

*KNOCKING
at THE DOOR:
APPROACHING THE OTHER*

Lisa Sisler & Lea C. Deschenes, Editors



Birch Bench Press
Long Beach, CA

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Sisler, Lisa. Deschenes, Lea. Editors

1st edition.

ISBN: 978-1-935904-99-1

Interior Layout by Lea C. Deschenes

Cover Designed by Bill Jonas

Cover Art and Interior Illustrations by Raül Villarreal

Edited by Lea C. Deschenes and Lisa Sisler

Special thanks to Lightning Bolt Donor, Weston Renoud

“Lessons From a Rock” by Annie Finch appeared previously in *Diner*.

Printed in Tennessee, USA

Birch Bench Press

Long Beach, CA

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SPECIAL THANKS

The editors would like to thank the following people:

Victor D. Infante for his tolerance of weekend-long editorial sessions and taco runs; Matt Marnett for his encouragement and for letting random poets sleep on the floor; the poetry community of New England College for their friendship and continuous support; the poets of Write Bloody and their Grand Poobah, Derrick Brown for their enthusiasm and contagious spirit; Bruce & Mickey Sisler for parental services rendered and the loan of a car when most needed; Dorinda Wegener and Ivy Page for occasionally talking the editors off ledges; Michael Waters and Mihaela Moscaliuc for their sage advice and great parties; and Ilya Kaminsky for serving as constant reminder of the joy of poetry.

Finally, we would like to thank the wonderful authors who have sent us an amazingly diverse and accomplished body of work.

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A Note from the Editors

The Other is Big. Really Big. We are in no position to attempt to encompass its full scope in one small note, nor can we claim to have captured all of it in this anthology.

This ambiguity and unwieldiness is what drew us to this concept as an anthology subject—it requires each poet to wrestle with its definition for themselves. The Other exists only in the negative space around the Self and often says as much or more about its definers than those it attempts to define. As artists, we were intrigued by the notion of not only cataloging stories of conflict with the other, but of reconciliation and blurred boundaries between Self and Other.

The poems that follow approach the Other with techniques as diverse as their authors and tackle it from various viewpoints: on societal or interpersonal scales, sounding off through borrowed voices and digging to uncover those strange corners of Self that remain foreign to their owners.

We hope that you find these poems as thought-provoking and moving as we do.

—*Lisa SIsLER & Lea C. DesCHENES, EDITORS*

*“For the poem is making toward an Other,
each thing, each person is a form of this Other.”*

- Paul Celan

I WRITE YOU WITH THE INTENTION OF AMENDMENT
BY DORINDA WEGENER

Because you were a quart-berry basket filled with silver bells,
and I was the dried carrion carried by crows.
Because you were a fig tree with new roots,

and I, a garden of snakes. Because you were
a purse of gold coins, the last land of lands:
I have palmed this prayer in my pocket

till it turned stone, and you housed this stone
in your heart until it turned hardwood.
I have orphaned myself from the word

mother: the oxeye daisies pass to stiff asters as the bees
jump rabbit-foot clover, cone to cone, stitching the season
late is how I finished the family sampler

to cover the next generation's hope chest.
I need to scavenge the mother-daughter sentiment
from years of burnt eggs and runny oat, for I am done

arguing over tongues and the scorn of steel wool.
Matriarch, of the vine which scurries with myths
unseen, we have nursed through hunger's red music.

I create anew, name from your metronym and now understand;
momma, I write you with the intention of amendment, with thrift
to thrive penances: green as forgiveness, trepid as love.

As SLOW as POSSIBLE

BY TONY BROWN

Sept. 5, 2001:

A group of musicians and philosophers begin to inflate the bellows of a church organ in Halberstadt, Germany, in preparation for a performance of John Cage's piece, "As Slow As Possible".

Hate's eyes pop open;
he gets up, dresses,
steps outside.

Hate finds that while most people do not want to talk to him,
there are still others who embrace him, taking him to mean something
he never wanted to be;
and all Hate can do is numbly
submit, for *no* does not mean *no*,
when your name is Hate.

Although he's dragged it with him for so many years,
Hate does not understand his own baggage.

In idle moments, he tries to pretend that his name is
meaningless. He tells himself it's
simply a breath
pushed through a half smile, ending in a full stop
behind his tongue.
Every other thing it carries
was added by others along the way.

Hate thinks of himself as having had
so much potential.
It's all their fault
for having robbed him.

"As Slow As Possible" was originally written in 1944, at the end of WWII, as a piano piece that would last a half hour or so, based on the natural decay of the notes being played. This organ arrangement virtually eliminates the possibility of decay, and creates the space for the performance of an indefinitely long piece of music.

Hate prefers silence.
Assuming that to be a disability, everyone who meets him

offers Hate
a voice to speak through.

When he does attempt to speak on his own behalf,
Hate's throat cracks.
The edge of his own meaning salts his tongue.
Nothing green can grow there.

The vision of those who now inflate the bellows is that this piece will be played beginning to end, and that the distance between the beginning and end of this performance will be 639 years. The people who will play this music will die before completing their service to the piece. The people who will complete the service are not yet born.

In slack moments Hate tells himself:

"If I were to change careers, I'd be a baker.
All the loaves I baked
would split open at the far end
and grow larger as they were eaten.
You'd never want for more,
would never get to the end of a loaf.

