

# **quatre par quatre**

## **Poems from the French**

**Philippe Soupault  
Jean Follain  
Michel Garneau  
Robert Hébert**

(translations by Pat Nolan)

QUATRE PAR QUARTE

Poems from the French

Philippe Soupault

Jean Follain

Michel Garneau

Robert Hébert

(translations by Pat Nolan)

Neo-Mimeo Editions: 2026

Translations copyright (c) Pat Nolan 2026

Some of these translations have appeared in  
Contemporary Literature In Translation and  
Julebord.

Translator note: Quoted lines in the texts are  
in the original English

Neo-Mimeo Editions

Nualláin House, Publishers  
Digital Press Project  
Inquire at  
[nuallainhousepublishers@gmail.com](mailto:nuallainhousepublishers@gmail.com)

Philippe Soupault

Gift

Who'll give me quiet  
demands the inquisitive man  
nameless silence  
serious as a heart attack  
authentic and definitive  
And above all won't play the bad guy  
certainly not motorbikes and rag pickers  
grating silence  
heavy as fog you can cut with a knife  
paper fog  
And also who'll follow that fellow  
who left to go cry in the desert  
at least he'll know enough to stay quiet  
Quiet please  
and even if you don't please  
silence for the dead and for the living  
for those trying to sleep  
deeply  
Quiet for those who love silence  
white as snow  
blue as the moon  
eternal as the firmament  
A silence I live breath forget  
Silence must live  
like flourishing plants  
and their flowers who keep mum  
even as they suffer  
Silence like the smile of the beloved  
when she forgets I love her

## You Or Me

The man who watches passing trains  
the man at water's edge  
the man who can't keep his act together  
man of the hour  
the man who doesn't know he's a man  
the man who forgets  
the man who lives day by day  
man of destiny  
the man who never has time  
the man who laughs and cries  
the right man for the situation  
the man who dares not speak his name  
man lover of women  
the man who cries out in the desert  
the man who believes he is stronger than others  
the man who never ends  
man the human cannonball  
heartless headless man

## Plenty Of Time

The time that passes  
the time that doesn't  
the time we kill  
the time it takes to count to ten  
the time we don't have  
the time that has to do  
time to be lonely  
time to dream  
the time of agony  
the time to love  
the time to lose  
cherry blossom time  
bad times  
and good and beautiful and cold and hot times  
time to return  
the time for goodbyes  
time that's about time  
the time that isn't  
the time to blink  
relative time  
time to down a shot  
time to wait  
time to tie one on  
the time to die  
immeasurable time  
the time to shout look out  
dead time  
and then eternity

## Advice To Poets

Be like water  
of a spring and that of the clouds  
you may be gleaming or even colorless  
but let nothing stop you  
not even time  
No path is too long  
nor any sea too distant  
Fear not the wind  
even less heat or cold  
Learn to sing  
without getting weary  
murmur and slip by  
or tear through and make way  
leap or gush

Be still water  
that runs that plays  
water that purifies  
sweet and pure  
for it is purification itself  
for it is life to the living  
and death to the shipwrecked

from *Sans Phrases* (1953)

Jean Follain

The Drowned Beauties

By the dusty roads  
women unfurl their parasols  
in the midst of greenery  
right at the river's edge  
bend their supple backs  
to gather doubled flowers  
but shoved by the hand  
of a cynical rake  
fall into the green waters  
reflecting bordering oaks  
the golden voices of children  
alone answer their cries  
the sun's course  
three-quarters done  
when a man wracked with guilt  
follows the cooling banks where  
the ravishing adulterated bodies  
in the river's flow  
serve as islands for the birds

## The Bloody Tavern

The police dressed in their Sunday best  
hide within the copse  
flies buzz around  
the tables where red wine  
stains the white tablecloths  
the smoke from a cigar  
rises into the branches  
a furtive Gypsy girl  
gleans in a field  
the tavern keeper  
trembles like a little child  
a hunting party passes by  
ten feet from the manhunters  
Tally-ho! Tally-ho! lovely girl  
you won't give him up  
this morning in the granary  
don't you just love  
that he took great care  
to give himself a close shave

from La Nouvelle Revue Francaise no.221  
February 1, 1932

## Walking

Stained linens snap  
in the wind over the distant fields  
where the wheat ripens  
the dog pursues  
a rugged life  
which will certainly end  
before that of his master:  
both lug their shadows  
sometimes looking at each other  
when their paths cross  
in an odd peace  
where time endures  
beneath a final flicker

## By The Sea

Once upon a time  
a child at twilight  
hears the breeze  
rattle the thorny shrubs  
affable yet dying mother  
tells him a story  
on the beach a greyhound  
stretches in noble stride,  
making paw prints upon  
the pure sand  
in the shop with wood plates  
the printer tireless  
carefully composes  
a future decree

from Des heures (1960)

Michel Garneau

All The Soldiers  
(True Self/Vrais Moi)

all the soldiers from the first to the last  
all the industries profiting from the slaughter  
all the professions that support it  
& all the old veterans  
with their obscene medals  
all the collectors of military memorabilia  
all the moronic players of war games  
all the makers of alienating films of war  
& all the backers of appeasement  
all the corrupt politicians who prepare for  
peace  
& all the lazy citizens who accept it are  
complicit  
we are all war criminals  
evidently satisfied to be so

