

Striking Light, Striking Dark

1. *Ish Province Work Song* (Sam Hamill, *Habitation*, Lost Horse Press)
The plan is the work.
The work is play, joy.
Wherein reside silence and song
side by side
lighting, the way.
2. *How Could We Forget?* (Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Letters to a Young Poet*, VIII
August 12th, 1904)
How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races: the
myths about the dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses?
Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who only wait to see us act, just
once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps all that frightens us, in its deepest essence, is
something helpless that wants our love.
3. *Unity* (Pablo Neruda, from *World's End*, translated by William O'Daly, Copper
Canyon Press)
all leaves are this leaf
all petals are this flower
and abundance a lie.
for all fruit is the same
the trees are one, alone,
and the earth, a single flower.
4. *Solstice* (Sam Hamill, *Habitation*, Lost Horse Press)
Old snow turns to ice
what solitary stillness
empties this cold world.
* * *
Snow-laden cedars,
like monks in green and white robes,
all learning to bow.
* * *
One stick of incense,
one last bottle of sake—
one, and one, and one.
* * *
The moon, still alone.
Ten thousand whirling galaxies
and, simply, the moon.
5. *Peacock Feather* (Rainer Maria Rilke)
Peacock feather:
peerless in your elegance,

How I loved you even as a child.
I took you for a love token
which by silversilent ponds
elves in cool nights hand each other
when children are all gone to sleep.
And since good little Grandmama
often read me of wishing wands,
I dreamed, you delicate of air,
there flowed in your fine filaments
the crafty force of the divining-rod—
and sought you in the summer grass.

6. *Elegy* (Sam Hamill, *Habitation*, Lost Horse Press)

It is almost dawn,
the procession of stars
journeying again
into blindness. You who could
not touch me show me the way.

7. *All of It* (adapted from David Wagoner, *Who Shall be the Sun?*)

when you saw that man was coming you changed into the rocks
into fish and birds, a swimin' a flyin'
up on that hill there's you
have i held you much too lightly
have i broken your silence too
carelessly in my hands i drunk you and burnt you and carved you and knew you
and danced upon your skin
all of it
suffering my foolishness
I'll take care of this and more.
as the old wait quietly among the clumsy children
the others are coming soon
I must change into the people, my people, we people, only people
but how do i change myself?
if no one here can really teach me and reach me and calm me and know me
then let me become myself
i will learn to crawl, stand and fly,
anywhere, everywhere around you.

8. *Oracular* (Sam Hamill, *Habitation*, Lost Horse Press)

Gray alders turn glistening black
in the moonlight so yellow
it has blinded all the stars.
In all the leaflets night,
no sound.
Rain frozen on the boughs.

9. *The Art of Literary Translation* (Sam Hamill, *Habitation*, Lost Horse Press)

1.

Asking one who is
not a poet to translate
poetry is like
asking a heart surgeon to
repair your brakes—every
once in a while, you'll
find one who can do it well.

2.

Squabbling as they will
in busy traffic, two crows
make meals of road kill.

10. *The Search* (John Logan, from *John Logan, The Collected Poems*, BOA Editions Limited)

But for whom do I look?
The whole night long you will see me walk
or maybe during the day
watch me pass by.
But I do not wander.
It is a search. For I stop here,
or here, wherever people gather.
Depot, restaurant, bar.
But for whom do I seek?
You will see me coming back
perhaps at dawn. Sometimes
the faces seem like tombs.
I have tried to read the names
so long my eyes darken in their graves
of bone. (The bodies of our eyes lie side by side but do not touch.)
But for whom do I look? My search
is not for wife, daughter or for son
for time to time it has taken me from them.
Or has wrenched me from my friend:
I will abruptly leave him,
and I do not go home.
Then, for whom do I seek? Out of what fear?
It is not for queers
for my search leads me from their bars,
It is not for whores,
since I reject their wares,
or another time may not.
Then for whom do I look?
When I was young I thought

I wanted (yearned for) older age.
Now I think I hunt with so much rage
that I will risk or lose
family or friends for the ghost of my youth.
Thus I do not know for what I look.
Father? Mother?
The father who will be the mother?
Sister who will be the brother?
Often I hunt in the family of others—
until hope scatters.
I will call up a friend or student at night
or I will fly
to see them—will bask and heal in the warm
places of their homes.
And I must not be alone
no matter what needs be done,
for then my search is ended.
So now the panicked thumbs of my poem pick
through the grill. They poke
the lock
and put out a hand and then an arm.
The limbs of my poems
come within your reach.
Perhaps it is you whom I seek.

11. *Kyorei* (text from the *Kyotaku Denki Koku Jitai*, 1795)
Myôtôrai, myôtôda. Antôrai, antôda.
If light comes, I strike it. If dark comes, I strike it.

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