Exile Vol. XXIX No. 1

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Exile Vol. XXIX No. 1

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Once.

I wanted a little house near waves;  
to walk barefoot on wooden floors  
in blue dresses.

I'd arrange simple flowers from your garden,  
then wrap my hair in torn sheets.

Brown babies swing in swings  
swing in swings . . .  
the moon's pull takes away from me.

I cry two cups each day  
and add them to your pancakes,  
stand in front of the coffee until  
my head cracks and quicksilver  
drops out,  

mercury  
hitting the floor, now  
a thousand pieces  
rolling  
flashing  
into dusky corners,  
gleaming in straight lines  
between the polished boards.

Kate Silliman

"Mute"

It's winter  
and that's such a helpless season  
Why won't you listen to me  
As we walk down concrete steps  
Long and jagged  
Edged by yellow grass, ice-jeweled.

Robert Youngblood
Cactus Man

Cactus man, don't
prick me again.
I am all alone in your
desert of death.
I am the guest of the granules and
the candy-striped carrion.

I tip my hat to you cactus man,
you have used your resourcefulness,
and you live.
I lie here, a dry heap,
kissing your feet
for hope of your wisdom.

This shifting hell guarded
by the scorching sun dried my
last ounce of being.

This frame of baked bones died
begging.
For your wisdom.

Bruce Pedretti
From Years on Nauset Beach

She ain't no Nauset Woman
thanks Thoreau
Who broke away from a Siamese twin-grip on her teddy bear.
She's a tall building
nation's capitol
city woman
who's a Picasso Blue Boy's daughter,
living it up on oil paints, watercolors and
Nantucketless summers.
One of these days
it was one of those days,
she told me he really was
blue blue blue.
But who knows the truth about those blue fathers anyway?
I confess
I've been nursing White Russians
Anti-Franco I've become.
Trying to get a little closer
to that esoteric playground.
I need the chance to make it.
where Mona Lisa ladies
cast champagne magic spells.
— Though it all don't mix too well
with a Nauset beach poet's dream
pretty secrets never stick,
and a Nantucket summertime strolling memory
is unhealed windburn on my heart.
I'll remain standing
with mindless bears.

Kim Kiefer

Lazy days of the matter
that fills you with guild (and ecstatic)

Upsidedown hat
Sits on the ceiling desktop
Beneath the cast iron typewriter
Above the sackish denim strangler
I call my coat

Sunbeam filters through the madly reflective
Geometric institutional panes
Broken glass of yesterday's renderings
All upon the radiator
Beating to the floor

Blazes of hot wet colour hang on my walls
They drip and sway - delirious
They tremble and shatter my lime green truth
This is tomorrow and after tuesday
This is a drive in deathtrap

Cool jazz slithers from well spaced speakers
Dribbling over the shelves
Onto the desks and carpets
Up my trouser legs, chair legs
An aural climax morning

Hands flaked, slashed, chipped and bent
Writing in tune to the beat
Of a mind more used to wear
A square amidst the echoes
Of slamming doors and drunken laughter

Eric Stevenson
**Tennessee Friday**

Some Friday
she is gonna take her power
up off the bed
and ride the back of a Harley-Davidson
behind the beautiful,
behind the wicked
to Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

In a pink room
above the souvenir shop
where tourists are stacked
like postcards,
she sends her lover out for bourbon
and ice.
So he runs for her,
for her rounded thighs and arms,
pressing his age into his stomach
he runs from his children
and wives
and small brown towns
in Arkansas.

In the pink room
she will be laughing
and singing Amens -
he is powerless to the swing
of her lizard-tipped boots.
They will spread themselves
everywhere
within her young walls.

Some Friday
she is gonna run out
before dinner’s grace is said,
hungry for her lover,
And brush out her hair in Tennessee.

---

**street opera**

- crash helmeted kids playin
- in the street
- cruisin in the cadillac
- be bopping to the beat
- feel the summer heat
- on your neck
- uniformed officers with plastiscine faces
didn’t know joey with untied laces
- it can happen very fast
no one knows
- how long it will last
- in the end it is always the same
yet you can not let someone go
without feeling the pain
- crushed bike in the gutter
as the shoppers drive by
one be bopper to many
has sent a child to the sky

---

Becky Hinshaw

Jenny Gardner

Bill Hayes
Antonia

Mornings Antonia
pitches words
from her mouth;
I draw them in
cloud shapes and rubbed colors
of cartoon comic scenes.

