

12-2001

## decD2001

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## POINSETTIAS

I always felt there was something  
sinister about poinsettias.  
What is it, a macabre meat  
disguised as a flower,  
burning bush but no fire,  
scarlet bracts round timid flower  
itself hidden inside its color  
like a spider in a web of light.  
Waiting for me. But I didn't know  
that then, I didn't know anything,  
just this too uniform red, a red  
invented by someone who hates red,  
a shineless red, a dull intensity.  
This flower is the color of pain  
in other words. And hard to spell.  
I felt all that and now I should be thinking  
—in Germany we saw a tree made out of them  
twenty feet tall in the hall of the casino  
spectacular unnatural and red —  
just like me so why should I feel so wary,  
why do they give me a funny taste  
in the left forward temple of my brain  
as if some far-off mouth of me  
were slowly chewing chalk in a dream?

18 December 2001

## THE EXILE

*(from the Anglo-Saxon)*

How much could I stop and still go on  
Is there a reasonable answer to a pair  
Of knife-creased flannels or a house in the Hamptons?  
It does seem to help, pronouncing Wal-Mart Valmáhr  
As if it were a place in Proust, and anything that helps  
Helps, he lamely concluded, and sat down to a patter  
Of tepid yet spontaneous hawsers and chains  
Slipping in the night but not slack enough to let him  
Sail from Port Pagliacci on the morning tide, not yet.  
It's always Friday where I come from, she said,  
Her green eyes glowing in the carnival of her antique  
Attractions, wonderwheel, cyclone, and Time itself  
Shooting past, all that irretrievable feeling-plasma  
Sloshed down the drain of the hours — hippos  
Waltzed to it in Disney — Watch time with me  
The most is least to be, she winks at me  
And I belonged to her circus, mama, never come home.  
That's what I've been trying to face up to, doctor,  
I have no church to go back to, no home town,  
No stake to be burned at, I left all that in a locker  
And took a bus to Fresno (actual fact) when there still  
Were buses. What are there now? How does anybody  
Move around? And does anybody ever get there?

18 December 2001

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Flags, flags,  
too many flags and no country at all.

18 XII 01

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Things to worry me — a polder  
full of daisies and no December,  
a word ‘gypsy’ in the dictionary  
and no one to pin it on, a tree

I’m supposed to buy and erect and adorn,  
old-money families of Frankfurt and Boston,  
silhouettes of people in windows I’ll never meet,  
how can anybody meet a window, stop worrying,  
just make up something you can write down,

something you never saw before,  
hence never wanted.  
Maybe you can want it now.  
Maybe already it’s in your hand.

18 December 2001

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You scare me when you get ultimate  
the river freezes  
crows chase an owl over the construction site

the wounded one who nurtured us  
could have been a victim of such conspiracy  
he helped us,

a wound  
heals, a wounded animal brings men together

it could have been my child  
stareless and cold, the blind trees let sky through.  
Nobody is looking at me.

19 December 2001

## QUINBUS FLESTRIN SPEAKS

Who am I to complain?  
I wouldn't go to hear  
the morning stars sing together  
if they did it someplace else but here.  
I will not travel to be where I am.  
Or I am the mountain I pilgrimage around  
and stars are never silent long.

20 December 2001

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Now the sun is in my eyes  
and you are sleeping.  
The pronoun family  
safe in language again

while It, their little dog,  
is hungry in its little house  
outside, where pronouns fade  
dangerously into the actual

over there, trees, hills, horizons,  
unaccountable propensities of protein  
till you get to the sun  
all flame and no name.

Don't wake yet.  
There is something  
more for me to do, a few  
more things to silence by speaking.

20 December 2001

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my last painting install in this sky  
broken by the clean teeth of banks:

“Sky over Friedrichshain seen  
by a man already drunk at seven  
thirty on a spring morning  
looking up the Warschauerstrasse  
and needing a place to piss”

Money made me.  
Art broke me.  
I don't need liquor and I don't need sex,  
puberty was heart-attack enough for me,  
I'll live forever, I am the sky.

Every work of art is Narcissus  
staring at himself, hiding in water,  
pissing between the rocks, murmuring  
his name you hear as music  
trapped as you are in a world named me.

“So I'm the sky  
your only friend  
I change your mind”  
It says at the bottom of the document.

Every work is his, young N, the prisoner  
in the tower, the man in the iron mask,  
nobody but him, N, the one  
inside the action, he thrashes  
blindly to get out  
we call this dancing and we pay to see

the myriad convulsions of Narcissus  
on a day like me.

21 December 2001

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On the way back, I met a chair  
Said you need more furniture  
Daybed davenport love seat couch  
Chesterfield divan sofa lounge  
You need a book on architecture  
A lamp to read it by. For it was night.

