process of grammatical simplification was likely due to the fact that GT did not, at the time of first writing in 2012, seem to translate with larger-scale grammatical constructions in mind; subordinations and other complex nesting of dependent clauses seemed smoothed out as a byproduct of translating individual words or short phrases, rather than structures of a larger scale. Yet perhaps the greatest ‘loss’ in the course of machine translation of the poem was the ponderous, rhythmic lilt of certain phrases that Trakl achieves through syntactic inversions and compounding certain words. The line ‘Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter’, for example, loses its circling amphibrachs as the syntax is rearranged already in **2** to correspond to the more prosaic sentence formation of ‘Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen’. These cycles of sounds are crucial to the poem, capturing the sense of futility and helplessness that tempers the poem’s rich imagery with poignancy, despair.

Ultimately, though, it may be more fruitful to talk not of loss but unexpected gain—for the process yielded some pleasing and rather poetical surprises. One of the most prominent examples that highlights the flexibility and self-correction that arises when GT is run recursively on itself was the original ‘mondne Kühle’ that moved through the intriguing but stilted ‘lunar coolness’ in **1**, before arriving in **3** at the assonant and somehow startling ‘cool moon’: a simple image, but one that, situated between the Red Cloud, the angry god, the spilled blood, and the black rot, takes on a particularly smoothing, calming function—only to be washed over in the end with noise and horrific colour, just like the ‘silent grove’ with ‘bleeding heads’, ‘brazen altars’, and ‘hot flame’. Moments like this might excite us, and lead us to explore further applications of machine translation yielding unexpected poetic results.



2.

2018 GT *Grodek* is a rather different poem, both in German and in English. In German, only one line of the final poem from 2018 is shared with the original: ‘Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne’ (an online check in the 2018 process revealed that the original poem features ‘Und blauen Seen’, rather than ‘blaue Seen’ of the version I was initially given; saliently, however, GT quickly reverts the line’s ‘blauen’ to ‘blaue’ after the first rendering anyway). In English, only two lines of the final poem are shared between the 2012 and 2018 versions (**5** in each): ‘All roads lead to black rot’ and ‘To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads’. The final German poems from 2012 and 2018 (**6** in each), meanwhile, share no lines in common. As with the 2012 rendering, occurrences of GT re-expanding Trakl’s stylistic elisions are common: ‘die goldnen Ebenen’ by **2** becomes ‘den goldenen Ebenen’; ‘Das vergossne Blut’ by **2** becomes ‘Das vergossene Blut’; ‘Unter goldnem Gezweig’ by **4** becomes ‘Unter dem goldenen Ast’; ‘Die ungeborenen Enkel’ by **2** becomes ‘Der ungeborene Enkel’. Trakl’s preference for shorter variants of adjectives and past participles is not a coincidence—the clipped rhythms cut vowels away, enhancing the poem’s tension, its pain, as if recited through clenched teeth or locked jaw.

Similarly, many of Trakl’s more compact and gestural verbal phrases become simplified through expansion—GT seems to want such relations to be made explicit, if not overdetermined. ‘Düstrer hinrollt’ by **2** becomes ‘Düstrer rollt sich zusammen’, and by **4** becomes merely ‘Düster rollt sich zusammen’—note the eventual omission in **4** of the first r in ‘Düster’, reducing the comparative ‘darker’ to simply ‘dark’. Similarly, ‘Doch stille sammelt im Weidengrund’ by **2** becomes ‘Aber Stille sammelt sich auf dem Weidengrund’, and by **4** becomes ‘Aber Stille breitet sich auf dem Weidegrund aus’. GT likes to render evocative single



verbs like ‘hinrollt’ and ‘sammelt’ longer and more literal, with reflexive pronouns and extra prepositions. Adjectival simplification as seen with ‘düstrer’ happens elsewhere, where ‘zerbrochenen Münder’ becomes by **2** simply ‘gebrochenen Münder’, and where the comparative ‘stolzere Trauer’ is shortened by **2** to ‘stolzer trauern’ then reduced by **4** to merely ‘stolz trauern’.

