EXILE

Dension University's

Literary Magazine

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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

*Ezra Pound*
We make broken conversation,
And this, too, is making love;
Mingling and groping—
Intimate and selfish and vulnerable
And full of hunger.

Kent Lambert
Talk

They will tell you that we learn to love each other in the barest of rooms, with a spartan lightbulb and folding chairs, our conversation clinging to us like sand. They will tell you about drunken fistfights in Charleston, South Carolina, where men embraced and struck each other in passing seconds. They will tell you that you are inconsolable, and they will teach you how to bleed, not wistful like a spinster’s tears, but rigid and unyielding, a fist of emotion. They will tell you about white tiled walls and the sound of a windshield shattering.

They will tell you that desire is a brittle word, and you will believe them – because yours is a country of thin lines and small promises, where men who gave their backs and broad shoulders for the frontiers now sit in lame silences, in steel town bars and coffee shops everywhere. You have never felt the way a man’s hands will ache for a beer and sympathy. There are words, Katrin, you have no definitions for. This, for instance, is what we call progress. Tell me what you know about progress. You wrote me stories about desire and the Mississippi, moonlight on the grey Hudson. When you see a river, you imagine its ocean, and dream of fictional deltas. I only see water. They will tell you all this. You will believe them.

Richard Latimer

Storm Passing

Clouds as smooth and cool as marble pushed by impatient, mad winds

grind out the benign fire burning in the sun and drive my thoughts into darkness. Green, the desire of water, place and light turns brown in the cold, heavy darkness

and a cry for rain is answered with the pounding of thundering fists.

I half-dream of trampled and of trampling fields flattened under the weight and strength of stone, of the desire to live unfulfilled famished on a harvest of stone.

while malicious lightning burnt brown black while rivers overflowed with tears.

Silence clings to every sound while darkness fades to shadowed light life mends itself in the vacuum filling the stillness with dancing light

and I lie down in my exhaustion my mind as empty as the new blue sky.

Ben Kell
I Again Awake

Red blood platelets encompass
my feeble view of creation as
the dogeared pages of war-torn
books flap delectably and languidly in
the salty air of wickedness.
I stir and lift myself from the red-clay
mud of the deserted field and
walk slowly north on the black
paved highway leaving red-clay footprints
weaving and playing with the
broken-yellow line.
The blue chevy van swishes past and
swerves as it notices my nakedness
and the speeds up when
it sees my blood. The blood
pouring from the wounds on my hands
and feet and head and from the
tears in my happy flesh –
I fall onto the darkness and
fighting the blue-brown pain, I
rise again and walk toward
the Elysian Fields that lie to either
side of the long highway.

    I fall once again at the rocky edge
of the road, my hand falling into the downy
neck-hair softness of the field.

    The flowers of the field begin
to glow yet before I can grasp their
beauty and message, I awake
in the trench-hole in the fields of France in 1943,
and I again awake in the tepid jungle of Vietnam in 1969
and I again awake in the tank in Panama, 1989, and I again awake . . .

Shannon Salser

Demigods and Demons

Man creates, and becomes his creation,
Breaking the circle of his own mortality,
Slipping so effortlessly into infinity
That he misses the reason altogether.

We could find ourselves all alone,
Kings of an empty realm,
Defacto gods with paper crowns.

Something for nothing—
All in the end.
Infinity feeding upon itself
Like a madman upon his own hand.
We march within our fragile creeds
Humming our own epics
As we trample meaning on the way to fulfillment.

Kent Lambert
Apology

My mother once fought over the will
Her father wrote in a hospital ward. Her brother,
Godfrey Child, wanted to auction his inheritance
With a loudspeaker and bidding tables, & he tore
The typed papers, evenly, between his calloused
Bare hands, so it seemed final
And with terrific sincerity,
He left her life. It was like a dark fork in a road,
And for a moment, the nurse held still
With that syringe. When it was over,
My mother simply drove home and cooked dinner, and then,
As always, sat alone in her den, reading the paper.
She never talked about it.

Sometimes, I drive out to this beach at night,
And listen to the wet lap of the sea in autumn,
The black edge of the world turning over.
It used to make me feel smaller, looking out on it.
In Maryland, that depth was enough.
In a Maryland I will not see again,
My life is beginning to change. Something
Inside me is slowly turning over
Everything it ever owned.
Now, if I try to talk, I hear my mother
Find all the right words she forgot to say
As if her voice, calling from in me,
Might solve everything, and though now, my uncle
is dying, that voice is sorry . . .
If you can think of the senses as a network,  
A city mile driven behind the wheel of a car,  
Acknowledging every red light,  
Imagine, now, a turn – as when the road changes  
To dirt and the billboards change to fields, mile after  
Mile, heading in one direction, until at last  
The engine grows tired and sleeps, or until  
Even the hum from travel is a kind  
Of lullaby; and when the afternoon turns to night  
And the head lamps grow narrow into dark,  
You can almost feel that the engine, as it slows,  
Must fall off the land and open onto sea.

