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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
solute, 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
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
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
Horrified 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
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
Flourish entertainingly
Above common semblances of words

Meaning nothing and intimating much.
Sit down and cross your legs and eat with me
Gooey 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
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
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?)

\[ \textit{j’ai besoin de tes fesses} \]
\[ \textit{pour rester sur la terre} \]
\[ \textit{j’ai besoin de ta langue} \]
\[ \textit{pour savoir mon nom} \]

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
Enjoy everybody in Everything all the time

29 December 2000
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-dabarán, ‘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
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
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
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
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
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\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd}
   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