

Two from Gerard de Nerval

Translated from the French

by Evelyn Hooven (April 2018)

G érard de Nerval, born in Paris in 1808, died there in 1855 by his own hand. In an era when most poems tended to be about love or nature, Nerval's often myth-based, highly symbolized, original poetry set him apart. His poems have customarily been viewed as obscure. I find his poems often striking in their concentration on the darker moments of fantasy, on longing or the dreaming self. Such poems tend not to be time-bound. Not surprisingly, they have exerted influence on the surrealists, on Marcel Proust . . . and even the psychoanalyst Carl Jung.



Visage, Antonio Guanse, 1974

Obstinate and Beyond

Whosoever stares long at the sun
Thinks he sees obstinate and beyond
Around and above him in air—a stain;

So, when young and still full of bravery
I dared stare an instant at glory
I saw a black dot intervene;

Then mingled through all, mournful signal,
Wherever my glance might remain,
I felt it interpose—obscure flaw
Between joy and me, perpetual.

That other world—of glory and of sun,
Is it the eagle's alone? His, not mine?



Shakespeare Recites Shakespeare, Umberto Romano, 1960s

So Goes the Tale

He lived gaily, a fluttery starling,
By turns amorous, careless, tender;
Somber, sometimes, like a dreamer
Till he heard someone ring at his gate;

It was Death, so he asked him: Please wait
Till I've crossed the T on my sonnet . . .
Then, with no more ado, he stretched himself out

Trembling, frozen deep in his coffin.

He was indolent, so goes the tale,

Let the ink dry up in its jar;

Wished to know all, knew nothing at all,

And when time was up and this life lost,

When, one winter evening, he gave up the ghost,

He went away saying: Why did I come?

Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

Please help [support](#) *New English Review*.

More by Evelyn Hooven [here](#).