

INGER CHRISTENSEN

DENMARK (1935–2009)

LANGUAGE: DANISH

HVISKENDE GRÆSFØDDER

Hviskende græsfødder
lister sig gennem os,
granfingre rører hinanden
når stierne mødes,
sejg svedende harpiks
klæber os sammen,
sommerbegærlige spætter
hakker i hårdføre
frøgemmejerter.



Inger Christensen is perhaps Denmark's most famous poet. She was born in the rural town of Vejle, Denmark. She spent her childhood playing in the surrounding forests, fields, and fjords, which would later influence the imagery in her poetry. Though she wrote numerous novels, essays, plays, and children's books, her poetry was what caught the attention of readers and writers throughout the world. In this poem she combines words to make up complex compound words. Her translator Susanna Nied commented, "Recreating her structures in translation is challenging. But the real challenge lies in the intangibles."*

* From *Some Kind of Beautiful Signal* (2010), published by Two Lines Press.

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
frøgemme hjertes (word phrase)	a phrase made up of three words— <i>frø</i> is a noun meaning a flowering plant's unit of reproduction; <i>gemme</i> is an adjective meaning keeping safe from harm; <i>hjerter</i> is a noun meaning the central or innermost parts	seed-hiding-hearts, kernel-storing-cores, seed-protecting-souls, kernel-shielding-hearts
græsfødder (word phrase)	a phrase made up of two words— <i>græs</i> is a noun meaning a short plant with long narrow leaves, growing wild or cultivated on lawns and pastures; and <i>fødder</i> is a noun meaning the lower extremities on which a person stands or walks	grassfeet, turftoes, weedfeet, sodfeet, lawnheels, greenfeet
granfingre (word phrase)	a phrase made up of two words— <i>gran</i> is a noun meaning a widespread coniferous tree that has a distinctive conical shape and hanging cones; <i>fingre</i> is a noun meaning the slender jointed parts attached to either hand	spruce-fingers, fir-fingers, fir-digits, pine-thumbs
hakker (v.)	to strike or knock on something persistently	hammer, dig, hack, pound, batter, peck, pick, drill
hårdføre (adj.)	capable of enduring difficult conditions	hardy, tough, sturdy, robust, strong
harpiks (n.)	a sticky substance exuded by some trees	resin, sap, gum, adhesive
hinanden (pron.)	used when the action is reciprocal	each other, one another, together
hviskende (adj.)	speaking very softly, especially for the sake of privacy	murmuring, whispering, muttering, mumbling, hissing
i (prep.)	expressing location in a particular place or position	at, against, into
klæber (v.)	fastens or causes to adhere to an object or surface	sticks, glues, bonds, cements, affixes
lister (v.)	move somewhere quietly	creep, sneak, steal, tiptoe, sidle
mødes (v.)	come into contact with by chance or arrangement	meet, come together, converge, connect, link, intersect, cross

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
når (adv.)	at or during a specific time or place	when, where, if, once
os (pron.)	used by speaker to refer to himself or herself and one or more other people	us, ourselves
rører (v.)	come so close to so as to come into contact with	touch, meet, join, hold, connect
sammen (adv.)	with or in proximity to another person or people	together, jointly, side by side, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder
sejg (adj.)	of a substance strong enough to withstand adverse conditions	tough, thick, strong, dense, gelatinous
sig gennem (prep.)	moving in one side and out the other side of	through, their way through, throughout, within
sommerbegærlige (word phrase)	a phrase made up of two words— <i>sommer</i> is a noun meaning the warmest season of the year in the northern hemisphere; <i>begærlige</i> is an adjective meaning having or showing a great desire to possess something	summer-greedy, summer-hungry, green with summer-envy, summer-itching, summer-eager
spætter (n.)	birds with strong bills and stiff tails that climb tree trunks to find insects and drum on dead wood to mark territory	woodpeckers
stierne (n.)	courses or directions in which a person or thing moves	paths, trails, ways, walkways, footpaths, roads, routes, passageways
svedende (adj.)	shedding small drops of liquid	dripping, perspiring, sweating, leaking, oozing

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

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klæber os sammen, _____

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REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?
