

## Heart & Soul

to essex hemphill

every day  
every time i leave my house  
everywhere i go  
i pin on my knapsack  
twin petal-small flags  
to which my allegiance is pledged  
whole

*these flags are not monkeys on my back  
i carry them as a coat of arms  
mantles of double brotherhood  
they shield like second skin  
to drape my dreams*

one floats rainbow  
the other wings tricolor  
both bold with movement  
i am not ashamed  
of what they stand for  
when their meaning is  
questioned

*these flags are not chips on my shoulders  
i carry them as beauty spots  
markings of double brotherhood  
they shine like mirror beads  
to reflect prejudice*

one unfurls the future of the queer nation  
the other salutes african ancestors  
both wave s.o.s. signals  
i am not afraid  
to stand my ground  
when their beauty is  
challenged

*these flags are not crossbones on my life  
i carry them as amulets  
emblems of double brotherhood  
they spellbind like stars  
to stripe america*

glory  
that becomes me in tribal rituals  
& battle against bigots  
i have honored with my blood  
everywhere i go  
every time i leave my house  
every day

Assotto Samir Wishing For Wings 1994  
Galena Press

(22)

o Part Nine: Out There

if we shared what no one might possess,  
 nce in a net we sought to hold the wind.  
 here he lay on the pillow, mortally thinned,  
 eaker than water, yet his gesture proving  
 steady as an undertow. Unmoving  
 the sustained though slight aversion, grim  
 wordlessness. Nothing deflected him,  
 othing I did and nothing I could say.  
 nd so I left. I heard he died next day.

have imagined that he still could taste  
 hat bitterness and anger to the last,  
 gainst the roles he saw me in because  
 fe had to: of victor, as he thought I was,  
 Of heir, as to the cherished property  
 lis mother—who knows why?—was giving me,  
 nd of survivor, as I am indeed,  
 recording so that I may later read  
 Of what has happened, whether between sheets,  
 Or in post offices, or on the streets.

POST SCRIPT: THE PANEL

Reciprocation from the dead. Having finished the postoffice poem, I think I will  
 take a look at the stained-glass panel it refers to, which C made I would say two  
 years before he died. I fish it out from where I have kept it, between a filing cabi-  
 net and a small chest of drawers. It has acquired a cobweb, which I brush off before  
 I look at it. In the lower foreground are a face with oriental features and an arm, as  
 of someone lying on his stomach: a mysteriously tiered cone lies behind and above  
 him. What I had forgotten is that the picture is surrounded on all four sides by the  
 following inscription:

The needs of ghosts embarrass the living.  
 A ghost must eat and shit, must pack his  
 body someplace. Neither buyer nor bundle,  
 a ghost has no tally, no readjusting value,  
 no soul counted at a bank.

Is this an excerpt from some Chinese book of wisdom, or is it C himself speaking?  
 When he made the panel, C may have already suspected he had AIDS, but the pre-  
 sence of the first sentence astonishes me—as it does also that I remembered nothing  
 of the inscription while writing the poem but looked it up immediately on fin-  
 ishing it.

Yes, the needs of him and his friend to “embarrass” me after their deaths. The  
 dead have no sense of tact, no manners, they enter doors without knocking, but I  
 continue to deal with them, as proved by my writing the poem. They pack their  
 bodies into my dreams, they eat my feelings, and shit in my mind. They are no good  
 to me, of no value to me, but I cannot shake them and do not want to. Their story,

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being part of mine, refuses to reach an end. They present me with new problems,  
 surprise me, contradict me, my dear, my everpresent dead.

August 7, 1991

Walter Holland

FROM A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEARS

A Journal of the Plague Years

I remember dancing in July on the banks of the Hudson in the City,  
 the way some of us, innocent then, reported the rumors  
 we had heard I remember you, a doctor, discussing your work  
 on the wards of San Francisco and the way we worried about  
 our friends and the way you stood in the elevator  
 pushing an i.v. stand, not really speaking—the calls  
 at night and the endless plans to move from the city and the fevers  
 you had and the pills by your bed and the vigil I kept until  
 you died. I remember the party for your birthday, the way  
 you wore a floral-print shirt, an amused smile on your thin  
 face, the flash of my camera filling the room, sudden,  
 startling even now. Then Scott fell ill soon after and Raymond  
 was said to have disappeared, no word of funeral or forwarding  
 address, just unanswered calls to his mother—the never knowing  
 if he had died and the way I watched Robert stare at the panel  
 they'd made for Kyle—the way we stood astonished in a room spread full  
 of names, the fabric of the quilt unfurled, silk-like, brilliant.

Michael Lassell (b. 1947)

How to Watch Your Brother Die (1985)

When the call comes, be calm.  
 Say to your wife, “My brother is dying. I have to fly  
 to California.”  
 Try not to be shocked that he already looks like  
 a cadaver.  
 Say to the young man sitting by your brother's side,  
 “I'm his brother.”  
 Try not to be shocked when the young man says,  
 “I'm his lover. Thanks for coming.”

Listen to the doctor with a steel face on.  
 Sign the necessary forms.  
 Tell the doctor you will take care of everything.  
 Wonder why doctors are so remote.

Watch the lover's eyes as they stare into

include back  
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 of Masculine  
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 African Ameri-  
 g, who is still  
 author of the  
 stories have  
 ten, and he is

1 of 2  
 From  
 The Columbia  
 Anthology of  
 Gay Literature  
 Ed. Foner 1998