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# Excerpts from *And here's the song* by Hélène Sanguinetti

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Excerpts from *And here's the song*

Hélène Sanguinetti  
*Et voici la chanson*

## *YOKE 1*

it's snowing today<sup>1</sup> here → butterfly  
comes down, maybe flower, not snow,  
to kiss below where no one ever  
(posed dry lips, so to speak)

so much before had been spoken of so much before,  
today let's go let's stay

ppffuuuuuffffff butterfly and  
flower, No, snow,  
on snow so steep that  
no one falls, flies away

1: if this day exists

“What’s the point?” so much before was,  
no harm to earth and grass, a pebble  
smashes rolls down  
Where? hey! hey! someone  
lights up, frozen, he died and he lives, it is written:  
many circulate still, nails, beards, hairs

Let’s be here let’s go, she’s a good girl she has her checkered  
dress her favorite, Still kisses the little Red  
well-ironed clutch ↓ Taken away

Gilbert smokes and spits in pnou  
what woman, hips of a boy  
Gigi cries (panther paces her eyes)  
her husband fishing-captain had a small craft and  
boat<sup>2</sup> (panther pnoue weeps in his eyes)

2: possibly a boat

Then dogs, their bowls shine  
in the sun at entrance to their doghouse the sun  
and one is called *Wham*, the girl pets it, she  
has a name,  
someone knows, not here

To be born to several, to love a dream, to be loved by it –  
– terracotta kitchen tiles  
Humble.

I live on a peak  
It was  
(Already the profile of a little dancer)  
Was one I  
It snows  
Scattered

It is snowing on me  
Who was a peak  
Was a kind of musk ox, Moss  
under horns, spit, wind

Loving the moon of the night with such wind more than anything  
to pick up a body crushed for days

“was am will be all squirted and all gone”  
She has slippers of glass or fur? question  
He wants to marry her so slipper he fucks and fucks  
again

Who receives the most?  
In Hell the Cloven indignant  
One can imagine  
without recoiling

one day, Raised up.  
Lights a candle for You, beautiful Belt,  
one day, Saint Anthony, Saint Christine,  
for the eternal living and  
it smells good

So: fishing-captain was  
Even had a name,  
someone must know, not here<sup>3</sup>

Pezzi di pane, scraps of bread,  
ucello che beve with small jabs of beak  
spout from head, Bird drinks and swallows  
Again

3: too little

Dust infinite difficulty infinitely deep on the square  
there is a church with colonnades and also very fine rain

He died, it was for nothing, that the robin returned

## Commentary

Hélène Sanguinetti and I have been working together for nearly two decades. In translating Hélène, I stay as faithful to her text as possible. Reading her work is a little like falling down a rabbit hole: unexpected punctuation, mixed verb tenses, awkward juxtapositions, varying fonts, and whimsical drawings drop the reader into a world that enchants and disturbs. To make this journey any less challenging would deprive readers of its newness, and would dilute Hélène's desire to create language that's "scraped." Hélène's goal is to use language in a way that disturbs and disorients the reader—with the result being the heightened alertness one might feel as one passes through a darkened room, feeling for furniture or a light switch on the wall.

This selection represents the first few pages from Hélène's fourth book, *Et voici la chanson* (Éditions de L'Amandier, 2012). While the title *And here's the song*, inspired by a CD of acoustic guitar I sent Hélène, might suggest frivolity, the text sets up opposing forces—*Yoke* and *Joke*—that act as night/day, life/death, moon/sun, water/thirst, good/evil, and so on. The two engage one another against a backdrop of tragedy and triumph, respectively the *Kap Arkona* sinking and five-game record of US Olympian Willye White.

Hélène's collage-like approach, cohesive as it is surprising, addresses the political on a collective human scale. Heightened by multiple individual voices, it is studded with jewel-like imagery such as grains of sand or dust, a bird's beak, or snow falling on snow. This audacious architecture—from broad philosophical and moral themes to intimate human moments and longing—is signature Sanguinetti.