Yet such simplifications do not always flatten the poem out. While ‘Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung’ by **2** becomes ‘Alle Straßen führen zu Schwarzfäule’, swapping the more specific ‘münden’ for the more quotidian ‘führen’, the transition from ‘schwarze Verwesung’ to ‘Schwarzfäule’ seems to only enhance the sense of abrupt consumption; correspondingly, in English, ‘All roads lead to black decay’ in **1** is refined in **3** to ‘All roads lead to black rot.’ And when ‘Unter goldnem Gezweig der Nacht’ is temporarily expanded in **2** to ‘Unter dem goldenen Zweig der Nacht’, (from ‘bough’ to ‘branch’), simplifying ‘Zweig’ even further to ‘Ast’ in **4** yields a fitting assonance with the ‘Nacht’ later in the line.

And these are not the only surprisingly permissible changes to the German poem. Despite ‘schweigenden’ in the sixth-to-last line turning by **2** to the simpler ‘stillen’, and ‘schwankt’ (‘sways’) by **4** to ‘schwingt’ (‘swings’), ‘Schwester Schatten’ has by **6** become ‘Schwester Shadow’—a spectre neither familiar nor foreign, flitting between languages and realms, instilling an even greater sense of unease than either equivalent monolingual phrase could conjure.

The same line in English also sees differences from the 2012 version. Here, ‘Sister Shade sways’ in **1** becomes ‘Sister shadow sways’ in **3**, then ‘Sister Shadow swings through the silent grove’ in **5**—all quite an improvement from 2012’s ‘It varies the sister’s shadow through the silent grove’, whether the goal is fidelity to the original or simply stylistic coherence. Similarly,

where ‘Hinrollt’ persisted throughout the 2012 English rendering, here it was ‘Düstrer’ that lingered, rolling up in **1**, curling up in **3**, and eventually in **5** settling to ‘Gloomy rolls up’.

Other differences are not so clearly in favour of the 2018 rendering. ‘Ebenen’, rendered as ‘plains’ in 2012, here becomes ‘planes’ in **1**, then ‘levels’ from **3**—something in the frequency or likelihood of different meanings of the word in GT’s text bank must since have changed. And where ‘mondne Kühle’ yielding ‘cool moon’ was a highlight of the 2012, the 2018 somehow takes it immediately in **1** even further to simply ‘coolness’—not bad, certainly, though nor is the image, or the ‘shed blood’ with which it shares the line, quite as arresting under a moonless sky.

Yet the 2018 version also introduces some new gems of its own. Where the 2012 gave the clunky ‘But quietly accumulated in pastures’, the 2018 emits the melodic ‘But silence spreads on the pasture ground’—three iambs and a satisfying anapest in the middle, a short shiver of anxious pleasure as the red clouds gather and the god of anger drives us further on.

Towards the end, what was once in 2012 ‘Oh proud sorrow’ now becomes ‘Oh proud mourn’—the comparative and gerundive suffixes dropped after the ‘prouder mourning’ of **1**, yielding a brisk yet richly ambiguous phrase. ‘Oh proud mourn’ functions both as a kind of imperative—‘You who are proud, mourn!’—as well as a homonym of ‘morn’, which, at the end of the 2018 rendering, after the autumnal forests in evening, the gloomily rolling sun, the clouds and coolness and night and stars, we might inadvertently glimpse in English. Grodek rejects any such hint of optimism in his original poem—no spring follows the darkly fluted autumn; the unborn grandsons hang in a terminal night; all roads, now and hence, lead to black rot. In 2012, GT concurred with Trakl’s apocalypticism; in 2018, it does still, though suggests something else, however accidental, in addition: not a sorrow that wallows in sleepless delirium, in the



flaming pain of absence, in foreclosed possibility, but a mourning that also has a tomorrow—  
another page, not blank, but neither fully foretold. The machine can be a deadly weapon. The  
machine can also surprise.

Appendix 1. 2012 Rendering

*0 (original)*

GRODEK

Am Abend tönen die herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
Düstrer hinrollt; umfängt die Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
Doch stille sammelt im Weidengrund  
Rotes Gewölk, darin ein zürnender Gott wohnt  
Das vergossne Blut sich, mondne Kühle;  
Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung.  
Unter goldnem Gezweig der Nacht und Sternen  
Es schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter;  
Und leise tönen im Rohr die dunkeln Flöten des Herbstes.  
O stolzere Trauer! ihr ehernen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein gewaltiger Schmerz,  
Die ungeborenen Enkel.