Kelly Bondurant

Guest Speaker

Standing before me  
pinching and prodding  
deforming the air between us  
with plump colorless hands

My eyes run from double chin  
to square of glass  
desperate to escape  
the voice  
Proclaiming a story of success  
Rags to Riches  
All you need is Self Love  
Positive Attitudes  
You can do it too  
Just look at me  
Look at me

Bullshit  
my mind screeches  
sounding like fingernails  
on a black board

Inflated with nothingness  
Arms pumping  
Lips flapping  
like a silent movie  
you kill something inside me

Ann Mierson
Watching for Minnows

So we will not forget,
The silence whispers its name again,
And I am reminded
Of a small boy
Who once stood
Looking off a bridge
As I stand now
Looking into your eyes,
That same name fresh on his lips
As he looked through his reflection
To the darting silver flashes beyond
That glistened in his treasure box eyes,
More fascinating than the odd look
That hovered just above them.
And now, as then,
The light glances off the surface
Of watery eyes thick with clouds
As I wait,
Watching for minnows.

Kent Lambert
Thunderbird

Black granite, ash, warped pews, overgrowth so dense it takes hours to hack through, a tarnished brass cross slanting the thin streamlets of sun, and one turquoise egg half-shaded by a limb. The pastor who left parish 11 for New Staunton, left his robes too. I come here alone, unnerved the way I came years before to run side-by-side setters and pointers. They were the first closed under good bird cover.

Six miles of oak loom, thickened, curling like paint on walls where dim-wit yokels plead, half starved near drying fields with something to consider and plenty to hate. One contractor sits children on his right knee, a gesture like an earthquake. Soil caulks their nails. I am one of few who hiked uphill through gullies of vine to pull back his tracks, scared to death.

Now only hunters find the stained glass if they’re lucky, if birds have covered and dogs go on point, if light hits the grove just right. This time there’s no secret being kept. The pews are riddled with shot: 7 1/2’s, 8’s, 9’s, a slug or two. My grandfather hoarsed-up when he told the story. His father, the leader, bought by Virginia power, needing his family more than the land. On this hill crest I think of all the sweat poured over the ascent in barrow and cinder block. I stare through the looped honeysuckle circling the bell tower and catch a stuttered glimpse of faces hardened like troops on leave, women wearing frocks, black as famine potatoes.

Stirring into the conscience of this shrouded wayside, I feel the alter start to tremble and I prod my memory to bury a boy killed near Spotsylvania, a farmer straining alcohol from tubing out a still. Where I stand in this darkened, hateful home will not leave me. The echo of bells I hear more like coon hounds at bay, runned scared and lost with scent.

Father, you and I bore barrels flush in late November hollows, swapping tales mothers should never hear, fumbling for shells in briars we named by each rigid point. You never stopped here? I’ve been sitting in the pews thinking about us a long time, long enough to see weathered stones pushed awkward against a rooted birch. The dates our family owns.

I keep promising I’ll forget, I’ll leave them, this chapel yard, and get on with my life. A year ago a man with sanitarium eyes stumbled across these broken floorboards and sang from a hymnal and pulled out a bottle of Thunderbird and nobody gave a damn because nobody heard a thing from that podium or even listed to find out what was sung: old verses, “Onward Christian Soldiers” above the strip-mine clangor of drills.
I'm the boy who stole up to this promontory without your knowing to summon mercy for ungrateful years. I stand deranged on the swelling ground to curse the sermon in this room and to catch the faces aged to stone. All I catch are mossed numbers, nicknames, and fabled quotes, rusted brass shells scattered like an archaic testimony, an empty language only a grim handful can understand.

Outside bobwhites whistle their broken lives back together and you and I sit miles apart. Every crack in the wall speaks of age and father, I hear the leaves brush it all down like the wind was a final, silent voice shaking the land just enough to turn things over, to pull from the ground whatever it needs to hide.

Kelly Bondurant

Glendalough (St. Kevin)

After a lifetime of solitude, cultivated like an empty garden, I allowed her in: a seed of doubt reached fruition choking the songbirds hymn into silence as things were revealed to me. Gradually, she removed the veils like the carving dance of the water falling to the stream by my cell until she lay naked under me: deep and misty as the fiery mirror of the lake at sunrise. With a sudden jolt of the hips we opened my cloistered mind, releasing my body into a delicious, earthbound epiphany flowing from every-uncontainable-thing like God. I heard the music of the lute snaking and coiling over the chaste birdsongs, baring me to the glory in my senses, caressing and holding me in a new passionate joy for the finite. I awoke free from my life, rooted firmly within a fertile furrow crouched between mountains

holding back a growing world and I was afraid. Within my lone, stone monument to faith I contemplated: every rock had been a gift: blessed and familiar, essential of the certainty I tried to believe into existence. An existence in which every leaf, blade of grass, breath, drop of water was signed by the Artist, every creation a celebration of His divinity while I learned nothing about my world, other worlds, this world until I retreated here. In my cell
above the water I fast:
meditating on sin and how little I understand of it now,
stare at the smiling mad beauty reflected in the dark pool
below: resisting its call to worship, wait and
listen for birds
after she, siren and Avatar,
let me see
the other signatures on creation and helped me to write my own.

