

cognate means blood-related

— Christine Ernst 2016

linguists have somehow identified a handful
of words that have survived since the last ice age
relics of a mother tongue spoken by hunter-gatherers somewhere
in neolithic anatolia
as the glaciers were receding 150 centuries ago
15,000 years of story and song and slang
millennia of uncountable
dialects in which we have misunderstood each other from the very beginning
the cognates of 23 proto-words persist
living fossilwords or
ultraconserved as the archeolinguist
.describes them:

spit worm flow black bark ashes hand not we
who ye that pull this
mother man old fire what I give hear
and one word even more vigorous than the rest
the only word that occurs in some form in 700 living languages spanning
the families indoeuropean and chuk-chi-kam-chat-kan and
kartvelian from the arctic to india western china to ireland
spoken by half the people on earth for the past 15,000 years
one word distilled the purest word the absolute descendent of all words
the heir of language itself

thou

the word *thou* and its living

cognates: you tu ti turi esh-te te t'kin dhe thou
thou not *me* or *I* or even *we* *thou*

the longing to be comprehended by the one not oneself contained inside the sound

thou dhe t'kin te esh-te turi ti tu you thou

so that when I say

*you! hear me, man! -- don't be a worm! pull your hand from the ashes and give this black bark to
the old mother — and no spitting in the fire!*

I might be understood by a caveman in stone-age Turkey or a
reindeer herder in bronze-age Greenland by a pilgrim at Stonehenge by
Alexander the Great himself by anyone on
any number of continents tomorrow afternoon
understood through the ages in any language
the sounds I make familiar and eternal
but I am speaking to you now
to you
you