

## 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