## Like a Light

(Leaving Mt. Baldy/Quittant Mount Baldy)

it was in San Francisco  
in another century  
the weather was beautiful  
I was about to turn thirty  
on a street corner waiting  
for the light to turn green  
I saw a vison on the opposite side  
a woman in an orange dress  
that pierced my gut  
like a light  
& we met  
in the middle of the street for a second  
we stopped right in the middle  
of life for a second  
she said to me—"my you're beautiful"  
& I laughed & that laughter flowed through me  
for a second in the sunlight  
our eyes met  
for a second & it was love  
& it was pleasure & happiness  
for a second like a light  
totally flowing into my gut  
more radiant  
than usual

## The Uniform

(The Lovesick Monk/Le Moine En mal D'Amour)

### Telegraph Avenue

I have long hair

a big beard

### Berkeley

I am entirely in denim

pants shirt jacket

I wear cowboy boots

that come from Cheyenne

1969

I have come on a pilgrimage

to the holy sites of the new age

but inwardly I trip

into a vast unsettling giddiness

when I realize

that three-quarters of the guys

walking alongside me

on Telegraph Avenue

in Berkeley 1969

are wearing exactly

the same uniform

Poetry Can't Be Killed  
(Other Writers/ Autres Écrivains)

poetry can't be killed  
because it withstands  
festivals of vanity  
negative reviews  
anthologies of petty personal opinions  
critiques by closet Catholics  
awards 'more numerous than numbers'  
symposiums that render obsolete the word 'ennui'  
pissy ass juries  
of the academic mafia  
sexist cliques  
grasping careerist  
clashing schools  
and even  
imagine its strength its resilience  
even poets

From *Poèmes du traducteur* (2008)

Robert Hébert

KATHARMOI

Think anew  
under the fire of night and day  
eternity quaffs a ton of extremities in becoming  
Heraclitus the obscure knows it all  
the bow and the lyre  
the assault rifle and the guitar

To purify himself  
past love and hate  
Empedocles dabbles in the riddles of apeiron  
thought is otherwise matter  
will power weak  
trembling through your sinews

To merge with  
a population of virgin bacteria  
eat carbon monoxide  
experience the entirety of subterranean infernos  
for over three thousand years  
I AM HADESARCHAEA

## FRICTIONS

Seditious action is at the heart of good and  
evil

"war is the acting out of any wishful  
thinking"

denounce the emptiness of the geographical maps

"war is the blurring of yesterday's map"  
promote the end of exoticism

"war is making sense of otherness"  
sing a poem to "spectrality"

"war is a nuzzling against a stratified fog"  
nothing new

theoretical nets don't catch anything

## DEVASTATION

Museums, relevant arts  
here is an Anselm Kiefer installation  
getting a grip on nothingness  
better than nothing  
welcomes tourists  
indelible selfie impressions

"but war is the conditioning of all bold arts"

philosophies, humanism, xyz beliefs  
ooze the length of words centuries old  
glittering lures  
concatenations so tenuous

"but war is the packaging of children's viscera  
and peace is the branding  
of their brains"

"ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD"

Digital cloud, neo-macaronic  
quadrillion words and images  
non-consensual, a "must"  
Facebook, my crack, my gnostic gazebo  
millions a priori  
exclusive injuries  
dead to the world, resurrected by intangible  
assets  
cogito "nowhere" sum  
splendid  
"offshore" eschatology  
then collapse, the daily toxic dose  
users riddled with debt within debt  
Kapital eats at you  
lamento  
what a shame

from MONSIEUR RHÉSUS (2019)

Philippe Soupault (1897-1990), along with André Breton and Louis Aragon, was the founder of the Surrealist movement, and collaborated with Breton on the first Surrealist document, *Les Champs magnétiques*. He would later be expelled from the movement for, in his words, "writing novels and smoking English cigarettes." The poems translated here are from his later work, *Sans Phrase* (1953).

Jean Follain (1903-1971) first came to the attention of US poetry readers in W.S. Merwin's *as Transparency Of The World* published in 1969. More recently a larger comprehensive selection of his work has been published by The Song Cave as *Earthly*, translated by Andrew Seguin. Follain is noted for his succinct haunting lyrics evocative the landscape of his native Normandy.

Michel Garnau (1939-2021) was a well-known Quebecois playwright and poet born in Montreal. The poems selected here are from *poèmes du traducteur* (poems of the translator) written while he was translating Leonard Cohen's *Book Of Longing*, writing an original poem for each poem he translated. The friend who gifted me this edition called him "the Charles Bukowski of Montreal."

Robert Hébert is a Montreal based poet and philosopher. He is the author of numerous books of poetry and things Quebecois. His most recent book is *La Légende des incarnation* (Note Bene, 2025). An interesting feature of Hébert's is his use of code switching from French to English. Pat Nolan was born in Montreal and grew up in a bilingual household.