*1*

GRODEK

In the evening shades the autumn woods  
Of deadly weapons, the golden plains  
And blue lakes, over the sun  
Hinrollt gloomy, the night embraces  
Dying warriors, the wild lament  
Of their broken mouths.  
But quietly accumulated in pastures due  
Red clouds, it lives an angry god  
The spilled blood itself, lunar coolness;  
All roads lead to black rot.  
Under the golden branches of the night and stars  
It varies the sister's shadow through the silent grove,  
To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
And quietly drown in the dark flutes of autumn tube.  
O prouder grief! You brazen altars  
The hot flame of the Spirit today approaches a huge pain,  
The unborn grandchildren.

## GRODEK

**In den Abendstunden Schatten der** herbstlichen Wälder  
 Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
 Und blauen Seen, [**dar**]über die Sonne  
**Hinrollt düster, umarmt** die Nacht  
 Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
 Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
**Aber ruhig in Weiden durch akkumulierte**  
**Rote Wolken, lebt sie einen zornigen Gott**  
 Das **vergossene** Blut sich, **Mond** Kühle;  
 Alle **Wege führen nach Schwarzfäule.**  
 Unter **den goldenen Zweigen** der Nacht und Sternen  
**Sie** schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
**Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, leitet die Blutung;**  
 Und leise **in den dunklen Flöten des Herbstes Rohr zu ertränken.**  
 O **stolzer** Trauer! Ihr ehernen Altäre  
 Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein **riesiger** Schmerz,  
 Die **ungeborenen** Enkel.

## GRODEK

In the evening **shadows of** the autumn woods  
 Of deadly weapons, the golden plains  
 And blue lakes, over the sun  
 Hinrollt **dark embraces the night**  
 Dying warriors, the wild lament  
 Of their broken mouths.  
 But by quietly accumulated in pastures [**due**]  
**Red Cloud is alive, she an** angry god  
 The spilled blood itself, **cool moon;**  
 All roads lead to black rot.  
**Among** the golden branches of the night and stars  
 It varies the sister's shadow through the silent grove,  
 To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
 And **softly to** drown in the dark flutes of autumn tube.  
 O **proud sorrow!** You brazen altars  
 The hot flame of the Spirit today approaches a huge pain,  
 The unborn grandchildren.

## GRODEK

In den Abendstunden Schatten der herbstlichen Wälder  
 Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
 Und blauen Seen, **[über]** die Sonne  
 Hinrollt **dunklen umfasst** die Nacht  
 Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
 Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
 Aber ruhig in Weiden **angesammelt**  
**Red Cloud ist lebendig, sie ein zorniger** Gott  
 Das vergossene Blut sich, **kühle Mond;**  
 Alle Wege führen nach Schwarzfäule.  
 Unter den goldenen Zweigen der Nacht und Sternen  
 Sie schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
 Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, leitet die Blutung;  
 Und leise, **um** in den dunklen Flöten des Herbstes Rohr zu ertränken.  
 O stolzer Trauer! Ihr ehernen Altäre  
 Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein riesiger Schmerz,  
 Die ungeborenen Enkel.

## GRODEK

In the evening shadows of the autumn woods  
 Of deadly weapons, the golden plains  
 And blue lakes, the sun  
 Hinrollt **includes dark** night  
 Dying warriors, the wild lament  
 Of their broken mouths.  
 But **[by]** quietly accumulated in pastures  
 Red Cloud is alive, she **is** an angry god  
 The spilled blood itself, cool moon;  
 All roads lead to black rot.  
 Among the golden branches of the night and stars  
 It varies the sister's shadow through the silent grove,  
 To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
 And softly to drown in the dark flutes of autumn tube.  
 O proud sorrow! You brazen altars  
 The hot flame of the Spirit today approaches a huge pain,  
 The unborn grandchildren.

## GRODEK

In den Abendstunden Schatten der herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
Und blauen Seen, die Sonne  
Hinrollt **umfasst dunkle [die]** Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
Aber ruhig in Weiden angesammelt  
Red Cloud ist lebendig, sie **ist** ein zorniger Gott  
Das vergossene Blut sich, kühle Mond;  
Alle Wege führen nach Schwarzfäule.  
Unter den goldenen Zweigen der Nacht und Sternen  
Sie schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, leitet die Blutung;  
Und leise, um in den dunklen Flöten des Herbstes Rohr zu ertränken.  
O stolzer Trauer! Ihr ehernen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein riesiger Schmerz,  
Die ungeborenen Enkel.