If I were to marry
I'd pick a partner named Bread Dancer.
If Bread Dancer and I were to have children
they'd be named Easter and Breakfast.
Bread Dancer would dance the bread dance
for each person
who bought bread.

After many years
I would leave the business to my children,
and they would bake for others' children,
and that's the way
it would go for as far out
as I can see."

The church that holds the organ was purchased strictly to house this organ and this performance. It was unused for years, and is now refurbished as a place for the longest music to stretch out. There are still pipes waiting to be installed. This organ cannot even yet play all the notes necessary to complete the piece.

Hate finally moves from his home, burning it
behind him, leaves in the dead hour before dawn,
taking little with him, no ID, no passport.

Hate becomes a monk
on multiple roads,
plays at pilgrim and tinker,
but always ends up a soldier,
always regrets,
turns away,
always, always,
always.

Feb. 5, 2003:

*The first chord of the piece is struck upon that organ. Lead weights hold the keys
down, and the notes will sound for the next year and a half.*

Hate, after poisoning
many years
with his wandering,
discovers the Halberstadt church
and enters to pray
for amnesia.

Everything must be possible, even if it has not yet been imagined.

JASON VOORHEES' FIRST DAY AT IN AND OUT
BY AMANDA CHIADO

You can understand Jason's discontent
On his first day of work.
He was too old for killing
And thrilling the panties off of young hotties
On the lakeside.

He was a wrinkled man now
And he needed a non-killing gig.
He couldn't stand the white
Uniform, he just wanted to get his hands
On some ketchup to destroy it.

He'd been fired from Dairy Queen,
Slapped his boss with a Dilly Bar
Yanked his arm from the socket
Then, made a blizzard out of the arm.
Apparently, that is against policy.

He'd also been fired from Petsmart
For eating innumerable parakeets
And one small dog
That wouldn't stop barking.

But today he felt good about burgers
And dressing them up in ketchup.
He decided he might smile
For the first time
if a pretty girl ordered a double,
But first he washed his
mask, and practiced his hello.

In the blur of training videos
And people, whom he thought,
All harbored a legitimate reason
To be murdered—
He was capable although
Non-communicative.

"A killer fry guy," who could tell
Just when to give a rest to
what burns. He over salted.
That was his "good quality
gone bad," the boss said.

That night he lay in bed with a little
Cheese left on the corner
Of his scarred mouth, his free meal.
He was surprised at the thickness
Of the vanilla shakes. He thought
About the thickness of human skin.
It made his old scars hurt
To suck out that vanilla sludge.

His uniform lay on his chair
As he watched *Three's Company*,
The apron happily red.

He started to dream about
His favorite part: the sizzle
Of the grills, and the pink meat hissing
On gray skins, how it burned a bit,
When it was flipped from back to front.

*FOR THE MEN WHO CALL
THE RAPE CRISIS HOTLINE AND MASTURBATE*

BY CORRINA BAIN

When the counselors meet to discuss techniques
invariably a few of us have heard from you
town criers of a dreadful village.
Perfecting your narrative, pretending
that you are not doing what you are
breathily, doing. Sped-up edge of the voice, reflection
of your slapping hand. Or else a damp languor
like quicksand, how slowly you unfold the syllables

into the receiver. Raped, you say, by a gang
of teen-aged girls in leather mini skirts.
You say, they drizzled chocolate syrup over you,
that you licked the soles of their shoes. The list is endless.
And how can you think that would be new to us? To me?
How can you imagine that we have had no news
from the Land of Penthouse Letters, from the coercion
of quote unquote amateur films?

So the counselors, as I said, report on it.
I think you would like that part, the gale
of nervous laughter like cherry blossoms
flitting in the air. They say how they handled it.
How they got rid of you, Sick-o. Shifting their
feminist buttocks in the folding chairs.
The handful of minutes you secure for yourself
stolen from us. If you must know, the counselors
are lovely. Everything you would hope from their
reliably female voices, encouraging, listening, on
your lonely nights. Their big, dewy eyes like fawns.

I wonder what exactly it is that you like. If you are hoping
for the quivering nerves of a new counselor
afraid to cut you off. Or if you enjoy the moment
when we recognize you, the sharp inhale that means
you have been severed, again, from human contact
found out for what you are.

You may well think you are the only one. That you
invented this. Not knowing that we keep your
number on a special roster, alongside a dozen
others. Not knowing how familiar, the desire to think of sex
that is not your responsibility. I sit with the other counselors
and their pantomime disgust, but to me
you sound like the squeak of flesh across a greasy mirror
the whole, false, detail-laden story something I could come up with
as I surrendered to the vibrator's humming petition.

I think of you often, as I look at the picture of someone
who does not know that I am looking at a picture of them.
I wonder whether you dress up for it—if the pasty roll
of your gut oozes over the top of your lacey briefs.

I follow protocol, I get you off the phone
but in your damp breath, I hear the echo.
I know that we are both alone
in messy apartments. I imagine us twins in that
no one we truly wanted has truly chosen us
that underneath the ring of filth at the back of your neck
behind the furred yellow plaque on your teeth
is the gleam of loneliness, like a family resemblance.

More than any other story that I can tell
you are what spurs outrage into my friends
what the other counselors say they cannot abide, cannot sustain.

If it were only my choice, I would let you go on.
Questionable, if that is even kindness.
Let you tell your whole imagined story—
grunt and swear and finish it
palpitate—
writhe.

