



## Rhythm, Expectation and Abstraction in Poetic Spoken Atmospheres: Inger Christensen and Antonio Gamoneda



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Video. Læse på Universitetet i Agder. 18. juni 1997. ([Link](#) minutes: 4:33-8:11).

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##### *Libro del frío* (*Book of the cold*, 1992)

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Un animal oculto... / [A animal hidden...]

## Inger Christensen, *alfabet* (1981)

1  
abrikostræerne findes, abrikostræerne findes

2  
bregnerne findes; og brombær, brombær  
og brom findes; og brinten, brinten

3  
cikaderne findes; cikorie, chrom  
og citrontræer findes; cikaderne findes;  
cikaderne, ceder, cypres, cerebellum

4  
duerne findes; drømmerne, dukkerne  
dræberne findes; duerne, duerne;  
dis, dioxin og dagene; dagene  
findes; dagene døden; og digtene  
findes; digtene, dagene, døden

5  
efteråret findes; eftersmagen og eftertanken  
findes; og enrummet findes; englene,  
enkerne og elsdyret findes; enkelthederne  
findes, erindringen, erindringens lys;  
og efterlyset findes, egetræet og elmetræet  
findes, og enebærbusken, ensheden, ensomheden  
findes, og edderfuglen og edderkoppen findes,  
og eddiken findes, og eftertiden, eftertiden

1  
apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist

2  
bracken exists; and blackberries, blackberries;  
bromine exists; and hydrogen, hydrogen

3  
cicadas exist; chicory, chromium,  
citrus trees; cicadas exist;  
cicadas, cedars, cypresses, the cerebellum

4  
doves exist, dreamers, and dolls;  
killers exist, and doves, and doves;  
haze, dioxin, and days; days  
exist, days and death; and poems  
exist; poems, days, death

5  
early fall exists; aftertaste, afterthought;  
seclusion and angels exist;  
widows and elk exist; every  
detail exists; memory, memory's light;  
afterglow exists; oaks, elms,  
junipers, sameness, loneliness exist;  
eider ducks, spiders, and vinegar  
exist, and the future, the future

6

fiskehejren findes, med sin gråblå hvælvede  
ryg findes den, med sin fjertop sort  
og sine halefjer lyse findes den; i kolonier  
findes den; i den såkaldt Gamle Verden;  
findes også fiskene; og fiskeørnen, fjeldrypen  
falken; festgræsset og fårenes farver;  
fissionsprodukterne findes og figentræet findes;  
fejlene findes, de grove, de systematiske,  
de tilfældige; fjernstyringen findes og fuglene;  
og frugtræerne findes og frugterne i frugthaven hvor  
abrikotræerne findes, abrikotræerne findes,  
i lande hvor varmen vil frembringe netop den  
farve i kødet abrikosfrugter har

12

livet, luften vi indånder findes  
en lethed i alt, en lighed i alt,  
en ligning, et åbent bevægeligt udsagn  
i alt, og mens træ efter træ bruser op i  
den tidlige sommer, en lidenskab, lidenskab  
i alt, som fandtes der til luftens leg med  
den faldende manna en enkel principtegning,  
enkel som når lykken har masser af mad  
og ulykken ingen, enkel som når længslen  
har masser af veje og lidelsen ingen,  
enkel som den hellige lotus er enkel  
fordi den kan spises, en tegning så enkel  
som når latteren tegner dit ansigt i luft

6

fisherbird herons exist, with their grey-blue arching  
backs, with their black-feathered crests and their  
bright-feathered tails they exist; in colonies  
they exist, in the so-called Old World;  
fish, too, exist, and ospreys, ptarmigans,  
falcons, sweetgrass, and the fleeces of sheep;  
fig trees and the products of fission exist;  
errors exist, instrumental, systemic,  
random; remote control exists, and birds;  
and fruit trees exist, fruittherein the orchard where  
apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist  
in countries whose warmth will call forth the exact  
colour of apricots in the flesh

12

life, the air inhale exists  
a lightness in it all, a likeness in it all,  
an equation, an open and transferable expression  
in it all, and as tree after tree foams up in  
early summer, a passion in it all,  
as if in the air's play with elm keys falling  
like manna there existed a simply sketched design,  
simple as happiness having plenty of food  
and unhappiness none, simple as longing  
having plenty of options and suffering none,  
simple as the holy lotus is simple  
because it is edible, a design as simple as laughter  
sketching your face in the air

Translated by Susanna Nied. New York: New  
Directions Publishing. 2001.