Sewn to her neck
her ragged head flops
as she runs,
pencil legs spinning
down to the edge
of the cornfield,
where she catches
spirled ball boob shot.

As matron of
S. Pearl St. estate,
she announces
anyone is welcome;
Tequila and lemon
balanced upon
an ash dusted tray.
An eight cut,
six seven seven eight
in the crib.
I watch smoke circle
down a ray
from the window,
ejected lemon peel flies,
twenty-four points!

Late afternoon
she sits
in an overstuffed chair,
her nanny's chest
bulging and falling in rhythm
with the click
of knitting needles,
Garp closed at foot,
huge grey cat draped
over her belly.

Ruth Wick
Tunnelvision

Her needlepoint face punches into the room.
Strands of yarn connect empty boxes
Creating a pattern, a universe in her mind
Superimposed on a disordered world:
Funnel-eyes track the moving target,
Blow it away in one nasal blast.
Still, a lost butterfly flutters in her breast.

Jeff Reynolds

Mrs. Mathews

Sun gently cleansing the glass
Mayonnaise jars, pregnant with fading flowers,
On the dusty window sill.
Smoke from her cigarette
Squirming around the room
While she bends her head
Over the brown-cracked china
Coffee cups,
Reflecting a gentle complexion
Wrung with pain.
The floor remains unswept
From memories of he
(who is gone).
Solitude unruffled
Her quiet composition
And she moaned to the table
Her despondence
As the black and white TV
Squawked, mocking her color dreams.

Kate Reynolds

A White Mountain

Early morning mist
circles
abundant Maple tops.

Rhythmic breathing lulls me
sinking back
into my down ocean,
submerged in
sweaty dreams,
then rising
to restlessness.

Ascending pine mountain ramps
the damp waxy cover
melts
and then disperses
from sharpened sun rays.

Continuing to twist
a wet pony-tail
around
in back of my head,

I stare at the Hump
a protruding bald
forehead of rock.

The dried stony stream
leading up to more
rooted, rutted path.

Each step pushing my knee
up higher
than the following leg
anticipates,
hot and trembling.

A sound in silence,
rustling patches of ground
or dribbling
splashes of water
from rock to rock.

At top of throat
breathing unclogs
ears and throat
hot with mucus,
temples pulsing.
Shadows lighten, dampness lifts, the path line expands...

...a rolling bushy blanket meets the horizon below. Tiny buildings float on puddles of lighter green, some placid, some larger and rippled.

I strip my feet feeling the wind cool my toes. I grip my knees rubbing small muscles ligaments to catch the jolt of my weight, support to take me down.

Clammy and calm I see the Burlington water tower, Camel's Hump in the pinking sky.

Ruth Wick

The Last Days of Oliver Descantes

Wednesday

Oliver Descantes wanted to be a writer. There was just so much to express, so much he wanted to say. But Oliver wasn't completely convinced that just 'wanting to say things' was enough reason to be a writer. Oliver knew about graphomania, wondered constantly, when he was writing words on a page, if he was the next addition to the list of a million graphomaniacs. But what this worry really did was make Oliver find other explanations for his wish and need to be a writer.

Oliver wondered, for instance, if he liked to write because he was a very lonely person who needed to talk to someone, even if that someone was a piece of paper. Oliver knew he was lonely, and he knew he had friends. He realized that he had not been able to maintain a decent relationship with a women, and he knew that there were some things he could only tell a piece of paper. Things he could only tell a piece of paper; this he found a valid, if not a good reason for wanting to write. Oliver also found it very peaceful being alone sometimes, with just pen and paper, writing. He liked being with himself. He was his own best friend. He had a sense of himself. Not many people understood Oliver like Oliver understood Oliver. Sometimes he would fall asleep over a sentence he'd been writing. Not because it was boring. Because Oliver was happy.

