

MIN PIGE ER SÅ LYS SOM RAV

The following poem, by Helge Rode (1870-1939) has been set to music by Carl Nielsen. Both poem and music are dated 1920.

The most famous recording of the song is by Aksel Schiøtz (14/02/1938). It is Song No. 18 on Danske Sange Vol. 1 (you can hear a sample at:

<http://www.7digital.com/stores/productDetail.aspx?shop=15&pid=160338>).

Min pige er så lys som rav

Min pige er så lys som rav
og Danmarks gyldne hvede,
og blikket er så blåt som hav,
når himmel er dernede.
Prinsesse Tove af Danmark!

Min piges smil er sol i maj
og sang fra lærkestruber,
og smilehullet viser vej
til sindets gyldne gruber -
Prinsesse Tove af Danmark!

Min pige kan vel være hård
mod dem, hun ilde lider,
da har hun ord, som hidsigt slår
og lidt for hidsigt bider.
Prinsesse Tove af Danmark!

Det smilehul går bag en sky,
og farligt øjet gråner;
men smilet bryder frem på ny,
og blikkets bølger blåner.
Prinsesse Tove af Danmark!

Thi ser jeg i de øjne ind,
de bliver vege, varme.
Da hviler jeg i hendes sind
som i to bløde arme.
Prinsesse Tove af Danmark!

Helge Rode 1870-1937

WORD BY WORD:

My girl is as bright as amber/and Denmark's golden corn,/and the gaze is as blue as the sea,/when the sky is down there./ Princess Tove of Denmark!

My girl's smile is sun in May/and song from lark-throats,/and the dimple shows the way/to the mind's golden mines - / REF.

My girl can indeed be hard/to those she dislikes,/then she has words that strike hot-temperedly/and bite a bit too hot-temperedly. / REF. That dimple goes behind a cloud, and dangerously the eye turns grey;/but the smile breaks through once more,/and the gaze's waves turn blue. / REF. For if I look into the eyes,/they become, weak, warm./Then I rest in her mind/as in two soft arms. REF.

Min pige er så lys som rav

Carl Nielsen, 1920

Min pi - ge er så lys som rav og Dan-marks gyld - ne
 hve - de, og blik - ket er så blåt som hav, når him - mel
 er der - ne - de. Prin - ses - se To - ve af Dan - mark!

I am at present embarking on a project of translating Danish poems set to music by Carl Nielsen. This poem being an obvious choice, I set about translating it on 16 Sept, 2008. I send this version to a friend who has also been sent many poems from my previous project, to make an anthology of 100 translations based on the Danish anthology '1000 Danske Digte'. 'Haven't I seen this translation before, or something like it?' was the reaction. On searching through my hard disk, I found this to be the case. I had completely forgotten I had translated it, starting on 26 July 2006. On opening this earlier translation, I was struck by the similarities of some lines, but much more by the dissimilarity of most of them. And only two years between the translations. Had my priorities changed? Had one of them been done on a bad day? Here are the translations:

My Princess Tove of Denmark

My girl is just like amber bright
 and Denmark's wheat full-waving,
 her gaze a sea of blue and light
 that skies descend to bathe in.
 My Princess Tove of Denmark!

My girl's smile is the sun in May
 and lark song's liquid pleasures,
 and her sweet dimple shows the way
 to golden inner treasures.
 My Princess Tove of Denmark!

My girl can be a trifle harsh
 to those she does not favour,

then she has words that cut like glass,
a tongue at which they quaver.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!

That dimple hides behind a cloud,
her eyes grow grey and stony,
but then her smile once more breaks out,
blue waves her look is only.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!

And if I look into those eyes,
They start to greet and warm me.
Within her mind I seem to lie
As if soft arms now bore me.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!
(2006)

My sweet girl is as amber bright

My sweet girl is as amber bright
and Denmark's wheat so golden,
her gaze as ocean-blue a sight
as skies when there beholden.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

[My sweet girl's smile's a sun in May
and songs from lark's throats pouring,
and dimples gently point the way
to gems her mind's been storing –
My princess Tove of Denmark!]

My sweet girl can at times be hard
to those she does not favour,
her tongue is then a keen-edged sword
whose bite makes keen men quaver.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

Her dimple goes behind a cloud,
her eye goes grey as ashes;
but then a smile once more breaks out,
blue waves her gaze then flashes.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

For if I look into those eyes,
they grow both warm and yielding.
Within her mind I then recline
as in two arms full-shielding.
My princess Tove of Denmark!
(2008)

What I now propose to do is to write a THIRD translation, based on the previous two and giving reasons for my choices.

