

12-1994

## decB1994

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When Jesus was nine years old  
some Germans led the Roman army  
deep into the peopled forest  
all wet and nasty. It wasn't so cold  
as winters in Germany run  
but it rained and froze and thawed  
and mess and men used to Our Own Sea  
died by the mean little black  
rivers narrow as sewer ditches  
scummy with elm leaves with maple.  
Acorns underfoot to twist  
Italian ankles. Wild boar and bears  
to holler at them from the shadow  
and that one youngish Saxon  
or Coruscan or whatever he was,  
assassin, dux bellorum, leader  
of men. After three days  
the Romans were dead or slaves.  
Arminius led them away  
into the death cults, the meaningless  
names of local divinities  
who knew nothing of sunlight.  
He was not yet thirty years old  
and the Reformation was  
already beginning.

Rome  
was radical but never had a chance.  
They did not ever understand  
weather, strange since their own god  
was the god of rain. Arminius  
is not noted for his devotion.  
For beech and ash wood, maybe,  
for spears, and bronze  
snake-tongued daggers, yes,  
but not religion. Religion  
is of use only to the losers.

They had the forest, the Dark  
Mass, the slippery yellow  
leathery leaves. Their naked  
arms. No room for gods in the woods.

5 December 1994

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A kind of pagan roar, smooth  
the way a calm wind probes  
under your clothes. The wolves  
are far away, a wind away  
half past a forest. Sun. Sun.

*Whatever moves yearns for knowledge  
of what is still.*

The traveler stops  
and looks on that, chiseled into a boulder  
and something like milk still dripping down it—  
an offering or a mistake, what traveler  
can tell the difference?

Thinks  
about what is written. Feels wind  
like a smooth palm move on skin.  
Understands what it means to be between.

6 December 1994

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The drain of light is a remember time  
as if the rain —or even snow— would come  
rearranging symmetries — first this umber  
shimmery pallor of the day — the discussion  
is of war — old men own a monopoly  
on war — they create it, arrange it, declare it  
won or lost, and above all they survive it —  
then write down their memoirs — bar room  
by bar room until they too pass into  
the wounded majority they have recruited —  
why do deaths observed make conversation  
plausible — is death some Sorbonne scholar  
that we should listen so raptly to his graduates?  
Birdless the image window-held now, the whole world  
between the rhododendron and the barn —  
light, war, place, bird are these — lightless,  
warless, birdless, only place apparent —  
we live among apparencies — the eidolons of order —  
is seem enough to spell a noble music, Frescobaldi,  
Gabrieli? — come or not come, symmetries  
abound — Goliath saw one coming fast from David's hand,  
thing between us, word or weapon, thing, thing, thing —  
no telling what death is — except the old Narrators  
in every tavern telling of Troy — My Lai — Kuwait —  
our trashy little wars and great — the words we say.  
Pearl Harbor Day — mark this to ponder, how  
we did right wrong and opportunely. And conversely.

7 December 1994

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How are the Gauls likely to react  
when a windstorm —in the rain—  
slips across the Channel from the Mother of Weather  
— over there, Alba — and snorts around their cool  
—gorgeous — naked — torquey torsos and

when that time comes (Philomela, Corax,  
Anas) the mythic Transforms  
flutter down and eat out of our hands.

Whatever they might have been once they now are birds.

7 December 1994

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Not having a say now is some hoping  
still-stand will say my piece for me  
for I loved this forest's forester's daughter  
but only the birds and things will answer me

a city slacker, a sugar loafer in anxiety among  
this mishmash of precise detail a woods is—  
and if I have to know the properties of each least wort  
moss beetle in all the agitprop of wind and night

what will I ever learn of his daughter, is she  
not *somewhere* simple, as a want is, or a touch  
you maybe of some quick thing, water is it,  
wet or not, no other parameter to decode,

but a daughter, and his daughter, and I want?  
Playing with words while no one listens  
I prepare a busy vacancy for her to sit in,  
I build like a dumb bower bird my cabana for her

and wait with mugger's manners at each trailside  
knowing her father will let her come this way some day  
and then she'll see this punk palazzo, this house of shards,  
time-trap, the weasel-face of history peeking in,

that a lazy man has labored all his life to heap,  
hap on, harp, haggle, hod up ladders and hammer in place  
instead of learning the names of all the dickussy particulars  
spread out at our feet adoring him, and her, and even me.