That was it! It must be a combination of those two things! Oliver made a point of enumerating his 'reasons why I write:'

1. I like talking to myself on paper when I'm lonely.
2. I'm happy when I'm just with myself.'

The list looked a little skimpy, not to say dumb to Oliver, and so he decided not to show anyone.

In fact Oliver generally didn't show anyone any of his writing. Oliver loved to write fiction, Oliver loved to write poetry, but he hadn't shown anyone his stories or poems since he quit college two years earlier. Oliver took one course in Creative Writing his freshman year at Caddiefield College--in his second semester--but he wrote so much for that class he flunked out of school. He only got a 'C' in the Creative Writing course, and he wrote more than anyone in the class, majors included. The instructor, Mr. John Malapit, (whose first volume of poetry My Interior Spaces, Oliver never read) thought that what Oliver wrote was stupid, or, as be described it, 'fairly adolescent.' For instance, one poem Oliver submitted to Mr. Malapit was titled

Why I Write
by Oliver Descantes

I was trying to explain to myself
Explain the insufficiency of love, of life or words
When it all began to seem terribly insufficient--
And so I scrapped that too.
There are several routes to failure here:
Roethkean terms would have love as some region vast, funnily unapproachable, deadly frustrating, non-disconfirmable and of course, there: a bit of Existentialist, Roethke, I think.
My hero, Dylan said: "I love you more than blood," and this strikes at my terrible, cursed insufficiency;
He really can’t find
the words for love, and so he will
sacrifice all for it.
The rub, my readers, is here.
We have two ways to go, with two easily
discernable paths, parallel and distant:
Love or
Die, and explain why.

As Oliver always waited with anticipation of Malapit’s response, so it was with this poem, which Malapit handed back the next day in class, with this comment:

Oliver,

This poem I think needs much reconsidering. For though it may be of some interest to you, it’s really not much of a poem at all. Instead it strikes me as being prose with a key, the key being, one guesses, the title. Which brings up a concern all true writers should have when writing. Bluntly stated, If you, as a writer, are wondering “Why I Write” I, as a reader, may be wondering “Why Should I Care?” This consideration may be harsh, but worth your time. Consider also line structure; there seems too little of it here. The Dylan lines, along with the last four lines, seem a riddle to me; have you given your reader enough of an experience in this poem, or is what comes out rather privileged, and therefore not the proper material of poetry? And can Dylan’s words hold the page? One more thing: To the educated reader, the Roethke section seems a bit odd. What do you mean? Have you read Roethke? Please feel free, as always, to reconsider and resubmit a re-write of this poem.

Oliver’s initial reaction to Malapit’s comments was a mean-spirited one: Oliver wanted to tell him that, as a writer, Oliver didn’t care if Malapit cared why he wrote; Oliver just wanted a “B” and out of Malapit’s pompous class. But of course it wasn’t true; Oliver was enough of a grapho-paranoiac to realize he did care whether or not Malapit cared. And so the vindictive impulse remained inside Oliver, or rather perhaps outside, viciously tempting him.

And when he didn’t make the “B” in Creative writing that might have kept him in school, Oliver left Caddlefield without saying goodbye to John Malapit, “the” only editor he was ever to have. Oliver went home resolved to be a writer, however unsure as ever about why.

Later that Wednesday evening, Oliver Descantes thought

“I don’t know why I didn’t make grades at school; I let my mind wander and there will never be anything for me in the world with an uncertain mind. Except maybe a fiction writer, except they must have trained minds too and I lucked out to get Malapit and what did he know about fictive minds he was a goddamn poet and all he cared about was holding down whatever traditions maintained his conception of “poetry” which doesn’t mean fiction and he didn’t even know that I never intended to use Roethke “precisely” or “wisely” or “incisively” or “poetically” or any of that crap I was trying to assert though I guess it wasn’t very convincing that Roethke, Yeats, Keats, Bates it doesn’t matter who says it it’s what they say but I should’ve known someone who’s as egotistical as Malapit “the name is what counts yes because what is a piece of art without the artist and I . . .” no he probably wouldn’t have the gall to make any claim like that but he’d sure think it and that’s it of course Malapit another victim of “I” the “I decade” and here I me am falling into it myself.”