## *Sommerfugledalen. Et requiem (1991)*

I

De stiger op, planetens sommerfugle  
som farvestøv fra jordens varme krop,  
zinnober, okker, guld og fosforgule,  
en sværm af kemisk grundstofløftet op.

Er dette vingeflimmer kun en stime  
af lyspartikler i et indbildt syn?  
Er det min barndoms drømte sommertime  
splintret som i tidsforskudte lyn?

Nej, det er lysets engel, som kan male  
sig selv som sort Apollo mnemosyne,  
som ildfugl, poppelfugl og svalehale.

Jeg ser dem med min slørede fornuft  
som lette fjer i varmedisens dyne  
i Brajčinodalens middagshede luft.

II

I Brajčinodalens middagshede luft,  
hvor al erindring smuldrer, og det hele  
i lysets sammenfald med plantedele  
forvandler sig fra duftløshed til duft,

går jeg fra blad til blad tilbage  
og sætter dem på barndomslandets nælde,  
naturens mest guddommelige fælde,  
der fanger hvad der før fløj væk som dage.

Her sidder admiralen i sit spind,  
mens den fra forårsgrøn, forslugen larve  
forvandler sig til det vi kalder sind,

så den som andre somres sommerfugle  
kan hente livets tætte purpurfarve  
op fra den underjordisk bitre hule.

I

Up they soar, the planet's butterflies,  
pigments from the warm body of the earth,  
cinnabar, ochre, phosphor yellow, gold  
a swarm of basic elements aloft.

Is this flickering of wings only a shoal  
of light particles, a quirk of perception?  
Is it the dreamed summer hour of my childhood  
shattered as by lightning lost in time?

No, this is the angel of light, who can paint  
himself as dark mnemosyne Apollo,  
as copper, hawkmoth, swallowtail.

I see them with my blurred understanding  
as feathers in the coverlet of haze  
in Brajcino Valley's noon-hot air.

II

In Brajčino Valley's noon-hot air  
where recollection crumbles, and all things  
in the melding of plant segments and light  
transform themselves from scentlessness to  
scent,

there I move backward, go from leaf to leaf  
set them on nettles from my childhood's land,  
the most divine of all of nature's snares  
to capture what once flew away as days.

Here in its cocoon the admiral  
once a spring-green, glutton caterpillar,  
transforms itself to what we call a mind

so that, like other summers' butterflies,  
it can bring the dense crimson hue of life  
up from acrid caverns underground.

### III

Op fra den underjordisk bitre hule,  
hvor kældermørkets første drømmekryb  
og al den grusomhed, vi helst vil skjule,  
lægger bunden under sindets dyb,

op stiger Morfeus, dødningshoved, alle,  
der vender aftensværmersiden ud,  
og viser mig, hvor blødt det er at falde  
ned i det askegrå og ligne gud.

Kålsommerfuglen fra en eng i Vejle,  
den hvide sjæl, som har en tegning malet  
af altings flygtighed på vingens spejle,

hvad vil den her i denne dystre luft?  
Er det den sorg, mit liv har overhalet,  
som bjergbuskadset dækker med sin duft?

### IV

Som bjergbuskadset dækker med sin duft,  
at blomstringen har rod i alt det rådne,  
det skyggefulde, filtrede og lådne,  
en vild og labyrintisk ufornuft,

kan sommerfuglen med sin flagren dække,  
at den er bundet til insektets krop,  
man tror det er en blomst der flyver op,  
og ikke denne billedstorm på række,

som når en sværmer, spinder, måler, ugle,  
der hvirvler farvens tegnfigur forbi,  
tilkaster os en gåde som skal skjule,

at alt hvad sjælelivet har at håbe  
hinsides alt er sorgens symmetri  
som blåfugl, admiral og sørgekåbe.

