

**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.