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CONTRA INVIDIAM

How can they be my enemies
when we're all clearing paths
through the same holy forest
towards the same cenote
where the sun is born
every morning and comes to us
over the leaves of our distraction
wet with light?

Craft rivalries wound more than war.
To hate a man's poetry is to kill his soul.
And one's own, by the mirror effect
envy and disdain always wield.

Love only difference.
The further from me and my own practice they are
the nearer they must be to my own goal.

Take every difference as distance
measured towards Jerusalem.
And praise some vapid poetaster for their good luck?
Indeed. Their carcasses also
make paths through snow, their sad little
frenzies too make paths through thickets.
And the monkey-at-a-keyboard metapoets?

They clear the air. They teach
everything to make sense
and make us heed the inner itch
of even this.

1 March 2005

The past tense refers only to the physical.

— Julia Tadlock

The future to the spirit.
There is no present tense
in this language.

My hand rests on your hip
and this means now in most languages

your lips breathe on the place
soft even at my age
between my right ear and the back of the skull

it is warm there
there is a name for it in another language

my hand runs along your side
like a subjunctive verb trying to be sure

you are always there
I am never there

the present tense is made up
exclusively of impersonal verbs.

It is snowing, for instance
and it is getting late.

1 March 2005

=====

Maybe to hack at the word
with the arm
maybe the hard
makes it happen and the hum
does nothing but time

doing time the old movies said
of what prisoners did

then what does the wind do
and what does the night?

2 March 2005

=====

So many things to tell
and a blue sky.

So many people waiting
and I'm already here.

2 III 05

=====

What can it mean
to have so many visitors and no friends?

Don't I give each
a cracker picked in my beak

each cracker scribed with their future,
character, destiny, mind?

What more can I give them
but their own souls?

Do they want the scarlet
feathers off my breast too

the deep and final squawk
hidden in my heart?

2 March 2005

=====

Being right and wrong at the same time
I try but only a traffic light is red and green at once
depending on how you look at it answer the phone
to make it ring I mean what street are you on
I want to be a ribbon in your hair for instance
watch the strange object approaching Earth
we saw you from afar shepherd of men
everyone remembers another one of me.

2 March 2005

A WOLF AND A DOOR

1.

Presume: a wolf and a door.

Now put them together.

One opens the other
presuming one is able.

The sound. The door creaks
like our bedroom closet's
with a human voice. A closet
is the most human place in a house,

most like a man.

Most like a heart holding
everything in. Most like
a woman in the dark.

Or a wolf running over the snow
with a door in his mouth.
Where does the door go?

2.

The door be you
and I be through.

Or two be me
and none be you.

Because in the middle of a door
is nowhere at all,

not here and not there. *Seuil*,
door *sill* or threshold.

3.

I am a way in, he said,
another way in
you have to go out
to find.

It is cold in my hands
so be a coat with no one in it,
a fox in the jaws of a wolf
but not complaining.

We need this tender bite.

4.

You were with me when we saw the wolf.
It joined us together, sharing that sight,
more than even marriage or behavior could.

We shared what is there becomes
we shared what there is
until there is nothing but us.

We were woven in the commitment of to be.
We walked one way and the wolf walked the other
till there was nothing but.

3 March 2005

=====

It is hard to do what you always do
when you always do it. The mill
turns around the stone, the grain of wheat
hides in the ground. And water!
You'd never guess what water does
but there is light there too
in the place it goes
but no colors you could name
though blue comes close. Always
pulling us by the hand into the sky.
Always taking me away.

4 March 2005

=====

Something may remember ahead
to the other side of the mountain
where the shadows of sheep move
but there are no sheep

Nothing is ready yet.

Premies

we come to earth
and spend our time waiting,
digging coal, building mosques,
writing scrolls, milking beasts,
always waiting.

When will
the planet be ready for our deed?
Will we still have balls and brains for it
when it finally is time?

4 March 2005

=====

Always guilty
always looking
over my shoulder.

4 III 05

=====

My breath is made of silver
chased clever openwork
curved and chalicey
gaping with vistas of what nobody means
nobody would dare to
far-away valleys with armies filing through them
singing mild boyish songs to keep the crows away

my breath is made of crows
and vigilance and fear, of mountains
raped by valleys, glaciers bleeding,
wolves frightened by old motorcars
driven by mad ballerinas up the deer tracks

my breath is made of everything I forget.

4 March 2005

[Zettelgedicht]

I haven't always known by left foot
is a whole size bigger than my right

I haven't always known what I needed to know

so I am the poem Clayton Eshleman wanted to write
or does it say waited to write

too long, so I wrote it first, about feet,
what do I know about his feet, anybody's anything,

I don't know my own left foot from my right,
I know what hurts. I know what comes to help.

(from a scrap of quadrille paper dated Brockton, 18 December 1993)

4 March 2005

=====

Blue hydrangeas
on the windowsill
between me and the snow
and the sun and the road
and everything that goes
and these blue things stay.

They have been with me
since you gave them to me
last fall, surprised at my
delight in seeing them
in your house, surprised
to find flowers there
that were always mine
since I was a child
and saw them on my mother's
Chinese table in a big
Chinese vase above me,

bearing blue flowers.
These flowers look
good to me, as if I belonged
where I am, the proof
is in seeing them,
wherever I can see
such colors I am at home.

Paper flowers. How long
they last. And memory
is just scraps of this and that
crinkly somewhere in the folds

of our strange meat.
And animal that remembers—
that's what humans are,
they remember all that grew
up from the ground
to meet them when they were new
themselves, just coming
to behold. And still are blue.

5 March 2005

=====

An actor
is a copper bracelet
around your hand

take the speaker
off the stage
and let the skin of words

feel its own,
temperature
of a glass of water

with a flower in it
or a drop of ink
tendrilling down

there are creatures
also who hide
beneath the night.

5 March 2005

=====

As torn the wicks
ripped out of the wax shafts
leave no light from all that fuel
we mumble in the dark
sly fugues left of earliest
liturgy lacking only
the fingers to connect
sound with circumstance
the words with their astronomy
and know the right time
when what we speak
suddenly works.

We have borrowed
the wicks from the wax
and stored them in books
safe from light
sometimes try to
see by the word
they glow a moment
then smolder out

flamelessly improsperous.
Some nights we hear in dream
the murmur of bees
who might come
bringing morning
in amber charity and soak
our words again with world.
Then the gods again will
come at our call.

6 March 2005

=====

This is called paying attention—
wait scurrilous at the cesspit
for the meaning to flop in
from some higher life form
like a sentence torn out of a book
cherished by old priest fingers
because it was a word and
comes again in glory
from the oilslick on the harbor
the cloud in your eyes

and will form part of the New
Sentence that will bring
the world to life again
after this long dream.

6 March 2005