### III

Up from acrid caverns underground  
where first dream-creepers of the cellar darkness  
and all the cruelty we would rather hide  
form the foundation under the mind's depths,

up soar the Morpheus, the death-head, all  
that turn their night-moth aspect outermost,  
showing me how soft it is to fall  
into ash-grayness and resemble god.

The cabbage butterfly from Vejle meadows,  
that white soul on whose wing-mirror is drawn  
the evanescent nature of all things,

what is it doing in this gloomy air?  
Is it the grief my life has overtaken,  
concealed by the perfume of mountain brush?

### IV

Concealed by the perfume of mountain brush,  
all blossoming is rooted in decay,  
in tangle, shadow, and decomposition,  
a labyrinthine, wild insanity,

just as the butterfly in flight conceals  
the insect body to which it is bound—  
we see it as a flower flying up  
not as the rank iconoclasm it is—

as when an owl moth, sphinx moth, underwing,  
whirling the characters of color past,  
casts us a riddle to conceal the fact

that all the soul possesses for its hope,  
beyond all, is the symmetry of sorrow, seen  
as admirals, as blues, as mourning cloaks.

**Antonio Gamoneda *Libro del frío* (*Book of the cold*, 1992)**

**[En la ebriedad le rodeaban mujeres...]**

En la ebriedad le rodeaban mujeres, sombra, policía, viento.

Ponía venas en las urces cárdenas, vértigo en la pureza; la flor furiosa de la escarcha era azul en su oído.

Rosas, serpientes y cucharas eran bellas mientras permanecían en sus manos.

**[Inebriated, he was surrounded by women...]**

Inebriated, he was surrounded by women, shadow, police, wind.

He strung veins on the heather row, put vertigo in virtue, frost's furious flower went blue in his ear.

Roses, snakes and spoons were beautiful so long as he held them in his hands.

**[Vigilaba la serenidad adherida a las sombras...]**

Vigilaba la serenidad adherida a las sombras, los círculos donde se depositan flores abrasadas, la inclinación de los sarmientos.

Algunas tardes, su mano incomprensible nos conducía al lugar sin nombre, a la melancolía de las herramientas abandonadas.

**[He noticed the calm clinging to shadows...]**

He noticed the calm clinging to shadows, the circles where burnt flowers fell, the inclination of vines.

Some evenings, his incomprehensible hand pointed us to a nameless place, to the melancholy of abandoned tools.

**[Busco tu piel inconfesable...]**

Busco tu piel inconfesable, tu piel ungida por la tristeza de las serpientes; distingo tus asuntos invisibles, el rastro frío del corazón.

Hubiera visto tu cinta ensangrentada, tu llanto entre cristales y no tu llaga amarilla,

pero mi sueño vive debajo de tus párpados.

**[Feeling for your unconfessable skin]**

Feeling for your unconfessable skin, your skin anointed by the sadness of snakes; I can make out your invisible concerns, your heart's cold trail.

I would have noticed your bloody sash, your weeping between window panes, and not the yellow of your wound,

but my dream lives under your eyelids.

**[La infección es más grande que la tristeza...]**

La infección es más grande que la tristeza; lame los parietales torturados, entra en los dormitorios del sudor y el láudano y luego tiembla como un ala fría: es la humedad de los agonizantes.

Viene despacio la paloma impura, viene a los vasos llenos de sombra y la ceniza capilar se extiende sobre vestigios de mercurio y llanto.

La lente anuncia la mendicidad pero su luz procede del abismo. Ante las córneas abrasadas penden los hilos del silencio. Luego

las desapariciones bajan al corazón.

**[The infection is larger than sadness]**

The infection is larger than sadness; it licks the tortured parietal bones, it penetrates the bedrooms of sweat and laudanum and later it trembles like a cold wing: it is the moisture of people who are dying.

Slowly the impure dove approaches, approaches cups full of shadow and capillaries of ash spread over remnants of mercury and tears.

The lens reveals mendacity but its light comes from the abyss. In front of scorched corneas hang threads of silence. Later

the disappearances depress the heart.