2012 Rendering stable versions

6

GRODEK

In den Abendstunden Schatten der herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
Und blauen Seen, die Sonne  
Hinrollt umfasst dunkle Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
Aber ruhig in Weiden angesammelt  
Red Cloud ist lebendig, sie ist ein zorniger Gott  
Das vergossene Blut sich, kühle Mond;  
Alle Wege führen nach Schwarzfäule.  
Unter den goldenen Zweigen der Nacht und Sternen  
Sie schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, leitet die Blutung;  
Und leise, um in den dunklen Flöten des Herbstes Rohr zu ertränken.  
O stolzer Trauer! Ihr ehernen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein riesiger Schmerz,  
Die ungeborenen Enkel.

5

GRODEK

In the evening shadows of the autumn woods  
Of deadly weapons, the golden plains  
And blue lakes, the sun  
Hinrollt includes dark night  
Dying warriors, the wild lament  
Of their broken mouths.  
But quietly accumulated in pastures  
Red Cloud is alive, she is an angry god  
The spilled blood itself, cool moon;  
All roads lead to black rot.  
Among the golden branches of the night and stars  
It varies the sister's shadow through the silent grove,  
To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
And softly to drown in the dark flutes of autumn tube.  
O proud sorrow! You brazen altars  
The hot flame of the Spirit today approaches a huge pain,  
The unborn grandchildren.

Appendix 2. 2018 Rendering

*0 (original)*

GRODEK

Am Abend tönen die herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
Düstrer hinrollt; umfängt die Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
Doch stille sammelt im Weidengrund  
Rotes Gewölk, darin ein zürnender Gott wohnt  
Das vergossne Blut sich, mondne Kühle;  
Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung.  
Unter goldnem Gezweig der Nacht und Sternen  
Es schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter;  
Und leise tönen im Rohr die dunkeln Flöten des Herbstes.  
O stolzere Trauer! ihr ehernen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert heute ein gewaltiger Schmerz,  
Die ungeborenen Enkel.

*1*

GRODEK

In the evening, the autumnal forests sound  
Of deadly weapons, the golden planes  
And blue lakes, above it the sun  
Düstrer rolls up; surrounds the night  
Dying warriors, the wild suit  
Her broken mouths.  
But quiet gathers in the pasture ground  
Red clouds in which a god of wrath lives  
The shed blood, coolness;  
All roads lead to black decay.  
Under golden branch of the night and stars  
Sister Shade sways through the silent grove,  
To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
And softly the dark flutes of autumn sound in the pipe.  
O prouder mourning! their bronze altars  
The hot flame of the spirit is approaching a tremendous pain today  
The unborn grandson.

## GRODEK

Am Abend **klingen** die herbstlichen Wälder  
 Von tödlichen Waffen, **den** goldenen Ebenen  
 Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
 Düsterrer **rollt sich zusammen; umgibt** die Nacht  
 Sterbende Krieger, der wilde **Anzug**  
 Ihre[r] gebrochenen Mäuler.  
**Aber** Stille sammelt **sich auf dem** Weide[n]grund  
 Rote[s] **Wolken, in denen** ein Gott **des Zorns lebt**  
 Das vergossene Blut [sich], **die** Kühle;  
 Alle Straßen **führen zu Schwarzfäule**.  
 Unter **dem** goldenen [Ge]Zweig der Nacht und Sterne[n]  
**Schwester Schatten schwankt** durch den **stillen** Hain,  
**Um** die Geister der Helden **zu begrüßen**, die blutenden **Köpfe**;  
 Und leise **klingen** die dunklen Flöten des Herbstes **in der Pfeife**.  
 Oh stolzer[e] trauern! ihre **bronzenen** Altäre  
 Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert **sich** heute **einem** gewaltigen Schmerz[,]  
 Der ungeborene[n] Enkel.

## GRODEK

In the evening[,] the autumnal forests sound  
 Of deadly weapons, the golden **levels**  
 And blue lakes, above it the sun  
 Düsterrer **curls** up; surrounds the night  
 Dying warriors, the wild suit  
**Your** broken mouths.  
 But **silence** gathers **on** the pasture ground  
 Red clouds in which a god of **anger** lives  
 The shed blood, the coolness;  
 All roads lead to black **rot**.  
 Under the golden branch of the night and stars  
 Sister **shadow** sways through the silent grove,  
 To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
 And softly, the dark flutes of autumn sound in the pipe.  
 Oh proud[er] mourn[ing]! their bronze altars  
 The hot flame of the spirit is approaching a tremendous pain today  
 The unborn grandson.



