

THE MIGRANTS

The tidal motion of refugees, not the flight of wild geese,
the faces in freight-cars, haggard and coal-eyed,
particularly the peaked stare of children,
the huge bundles crossing bridges, axles creaking
as if joints and bones were audible, the dark stain
spreading on maps whose shapes dissolve their frontiers
the way that corpses melt in a lime-pit, or
the bright mulch of autumn is trampled into mud
and the smoke of a cypress signals Sachenhäusen,
those without trains, without mules or horses,
those who have the rocking-chair and the sewing-machine
heaped on a human cart, a wagon without horses
for horses have long since galloped out of their field
back to the mythology of mercy, back to the cone
of the orange steeple piercing clouds over the lindens
and the stone bells of Sunday over the cobbles,
those who rest their hands on the sides of carts
as if they were the flanks of mules, and the women
with their flint faces, with glazed cheekbones, with eyes
the colour of duck-ponds glazed over with ice,
for whom the year has only one season, one sky:
that of the rocks flapping like torn umbrellas,
all have been reduced into a common language,
the homeless, the province-less, to the incredible memory
of apples and clean streams, and the sound of milk
filling the summer churns, where are you from,
what was your district, I know that lake, I know the beer
and its inns, I believed in its mountains,
now there is a monstrous map that is called Nowhere
and that is where we're all headed, behind it
there is a view called the Province of Mercy,
where the only government is that of the apples
and the only army the wide banners of barley,
and its farms are simple, and that is the vision
that narrows in the irises of the dying
and the tired whom we leave in ditches
before they stiffen and their brows go cold
as the stones that have broken our shoes,
as the clouds that grow ashen so quickly after dawn
over palm and poplar, in the deceitful sunrise
of this, your new century.

St. Lucia, Caribbean, June 16, 2000