And usually at times like this, when in conversation with himself, Oliver would tell himself to shut up and turn it into fiction, turn it into poetry. Sitting in his room, late at night, watching t.v., reading a book, writing letters to no one in particular, oral letters — newsy, psychic, dumb letters Oliver thought. And he would try to set it down on paper, make something of it; time could pass very quickly this way. But on this night Oliver Descantes’ grandmother called upstairs as he was sitting down to write. “Oliver, are you asleep?” she yelled, and though he wasn’t, Oliver responded that he had been, and thanks for waking him up. Then Oliver dressed to go to work.

Oliver worked as an Earp Brothers security guard at a packaging plant on the north side of the city. He worked midnight shift, midnight to 8am, and lived with his grandparents, who housed him on the condition that he support himself, which he more or less did. Oliver’s grandparents wanted him to go back to school. Understandably. Oliver’s parents wanted enough for Oliver to go to school, and Oliver had flunked out. His grandparents made sure that the money was reserved in case he decided to go back, and until he did, he was to support himself.

This seemed fair to Oliver. As he drove to work, Oliver mulled over, again, the advantages and disadvantages of working for Earp Brothers. Upon arriving at the plant, Oliver went to the front-gate guard-shack to have his weapon—a .38—checked. And Oliver felt again the joke of his carrying a gun, and the dread of spending another night with that joke. There had never arisen a situation in which Oliver even thought of using the gun, but still he was required to wear it. And it didn’t feel right. It was only when he walked to the back of the plant complex, to his post at the south gate guard-shack, that Oliver felt right.

Usually when he arrived at his post, he sat down and began writing. It was in the abeyance of third shift that Oliver found time to do his work. There was no television, no radio, no people, just his small, stainless steel and plexi-windowed shack, the plant’s lights, and the flow of smoke and chemicals pouring from the top of exhaust tanks behind him. Every two hours Oliver had to walk a beat, and inbetween the first beat and the second, since all was secure, Oliver wrote.

Pike Callahers’ Short Story

Sometimes when Pike looks in the mirror, he can im-
agine his face in the bedrooms of every teenager in America; he turns his head slightly, and sees the worn skin of his cheek, how loosely it hangs from his hairline. Pike turns back to face himself head-on, thinking that this is the image he wants her to have of him; not a profile. Pike looks into his eyes and feels her warm skin against the back of his eyeballs; she is back there, he is trying to see her, feel her, use her, give her two eyes with which to be looked at. Pike wonders: 'Can she see me?' He is too worn even to believe she could love him and so these days Pike simply tends to take it for granted. Pike tends to imagine self-pity is too perpetual for another to understand; those doubts love the mirror, love to be suspicious of her, love to resign her to another lost relationship another thought-filled night, alone in some room, his self-love too great and ironic to escape. And Pike will picture her then, he will see her when he looks at his dark walls, he will feel the warmth and spirit of her eyes, her energy will flow through him like a moment of anger and hate, he will know all that is written now; Pike will go again to the mirror.

Oliver stopped there, looking up to his own reflection in the glass shaw. He couldn’t decide what Pike would or should do next. Oliver loved writing from the different perspectives of his fictive characters, but often had less fun creating situations for them to act in. Oliver Descantes thought about school again, how he needed that formal training if he ever wanted to be a good writer, and not just a person who wrote. He was frustrated by his feeling that he wasn’t good at writing. He needed something to be good at. To get him out of his rut. Something.

Thursday

Thursday afternoon when Oliver Descantes woke up he packed up a back pack full of his manuscripts and headed toward the University Library on the south side of the city, close to where he and his grandparents lived. He was going to the library to read and browse but he carried his writing just in case (though just in case of what Oliver didn’t know). Oliver went to the University Library half expecting to see his old girlfriend, Jean, and half hoping not to. It was with this approach-avoid ambivalence that Oliver always chose the University Library to kill a day. Jean was in summer session at the University and so Oliver walked around campus with his eyes pre-occupied to avoid confrontation, and yet looking for her. They had seen each other on campus only once since they terminated their relationship. It had been a quick and passing hello, about a week earlier. However Oliver didn’t see her on his way to the library, and with both relief and dissatisfaction he headed for the stacks.

