

Minas Gerais, Brazil, 15 May 2002

## Santuário do Carasas

The wolf steps among us.  
Shaggy copper hair.  
Stilt legs.  
Long black toes  
placed silently  
on tile pavement.  
Wedge head slung low  
between pointed shoulders  
face-high as we sit,  
backs to baroque balustrades,  
encircling the ecclesiastical forecourt.

Large cupped ears, white inside, black outside,  
tall triangles  
swivel as head rotates  
looking left, right, and back.  
Then, drawing up its short back  
and long hocks,  
the wolf strides forward,  
gently picks meat  
from the tile floor,  
and retreats down  
rococo steps  
into darkness.

For thirty years  
Fathers of the Santurario  
Nossa Senhora Maes dos Homens  
fed three generations of  
maned wolves, *Chrysocyon brachyurus*,  
on the old terrace  
before their church portal.  
Built three hundred years ago  
against granite peaks  
of Serra Caraça,  
the monastery and school  
now share rooms  
with eco-tourists and  
children from the capitol,  
Belo Horizonte.

Tourists on the terrace are  
loud, gay, commanding.  
Flash cameras and spotlights.  
Human eyes can't see  
what the wolf sees.  
Human ears, filled with exclamations,  
laughter and surprise, can't hear  
what the wolf hears.  
Tourists, and the Church itself,  
are unaware of their foreignness.  
Three minutes or three millennia –  
all the same to the red granite serra,  
grey green cerrada.

The wolf waits on the stairs again,  
an apparition under  
weak terrace lights.  
Plop... plop. Meat thrown on pavement  
signals the wolf. Come... come.

The wolf comes in his own time,  
silent, fragile, bold.  
People say less, see more.  
Long copper coat,  
white tail tip,  
body all angles  
hinged at neck and waist.  
Red back and flanks  
slope to high, rolling rump.

It pauses, ambles forward,  
lifts meat delicately with lips and teeth,  
retreats with a flash of tail,  
shadow into shadows,  
to eat in peace.  
The wolf, unaware celebrity is salvation,  
enjoys chicken fillet from the terrace.

Is this the world zoo,  
service in eco-entertainment  
for survival?  
Maned wolves,  
more innocent than Balinese dancers  
or posing Masai warriors,  
perform for the same reason:  
easy meat.