My sweet girl is as amber bright

Stanza 1:

I have discovered when translating another poem for this project that 'pige' is a mixture of 'my girl' and 'sweetheart'. I rather like the expression 'my sweet girl', despite its male-chauvinistic undertone. I suspect this is fine for 1920. Both versions have had to change the word-order to end on a stressed syllable. The solutions arrived at were similar. I would like to have Denmark and golden in line 2, but my 2008 translation then has to take 'beholden' in line 4, which is so 'olde-worlde' that it ruins the simplicity of the line. I feel the colour 'golden' is more important than 'Danish' in line 2, since the refrain is insistent enough on that point. 2008 line 3 'as ocean-blue a sight' is less natural than the 2006 version. This version introduced an idea of 'bathing' rather than reflection, but the personification seems OK and the 'waving/bathe in' near-rhyme is fine by me. There is no way I can see of avoiding adding 'my' in the refrain to keep the stress pattern: Prin'sesse/My 'Princess. So here, I revert almost entirely to the 2006 version:

My sweet girl is as amber bright
and golden wheat full-waving,
her gaze a sea of blue and light
that skies descend to bathe in.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!

Stanza 2:

This stanza is not on the Aksel Schiøtz recording for some reason, which is odd, since it contrasts her appearance with her inner being – something returned to in the last stanza. The hardest line is the fourth one. For 'sind'/'mind' is a word returned to in stanza 5. But the 2008 version, which has used 'mind', has trouble finding a rhyme. 'Has been storing' is not good, since it describes a process of hoarding, whereas the original talks of the golden mines more as a state of mind, something she has always had. Furthermore, 'golden' has disappeared from the line – and I am beginning to feel that the colours mentioned should all be there in the translation. Is then the 2006 version OK as it stands? No. The rhythm of line 6 is bad. And 'liquid pleasures' in line 7 is ghastly. Line 8 raises the question of singular/plural, something that will recur in stanza 4, with both dimple and eye involved. Here I have finally chosen the singular. One dimple maybe looks odd here, but the use of 'That dimple' in stanza four must have a singular word to refer back to. Lastly, 'the sun' is better than 'a sun', I think. The poet is not contrasting with other possible suns in May. So here is Stanza 2:

My sweet girl's smile's the sun in May
And lark song's high-trilled measures,
her dimple gently points the way

to golden inner treasures –
My princess Tove of Denmark!

Stanza 3:

The 2006 version left out both occurrences of 'hidsigt'. The 2008 one plays on the two meanings of 'keen' – keen-edged and eager. This is another meaning of the Danish word. So here I have really mixed the two versions:

My sweet girl can at times be harsh
to those she does not favour,
her tongue has words as keen as glass,
whose bite makes keen men quaver.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

OBJECTION! A friend of mine has rightly asked: 'Where did all those men come from?'

So here is a fourth version:

My sweet girl can be quite severe
to those she does not favour,
she then has words that keenly sear
and make my keen heart quaver.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

Stanza 4:

I like the 'stony' of 2006, but 'blue waves her look is only' sounds most unnatural. I have been unable to get the idea of 'dangerous' included in the second line, alas. I think the sun 'goes' behind a cloud, so have replaced 'hides'. The fourth line in 2008 had an odd word order, so I have reversed and put the subject first:

That dimple goes behind a cloud,
her eye turns grey as ashes;
but then a smile once more breaks out,
her gaze blue waves then flashes.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

Stanza 5:

The 2006 version is much more natural, but it has not the idea of 'weak' or 'yielding' at all. So I have changed the second line. I see no real reason for the 'For' in the first line. There is no explanation. So I have changed to 'And'. The 2006 version is much closer to the original and natural speech:

And if I look into those eyes,
They start to yield and warm me.
Within her mind I seem to lie
As if soft arms now bore me.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!

Here, then, is the third version of the translation:

My sweet girl is as amber bright

My sweet girl is as amber bright
and golden wheat full-waving,
her gaze a sea of blue and light
that skies descend to bathe in.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!

My sweet girl's smile's the sun in May
And lark song's high-trilled measures,
her dimple gently points the way
to golden inner treasures –
My princess Tove of Denmark!

My sweet girl can be quite severe
to those she does not favour,
she then has words that keenly sear
and make my keen heart quaver.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

That dimple goes behind a cloud,
her eye turns grey as ashes;
but then a smile once more breaks out,
her gaze blue waves then flashes.
My princess Tove of Denmark!

And if I look into those eyes,
They start to yield and warm me.
Within her mind I seem to lie
As if soft arms now bore me.
My Princess Tove of Denmark!