

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-smearred faces of pillagers.

Ed didn’t show at seven this morn-

ing 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.