But every college woman Oliver saw reminded him of Jean. They had met in the Library the summer after Oliver flunked out of Caddiefield, both of them scanning the stacks for the same volume of Cathy Omizar.
of potential violence
jactitating love,
making him delerious
O so delerious.

And she sprayed the "love"
of the "New Woman"
woman, girdling her life
with a limpid self-knowledge.
(He thought of dependence.)
A coquette of needs,
She said "I
need only me.'"
And he left

crying
 uncontrollably.

Oliver shook his head as he read the poem. He had been serious when he wrote it. It had been a serious poem, then. Now Oliver wondered if any part of it was salvageable, or if he should just keep it for memory's sake. Grinning to himself, he thought of a good title for the poem, one that would take the edge off of it: "If A Woman Had Written This It would Be 'A Feminist Poem.'"

Then Oliver thought of a scheme. Going to the poetry room of the library, Oliver went through all the poetry periodicals, searching for a particular poetry journal Malapit had mentioned once in class. Finally, he found it: A Woman's Place. Oliver quickly copied down the periodical's address, grabbed his books and started for the Post Office. He would title the poem "A Feminist Poem" sign it Olivera Descantes (a housewife-poet, Oliver thought, who writes between noon and evening pasta) and send it to A Woman's Place. And he had the stamp on the envelope and the lip sealed before he realized the absurdity of it, that it didn't matter to Oliver that they probably wouldn't come out even publishable. For at times like this, Oliver was lost; he drifted into a light sleep; a writer's sleep.

(Later, Oliver thought, as he was reading the poem again, to himself, I think I'll write a love poem. I don't know why, I just feel like I need to write a love poem.)

But Oliver had stood in front of Jean then, speechless and guilty, as she said that, and yet something told him "wait, something's all screwy."

Intoxicated, Pike stares right through himself. He says nothing, sees nothing, thinks nothing. It is now is now that a surge of sensations flow up through his back to his shoulders cold as he surges forward now now throwing his fist through the window pane in front of him shattering it still not harming his hand. Pike is breathing hard as he withdraws his arm from this broken reflection and with reason now and purpose Pike grabs a jagged piece of glass, cuts his palm, but not bad enough as he lifts the edge to his face and tears at himself in a rage, scraping down ripping eyes his eyes closed and now opening, to feel wetness and see window and blur and closed again now and now fear and wetness and shivers cold shivers and open again and darkness and fear and finally Pike runs not knowing how he's harmed himself but sensing it's over, it's over must be over, something must be over. Soon it will be over.

And Oliver stopped there, knowing it was bad but still rather happy. He wondered why it was that often the things he most enjoyed writing he thought were of the worst quality. A bad sign for a writer, Oliver thought

"Another bad sign. But at least I can judge what's bad and good in my writing or at least I think I can, though I'd never know since I never show anyone anything. I should've gone back to school if writing is what I want to do and it is and not only that I could have saved myself getting messed up with Jean she thinks I'm some weird neurotic depressive 'Oliver what am I supposed to think you killed yourself because of me, you think that's not a tough thing to live with, I have to live with myself and be happy about myself and I have to handle being the cause of your suicide.'"

And Oliver had stood in front of Jean then, speechless and guilty, as she said that, and yet something told him "wait, something's all screwed up here" and now Oliver was thinking

god, the bitch! all she could do was think of herself how it affected her, the great 'me' of all time and listen to me I'm just as bad; here I am thinking about myself actually I'm the selfish one the great 'me'"

and Oliver was bundled up again. He was spiraling and couldn't get the hate off his mind thinking

"Okay just shut up and put it down on paper"

And he sat there, in the gate guard shack, staring at the piece of paper in front of him. He didn't know where to start. There was a white piece of paper, and his right hand holding a pen. Oliver was nervous, afraid;
he felt the burden of the paper, and its whiteness, absorbing his stare. It was too much, there was too much to say. Oliver Descantes could not sort out the guilt and the resentment, or darken the page with it. Not yet. He sat there looking at the page blankly — not knowing what to do, when he heard a blast from behind him and startled himself with his reflection in the window; It was a chemical exhaust tank behind, blowing out its waste. Oliver got up and walked his evening beat.

