

12-2000

## decE2000

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To name a thing the sea  
then drink from it  
or drink all of it

I hunger for your salt  
I crave in solid form alas  
you give me waves, salt  
solutes, waters when  
I want to bite the actual thing

swallow the density of you,  
not your word about how it is  
to be with you or be in you

but the thing itself.  
Because the senses are illusory  
but beyond the senses there's nothing at all.

24 December 2000

## **Pilgrimage**

They are on their way  
But where is that

Does the way have a mind of its own?

*I said to the pilgrim:*

How far is the journey  
From here to where you are

How far do you have to go  
To get to where you are?

And when did you set out on this journey  
And why did you think the place you started from was where you were?  
If you knew where you were, why bother to travel?

How will you know you're there when you get there?

*And then the Pilgrim answered:*

Who are you when you talk to me,  
Who are you when you ask these questions

And if I answered,  
Who would I be speaking to?

You talk and then you rest  
And then another talks

And are you listening then  
And if you are, who is it who's listening?

I'm on my way to find

The nature of my mind

And the questions you ask  
are not the ones the mind means  
but sound a little like them,  
so I don't mind,

And words are shadows, shadows only,

but what are the Objects that cast such shadows,  
blocking what inconceivable light?

25 December 2000

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Saying goodbye to someone  
is not the same as saying.

Sudden lips sometimes understand  
the whole evening in the last

seconds of it, it is said.  
I preach a great revision of the Sea

to be  
on both shores of it at once.

25 December 2000



# Totentanz

(for Katherine Fryer)

And Death one day came along the same road I had to use. There he was, swinging his familiar scythe with what looked, and this was new to me, a stiff but still flexible handle — snathe is I think the proper name for it.

Hmm, I said, that's a surprise, I always thought it was wood.

No, he said, it's bone, backbone, in fact.

Dare I ask whose bone you use to swing that blade?

Of course. It's yours. I slay you only with what gives life. Just as your mother gave you birth, I give you death. You might call me the mother of the dark. Your Greeks ...

I interrupted: I have no Greeks.

Your Greeks, he went on, thought the spinal fluid, the fluid round the brain, the synovial fluid round the knees, the seminal flow of men, all these they thought were the same humor, *aion*, the water of life. It was the Water of the Styx, on which they swore unbreakable oaths.

No oath is unbreakable, I said.

O no? said he, and started dancing

Round me a stick  
It seemed shoved  
Between my ankles  
And flipped me

But I danced back  
And would not fall  
I didn't spend  
So many years drunk

Only to fall down  
Now sober  
Not I, not I  
And so I danced

Right back in his face  
More leathery than bone  
But still a fright  
I felt his ribs

More bone than skin  
And then his blade  
Laid a caress  
Along my flank

Where in hell  
Had he come from  
And what good  
Did my dark blood

Do him? Can you drink  
I asked him,  
I can and I do  
He said, but not you,

I am dancing with you  
Only to establish  
My right to do so  
And your skill too

To stumble drunkenly  
Two old dead men  
On a dusty road  
Dancing

And all the girls  
Of the village come by  
Half hilarious half  
Horried to see us

We struggled half  
Laughing ourselves  
As if the struggle  
Had meaning or goal

As if death were something



Worth doing or  
Life were something  
Worth losing

I tripped him  
And he tripped me  
We both fell down  
And the girls

Helped up to our feet  
brushed me off  
and one of them  
said to me Why

were you dancing  
in the middle  
of this old road  
all alone?

26 December 2000

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Where was this headed when it spoke  
Where was China when we needed it  
Where was liberty when loose?

Find a place to flaunt your flavors in  
an ice cream parlor of the mind  
(two antique concepts there, beware)

where everything is chocolate.  
Find a place where Hungarian accent marks  
Flóurish entertainingly  
Above common semblances of words

Meaning nothing and intimating much.  
Sit down and cross your legs and eat with me  
Goey raptures of Kakanian cuisine  
And watch the swans float by or is it snow

Lumped graceful down the swift river  
Dunno, I left my spectacles behind.  
O lose those lights that shone on liberty,

Sharp mustard is heat enough for us.  
The snow is lingering on Berlin,  
The wind is wild in Annandale  
And we are measured by our places

The terrible morning when we wake  
Understanding I belong where I am.

