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Exile Vol. XXXVI No. 1

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Words

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

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Storm Passing

Talk

Words

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

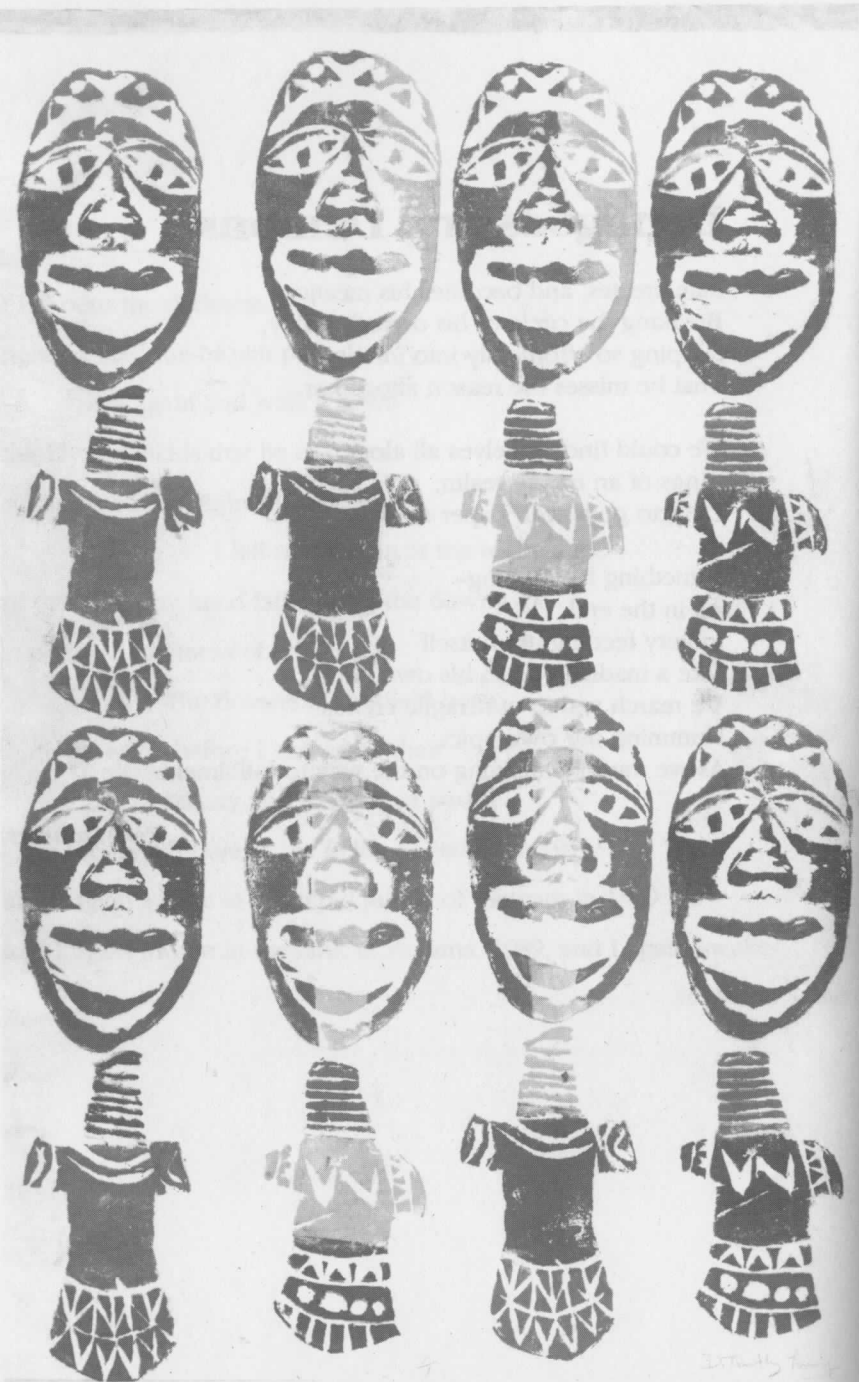
Demigods and Demons

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 callused
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

