MEAT FOR TEA

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THE VALLEY REVIEW

CHÂTEAUBRIAND

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

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salutations from the editor

Greetings dear reader and welcome to the Châteaubriand issue. While most think of the luxury filet mignon dish for two, I like to recall the purported founder of romanticism in French literature, François-René de Châteaubriand. Lately, I've come to ponder whether print media itself is becoming a romantic notion. Especially since I've watched so many seminal print journals fold in recent years. A recent conversation on that musky site that I've been meaning to leave forced me to confront this very notion. The tweety chat was on the hotly contested practice of charging submission fees and I threw my hat into the ring, making it clear that my little fee helps cover the cost of shipping physical contributor's copies all over the country. "This is a digital age," I was swiftly informed. "There's no need to make print copies," she went on. I agree…there is no actual need, but what of desire?

Is there a need for paintings, sculptures, leather-bound volumes, vinyl records, perfumes, spices, and all of the things that make the world lovelier? Perhaps not, but how much are our lives enhanced by the inclusion of these non-digital things? Things we can have, hold in our hands, smell, touch, and maybe even things with pages we can actually turn.

And with this brief sermon, I present to you Châteaubriand, pleased for you at the delights you will encounter within…when you turn the pages.

Besos y Abrazos,
Elizabeth

working in red dark

Thomas Reed Willemain

My first real job
quality control
local paper mill
coating Polaroid stock.

Adding backcoat
thwarting photons
no bits of light
should ever get through.

Sampling each roll
zapping with light
looking for dots
in a darkroom of red light.

Working in red dark
Samples in hands
dipping in chemicals
watching them dry.

Like an astronomer
searching in star plates
but lacking optics
and lacking science.

Untrained eyes
searching for dots
too many? too big?
Quality Control!

I was unskilled
just doing as told
not asking questions
alone in red dark.

Bored in red dark
picturing my girlfriend
or a forbidden girl,
enhancing my red.

Counting dots in red dark
thinking red thoughts
a green kid in red
earning a paycheck.

wood pigeons

Peter Tacy

Two by two, coo to coo
one after the other; "Yoo-hoo!
Are we two anew, we two?
Or…who's new to you?"

Oh, there's familiar syntax
in it…pause and call, relax —
as if more is left to say
and yet — goes on that way.

One bird arrived as another flew;
yet the chant went on: "You!
Are you the doo I one day knew,
who's truly true, among the few?"

Bored, I drift away. Animal lust
is what it is; and then, I must
see what my lover has to say
about the way we'll live today…

the war writers

John Guzlowski

They're all alike

They tell you
about the bodies
like bundles of rags
the splintered trees
the blood so red
no words can nail it down

You hear it
in Stephen Crane
in Wilfred Owen
in Thucydides

Remember the butterfly
in *All's Quiet*
on the Western Front?

Sure you do

Vonnegut's soldier
asking "Why me?"

Yeah, that too

You've heard it
all before

Every word

And you'll hear it again

or your son will
or your daughter will

love after the war

John Guzlowski

Pulling back the covers, she sees he's taken
off his pants and his prosthetic leg too,
but not the straps that bind it to his stump.
His right leg ends just above the knee.
He has no calf, no ankle, no foot, no toes.

She sees he's sleeping, perhaps dreaming
about the day the doctors cut his leg off.
She looks out the window, hears a dog
barking somewhere far off and wonders
what it's like not to have a leg,
rising in the morning and seeing it gone,
the eternal surprise of its forever loss.

She's read the great stories of longing
and love, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,
Romeo and Juliet, *Love in the Time*
Of Cholera, and knows they're just
children's stories. She knows no one
loves another person more than we love
our own limbs and cheeks, our fingers
and faces and open loving hands.

She lies down slowly next to him
And pulls the comforter over them.

the belle of the eunuch ball or why i called the cops on karen

Connolly Ryan

"Every sentence I use refer to women and their names."-Talking Heads

Angela likes her jellyfish beige and willing.
If you see Beth, tell her I said that everyone
is no longer everyone. She'll know what I mean.
Lest incest ruin her celestial youth, Celeste ghosted
her ridiculously alluring cousin Chaz. Dhalia walked
her lavender-espaliered spaniel across the seriously
weeping street. Ah Edna, the rose of God's idiocy,
The Belle of the Eunuch Ball, what will we ever do
with the envelopes of free time we hoarded for just
this very moment? When I first French-kissed Francesca,
I could feel my entire childhood tumescing.
Naturally Gertrude prefers to ring her own neck.
Halfway through a brick of piebald Halvah, Hester
both belched and farted and each of her spectrum-incandesced
adolescent sextuplets quivered with such gelid jollity
that the ceiling fan, usually taciturn, suddenly became
ebullient and very-near-literally chopped our freakin' ears off.
Is Israel real?, inquired Isabel who was on her way
to go see Palestinian Light Orchestra play the Vatican..
Be nice to Janice, her chihuahua has leukemia
and her children have termites. With every intention
of being generically ironic, I called the cops on Karen.
No sir, to say I was in love with both Lydia and Lilith
would NOT be an overstatement, but neither one
of those babies have my innocent features. .