Ben Kell

Untitled

We have had it up to here.
We have slapped a pointy
cap on its head, rapped
it on the knuckles and sent it
upstairs without any supper.
Forget fairy tales and soothing
bedtime stories. There is nothing
more to fear; no more monsters,
slowly through the cracked
closet door, or smashing evil
teeth beneath the bed.
The world is a finite place
and we intend to keep it that way.
No room for
spirits or spectres—
they're only auto exhaust & sewer steam.
Mirages are merely mudpuddles,
Atlantis simply sludge,
We believe only in concrete
buildings, asphalt lots and No
Parking signs. There's a neon dawn
lighting the night that swallowed up
Mom & Pop & and they're penny candy
schtick. It's all convenient as hell.
The stores here never close,
not even on X-Mass and they sell
every necessity—toiletries,
aspirin, cold medicine.

Craig Bagno
Flying Machines In Pieces On The Ground

What is it you think when you look into the polished wood and your face glares back at you, dead as the woman lying inside, and the ceiling light shines clear against the oak surface and blinds you as the sun must have spotted her eyes when she glanced at it from the same airplane window which now lies in fragments embedded in burnt patches of dirt in those Carolina hills, dirt charred a shade darker than the casket in front of you; the rich grains in the oakwood catch your eyes and you fall into their coiling pattern while the preacher's voice fades out as each grain circles like the plane must have spiraled, twisting against the still sky, tail spinning downward until it smashed into the earth and exploded into a shower of flames and ash which covered the wreckage so completely that when they hand you the shovel, you will pass it on, knowing too well she has already been buried.

Kelly Bondurant

Tuesday, December 13, 1988

Bill & Walt's Toy Shoppe:

For a source of pecuniary pleasure, the gun was poised at her face, and as the man behind the mask smiled, he pulled the trigger twice.

And a thousand eyes saw this—each from every shelf, and after the man had absconded with the night, their hands were still raised to themselves.

Alexander Speyer
Weathered Wood

You sit there in your rocking chair and creak the floorboards back and forth.
Out in the heat of the front yard your voice holds onto me. Don't you pick at my weeds, you say, I like 'em just how they is.

Eight years ago today you took me to the railroad crossing, drove the Chevy across the track. The Rabun County Courthouse vanished into the distance like this shack will disappear in the dust billowing behind the bus that will take me. Grandpa, sometime in the next few years your chest will cease its heaving, your hands turning as grey as the weathered wood they grasp. For a moment they'll seem as if carved from the same wood, withered skin wrinkled like the armrest they've held onto for 35 years.

I will reach over and pry your fingers from the dead wood, then slide into my good pair of jeans and slip the photograph of Mother and Father into the back pocket. When Georgia Gillespie has given her condolences I'll wait by the fence for the next bus. But not before I've taken your chair out back and thrown it into a pile of wood and crumbled papers. The Clayton Tribune will spark the splinters jotting from its legs. I will stand there until the center splits and falls into itself, and the embers, brittle, break into tiny glowing ashes against the dirt.

Kelly Bondurant

Above Grey Water

Within the darkened light
the sweet smoke
swallows me.
Outside the canal splits
the cobbled streets;
this side blinks red.

I walk out through the narrowed lane, turn to cross a bridge above grey water. Another cobbled street, sets the same scene. Signs jut into the street announcing the sport of women kept inside. Women stripped down to lingerie look down through dusted panes.

Beyond that, uniformed sex shops, at least three to a block, their windows filled with unfamiliar toys.
I walk on,

turn a corner
into a sidestreet.
Music rumbles
from cold hands
in small groups against walls;
a hat
awaits reward.
Amid crated vegetables
turns a man
cucumber in hand,
eyes on me,
words spoken
through a slit
of no teeth.
Quickly paced,
a man hisses by.
"Cocaina, hashisha?"
Whispers
down my spine.
People on all sides,
their faces mock me
with foreign smiles.

I do not even
know with
whom I came.

I walk on,

pass the dizziness
to an open square,
Craig Bagno is a senior English Major.
Kelly Bandurant
Susanna Duff
Ben Kell
Kent Lambert is a senior.
Richard Lakmore
Ann Mierson
Shanon Salser - He is what others don't dare to be.
Alexander Speyer