

Infinite America

Adeste fideles, infinite America is convening. More, they said, more. And then even more. And they did less with more than they had a room for. How kind they are, and blind, painted white and adorned for war, too drunk or stupid to remember the time they fell down on the job. How semper fi they were in the sticky night, how they tripped on the wire of evaporated doubts and booby-trapping humiliation.

America found itself as if in a fairy tale with a big fat Dagwood of a sandwich piled high with all the meats and cheeses of the Christian world, mean-mugging the face of the known universe, and wearing a helmet with Mickey Mouse ears and a dense air of authority and armor indecently-scaled.

America has a big surprise for those of you who consider yourselves smart, something beyond your competence and potentially humiliating that will leave you gasping in a state of baffled horror. Specialists of all classes are flying through the night air to join us where Johnny's spent too long at the fair. America needs a good gas man, stat, because this war between truth and fact is doing something deeply to its brain and it has to be put to sleep.

America can no longer tell what errors are close, har har, and which are far away like the highway that goes straight through the middle of the world and leads to home. That's a joke only if you like getting punched in the face.

Someone left a book about the fiasco in Iraq in the laundromat. Inside the back cover they wrote the names of famous country songs—Folsom Prison, Red Headed Stranger, Honky Tonk Heroes—songs that America must have played when it thought the story was going to end well, before explosions prized the cover off the archaic atlas of the world and borders were redrawn with the disordered twang of a guitar string stretched by years of faulty tuning in a more modern style. In imperium ad infinitum.

Leave a book, take a book, the grave markers sing. Everyone do your laundry and fold it carefully, with all the sublimity of life's stupidest chores. Everyone's stupid everywhere but some are stupider than others. America, with the awful power to compel and destroy and the self-control of a randy teenager, is sublimely stupid. I heard that in a dream when the dead Americans appeared as they did every night for years and told me how stupid they were for believing in the imperium's fatal causes. The dialectic is so broken, they said, stretched beyond repair like the broken string of a guitar. Some are so stupid they still believe in causes; some of them were gutted like chickens. This Memorial Day, stupid or not, gutted or not, or blown apart with limbs strewn alongside the road as if displayed at a market, I've forgotten them all already.

On the 20th Century

By the time we found ourselves
nose to hairy ass with the anguish
of the 20th Century's end,
it was too late to reconsider:
But now it lives again like a trick
candle you can't extinguish.

If only I could squeeze its
sallow skin
into a tight rubber suit
like a gummy bear.
Because politics matter
as much as any all-day sucker
and the dead are unaware
and at our mercy.

As are the dead of Dresden
and Hiroshima.
And whether their burning
was a crime on a biblical scale
or a necessary scrubbing party.
Though some deserved to die,
were destined to fail
and treated accordingly, as if heathens,
others were surely innocent,
sucker-punched between
beginning and end, they were
incinerated by either side.

Not much difference in the end,
and with no heaven overhead,
just the sky in all directions,
we cruelly depose the dead
into undifferentiated selections:
doctor, lawyer, soldier, chief,
tinker, tailor, teacher, thief.
All that's left is a listing
in the *fait divers* of bad belief

and a lasting memory
of the delinquent god of history
writ as holy babble in the
igneous bible of the 20th Century,

Which I read as a cease and desist
letter in bad translation.
Sometimes you have to wait it out
until your biographers, in their
roving omniscience, evaluate
your friends and relations,
what play, love, adventure,
what bad thing du jour just arrived
on the shores of your Mediterranea.

Day of the Dead

Who does not remember
the infamous ghost of 24th Street
and its peculiar doings?
What intense excitement
was occasioned by its appearance,
as a protracted struggle occurred
with disreputable virtue,
and an ending ensued
that no one expected
when first it was joined.
The city went wild with interest
and unhealthy speculation,
which was perfectly natural
given our unfamiliarity
with the latest foreign interventions
and ignorance of life in general.
Rumors circulated without restraint
as the terror spread northward
from narrow cobbled Vandam Street,
soon to be completely deserted,
to the green expanses of Inwood,
where a great fire was built
to ward off the wintry chill
of midnight's blind miasmas.
A throng of unsighted citizens,
churlish and lost, wandered
on its perplexed way, disoriented
by the moans and roars and cries
of warning carried by the fear
of the fog-shrouded public aroused
and surging in all directions.
Owls flew through foul air in squadrons
and dogs howled, mourning their masters.
And when the outcome came clear,
many begged to be spared
an outrageous fate, the ignominy
of removal and disappearance,
and offered bribes of pocket lint,

or paltry sums of money, whatever
they had, the pitiful sentimental
heirlooms of the ancestor's generation,
hidden in walls and gardens,
or even the dubious services
of their failing bodies, no matter
how peculiar or unenticing.
All to no avail, as vice prevailed
and everyone involved
found himself depreciated
and steeped to the lips in sin.
Strangers, dumbfounded and silent,
were left to their own devices,
and their shameful features
stood out in bold relief, grinning
like a by-standing skeleton's gaping
smile. A place of former refuge
had the dubious honor
of becoming a haunted storehouse
of the unclaimed dead
and welcomed all living
credulities and the grossest forms
of superstition and anger,
opening its broken windows
to admit the dark of human agency
and allow the ashes of hope to escape.
How many days before the excitement
died down and many days more
before we could ask: How much suffering
can you take? How much mere
rearranging of shadows? Even now
it is not possible to fully explain,
although in truth few attempted a solution
to the mystery, and few desired one.

Stories of Chaos

I see stories of chaos
they are absolutely real
but so much of the news is fake
I get good ratings you have to admit
I had a very smooth rollout

I've always talked about strong borders
lots of things are done including some bad things
but nobody talks about it
like with stupid cheap plastic buttons
made us all look like a bunch of jerks
now if I do that oh I'm the bad guy

I'm really not a bad person
no puppet no puppet not a puppet
I'm well-schooled in flirtation
I do it very very well

I'm not ranting and raving
I was given that information
I've seen that information around
that is a number I heard
that ends the argument
I got a small loan from my father
I haven't made a phone call in years
and I know what's good
I know what's bad
I'm just telling you
this rhythm is infected
with my vanity
it's so much anger and hatred
and just the hatred we share

uranium is this thing
called nuclear weapons and other things
including some bad things
anybody that ever read the most basic book can say it
but nobody talks about that

there are a lot of bad hombres out there
I mean they fill up our alleys with people
that you wonder how they get there
They all tried and it failed
are they friends of yours?
Do you want to set up the meeting?

I'm like a smart person
I'm different from those people
I'm so beautifully represented
my mind is an expansive stage
I'm not ranting and raving
I have the gift of honesty
I'm very professional and very good
I'm running a fine-tuned machine
I describe myself the way I see myself
you reflect me and I see my reflection
you have to admit it
if you don't love you hate me
I'm not ranting and raving
I'm the thing I don't deny
the thing I say you are
my faults are your faults
my beauty is your beauty
my wealth is your wealth
I'm describing my natural state
I am nature let loose
that's what I've been talking about
for a year and a half
I will banish fear
in favor of vengeance
the alchemy of my character
is everything
I will transform your fear
into anger and your anger
into joyous lust
that burns like fire
that's my power
I'm as willful as a fist
I'm throwing it back at you