Melanie had the smell of a peach orchard, but her brother,
my best friend, stank of ridicule and failure. When you
asked me if I thought Nola was gay I thought you said Enola Gay,
which seemed bizarrely insensitive considering what
my grandmother went through! Well, whether Oona
really was caught canoodling with an umlaut or not, I'm not
the grammar gestapo and could care less than less.
Pretty much everyone had counted Pauline out
of the knish-eating competition, but with only a mustardy
furlong to go, she and the reigning champion finished
in a dead heat. Liquored up, shellacked, three shit-fans
to the wind, whatever you call it, Querida was definitely
none of those. in fact she was a curvy pillar of shattering
clarity who once took me on a mystical hayride which I never
quite learned how to get off of. Ronda was her name, mankind
was her game. Which is to say, she actually hunted people.

She always shared her sandwiches with me, Sissy did,
and I can still cry just thinking about it.
I don't have to do anything you tell me to do, commanded seven
year old Thalia, to both her Snoopy and Winnie the Pooh dolls,
whose faces promptly sank in shame. "One of the great mundane
heroines of politely radical literature, Edith Wharton's Undine Spragg,
is immortalized by the gnarled elegance of her name alone," opined
Ursula under a parasol on Christmas Day.
While introducing myself to the shyest girl at the party,
whose name turned out to be Violet and to whom a decade
later I would be tragically affianced (we'd both perish
in a yacht-wreck on our way to go watch billionaires drown).

Not everyone knows, but the name Wendy never existed until the author
of Peter Pan conceived it as a nifty and catchy rhyme for "Fwendy," a tender
and child-like way to refer to a friend. My aptly named ex, Xena, not only
excelled at xylophone, but she could also play a fairly vicious zither.
On the avenue she lived, there were precious few venues
for the lithe thespian Yvette to recite her eccentric sonnets
and alchemize ecstatic vignettes. Never lacking spunk nor
pizzazz, on the trapeze or elsewise, Zola choked on a lozenge and expired.

how quiet the house

Jane Yolen

The door shuts behind you,
and the house raises
its wooden finger
to a stone lip.
All goes quiet except
the tap-tap of my fingers
on the computer keys.
Poems long compressed
inside my head leap forth,
some better than I remembered,
some worse for their long sleep.

Philip Kobylarz

willa cather

Linda Chown

How words as words as worst
May intrude on the face you see.
Words as worst stab out the stuffing, the good stuff,
And leave you panting for the oil,
The smear stuff that makes it it.

Willa Cather knew through the moon that stars beat the night
Into lasting cream, that willy is not nilly. She knew to see the burn
of fires before the flat flab of name.

Reading her is like an unseen jump
Into always with everything there
nearby just right, not words but illuminations for your you to see.

walt and emily

Peter Tacy

How can we think of them without each other?
Or to ask this in another mode, how can we think of ourselves
without keeping ever-closer company with them?

Walt and Emily: they made others uncomfortable.
In that, for starters, they were American!

Walt, chanting in his apostate, worshipful voice;
celebrating all by encompassing all, notwithstanding
some resistance; Emily, celebrating all by seeing small,
the prime ingredient in everything that can be whole.

Strategic liars; a national trait. I am you, and us,
and everything else, sings Walt. I am no one. Are you too?
murmurs Emily. Brave individuals, pretending otherwise.
Both conscious of the poet's pulpit; both players.

Oh, we are not easy to deal with, we Yanks. Don't bother
trying. We're more interested in us than you, anyway.

But come along with us! A voyage of discovery?
Tryst? Journey without destination? Lover's quarrel?
Whatever! Walt and Emily will show us on our way.

consequences

R.L. Peterson

My high school shop teacher, World War II veteran, Mr. Blasingame, suggested I keep a journal when he learned I was enlisting in the Marine Corps. "We think we'll remember things that are important, but time clouds our recall button, and we forget. You don't have to write an essay. Just jot down enough to recall what happened. You'll be glad you did later." It sounded silly to me then and it sounds even sillier now, but in spite of myself, I started a journal a few days before Marine bootcamp. It's been a great tool to help me control the ghosts in my life.

10 June 63

Made it with Yvonne.

That's all. Like sex with a beautiful, married woman on my eighteenth birthday was no big deal. I'd arrived at Hank and Yvonne Cirillo's at 10 o'clock, ready to work. Tall maples shade their house, their lawn manicured, sidewalks lined with red geraniums. No hint that ghosts prowled the green pastures bordered by white painted fences.

I park my bike and put my sack lunch in the bough of a nearby maple. Yvonne, in white blouse and black slacks, auburn hair in a bun, lips painted red, answers my ring. "Good morning, Ken. Thanks for being on time. We've work to do."

Hank, gray chest hairs peeking from his open neck, flowered silk shirt, is all business. "Good to see you, Boy. While I'm gone, Yvonne's in charge." His grip would wring water from a rock.

"Off to be a Marine, huh? Here's a little something for ya." He slips a twenty-dollar bill into my shirt pocket.

Surprised, I manage a weak, "Thank you."

I've worked for Hank and Yvonne before. They're regulars at the Fair Oaks Diner where I 'pig tail' filling water glasses, pouring coffee, clearing tables so the waitress can take food orders faster. Hank's a legend around here. His spice import/export business employees forty or so locals, mostly women, pays well and offers benefits. Folks joke Hank went to visit the Grand Canyon and brought home the scenery. Yvonne, regal as a swan, is a real head turner in her late twenties. Hank's sixty if he's a day.

"Be careful. Don't get shot in some silly war," Hank calls as he drives off in his red Cadillac.

Yvonne seems out of breath. "We'll work down by the lake. I'll meet you there."

***

I walk past the dog kennel with the green shutters I painted last fall. Their lake glistens in the sun, straw bales stacked next to the fence. A wooden bridge arches gracefully to a small island maybe twenty-five yards out.