1998

Thyme

Robert Dana

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4997
Robert Dana

Thyme

I’m drying herbs. A bumper crop of oregano, and all the thyme in the world. The oregano fills a cloudberry jam jar; and the old mayo jar (Hellmann’s Light), its label gone, is two thirds full of thyme. An old friend of mine’s just come back to swimming at the local rec center in the morning. “I had a little problem this spring,” he said. “A little fibrillation in the atrium. But my doctor said I’d better get back at it.” Like wind in a hallway, I thought. Or something Greek and tragic. I’d been searching for some formal innovation. A Fibonacci sequence of words. But what is it, anyway? An opera? An aria? More than just a progression of numbers in mathematics? It wasn’t in my *American Heritage*, but fibril was. “A small, slender fiber, as in root hair. From the Latin for fiber.” Then, fibrillate, “an uncoordinated twitching of individual muscular fibers.” So, not a wind, but the source of tiny breezes. Atrium. Two entries down from Atreus and the two dead kings. “An open central court. . . . A bodily cavity or chamber, as in the heart. [Latin: *atrium*. See *ater- in Appendix.*)” And so the
whole weight of the language through $Zz$ gets turned over. ai-—"An utterance." arek-—"To hold, contain, guard." ater-—"Fire.
1. Suffixed zero-grade form *atro- in Latin ater, black, (<'blackened by fire') . . . 2. Suffixed zero-grade form *atr-io in Latin atrium, forecourt, hall . . . (perhaps originally the place where smoke from the hearth escaped through a hole in the roof). . . ." And, finally, "3. Compound shortened zero-grade form *atr-okw- (okw-, looking; see . . .) in Latin atrox, 'black-looking,' frightful: ATROCIOUS."
The soot-smearèd faces of pillagers.
Ed didn't show at seven this morning for lap swim. But it's the day before the Fourth. He's probably o.k. Outside, the green business of the woods goes on. Two squirrels chase each other from cherry to mulberry, and our wren feeds its young and takes out the garbage unaware of its own heartbeat. And I sit here crumbling sweet thyme between my fingers; listening to the great wind of the world's breathing.