8 December 1994

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It was so warm the rhododendrons came to new bud —  
leaf buds or flower buds who can say? — and then December  
started acting like itself, blackboard sky and Orion incandescent  
over air too cold to breathe — it seemed after  
so much autumning — now ‘nipped’ the word is  
and we’ll wait and see — one remembers other words, *ge-  
lassenheit, impermanence, redemption, Spring* —  
and the Cam be flooded after — where are my legions? —  
so who’s asking? — a query built of stone in the form of a  
road — shale, shimmer of slate in the non glare — summer  
when the schools close — hot empty rooms empty blackboards  
—o Emperor we have lost the north, God save us the middle —  
spurt of grape juice from the dropped basket — revelers —  
under the curtain of her skirt a play is readying — wine  
later in all the altitudes of hope — my engine, my  
“photographic device called hope<sup>1</sup>” — alarm on the catwalk,  
someone falls to the stage and begins to speak — their text  
is this dying — AIDS research, implausible consolations —  
soldiers follow one another through the endless woods —  
no tryst but their own bodies — and we know the salt they scatter  
and what grows from such seed — Mercurius is worshipped here  
under the form of a loose-limbed youth whose image  
—iron plates bent over carved wood then fixed in shape  
by countless iron nails — these characters sing songs to  
and pour out beer — his name hard to pronounce —  
no spelling in our language — and this Mercury is armed.

9 December 1994

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<sup>1</sup>From a text on the city, by Nicole Dreyfus, November 1994.

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The fact we understand lucidly where  
a mind is “coming from” is not the same thing  
as lucid structural insight by an author — Bram  
Stoker’s long chapter in *Lair of the White Worm*  
comes to mind, irrelevant to the action —  
will they get married and be safe? — and pursuing  
instead how and how much a young man can  
bare his heart to and befriend an older —  
patently not-so-young Bram and Sir Henry Irving—  
the relationship of his life suddenly foregrounded —  
this is not the same as *Structure of the Literary Text*  
—though it tells all — *invoked or not invoked,*  
*the god is present* — there is no

marriage in this forest, no giving in marriage —  
the legions love one another as a man can  
love another man, it is not easy, — “towards a joining  
that is not easy,<sup>1</sup>” — love readies them — but love  
is not much the hermit of these woods, are you?—  
how far can love go? — and in winter —  
the hegemon of this discourse — a colony  
of language changing trees — blackbirds even  
the crow on my lawn — is my alarm — bird warn me  
where I walk — crow be my guide — I picked up  
the aluminum foil their scraps — rice, chick peas,  
lamb fat— had been set out on — clean, the metal  
pierced by their beaks, so many holes my music,  
beaked, they stab to eat — darlings — picques —  
injections — the habits of the heart so — to interject —  
wounding love’s object — the body — o love you long  
infection, or the body, it is no more than the metal  
platter on which the actual — personage of love —  
is served — stop-lights in fog — “my violences!<sup>1</sup>”

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Duncan, “Stanzas from Dante.”

tail-lights in rain? — no matter — when all a wood  
could be is who he is — following another just like himself  
into the lovelorn intricacies — brush and stubble —  
who calls the forest's tune? — a man is listening.

10 December 1994

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<sup>1</sup>Tennyson, "Idylls of the King"

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A word to look up . *orange*, etymology  
of Netherlandish dynasty, of tropic fruit,  
of 1944. Fresh squeezed juice of what is war.  
If you divide the homeless from the poor  
the poor become another enemy.  
Divide and eat. Proud beggar humble banker  
meet. The cannibal cartoon we incolate.  
Be in me, baby, as a finger or a pop tune is,  
unrelievedly pressing to *inhabit, dwell, reside,*  
*occupy* (as: to be an occupant of these or any  
premises, thus a sort of philosopher  
of the occasion, a man born blind), *move in,*  
*settle* or *be settled*, or generally speaking, *live*.  
Call them all The Poor, and know yourself  
among us. Tri-value system: Some people got  
everything. Something. Nothing. All morning a broken  
car alarm has yodeled over the suburban calm.

11 December 1994

## HOW TO WRITE A POEM

Bring in everything you're thinking about  
and anything else that comes along.  
The result's a poem, shape  
of your own glad (sad) mind.  
It is like the Gospels (a poem  
is like the Gospels): you send someone out  
to gather guests for the wedding feast.  
First he gets the proper ones all neat and kosher,  
dressed in finery and rented tuxes.  
But there's still room at the table.  
You keep setting the table. He goes  
out again and brings in anybody vaguely clean  
— and still there's more room at the table.  
Finally he goes and gets anything that breathes,  
brings them in and sits them down. Then and only then  
the wedding can take place, then  
the husband looks upon his bride, the evening  
comes, the feast is served, the poem's done.

11 December 1994