

Seasonal Adjustments

1

This winter's gone on so long
I can smell spring
even in the urinals swabbed down
with pine oil, a scent so strong
it clears a path from here
to Slidell, Louisiana
where once more I stand
moonfaced and confused
in a circle of tall trees
snarled at the top
and let the sunlight
warm me from the earth up.

2

Still north of April
and a cold rain
splinters the state, sharp
as an icepick through the heart.
I don't need this, even a blind
baffling of fog would do, something
sullen and sluggish
to hide my life in. Outside the storm window
the driveway writhes with worms
and two sorry chickadees
peck at the hanging feedbox,
their wings slicked back, their skullcaps
bobbing at the seder of seeds.
What do they care
for the byzantine misery of taxes?
Their eyes don't crawl upward
when the evening news
pours its blue light on the pork chops.
They don't feel in their wet breasts
a surge, a sick fear they'll be
condemned to die in Ohio,
that last outpost of civilized asylum.
They bring back people I once knew
on the Mississippi, who loved
its loose romance, its side
and rich silt, its minstrel winds,
and could not spell that river's name
the same way twice.

3

I'm writing this poem
sometime before the last snowfall becomes
the first flood, each flake a wheel
spinning with my limbs
lashed to the cold spokes.

I'm writing this poem
while others defend the beachheads
of Florida, throwing their money
at the sun, bribing the sea,
living on grapefruit and degradation.

I'm writing this poem
the way the ancient Persians
pursued their hard affairs,
drinking the night down
to its conclusion, then taking up
counsel again when the cups were quenched,
sober in dull daylight.

You will find this story
lodged in the nine volumes of Herodotus,
a man just Greek enough
to tell the truth
as though it were a lie
too beautiful to disbelieve.