Friday

It could be said of Oliver Descantes that his ambitions as a writer were greater than his abilities. But this only means Oliver might have written a long, long time. For Oliver, writing was a means of asking questions of himself, and trying to figure things out. It was a way of making his life a little easier to live. Oliver never had a writer’s block for any length of time; for whatever his limitations as a thinker or a writer, he was a producer. And so his possibilities seemed ahead of him.

But Friday morning had not been a good one for Oliver. He did not get much sleep after he came home from work; every time Oliver began to think that he was over Jean, over his suicide rap, beyond his own perpetuation of those thoughts, something triggered the whole spiral again.

In the afternoon, on his way into the University, Oliver saw Jean. He spotted her the minute he walked in the library; she was off to the left of him, in the reference section, looking something up. Unconsciously, Oliver stood for a moment inside the door, staring at her. She looked very good, of course; Oliver seemed hung in suspension for a moment, gazing, until she looked up and, suddenly nervous and self conscious, Oliver turned quickly to duck away.

For no reason at all, he walked into the poetry room. Once inside, Oliver realized this was not the place to be; he had walked in on the middle of a poetry reading. Oliver scanned the faces seated circularly in the room, and noticed him. Except for the one person seated in the far corner, the person who was reading. His was the only face Oliver recognized: Josiah Spock, a television actor who played Admiral Zirk on the old show Galaxy Tripping. Oliver had an idea Spock wrote poetry; he’d noticed him reading some of it on a talk show once, but Oliver hadn’t listened then. He had to now.

"don’t leave me. 
the two of us will fly now.
don’t let go, 
i won’t.
our lives, our lies
the earth
is no longer
below us.
they are gone."

And the people in the room clapped, with Oliver just getting seated as Spock spoke: “Thankyou. I’m a great believer in the ability of people
way, about two blocks from Oliver's house. She was alone, and drove past him fast, without noticing him and, in an intimidatory way, looking like she knew where she was going. "Doesn't have the suicide burden hanging over her now," Oliver thought, walking up his street to his house. Oliver knew he was still bitter, and unfairly so, towards Jean, only he couldn't help it, and didn't feel like trying. There was just so much he wanted to tell her, Oliver wanted her to know how she misjudged him.

All night, in fact, sitting around waiting to go to work, Oliver fought off the urge to phone her. But there was no way. Finally, Oliver found himself so full of things he wanted to tell Jean, tell someone, that he couldn't even sort them out to himself. And Oliver decided that he had better try writing again, try explaining himself that way.

Explanation
by Oliver Descantes

When lost
I leave
and drive random highways. This
(You may have heard)
is good therapy
for the perpetual self hater
The marching taps
of the road branding
my tires kick me in the butt,
the rhythm of their incentive
timing my response.
And I see strewn dead dogs
flashing by me
on the side their
tendons on the road
A lost companion somewhere.
The calm of their rigor
easy on their face.
These peripheral images
work their kinetic ways
on me
I have loaded
the weight of self love
the freedom of self hate,
my pity can conjure
eight year olds burned
alive
the charred red pulp
and underneath
their dead skin pistons
jam moans and
screams I've never heard before
up through their squinted eyes
and disfigured mouths
these pistons

When Oliver finished the poem, he had looked over it once before his grandmother shouted. "Oliver, you haven't forgotten work, have you?" and Oliver responded yes he had, and thank you. And he rushed to get his uniform on and out of the house. Friday night he brought only the poem and a pen with him to work.