4

GRODEK

Am Abend klingen die herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, den goldenen Ebenen  
Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
Düst[er]er rollt sich zusammen; umgibt die Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, der wilde Anzug  
**Deine** gebrochenen Münder.  
Aber Stille **breitet** sich auf dem Weidegrund **aus**  
Rote Wolken, in denen ein Gott der **Wut** lebt  
Das vergossene Blut, die Kühle;  
Alle Straßen führen zu Schwarzfäule.  
Unter dem goldenen **Ast** der Nacht und Sterne  
Schwester Schatten **schwingt** durch den stillen Hain,  
Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, die blutenden Köpfe;  
Und leise klingen die dunklen Flöten des Herbstes in der Pfeife.  
Oh stolz[er] trauern! ihre bronzenen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert sich heute einem gewaltigen Schmerz  
Der ungeborene Enkel.

5

GRODEK

In the evening the autumnal forests sound  
Of deadly weapons, the golden levels  
And blue lakes, above it the sun  
**Gloomy rolls** up; surrounds the night  
Dying warriors, the wild suit  
Your broken mouths.  
But silence spreads on the pasture ground  
Red clouds in which a god of anger lives  
The shed blood, the coolness;  
All roads lead to black rot.  
Under the golden branch of the night and stars  
Sister **Shadow swings** through the silent grove,  
To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
And softly, the dark flutes of autumn sound in the pipe.  
Oh proud mourn! their bronze altars  
The hot flame of the spirit is approaching a tremendous pain today  
The unborn grandson.

## GRODEK

Am Abend klingen die herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, den goldenen Ebenen  
Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
Düster rollt sich zusammen; umgibt die Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, der wilde Anzug  
Deine gebrochenen Mäuler.  
Aber Stille breitet sich auf dem Weidegrund aus  
Rote Wolken, in denen ein Gott der Wut lebt  
Das vergossene Blut, die Kühle;  
Alle Straßen führen zu Schwarzfäule.  
Unter dem goldenen Ast der Nacht und Sterne  
Schwester **Shadow** schwingt durch den stillen Hain,  
Um die Geister der Helden zu begrüßen, die blutenden Köpfe;  
Und leise klingen die dunklen Flöten des Herbstes in der Pfeife.  
Oh stolz trauern! ihre bronzenen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert sich heute einem gewaltigen Schmerz  
Der ungeborene Enkel.

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6

GRODEK

Am Abend klingen die herbstlichen Wälder  
Von tödlichen Waffen, den goldenen Ebenen  
Und blaue Seen, darüber die Sonne  
Düster rollt sich zusammen; umgibt die Nacht  
Sterbende Krieger, der wilde Anzug  
Deine gebrochenen Münder.  
Aber Stille breitet sich auf dem Weidegrund aus  
Rote Wolken, in denen ein Gott der Wut lebt  
Das vergossene Blut, die Kühle;  
Alle Straßen führen zu Schwarzfäule.  
Unter dem goldenen Ast der Nacht und Sterne  
Schwester Shadow schwingt durch den stillen Hain,  
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Oh stolz trauern! ihre bronzenen Altäre  
Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nähert sich heute einem gewaltigen Schmerz  
Der ungeborene Enkel.

5

GRODEK

In the evening the autumnal forests sound  
Of deadly weapons, the golden levels  
And blue lakes, above it the sun  
Gloomy rolls up; surrounds the night  
Dying warriors, the wild suit  
Your broken mouths.  
But silence spreads on the pasture ground  
Red clouds in which a god of anger lives  
The shed blood, the coolness;  
All roads lead to black rot.  
Under the golden branch of the night and stars  
Sister Shadow swings through the silent grove,  
To greet the spirits of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
And softly, the dark flutes of autumn sound in the pipe.  
Oh proud mourn! their bronze altars  
The hot flame of the spirit is approaching a tremendous pain today  
The unborn grandson.

**Biographical note**

Joshua Evans is a DPhil student in Geography and the Environment at Oxford, where he researches domestication and the microbiogeography of translated fermentation practices. He holds an MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science from Cambridge, and a BA in the Humanities from Yale where he studied literature and philosophy. He is currently finishing a complete English translation of Danish poet Theis Ørntoft's *Poems 2014*.