Translation by Donald Wellman

*Arden las pérdidas (Losses are burning, 2003)*

**[Vi lavandas sumergidas en un cuenco de llanto...]**

Vi lavandas sumergidas en un cuenco de llanto y la visión ardió en mí.

Más allá de la lluvia vi serpientes enfermas –bellas en sus úlceras transparentes–, frutos amenazados por espinas y sombras, hierbas excitadas por el rocío. Vi un ruiseñor agonizante y su garganta llena de luz.

Estoy soñando la existencia y es un jardín torturado. Ante mí pasan madres encanecidas en el vértigo.

Mi pensamiento es anterior a la eternidad pero no hay eternidad. He gastado mi juventud ante una tumba vacía, me he extenuado en preguntas que aún percuten en mí como un caballo que galopase tristemente en la memoria.

Aún giro dentro de mí mismo aunque sé que voy a caer en el frío de mi propio corazón.

Así es la vejez: claridad sin descanso.

**[I saw lavender submerged in a bowl of tears]**

I saw lavender submerged in a bowl of tears and the vision burned in me.

Beyond the rain I saw unwell snakes– beautiful with transparent ulcers–, fruits menaced by thorns and shadows, grasses irritated by dew. I saw a dying blackbird, its throat full of light.

I'm dreaming of existence and it's a tormented garden. In front of me pass gray haired mothers in vertigo.

My thought precedes eternity but there's no eternity. I've spent my youth before an empty tomb, I've exhausted myself in questions that still pound in me like a horse that gallops sadly in memory.

Still I turn around within myself although I know that I am going to fall into the cold of my heart.

So is old age: clarity without rest.



**[Un animal oculto...]**

Un animal oculto en el crepúsculo me vigila y se apiada de mí. Pesan las frutas corrompidas, hierven las cámaras corporales. Cansa atravesar esta enfermedad llena de espejos. Alguien silba en mi corazón. No sé quién es pero entiendo su sílaba interminable.

Hay sangre en mi pensamiento, escribo solo lápidas negras. Yo mismo soy el animal extraño. Me reconozco: lame los párpados que ama, lleva en su lengua las sustancias paternas. Soy yo, no hay duda: canta sin voz y se ha sentado a contemplar la muerte, pero no ve más que lámparas y moscas y las leyendas de las cintas fúnebres. A veces, grita en tardes inmóviles.

Lo invisible está dentro de la luz, pero, ¿arde algo dentro de lo invisible? La imposibilidad es nuestra iglesia. En todo caso, el animal se niega a fatigarse en la agonía.

Es el que está despierto en mí cuando yo duermo. No ha nacido y, sin embargo, ha de morir.

Así las cosas, ¿de qué pérdida claridad venimos? ¿Quién puede recordar la inexistencia? Podría ser más dulce regresar, pero

entramos indecisos en un bosque de espinos. No hay nada más allá de la última profecía. Hemos soñado que un dios lamía nuestras manos: nadie verá su máscara divina.

Así las cosas,

la locura es perfecta.

**[A animal hidden...]**

An animal hidden in twilight watches me and half pities itself. The bad fruit weighs heavily, the body's chambers boil. It's exhausting to pass through this illness full of mirrors. Someone whistles in my heart. I don't know who, but I understand the endless syllable.

Blood streaks my thoughts, I write on black tombstones. I am the strange animal. I recognize myself: licking the eyelids he loves, bearing on his tongue patrilineal substances. I am myself, no doubt: he sings voicelessly and sits himself down to contemplate death, but he sees only lamps and flies and the legends of funeral tapes. Sometimes he shouts into still afternoons.

The invisible is inside the light, but does something burn in the invisible? Our church is impossibility. In any case, the animal refuses to frazzle in agony.

It goes awake in me when I sleep. It was never born and, nevertheless, it's just died.

So things go, from what lost clarity do we come? Who can remember nonexistence? It might be sweeter, even, to return, but

we wander indecisively through a forest of thorns. There's nothing beyond the last prophecy. We dreamed a god licked our hands: no one will see the divine mask.

So things go,

madness is perfect.

Translated by Forrest Gander

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