On his way there Oliver Descantes mulled over lines of the poem; it was on his mind. He couldn't wait to arrive at the back shack so he could look at it again. It needed editing and Oliver could do that the minute he got to the back shack. Pulling in the packaging plant, Oliver parked his car and walked up to the front gate to get his gun checked. His gun didn't even bother him tonight. Oliver was so anxious to get back to the poem. He chatted only for a moment with the Earp Brothers supervisor and then started the long walk back to his post. Tonight the walk wasn't peaceful, it was ecstatic; Oliver thinking

"I need to trim out some of it, maybe; I'll have to see. I want it to be at its best if I want to show anyone and god, who would I show? I haven't shown anyone anything in so long maybe I'll show Malapit, right, I'll send it to Caddlefield and have Malapit look at it, see if he thinks it's any good; maybe I'll try to do something with Pike Callahers too there's no use just holding on to this stuff and Malapit will probably hate it but I've got nothing to lose, I'll send a note along with it, thanking him for taking the time to do it, I might as well do something with it."

And Oliver might have thought then about the letter he wanted to send to Malapit but as he approached his shack he noticed that the lights were on inside. Someone must have been inside. Oliver reasoned it must be an employee of the packaging plant looking for something; the plant stayed open working 'round the clock. And Oliver opened the door to the shack and faced a young man about Oliver's age who, Oliver thought, seemed too young to be an employee. "Can I help you find something?" Oliver asked, and the man didn't answer — he just looked at Oliver. "Are you an employee here?" Oliver asked, and this time the man said "no," and as he did, Oliver looked down and saw that the man had a gun, and Oliver realized that he, too, had one. It was then that Oliver Descantes heard the blast.
The Baptism

Mr. Crossway held a holy finger
to the window
asking me if today was it,
if Jesus came through that window
would I be saved.

Every Sunday Jesus snarled
through a brown beard
floating outside our sanctuary,
and we trembled with fear poking our bladders.

So we ran down the aisle
holding our souls in our mouths
like pennies
we could spit in the palm of the preacher
and Mr. Crossway
shrouded with age,
clutched me with rope-veined hands,
pressed against me praising God.

That night
I was nine and naked
under a white robe,
up to my belly in cold water.
And Mr. Crossway pulled me back into the well,
soaking me with eternal protection,
my robe floating up on the water,
revealing my naked body—
closing my eyes,
hoping He wouldn’t see,
I cried.

Numb with shame, with helplessness,
sobs jerking my body
like the final small kicks
of a deer,
Sealing my youth with confusion
and dreams of Mr. Crossway
coming through that window
seeing my girl body.

Becky Hinshaw
**Sunday Afternoon**

Take my ride over to the west side
bring 'long my pole some doughball and a bottle of wine.

Lake is lined with low rides — Caddy's and Electra's all rusted and dented.

Old gray-haired men eyes still red sit in lawn chairs and wait — stringers'll be full by nightfall.

My old lady likes catjack but my baby in the crib cries for carp.

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**The Joke's On**

So I'm standin there, ornamentin' this funky lampposty corner when outta nowhere this cat and his old lady come cuttin' by, rappin' 'bout who gotta do the dishes.

As I slam back the dregs of my bubbling companion she looks thru my eyes and fans my soul. Then she smiles and shuffles her hand through the cat's pocket and tosses me a C.

I toss her a nod and head for the bottle stop. Meanwhile she takes him home to do the dishes.

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Christopher B. Brougham
Blue’s*

Some Black Brothers in jeans
Rappin logically and shootin pool,
Eye a solid ball drop, safe,
Smooth as the evening buzz
Among Wednesday’s patrons at Blue’s.

September 19th ‘bout 10:30
Night sticks crash down solid.
Once more to make the blood run,
Once more, to make the fear run.
Too quick and vicious for retaliation.

Pool tables tumble helplessly,
Transvestite beat with his own crutch.
Thrown bottles shatter mirrors,
Blood collects on the wall and floor
Like frenzied sharks, police bite everywhere.

‘Breaking up a knife fight,
That’s why we arrived,’”
New York’s Finest tell the papers.
‘Why were there no arrests,’”
Asks those who know the truth.

Hate Hate Hate
They will always love who they want.
Beat Beat Beat
You rearrange faces, not color.
They are who they are.

* Blue’s is a Black/Gay bar in New York City. On 9/29/82 forty dressed police entered the bar and locked the door. They outnumbered the patrons. The police physically and verbally assaulted the patrons. When the police finally left, they bar was destroyed and many patrons had to go to hospitals. The story was covered in the Village Voice and a few other papers; the New York Times and other large newspapers made no mention of it.

