

# FROM THE PINE-WOOD NOTEBOOK



*Francis Ponge*

TRANSLATED BY DEREK MAHON

The pleasures of pine-woods:

You can stretch out there at your leisure (among great trunks somewhere between bronze and rubber). They've been well stripped. Of all their lower branches. No anarchy there, no confusion of creepers, no undergrowth. You sit down, you stretch out at your ease. A carpet covers everything. Stray rocks here and there, a few humble flowers, everywhere a reputedly wholesome atmosphere, a discreet and tasteful scent, a vibrant but soft and agreeable musicality. Great violet masts, more or less dark.

\*

Natural movements afoot among these great, more-or-less-dark posts, still spiny and lichenous half-way up, sombre as bronze, supple as rubber.

\*

(I won't say *sturdy* since that adjective properly belongs to another kind of tree.)

\*

No confusion of ropes and creepers, no boards but a thick carpet underfoot.

\*

A stem and a tip with conical fruit.

\*

*Aug. 8th*

Stripped (to half-way up) of their branches, as also by their exclusive concern for the green tip (the green cone at the top) and by their serious gloom in the mass...

Which is why the birds themselves are relegated to the heights.

\*

It's wonderful, these jade carpets in places where you might think all vegetable interest had withdrawn, where all the lower branches have been brought down in a heap.

\*

*Aug. 9th*

Of senile aspect, white like the beards of old negroes.

\*

*Aug. 13th 1940—Morning*

Try to resume. We have:

Ease

a) of passage:

no lower branches

no tall weeds

no creepers.

Thick carpet. A few rocks here and there.

b) of reflection:

mildness of light and wind.

Discreet scent.

Discreet sounds, music.

Wholesome atmosphere.

Life in the wings.

Soft and muted musical accompaniment.

\*

*Aug. 20th 1940*

Here where stands a fairly orderly profusion of senile trunks adorned with fresh cones, here where sun and wind are strained through an infinite interlacing of fresh needles, here where the earth is covered with a thick carpet of hairy pins: here, slowly, wood is made. Here, mass-produced on an industrial scale, but with a stately slowness, wood is made. There are by-products: gloom, reflection, scent etc., bundles of inferior brushwood, pine-cones (serrated like pineapples), hairy needles, mosses, ferns, bilberries, mushrooms. But, throughout all sorts of developments, each superseded by another (and so what), the general idea persists of the trunk, the stem:—the bean, the board.

\*

A 40-year wood is called a copse

A 40–60-year wood is called a half-grown forest

A 60–120-year wood is called a young full-grown forest

A wood more than 200 years old is called a full-grown forest in reversion.

END OF PINE-WOOD

FROM HERE ON YOU ARE IN OPEN COUNTRY

## POND'S COLD CREAM



*Patrick Warner*

Where they stood together, in quiet devotion,  
The empty space between made a spindle  
Whose outline wavered with their bodies' motion,  
Flaring from time to time like a penny candle  
When it hits some flaw or kink along the wick,  
Or touches the wax-well in the candle-stick.

Through this space I could see the priest perform,  
Hunched over and whispering, holding the host  
As a scientist might hold a moth for collection,  
Flanked by this man in Tweed jacket and vest,  
And by his wife whose youthful complexion  
Made me think of Oil of Ulay, Pond's Cold Cream.

Something about it all dragged up the morning  
I stood by a boghole, half watching the weather,  
Half watching myself in tea-coloured clouds  
With no thought at all that I might be sinking  
Until I felt the first cold dribble pour in over  
The two yellow lines at the tops of my boots.

Perhaps it was the gentle way he took her hand—  
When I knew he, in his youth, was a hurler—  
That conjured up those leggy water spiders,  
Whose playing turned this way and that way  
In and around the outline of my shadow  
Which now, more and more, looms as a grandstand.

It was the hesitance that briefly showed in his face  
As he turned to guide her out of her seat—  
That had me wishing for that last-minute cross,  
That had me catch myself holding my breath  
As a group of players rose up like a sculpture  
And one hand perfectly grasping the sliotar.