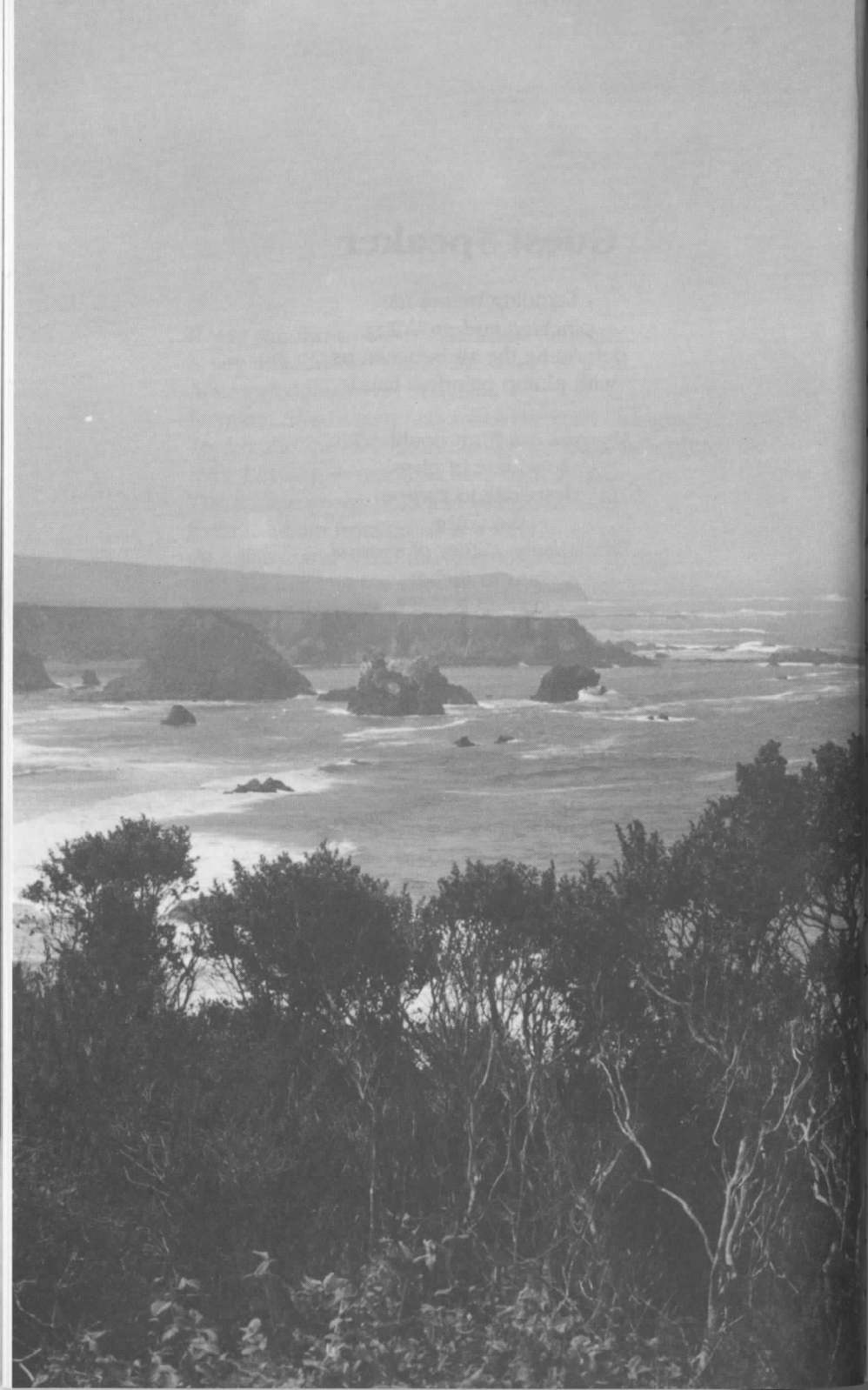
Standing before me
pinching and prodding
deforming the air between us
with plump colorless hands

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 coveyed
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,
slowering through the cracked
closet door, or snashing 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. Its 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,

through a door
down dark steps,
sit on a stool
and in the coolness
breathe
the welcomed air.

Susanna Duff



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