Speaking to You Through the Derision

I am locked around your morning sleep scent,
girdling my pillow, squeezing
my eyes closed
Imagining these words,
after you’ve left.
And I sense so much potency for love
in my twenties —
my mind leaps
to warnings
I want to give my children
not to doubt or abort their riddled emotions
nor accept
quickly
this abeyance
we so often call perspective.
I lie dreamily awake sometimes
certain
that if we must fail at love it must be
fully, awkwardly,
or not at all.
And still from this I gain no rest.
You, who have faced my revache
and made death of it:
In some less poetic moment
I became aware too late,
thinking thoughtless words,
lapping at the pain
lovingly saying:
“‘I understand me.
No one understands me.’”
The taste of myself dry,
and familiar, pale
and saltless,
Our two human bodies knee-jerking,
senseless.
And if love can make us better people
then paradoxes are forgivable
and memory only dormant
with dreams, releasing
out waking
nights together;
your flesh and our failures
are not the mutually exclusive property
of some plastic bag,
rolling away from another tragedy,
Horrors
too easy to imagine
and forget.
O woman I have loved —
We must talk of death
until there is no more
Death to fall from—
And we may speak through the derision
to some moment when we awake
and find we are not the people
we expected to be.
Northern Lights

in a wood of knotted pine
where
glowing lights drip
from darkened skies
birds of speckled feather
tavel upon flat grass waters
mountains of boldface rock
swallow silent suns

I grew
beyond the highest of needled branches
soaring gently over liquid sheets
hovering
over solid stone masses
interrupting
crimson-streaked skies
to reach
cradle
caress
in ivory palms
the sparkling tips of crystal stars
precious jewels nestled
snug
with pockets
of satin black twilight

Adrienne Wehr
Tripping on the Yawn of Tomorrow

Lopsided lazy moon chucking
Uncommon shadows before me;
Night clutching at my sides and
All the trees huddling to hide
Glowing eyes, shuttered wings,
A protesting stillness.

The road, once paved by a vomiting truck,
Has on its back a burping car
Who dissolves
The noise of my clacking shoes,
Who slices my solitude
With unrequested company.

A hill digests this manufactured
Member of the twilight,
Making the woods orchestra chortle
And remind me of my casting
As the foreigner.

The earth grasps, congratulating my feet,
My shadow melts like butter:
The tentacles of the sun hauling
It up over the black trees;
And the stars delicately kissing goodnight
The clear-complexioned sky,

Then closing the door to the night,
Which twitches the birds
Into blossoming harmony.
Sun slaps a smile on my mouth
And the lusting land;
While caws, chirps, questions, curses
Weave through the sky.

A fence, stoic it may be,
Witnesses with me this
Crackling morning of unfastened
Snow and growling spring
Until my mind spins from the field,
Replacing me on the shelf of the
Wrinkled, parched highway home.

Kate Reynolds

Cleo

Black and Blue plaid
your back wears your soul today—
a fresh bruise with no purple yet.
There ain’t no passion here today.
Cleo, your pink face screams
temporary Aunt Jemima
with no black fat.
No use for hysterics anymore.
You is done
    and spent.
When the doctor calls
you’ll cry and cry
but you don’t.
He tells you he loves you
and God does too.
So you walk on down
the streetlit world
into the citypark heaven of marriage,
and live it up on Saturday nights
with babysitter promises
and red-vinyl chaired Italian restaurants.
Art ain’t never gonna be your friend.
Oil paint looks best on black velvet,
and friends look best now,
as names on dime store party invitations.

Kim Kiefer
Kuei Mei

—from the I Ching or Book of Changes

The marrying maiden enters with an empty basket. Her fiance has black hair and is stabbing at a dead camel.

There are no eggs to carry back from the henhouse—the animal is bloodless. Each time she enters the house the wind draws back from the lake and she thinks of another man with smooth skin, his eyes slate-gray.

There is one almond of purity between her legs. When she crouches over the stove her fiance takes it from her.

She watches his muslin back as he returns to the orchard with a hatchet.

Amy Pence