21 December 2001

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Luminescent lunacy  
why can't the sun be serious for a moment

all this facetious morning light  
makes me giggle like a jackal

as if I had a heart  
and the moon some night would rise again

milky as an old mirror  
over the free world.

21 December 2001

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Was I really always already gone?  
Made for a departure  
to flee before fled?  
But even my shadow is a door,  
Stalinist architecture Ministry of Love.

21 December 2001

[the last line first read: *Permanent government of love.*]

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Something more like chisel  
a sign without a name  
cut into the windowpane  
a diamond did it

all you did was wash your hands  
of meaning and let your fingers  
skate along the glass remembering  
whatever Orient they chose,

ostriches in fezzes, Christ knows what,  
monks coiled asleep inside their rosary  
“in Islam the only monasticism  
is war”\* and then you went to sleep

leaving me to face this morning sun  
shouting in the sky like a lover’s sonnet  
left on a marble tabletop, eventually  
I’ll have to read every blessed word of it

to find out if I’m the one he thinks he loves.

22 December 2001

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\* Quoted by Samaha Khoury in his note on Jihad in *Détresse et Ingérence*, No.92, Bordeaux, 13 Nov.2001.

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A rapture ran by like the fox  
we came home to see running away  
or the wolf we saw standing his ground,  
the quiet other people who live our world

we know them only by childish names  
fox wolf crow owl bear  
as if they were still half words  
not yet born from our dreams into

the ordinary actual of dirt and stone.  
To have a name is miracle.  
And even now I don't say yours  
out loud, only when the night

listens hard and the train is moving,  
then I allow myself to speak  
out clearly but softly the secret  
formula that makes you you.

22 December 2001

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He composed fragments to be found in his notebooks after his demise. This was supposed to be some sort of comfort in the afterlife — a graduate student fingering his script and wondering what this squiggly word could be trying to tell her and maybe she should have worked on Hart Crane — and created a friction in the world system that the dead author felt as a thrill, the kind some Egyptian must have felt knowing some blue faience *shawabti* servant figurine was at work forever sealed in the sand of his tomb.

22 December 2001

## SEPULTURES

Into which of you  
Will I lay to rest  
My last guess?

Into whose lap or breast or ear will I croak  
My final secret, which will of course disappoint you,  
By turning out to be nothing but your name?

22 December 2001

## VANITIES, ECHOES, SEPULTURES

Hölderlin as a young man made a mysterious half-mad journey to Bordeaux, where he became Columbus and came to us, sinking down into the ocean of the paper, leaving words that float at various levels of the sea depending on their salt. Some part of him made his way back to the dark forests and low hills on foot, changing every step of the way. And in each and every case of that chronic malady called travel, who is it in fact who comes home? Who is it who stands as the door and calls out uncertainly It's me, speaking with no more conviction that you feel hearing?

22 December 2001

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My father-in-law Marvin Mandell once drove Max Schactman from New York to America. Snakes and bears crowded the savage highways west. When a man leaves town, he ceases being who he and we always thought he was. Most of what anybody is, is the city he comes from. He travels into the country and is another person — neither he nor we can guess who he will become. Ergo, don't think you know someone unless you've traveled with them. Don't marry anyone with whom you haven't driven, the two of you alone in an old car, by night, over bad roads and good, in winter, at least as far as Indiana, a country without the slightest hint of city.

22 December 2001

Der Alte

Wir gehen langsam über Gras  
Der Boden ist weich. Eine hübsche  
Schlange wartet auf mich, sie heisst  
Des Mannes Tod das Geburt  
Der Musik sie hat so  
Viele Namen nun vergisst du meinen.

22 December 2001

## LETTER TO APRIL

thank you for what (we realized, C first) must be from you, the embroidery, the ornament.

1. The ornament....I'd been talking about the ones of my childhood, how I wasn't allowed to touch them, there was a War on, they were irreplaceable, their fragility, And there one was on the porch, beautiful in itself, but the wind had played tricks on it, and whisked it off (the white stand?) and made it demonstrate its fragility. So I thank you for its beauty, its handpaintedness, and its fragility. The point and belly are intact..

2. The mirror in the pouch is whole. Which teaches me that mirrors take their strength from the faces that look into them. We make them strong. That's why breaking a mirror must bring bad luck—a broken mirror is one that hasn't been studied enough, its owner has not reflected himself enough, doesn't know himself—and what could bring worse luck than that? He has to sign the checks of a stranger, and live in a stranger's house, and go to bed with a stranger's wife.

So thank you for these tender lessons.

23 December 2001

[To April Howard, on the assumption she is the donor of the crepe-wrapped fall-broken Christmas tree ornament and the tiny hand-embroidered mirror purse we found on our porch.]