26 December 2000

## BOLZANO

We went to visit the Iceman once. He lies in reverent enclosure, gently terrifying, a dead human, on his side, and people quietly line up and approach the aquarium-like window through which we commune with him. I think he is our ancestor, to whom we confess our sins. It felt like that, waiting on line, reverently approaching. The sin must be that we let him die. He is our father, common ancestor, and we let him die and lie hundreds of years unburied.

It seems very strange to meet someone dead before I was born -- stranger than the unwrapped mummies who scare me in the British Museum, the grimace and smell of them, perhaps because of the iceman's quiet, and the modest, unrehearsed, unceremonious way in which he must have died.

26 December 2000

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It stands up and walks towards you  
It is a cup of coffee  
You can feel it before it gets inside you  
Pheromones and such

The sexy smell that waking has  
And snaps you out of  
Whatever you were in that wasn't this  
Gorgeous and immaculate

Morning on the sacred planet Earth  
And here you are  
Midway between Ethiopia and Jerusalem  
A holy holy personage

Warming your fingers round one more sacred cup.

27 December 2000

## End of Ramadan

It is the day of the night of the day  
The first time we see the night of the night  
Slicing through the dark of the day

It is the moon we say  
And the power of the unnamable  
Suddenly has a name with us

And we call it out, a sound from the dark  
Of our throats into the brightness of the breath  
And He is spoken.

Who? A person rises  
From the power when the night and the day  
Become a single word and we

Who are faithful see it, slim sign in the sky.

27 December 2000

TO HIS HOLINESS THE KARMAPA:  
ON A STATUE OF YANGCHENMA

The neck of her viña is shaped like a swan's  
To show that all things and all persons  
Are capable of music and poetry and truth

Because the part of us that sings is wings.  
Because we can tell stories we can sing, because  
We can sing we think we fly, and flying go

Out beyond the one we think we are  
Almost as far as where you are, we read your shadow  
On the precise impeccable snow of the highest

Mountains, we murmur as clearly as we can,  
We stumble upwards, we are not swans  
But we have swan in us somehow, somewhere,

And you can tell us all we need to know.  
Come down the mountain towards us a little  
And keep us in mind, show us the doctrine

You preserve intact from the first moment  
Of enlightenment, precious teacher, help us come  
To you, come down and feed your swans.

*This Prayer to His Holiness Orgyen Trinley Dorje, the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, is made by two students of the Venerable Lama Norlha Rinpoche in the eleventh month of the Iron Dragon year, Robert & Charlotte Kelly*

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As ever the instrument  
presents itself, a yacht  
on a bay of trouble

speaking towards pleasure  
in the vast sea  
between us and what we mean,

as ever the waves  
spank the bottom of the boat  
distracting (or is it helping)

it from its forward motion  
or is it solitary drifting  
moony floating a boat is

for in the first place  
to go or linger bellissimo  
all these years on the planet

we still don't even know.

28 December 2000

OLD BOTTLE OF INK ON MY WINDOW SILL

Do you know how old this is,  
this bottle of ink,  
Waterman's (American Waterman's!)  
SOUTH SEA BLUE  
a bottle in a box with a sail on it

and a shore with trees and you's and me's  
trying to write the oldest word

(What is the oldest word?)

We sit in the sand  
holding hands  
asking each other questions  
like How old were you  
and With whose hand  
and What finger do you use  
and Who is the tree outside your window and

all we want to do is find  
and then write down  
the oldest word  
the oldest word with the oldest ink

and then we'll find it written there  
and pronounce it carefully out loud

(Do you know the oldest word?)

*j'ai besoin de tes fesses  
pour rester sur la terre  
j'ai besoin de ta langue  
pour savoir mon nom*

the written word comes first  
and then we'll see

sparrowhawks? albatross?  
a man with a face looks just like me?



The word is hidden in the ink  
Come spill it out

We sit in the sand that's made of sun  
and ask each other questions made of moon  
until the ink decides what to do

then it writes the oldest word  
it takes the rest of time and space and me and you to read.

A New Years Poem  
29 December 2000



## [ETYMOLOGY]

### dpr

To turn one's back on (probably denominative from an old word for "back"). West Semitic variant (assimilated) form dbr. ALDEBARAN, from Arabic *ad-dabarân*, 'the following, follower,' from *dabara*, 'to follow.'

