

Adrienne Rich

SPLITTINGS

from *The Dream of a Common Language*

1.

My body opens over San Francisco like the day –  
light raining down      each pore crying the change of light  
I am not with her      I have been waking off and on  
all night to that pain      not simply absence but  
the presence of the past      destructive  
to living here and now      Yet if I could instruct  
myself, if we could learn to learn from pain  
even as it grasps us      if the mind, the mind that lives  
in this body could refuse      to let itself be crushed  
in that grasp      it would loosen      Pain would have to stand  
off from me and listen      its dark breath still on me  
but the mind could begin to speak to pain  
and pain would have to answer:

*We are older now  
we have met before      these are my hands before your eyes  
my figure blotting out      all that is not mine  
I am the pain of division      creator of divisions  
it is I who blot your lover from you  
and not the time-zones or the miles  
It is not separation calls me forth      but I  
who am separation      And remember  
I have no existence      apart from you*

2.

I believe I am choosing something now  
not to suffer uselessly      yet still to feel  
Does the infant memorize the body of the mother  
and create her in absence?      or simply cry

primordial loneliness?      does the bed of the stream  
once diverted      mourning      remember the wetness?  
But we, we live so much in these  
configurations of the past      I choose  
to separate her      from my past we have not shared  
I choose not to suffer uselessly  
to detect primordial pain as it stalks toward me  
flashing its bleak torch in my eyes      blotting out  
her particular being      the details of her love  
I will not be divided      from her or from myself  
by myths of separation  
while her mind and body in Manhattan are more with me  
than the smell of eucalyptus coolly burning      on these hills  
3.

The world tells me I am its creature  
I am raked by eyes      brushed by hands  
I want to crawl into her for refuge      lay my head  
in the space      between her breast and shoulder  
abnegating power for love  
as women have done      or hiding  
from power in her love      like a man  
I refuse these givens      the splitting  
between love and action      I am choosing  
not to suffer uselessly      and not to use her  
I choose to love      this time      for once  
with all my intelligence.