

(And then the name of the other)

Dear Myung,

This immediate problem of reporting. How to express the true appreciation I feel, to one who, in my experience, deflects direct attention and can spot received ideas and smarmy sentimentality a mile away? Is it even possible for me to entirely strip away the distortion of motivation and relationship that the institutionalized context in which we encountered each other inevitably supplies?

Yet I'm determined. The light is dying. It's an unusually hot evening in San Francisco. Tomorrow I plan to go to—the zoo. I'm terrified to see animals pent up in cages, but lately astounded by the thought that these creatures and I share a city. Maybe if nothing else I can grieve for them. Bear witness.

McCain is making his convention speech as I write this. I can't listen. Must rely in this instance on aftermath pundits. Yesterday Palin's speech riled me so, I could barely sleep, and when I did, had disturbed dreams starring her.

The light is dying. *In all respects already dying.* When I studied with you, I avoided reading your work. You already occupied such a large space in my poetry

consciousness that I sensed that I'd fall into your work, lose myself in it—I had to focus on carving my own poetic path. Now, in your absence, I turn to your writing—and find—

I find unflinching observation (*Vision of the form*] [*bloody mess of the city*) and acute listening (*O hummingbird, swift trill*)—the same ardent attention you gave to my work, challenged me to enact in my writing (*If one thing is seen and seen clearly and the effort to see it*) (*What kind of listening is it*), celebrated enthusiastically when I was able to do so.

I find vigilant documentation of the ways in which lives and thoughts are manipulated (*Manipulation prevent what emergent story*). Determination to upend received forms (*have there the freedom of movement and newness*). Deep trust in the movements of the always original mind (*synaptic//unruly enter*). The poem as a series of notations, propositions, life lines (*Propose: constant translation*). I think about all the times you challenged me to invert old terms, invent new ones. (*Became.//// made*).

I find the courage to face our planet's waking nightmare (*Summon deluge//Come now and hear*) with resistance (*the counter cry*), specificity (*What looked black in the Korean newspaper was my son's blood*), responsibility (*If I weren't his mother : you are*), and innovation (*Experiment is each scroll of white pages joined together*).

At the same time I find acknowledgement of the limits of the poet's capacity (*Hummingbird No word for its size*). Respect for the difficulty of articulation (*Upon the thr*) and the curiosity-driven, error-ridden struggle

to know anything (*They say it is the ocean*). Is it your own experience with the difficulty of saying and knowing, and with some of the conditions that lead to that (*One of the first words understood in English: stupid*), that made you so generous toward poems that were at times mere chicken scratches? Consistently mirroring whatever spark the work held, and the belief that it was en route—on its way to locating its irreplaceable, necessary vision. (*Building is a process. Light is an element.*)

You write: *envision her*, and reading: When I picture you reading a poem, the sense of touch is palpable. I see you brushing your fingers across its Braille, or taking its pulse. *Would get closer*. And then giving an astoundingly psychic reading of it. Doing this uncountable times. *Every locuter world of particular*. Inspiring me and others to reach for that level of response to one another's work, creating an atmosphere of true poetic community that I treasured then, treasure in memory, and have worked ever since to replicate in my teaching. And I remember all the times you stressed the notion of writing itself as an act of attention. *Attend] hear any one thing*

: *One flower when first my eyes wake// One blossom first eyes open* What's the lyric? What's a contemporary, a proposed or possible lyric? Does it have something to do with the courage and vulnerability not only to sit down in the midst of horror, but to acknowledge—no, to celebrate—the beauty of our world, a beauty that's fragile, to be sure, yet undeniably present if the eyes are open? A beauty found in the singular [], the singular word. *Catch sieve salve*

For me, your poetry enacts this notion of lyric, and you helped me and others learn to recognize and appreciate it when it appears in our own work.

Myung, I've used the past tense often in this letter, pointing to the particular time (the latter half of the 90s) when I worked with you. And yet, of course, through your writing and teaching, you continue, have continued, will continue to share your gifts with countless others. And although my work with you marked a specific period in my personal timeline, the *terms of the endeavor* you offered then still accompany me.

Having arrived here.

And crumbling pause

Recast deliberate meteorite