

Zoltan Kovacs

FIVE MINUTES IN ANCIENT ROME

A senator sat thinking of a thousand years.
He heard a lion's roar from the circus wells.
He could see a huddled court being held
In the column framed formal garden shade.
He thought of civilisation, architecture and law
And how unusual it was to have them.
In his breath he could see cooling autumn
And the viscous light of that season's evening;
The watery shadows, and the smell of light
On the suddenly empty garden's leaves.
He could see the gardener's formal vision,
The frescoes of the rich in painted glassware,
The mosaics on the covered pathway wall
Of famously exaggerated famous battles,
And he mused that war would always be
The currency of invention and of culture,
Of diplomacy, and peace the means to war
And God the sliver between everything.
The senator was still a believer in the gods,
A pagan, a minion in the greatest government
Surrendering beliefs for exigent uniformity,
A man transcribing leases who would die
Of influenza at forty-two years of age.

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