

CLAY

CLAY'S FACE IS

a thinned blade
used hard,

scalpel and scalpel's
consequence,

boxers in the clinch,
squeezing out inessence

until blade or virus gasps,
respires.

His labial skin
swags him: the pills'

hateful miracle
strains fat.

He smiles:
the basset bounds.

He unsmiles: his face falls
but not in disappointment.

His head shows skull,
a study in bone,

honed to St. Jerome's
buzzkill pleasure.

He is wartime,
scorched earth,

his turf wasted
craters the generals' boys

die for. Its shrubs
inhale the smoke,

squirm for the sun,
root for fluid.

His eyes, the sentry's
lookout, look out:

he knows his face
is a trench afire.

He grins with all
his arrows of teeth,

he opens his mouth, he says
Stick out your tongue.

TO MEN DEAD IN 1995

You recede into your dead millennium,
as remote as Reagan or Rommel.
Now that upscale men don't die en masse
& their disease has gone discreet,
your passion is antique, your shouts static.
You might as well have died in the towers,
another disaster students half-remember.

How embarrassing you embarrass me,
you with your absurd Doc Martens,
your shorts of hemmed denim,
the mimeoed leaflets blued to cloud,
your neckchains, your deadlines,
your youth with its squirmy whiff of Housman,
that brick of phone, the absence of tattoos,
your bad luck, your deconstruction,
the retro sideburns not yet retro now,
your young dumbness,
your skeleton of finger pointing,
your mouth sewn shut, your wirelessness.

JACKED

Farwell, TX toward Texico, NM

Driving late to the chain motel
past the empty lot of a town,
inhaling the feedlot reek,
plateaus of pulverized shit,
after seeing Clay's father
fresh from his lung scan
and his stepmother thinned
thanks to a third tumor,
we heard on the rental tires
an uproar of thud and crunch
akin to swallowing meat
as heard from within your head,
then something flicker or fly,
a sack or shooting star
that fled like a jackrabbit.
Jackrabbit, Clay remarked,
steering at ten and two,
steady on the gas.
My heart leaped into my head—
shouldn't we stop, should we
see what we hit?
I, a city boy,
always felt exempt
from corpses on the road
but Clay, of frontier stock,
let his father kill
his pet Raquel and her piglets
and ate pork within the year,
and saw his mother die
of one of the cancers the town

harvests like winter wheat.
The last of the gayboys
who slipped out and then returned—
the oldest to die of AIDS,
another to rev the car
to death in a closed garage—
he treats his blight of HIV
with ruthless pesticides.
Now he cruised into the night.
Jackrabbits die under tires.
The pioneer blood demands
and mile after mile requires
speed and brutal thrust.
At midnight in the high plains dark
as we plunged past the tracks
that separate the states
and mark a zone of time,
we gained an hour of life.

FANCY MEETING YOU HERE

You were supposed to be dead,
being missed for so long,
like the others another empty window
in a building blinking out. But there
you were in the Häagen-Dazs store,
seamed and thinned but
eating frozen yogurt, unlike a ghost.

Not that you and I had many minutes
remaining on our parking meter.
Your voice was still gut-deep
but full of nothing: lady gurus,
affirmations that kept you alive
(though they missed their shot
with the pessimistic dead...).

A dime of time and the red flag
flipped to the LED zeros
of your lovely eyes. You gave me
a dismissing kiss and ambled out
alive and now less precious
to the street of unmissing persons,
licking your globe of cone.

RICK O'SHEA

Scanning my porn, with a view of the bay,
I hear a nasty thwack—
there on the designer deck
lies a catbird on his back
stunned or dead from the slab of glass

reflecting an IBM-blue sky
and trompe l'oeil pine,
limned as if in Chinese pen
or a Calvin model's scrim,
blind to the David and laptop within.

With his feet erect like a cartoon cat's
as if he toys at being dead,
I await his mean meow,
the clenching of his ruffled fist.
Nope. A fluid stains the slats.

I guess before my morning wank
I must spatula him up
and pitch him deep into the weeds
for dirt to undertake its work.
What tools do I have in the utility shack?

But first let me look at this electric pic
quivering on the screen,
with his nearly vinyl skin,
the bay his diode's diadem.
I wonder what is Rick O'Shea's real name.

PAUL MONETTE HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

You ungowned yourself to show
the marvel of your swollen scrotum,
as if the jeweled egg you'd borne
from the Caucasus across the Elbe
smuggled cleverly in your pants
through Paris and past border guards
into the unsafe deposit of America
had suddenly blushed green
and grown more precious,
a scarab of remarkable powers
owned as it was by you.

Paul, you broadcast your death by inches
to governors and magazines,
performing your pinked rage,
dying no gentlemen's agreement,
no Episcopal fainting couch—
the courtier become the wizard
with his desiccant book of spells
the globe nodded slightly toward,
a ribbon wearing a hanging man,
vain, vain, and brave,
your flame so hot my face went red.

Yet when your final final assertion came,
your voice on the phone was a razor,
eerily virile—you'd forsworn all pills.
You'd write more soon, I promised—
that travel book we talked about—

No, you said, *I'm done*,
your matter all fact,
stripped for the sprint,
denying my denial,
your envoi sent.
I dropped the ball.

DEAD AIDS POET ARCHIVE

Their Corrasable datedness glares:
the Berlin Wall. Cassettes.
Vice President Bush. KS.

Fusty in their acidic folders
they are too gay and grim to
snare you like Berryman or Clare.

Instead they just lie there,
knights embedded in sarcophagi,
members of inscrutable orders.

Even their Xeroxed pics—
Tracy's voluptuous mullet,
David's mouth of mustache,

the roses of Glen's shirt,
Jim's throat's scaly matte—
padlock their cabinets.

Still. Those smudged serifs,
the grain of their onionskin,
the square Courier of their

type faces beckon
you to lie down with them.
They say *Read us in bed.*

THE TOMB OF LYSIAS

after Cavafy

I have passed my twenty-third summer
in the Beirut library, roofless now,
after the troubles with the Christians.
The last librarian, I can't recall his name,
the one who smokes those little gray cigarettes,
is gone and they've got a new one, a woman.
Few books have been destroyed so far
in the shelling, so my reading is unhindered—
except for that beautiful gentleman, Rami,
who works near my desk and seems himself
a source of sunlight. Before the worst of the heat
sometimes, we slip out to the old wrecked lobby
and, seated on a slab with its letters rubbed clean,
crack open pecans on the stone, and talk,
until mortars and our own shyness
pull us back to the splintered corridors.

ESSAY, FOR CLAY

Eat me not like a coyote
shaking the dog's dead neck,
then shot by the hunter,
coyote as compost;

snap me like a sunflower,
enough for a hundred blackbirds
and the scythe of wind
to seed the landfill,

crack me open
in your incisors,
let my oils
assume your saliva,

shake my stalk,
plant your mouth
against my dinner plate:
I erupt multitudes

for you, I am Abraham's stars.