

Translating Poetry as a Poet Through the Lyrics of Hermann Hesse

Hermann Hesse's "Ravenna (1)" Source Poem in German (1902)

Ich bin auch in Ravenna gewesen.
Ist eine kleine tote Stadt,
Die Kirchen und viel Ruinen hat,
Man kann davon in den Büchern lesen.

Du gehst hindurch und schaust dich um,
Die Strassen sind so trüb und nass
Und sind so tausendjährig stumm
Und überall wächst Moos und Gras.

Das ist wie alte Lieder sind–
Man hört sie an und keiner lacht
Und jeder lauscht und jeder sinnt
Hernach daran bis in die Nacht.

Literal English Translation

I have also been to Ravenna.
Is a little dead town,
Has the churches and many ruins.
You can read about it in the books.

You walk through and look around,
The streets are so muddy and wet
And have been mute for thousands of years
And moss and grass grow everywhere.

That's how old songs are–
You listen to them and nobody laughs
And everyone listens and everyone ponders
After that until the night.

My Literary Translation

I have been to Ravenna too.
It's a city that's little and dead,
with memories on pages you've read
that tell of the churches and ruins.

You've walked through and looked around.
The streets are so damp and muddy,
a thousand years without a sound,
and everywhere there's moss and leaves.

That's the way of old songs–
You all listen to them and nobody laughs.
And everybody listens and ponders long
until the moon is on their path.

