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THE TEMPER

1.

There must be a difference between

a flame and its fire.

Tell me what it is,
you've been in Spain,
you've sat beside the basin of the fountain
where *la llama de amor viva*
roared up once out of the water
heating you cooling you heating you cooling you
till you were tempered
into a strange new power,
a new kind of flesh.

The living flame of love. Or flame of living love.
No one can be sure. It surges
from the lucid water and overwhelms you,

the way the quiet people in the plaza are drenched with light.

2.

You felt it in your thighs,

in your vocabulary.

So tell me the difference,

the flame like a tongue

the fire like a language,

the whole of it trying to speak

what cooks in the blood,

humid fire of the alchemists,
and why do they call it blood?

It is in language that our desires are stored
our bodies take out, try on, use
to quench the moral thirst the pronouns sing,
I and you forever till the Moors come roaring back.

3.

As if I were the flame and you were the fire.
Is that it,

 something so easy, as if it could be
 a family of love,
 or love a family matter,
the terrible bullshit cartoons of the heart?

All songs end with *corazón*.

We're still trying to invent that thing,
the square-dance, the jota, the deep one,
the demon-infested four-room bungalow inside the chest,
all parador and no mirador, *el corazón*.
There, we did it again.

4.

So you should be my son a little while,
sit on my lap and endure my absent-minded tenderness

This flesh I made I will constrain
like King Lear spanking the cold wind.

5.

All kings are blind.
Sometimes I think I only see through you,

All flesh is made to suffer
Desire, ecstasy, remorse, confusion, prayer —

the five last things. And prayer? Prayer is
that whole holy silence of the body
halfway on the road between all it ever said
and where it falls asleep.

Needs sleep. No road.
Hold hands. Smoky wet fire.
Travelers, we come to the dark posada
Where the mountain eats the sun.

20 September 2001

Document::

John of the Cross's poem: *Llama de amor viva*

¡O llama de amor viva
que tiernamente hieres
de mi alma en el más profundo centro!
Pues ya no eres esquiva
acaba ya si quieres, 5
¡rompe la tela de este dulce encuentro!

¡O cauterio süave!
¡O regalada llaga!
¡O mano blanda! ¡O toque delicado
que a vida eterna sabe 10
y toda deuda paga!
Matando, muerte en vida has trocado.

¡O lámparas de fuego
en cuyos resplandores
las profundas cavernas del sentido, 15
que estaba oscuro y ciego,
con estraños primores
color y luz dan junto a su querido!

¡Cuán manso y amoroso
recuerdas en mi seno 20
donde secretamente solo moras,
y en tu aspirar sabroso
de bien y gloria lleno,
cuán delicadamente me enamoras!

So it is the morning
and lets itself be

 what once they let be called Beauty, that tribal name
for all that moves

 knows itself
into us

 as cool weather, a little rain, the light
curving over the basswood tree

a dark dome forgiven into heaven.

Heaven. Beauty. Tree.

What is the matter with me

- - -

21 September 2001

I need somebody to explain.
It's all too simple.

You're there, I'm here
And nothing works.

Other arrangements are possible
Always. Ultimatum from the central powers

Proximity or else.
The terrible compromises of growing up.

Ginger ale when you want Coke.
Going down on all those Satanist desserts.

It only gets worse.
This simplicity is a nightmare

Of irreducible distance. The silly blue sky
Frustrates the dark and decent earnest earth.

21 September 2001

WOODS ALONG THE WAY

1.

But it could be like that anytime.
any time of mind
you look out your window
you show yourself at your window
the world outside is one big eye

now do you know who?

2.

spare a glimpse for birds these dusty
import sparrows who cluster
sometimes in the crotches of that tree

the big one by your window, yes, you
the one from China and your husband's
name is Cherry Pie and you sell chalk.

3.

blue because eye, eye because mine
I suffer to become myself and pay the price.
The eyes. One creeps into the woods
and takes off some clothes, pees in bushes
what kind are they, what poison in the dark
because civilization is a meager part-time thing
a blue-eyed dog that runs away
a locked door and a drowned cigar.

4.

All the doors are locked, the station's closed,
the trains glide by in their trances, patients
analyzed by light stare out the windows
and then the world has passed.

But when does my train come
my cautious woods, my gravel by the tracks
my untranslated dream, my pigeonshit desire
scattered all over a dead world
full of statues and cornfields?

Illegible inscriptions. I missed the city
and it was gone, I saw the smoke of it
receding in the famous distances.

5.

What could they be doing in the woods,
darkness piled up among the trees
as if artful devils dragged it there to make
a wretched little city built of doubt and terror

and you have to walk those streets alone.
Of course I want to be there, be your tree,
the one you lean against, your prop, your stem,
rub into me, fall asleep on my rough.

22 September 2001

to be smitten by it and be whatever
just sit there we say meaning no harm
and still it happens a locked door
a subway station on the moon

¡mira! there are surfaces

and we make commitments to each other
by the big river a wedding

sitting on laps and learning Arabic

horse hoof horse shoe

magnet

= *aimant* in French, the adessive, the love thing

pulling us to or towards. raise to whose lips.

Dog yelp why morning
Saxifrage all night
Nibbling granite gateways
A stunned old man
(the sun) remembering his wife

(that was last night)

a jack stud by your door.

In every orgasm decades pass.

