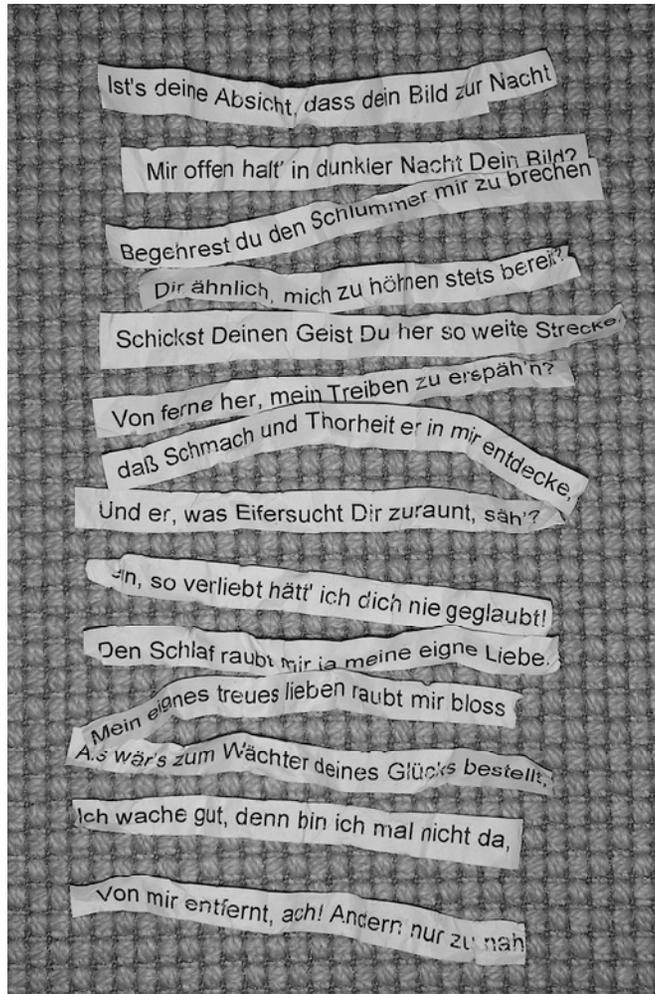




what is wakefulness in translation? spaces between words: not a blink, but clouds in the shape of sheep. count them. in german, tired eyelids are kept open with matches. a gap and they stick to it. with or without their red heads? certainly, a glow. a stick-up for sleep. and when, in this deep light, you rub against each word, tossing and turning, you will find meanings shifting their shapes every minute—*shadows like to thee*, mocking, ungraspable. translation is this lament: you are so far from me—transformed into a sustained and reversed lullaby. do you watch clouds change their shape, or do you, by watching, change them? minutes grow into hours, hours into a wake. not over a dead body, but over one that is so alive as to be constantly absent, slipping away—*far off, with others all too near*. being awake in translation means to trace this distance, but never close the gap (eye, mouth), to keep alive the presence of the absent other and at the same time unmask one's own desire to merge with it, to finally meet one's match. in the space between the distant lovers (languages), this process unfolds as a shift from active to present, a shadow play of failure and empowerment. first i am haunted and kept awake by the ghost of your language, then my language feels alive and awake because it watches yours—thereby creating its own

images and slumber-breaking spirits. thus one could lament that 'to watch' also means to look intently and/or wait in english, and that in german you'd wait for those meanings forever. but one could also point out that in german, unlike english, the words for being awake and keeping watch still show their common origin by sharing the exact same shape—*wach* and *Wache halten*—suggesting, perhaps, that being awake is not simply a state but the process of being constantly alert, of being watched by others and transgressing their watch at the same time. that it is in fact—like translation—a complicated collaborative process rather than a state or the result of not sleeping. *gemeinsam wachsam*—or else, *idle hours*. what, then, is a watchman in translation? she's someone who lets the sheep slip past the matches. a shepherd of *defeat* who intimately knows their desire to always be where *the others* are, and who also knows that, if they ever arrived at this distant, imagined place which slightly resembles Benjamin's *Ursprache*, language would stop wanting, waking and watching altogether, it would simply fall asleep. (to make sure it doesn't, 14 different german translations, cut up line by line, were used to form clouds that generated the translation of this particular poem, which was then translated back in to english. who's watching now?)



Ist's deine Absicht, dass dein Bild zur Nacht

Mir offen halt' in dunkler Nacht Dein Bild?

Begehrest du den Schummer mir zu brechen

Dir ähnlich, mich zu höhnen stets bereit?

Schickst Deinen Geist Du her so weite Strecke

Von ferne her, mein Treiben zu erspäh'n?

daß Schmach und Thorheit er in mir entdecke,

Und er, was Eifersucht Dir zuraunt, sah'?

„In, so verliebt hätt' ich dich nie geglaubt!

Den Schlaf raubt mir ja meine eigne Liebe.

Mein eignes treues Lieben raubt mir bloss

Als wär's zum Wächter deines Glücks bestellt,

Ich wache gut, denn bin ich mal nicht da,

von mir entfernt, ach! Andern nur zu nah

Is it your aim that at night your image

Markus Marti, ca. 2009

Keeps open your image in the dark night?

Ferdinand Adolph Gelbcke 1867

Do you desire to rupture my slumber—

Gottlob Regis 1836

Alike to you, and ready to ridicule me?

Alexander Neidhardt 1870

Do you send your ghost such a long way,

Fritz Krauss 1872

from far away, to spy on what I do?

Emil Wagner 1840

that infamy and folly he shall find in me

Fritz Krauss 1872

And will, what jealousy breathes to you, see?

Ferdinand Adolph Gelbcke 1867

No, I never thought you to be so in love!

Markus Marti ca. 2009

My sleep is robbed but by my own love

Christia Schuenke 1994

my own true loving simply robs from me

Stefan George 1909

As if I was designed to be the watchman of your bliss

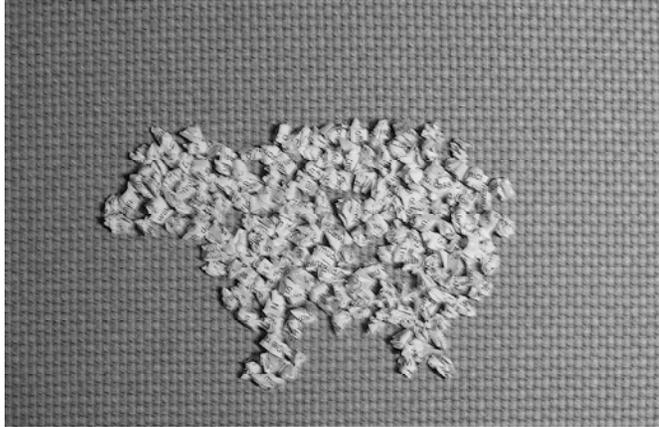
Terese Robinson 1927

I'm good at watching, cos in case I am not here,

Markus Marti ca. 2009

Afar from me, oh! too close to others everywhere.

Ferdinand Adolph Gelbcke 1867



uljana wolf