

The Truth of Two
Selected Translations

Harry Thomas

Un-Gyve Press



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Elegy

Having driven two hundred miles through towns
of strangers, by cabins, trailers, Mormon outposts,
I have come, brother, to your mountain grave,
a month too late to do my part in the service,
and years too late to set things right between us.
What words are there after so long a silence—
the need to make a living took me from you,
and then the life you chose took you from me?
Let a few wildflowers and an old love be all,
brother, you have from me forever. Farewell.

Caius Valerius Catullus
Rome
84 B.C.–54 B.C.
(exact dates uncertain)

Seeing a Friend Off

Green hills head north from the city.
Clear water winds east from the wall.

Here, we say *so long!*—a single sail
setting out over two thousand miles.

A scudding cloud 's a traveler's mind,
the sun at evening a friend we've loved.

Your hand in the air, you turn to go.
Your horse's whinny goes on and on.

Li Bai
China
701–762

Deor

Wayland in Varmland
suffered adversities,
that strong-minded man
knew misery.

Bitter setbacks, pains
of winter cold, these
were his companions.
His truck was with trouble
after Nithhad had done
the violence to him—
hacking his hamstrings,
hobbling the better man.

—That was endured;
so may this be.

Beadohilde despaired
when her brothers were butchered,
but when she was sure
she carried a child—
that was what wrecked her.
She couldn't conceive
of a future.

—That was endured;
so may this be.

We've all of us heard
how the Geat loved Mathilde,
loved her without limit,
loved with such love
his sleep was shattered.

—That was endured;
so may this be.

Thirty years Theodric
ruled the Maeringa's town.
The facts are all known.

—That was endured;
so may this be.

We all know of Eormanric
and his wolflike ways —
subjugating subjects
the length of Gottland.
He was a cruel king!
Men sat unmoving,
shackled to sorrow,
thinking just one thing —
to cut the king down.
 — That was endured;
 so may this be.

Of myself I'll say this:
I was once the poet
of the Heodingas,
dear to my lord.
My name was Deor.
Winter to winter
I had a good holding,
a lavishing lord.
Now one Heorrenda,
a masterly man,
finds praise in the place
until lately my lord
gave to me.
 — That was endured;
 so may this be.

Anonymous
England
c. 850

To Hope

Green hypnotist of every human life,
Mad hope! The gilded frenzy every man
Is swept away by day by day, the strife
Of dreaming you'll win wealth because you can.

The world's soul; flourishing senility;
The happy remedy for age's sorrow;
The day the lucky know will be today,
And the unlucky think will be tomorrow.

Let those whose spectacles of green dye
The world so that it meets all their demands,
Invoke your name, who need your light so much;

But as for me, unsure of fortune, I
Will keep my eyes well shaded by my hands,
And see alone the things that I can touch.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz
New Spain
1651–1695