A hundred years. Start again

in fact
the Prophet came yesterday, Jesus

the week before last

and everything is close.

To us. That's what matters.

It is close enough to touch

You all over again. It happened in January and can't help herself
And neither can he,

do you get my Spanish,
we age the world.

So now I am your meek Albanian
who once in Saxony upheld your fame
in tournaments of sleeping men

each dreamt a better version of his state
but I dreamed you,
the meaning of the whole,
the bottom line.

And then Toulouse was gone,
they woke and knew your consort is your only polis,
only state,

some bleeding people on the Autobahn in sunlight
young sitting next to old,
unnatural.

For nature is our ruin and our deaths, our designated killer
in bouffant green, in water silk, in precious stone

so be unnatural. Be young with old. Be soft with hard. Be everything.

The explosion. Chimu obscenities. Olmec head.

A pottery urn
with eyes and nose, some animal

trying to get born.

Muchacha, 'girl'

I called you once

before I learned your actual sex is me.

We. We were born in a coconut shell

the husks are still my hair

blowaway too dry my hair

needs to be conditioned

lovesweat of a million slaves

sperm of the trees

and you were born

to comfort me

by under

standing,

Speak another language

till I'm here,

you see that Berber morning in those trees,

a bleak of light

scarce overwhelming green?

O what are you writing home about now,

Yachtsman?

Narrow passage. Squeeze the news. My tongue

belongs in your ear.

23 September 2001

Could it be enough to say how little has been said
And make a library of silence
Where the new can come
New born senses still wanting to speak?

Put that in granite, darling, where the years are.
Live with me on the other side of speech.

23 September 2001

one doesn't have to but I do

— get nervous about arrival?

constantly looking out the door you know?

— no matter who?

I do, do you?

— it depends

on whom?

— in general I suppose so but you never know

— you mean?

maybe a door itself is deadly

23 September 2001

it is the way it lies against along the world

a day as if different from another

or holy any time of year

the structures of escape

24 September 2001

Send a word to the wall and what then?

The Ball Court.

American deaths
are always sacrifices to

some gods, some gods invoke
by smoking
offering the reek and fume thereof
aloft and then
the circumstantial afters of your death

Star surrogates
 whisperers of creative runes
we empower by our deaths.

Because we are the gods.

We are what is left of Æsir and Olympus
endlessly — and by now fairly mindlessly —
sacrificing ourselves into the cosmos
for the welfare of all minded beings we forget

that is, all beings.

But the sacrifice avails.

Sad secret history of America
with still a glory at the end of it
but not the old one, not old

we were West
where the gods had shriveled and reposed

and to us we came
out of merchant Europe and eggyolk Africa

unready race of gods and men, America.

24 September 2001

CHURCH HISTORY

All bishops and no priests
All priests and no people.

24 September 2001

BIRTHDAY

I am sixty six years old and I don't know it.
A chipmunk just scuttled by and I can't see it.
Bronze leaves are falling on my lawn and I don't care.

It is beauty, and beauty always takes care of itself.
Time is the light death sheds on beauty —
To show and to show and to show.

That's all our business is, and obligation.

24 September 2001

Why young people are so appealing:
They've spent so little of their beauty.

Beauty is how we live, the breathcoin, we spend it
To go on.

But since beauty is freshness, so.ma,
For those who know
It is infinitely renewable.

Catch the bus on Kudamm turns south and takes you to Charlottenburg
Where you'll see a golden woman
A pale blue bridge, a white swan.

What else do you think you'll ever need?

24 September 2001

Waking in the country of birds
A rainy spokesperson
declines to comment
On what got heard in the night

Concussion house shake tree
Fall. Later lights went out and came back on
Up the road an oak was on fire

But the rain seemed to quiet that too
Neither dark nor light had a chance against it
Whatever it is

What are you doing what is your voice
A little tipsy with weather
Trying to explain with such gleaming sequins

Lightning in wind and a swept tree
Auguries of fire?
The gods are on the move again below the earth
Usually so careful not to let us hear them go.

25 September 2001

Everything tries to answer the question at once
This eagerness begets a material world

You know better than I how close we are
My name is the same as yours only the letters are different

He waited for the rain to stop and is still waiting
Buñuel's film pours milk on the dairymaid's thighs

Things have an odd way of being rational
A gnat in a wise man's eye sees better than he

Beneath the fur of the acacia leaves a great tree sleeps
Everything is ready for the big moment we advertise

All moments are the same size time is a cube
Time is a lump of jet fits sweet the palm of my hand

Jet is an animal that long ago was wood
An animal is anything that makes us think

I am an animal that not so long ago was you
Curvature of light around a broken vase is whole

The answer was looking for me while I hid in the woods
The answer trickled down my back while you mopped my brow

The whole world is looking for somebody to blame
Very old people learn to do it with mirrors.

25 September 2001

The opportunities

lift over the dense horizon
an animate
energy like a small fruit bat
zipping behind your chimney

after all it is your house
or isn't it
the bat doesn't know
nobody knows

the baseball season draws to its end
again
 and some have won and most have lost
and people come home from the stadiums
as they used to do a thousand years ago in Istanbul

murmuring about blue, about green.

25 September 2001

THEORY

I'm counting. Every calorie every hour
Every breath or word or want,

All the agonizing yesses, the heart-attack noes,
The blabber-mouth guesses, the Antarctic rose —

Numbers batter the mind black and blue.

25 September 2001