

Toward a Time of Renewal

Music by Joelle Wallach

I

Living

The fire in leaf and grass
so green it seems
each summer the last summer.

The wind blowing, the leaves
shivering in the sun,
each day the last day.

A red salamander
so cold and so
easy to catch, dreamily

moves his delicate feet
and long tail. I hold
my hand open for him to go.
Each minute the last minute.

II

Midnight Gladness

The pleated lampshade, slightly askew,
dust a silverish muting of the lamp's fake brass.
My sock-monkey on the pillow, tail and limbs
asprawl

...
Gleams of water in my bedside glass,
miraculous water so peacefully
waiting to be consumed.

The day's crowding arrived
at this abundant stillness. Each thing
given to the eye before sleep, and water
at my lips....

The Fountain

Don't say, don't say there is no water
to solace the dryness at our hearts.
I have seen

the fountain springing out of the rock wall
and you drinking there. And I too
before your eyes

found footholds and climbed
to drink the cool water....
Don't say, don't say there is no water.
That fountain is there among its scalloped
...stones,

it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,
up and out through the rock.

III

The Battereders

A man sits by the bed
of a woman he has beaten,
dresses her wounds,
gingerly dabs at bruises.
Her blood pools about her,
darkens.

Astonished, he finds he's begun
to cherish her. He is terrified.
Why had he never
seen, before, what she was?
What if she stops breathing?

Earth, can we not love you
unless we believe the end is near?
Believe in you life
unless we think you are dying?

The Altars in the Street

On June 17th, 1966, The New York Times reported that, as part of the Buddhist campaign of non-violent resistance, Vietnamese children were building altars in the streets of Saigon and Hue, effectively jamming traffic.

Children begin at green dawn nimbly to build
topheavy altars, overweighted with prayers,
thronged each instant more densely....

Where tanks have cracked the roadway
the frail altars shake; here a boy

with red stumps for hands steadies a corner,
here one adjusts with his crutch the holy base.
The vast silence of Buddha overtakes

and overrules the oncoming roar...
it blocks the way of pedicabs, police, convoys.

The hale and maimed together
hurry to construct for the Buddha
a dwelling at each intersection. Each altar

made from whatever stones, sticks dreams are
at hand,
is a facet of one altar; by noon
the whole city in all its corruption,

all its shed blood...
has become a temple,
fragile, insolent, absolute.

based on poems by Denise Levertov

IV

The Open Sentence

To look out over roofs
of a different city —

steaming tiles, chimney pots, mansards,
the gleam on distant spires
after a downpour —

To look out...
and say to oneself,
Today...

Beginners

But we have only begun
to love the earth.

We have only begun
to imagine the fulness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
— so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?
— we have only begun

...to envision
how it might be...

Surely our river
cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot
drag in the silt,
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet —
there is too much broken
that must be mended,

too much...
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is beginning,
so much is in bud.