So we are abandoned  
to the question: is to turn  
my back on someone  
the same as following,

my back or yours?  
To show one's back  
to another  
thus leading them somewhere

or rejecting their company or  
leaving it up to them  
to come with you  
or to stay.

These are the wonders  
of the roots  
we think we remember  
dreaming below the words

that are actually just  
the echo of  
the sound you said  
before you turned away.

29 December 2000

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In a world system  
Where people are  
Generally born  
Young and die old

What kind of doctrine  
Would it be that wants  
Things to be instead  
The other way round?

*{A pierced nose for New Years}*

29 December 2000

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So long we need to be  
a countess or a horse  
fleeting over prairies  
while the little flies  
bang against the screen door

and you wake up suddenly  
knowing nothing  
absolutely nothing.

29 December 2000

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after all the snowing and going  
shoveling and sliding and peering  
through ice windows am home  
without you and the whole  
exercise was to bring you  
to the launching pad for India

and here I am alone  
watching the same snow snow  
just as hard the radio  
sings Traviata saddest  
of all our musics I can't bear it  
but in a month you will be home

whereas you are home all the time.

30 December 2000

---

but the kind of doing that finds us is a bird's way  
tasting the sky and doming it round in the smallest  
fragile oval as if everything could be that one thing

the way lovers do the way I miss you right now  
with the snow deeper than it's been in years  
but that's just time that's just memory's opera

we don't have to listen we too have work to do.

30 December 2000

Poem beginning with a phrase by Robyn Carliss

O “the mereness of her hands”  
— could paradiso me

wait for just that  
simple city of the touch

because skin’s our town  
and feeling peoples us  
love weathering  
for that one  
inhabitant

                                  to lay her skin  
against  
                                  my oldest mind  
such mereness could be  
sumptuously much.

30 December 2000



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to mine the fact of you and spill myself in us

---

now that I've watched the magnetic storms on Jupiter  
and shoveled my walkway three times and ready for a fourth  
I am convinced that all that really happens  
Is weather, and we are just a footnote  
With goosequill or scalpel or paintbrush or a shovel in the hand.

31 December 2000

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1.  
not to be as I remembered being  
a foolish squanderer of internal applause

when just at arms length an opening  
through the atmosphere of Jupiter  
into a safehouse where the [spirit]  
waits to hear what will be in this  
millennium its actual name.

2.  
because the actual is not the same as the essential;

there is a doctrine that lets us go. This is alchemy.

Snow outside. Brahms. I like one better than the other. Why do some great composers who sometimes write my heart awake (K.299, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> violin sonatas, the four-handed Fantasie) mostly feel a little dry and far. Mozart, Brahms, Schubert, I don't get excited when the radio announcer says their names, the way I do with Bach, Beethoven, Mahler, Strauss.

This measures me. I have to learn what this says of me, and whether I can still be changed.

The Brahms seems mean and pale and sad.

But the snow is not sad, and what do I mean?

Music always changes. Now a guitar you hate, now a cello you love, so what, so what, always something asking you, always you answering from the bottomless larder in the House of Habit.

One opinion after another, and you're never done.

There are no things in the world you can confront without in some way slightly or strongly preferring one to the other.

So preference is the name of our misery.

Now I can talk about it, the dark thing, the machine.

I am the machine.

To ask can I be changed is the same as asking Can the world be saved.

From what? For what?

To escape despair. If I could not change, that would be ground for despair.

To be different from my preferences, to be apart from my opinions.

To be, without being me.

31 December 2000

## LES TILLEULS

waiting for you under the lilac shadows of the snow  
a springtime knows you  
and an animal takes you by the hand

*that man loves you* is what it says  
because in and around old houses animals can talk  
*but doesn't know what love means — do you?*

Because in some houses it is always springtime  
and animals prance around the rose bush  
keeping their distance from the thorns

raspberry canes and last year's dry hydrangea  
— what kind of animals do you think they are  
and why do they think so much of you?

2.

On the oldest wall that human beings made  
You can (if you go to Turkey, up in the highlands I saw once  
High red and rugged and very dry)

See a painting, the first thing we painted on our walls  
In that first house. It shows a girl like you  
With an animal at either hand — she's taking care

And they worship her, a leopard and a wolf, maybe,  
Or goat and lion, eaten and eater, both love you,  
Both stand on their hind legs at Çatal Hüyük and beg.

This kind of begging looks like what we mean by prayer.

31 December 2000