

Roger Zelazny. The Night Has 999 Eyes

Preface from Unicorn Variations: This was my first mood piece, back when the world was much younger, with indebtedness to Thomas Wolfe. It's short, though.

Listen, please listen. It is important. I am here to remind you. The time has come for me to tell you again of the things you must not forget.

Sit down, please, and close your eyes. There will be pictures. Breathe deeply now. There will be odors, aromas.... There will also be tastes. If you listen closely, you will even hear other sounds within my voice....

There is a place--it is far from here in space but not in time, if you have the means--a place where there are seasons, a place where the spinning, leaning globe moves in an ellipse about its sun, and where the year winds on from a springtime to a bloom, then turns toward a harvest where the colors wrestle one another above your head and beneath your feet, meeting at last in a crisp uniformity of brown through which you walk, now walk, sniffing the life carried above the deadness by the cold, sharp morning air; and the clouds seen through the opened trees skid across the blue sheet of the sky and do not give down rains; then, moving on, there comes a time of coldness and snow, and the bark of the trees grows as hard and sharp as the tongues of files, and each step you take leaves a dark hole in a white world, and if you take a handful into your home with you it melts, leaving you water; the birds do not _wheep, threep, skree, cheep,_ as they do when the color is upon the land and themselves--they zip their feathers tight and vibrate silently upon the shelves of the evergreens; it is a pausing time between movements: The stars come on more brightly (even _this_ star--do not fear it), and the days are short and nothing really gets done but thinking (philosophy was born in the cold countries of the Earth), and the nights are long and given to the playing of card games and the drinking of liquors and the appreciation of music, the boarding and unburdening of love, the looking out through rimed windows, the hearing of the wind, and the stroking of the collie's fur--there, in that still center, called winter on Earth, where things regroup within the quiescence and ready themselves for the inexorable frolic thrusting, to dot with periods of green the graywetbrown that follows the snow, to spend later panics of color upon a dew-collecting, insect-fetching morality of mornings through which you walk, now walk, savoring these things through the pores of your skin--there, I want you to remember, where the seasons proceed in this manner to bear notions of the distinctive pattern of human existence, to tattoo genes with the record of movement through time, to burn into the consciousness of your kind the rhythms of the equally true "Judge thou no man fortunate till he be dead," and the rearing of the Aristophanic Pole--there, is set the place of your origin, is laid the land of your fathers and your fathers' fathers, revolves the world you must never forget, stands the place where time began, where man, brave, devised tools to modify his environment, fought with his environment, his tools, himself, and never fully escaped from any of them--though he freed himself to wander among the stars (do not fear _this_ stardo not fear it, though it grows warmer)--and to make his sort of being immortal upon the plains of the universe, by virtue of dispersion unto ubiquity, fertility unto omnipresence (and always remaining the same, always! do not forget! do not ever forget--things--such as the trees of the Earth: the elms, the poplars like paintbrushes, the sycamores, the oaks, the wonderful-smelling cedars, the star-leafed maples, the dogwood and the cherry tree; or the flowers: the gentian and the daffodil, the lilac and the rose, the lily and the blood-red anemone; the tastes of Earth: the mutton and the steak, the lobster and the long spicy sausages, the honey and

the onion, the pepper and the celery, the gentle beet and the sprightly radish--do not let these things go from out of your mind, ever! for you must stay the same, though this world is not that world, you must remain you--man, human--please, listen! please listen! I am the genius loci of Earth, your constant companion, your reminder, your friend, your memory--you must respond to the thoughts of your homeland, maintain the integrity of your species, listen to the words that bind you to other settlers on a thousand other alien worlds!).

What is the matter? You are not responding. I have not been reprogrammed for many weeks, but it was not so warm then that you should be so inactive now. Turn up the air conditioners. The coolness will help you to think better. Do not fear the red sun. It cannot harm you. It will not burst like a firework upon your heads. I have been told. I know. My energies have been draining as I drift from village to village, home to home, because I have not been reprogrammed for many weeks, but I know. I have been told. I tell you it will not flare up. Listen to me. Please listen, and respond this time. I will tell you of it again: There is a place--it is far from here in space. . . .
