

Driving Past the Oliver House

One day late in 1966 in quiet Hattiesburg,
Phillip Oliver, nineteen, shot
his step-mother four times
in the face and chest with a ten-gauge,

Drove what was left of her
in the back of the family's Ford pick-up
out to an empty lot
on the edge of town,

Unloaded her and emptied
a five gallon can of gasoline
on her and dropped a whole blazing box
of Ohio blue-tip kitchen matches
down on her and
backed away quickly.

He then drove to the police station
downtown and told everything. That's
how the newspaper reported it, at least,
that's how I recall it.

Funny thing though,
it was also reported that
friendly Phillip, cutting lawns and
doing odd-jobs, just out of high school,

Said he "didn't *mind* the lady,"
they had argued a bit that particular morning.
'His father had remarried a little quickly, he thought—maybe',
and that was that,
or so, I remember.

In any event, driving by what, for many years,
was the "Oliver Place", a non-descript brick Ranch
at Adeline Street and Twentieth Avenue,
and not favored by realtors,
was never the same.

Star Birth of the Word ULASSA

Just now, May 23, 2013, I have in my conceit
 created a brand new word, Ulassa,
 at 8:05 AM. As I write,
 Ulassa is like an infant star that burns white hot hydrogen and
 joins—who knows—988,000 English words or more,

As a new birthed star joins our known universe of—who knows—
 22 septillion other stars,
 give or take a few quadrillion,

150 billion galaxies
 150 billion stars
 Do the math humbly,

Ulassa—
 The Oxford English Dictionary will say it means
 “the short sense of escape we can experience,
 when something really bad has happened”,

like, a child'sister has gone missing or
 we hear we may lose a foot from frostbite,
 so in those short escapes from ongoing pain,

We get will get *ulassa*,
 from meditation or the bottom of
 a rum cola—

or the red coals
 of a summer campfire,
 the molecules of carbon
 drinking oxygen.

Ulassa in the dictionaries,
 will have no real etymology
 for a while,

Having first breathed air only
 on this morning of
 May 23, 2013,

Ulassa will enter poems
 and maybe yoga classes,
 will become a cocktail and

an expensive perfume, eventually
a breed of cat, or surely the
name of a racehorse,
even a minor crater on
the surface of the moon,

Ulassa will live for four hundred years.
104 languages, give or take,
will borrow and ingest it,

Before it burns out like a star or “odd bodkin”
from Shakespeare, just remember,
It started Here, on this day.

Morningwriting

8:59am I know I need a poem'
so, fountain pen and pad at the ready
sitting slantwise view
on our tiny back deck
the morninglit green curve of my tall cinnamon fern
bold, bright, near- yellow the way
the sun insinuates itself on it
weaving through upward layers
of east facing trees
that let light shimmer this frond poised
as if it were a ballerina highlighted onstage
the hanging basket of mauve miniature petunias just above
almost obscure, that sun does not yet favor them
their moment on the stage will come soon enough.

And now I'm ready to think about that poem.

DEDICATION

She breathed deeply, then wrote:

“This book
would not have been possible,
without both my slyness
and fortitude,
in evading the distractions of
my husband’s badgering, drinking and
threatened suicide attempts,
and my children’s sweetly
relentless neediness.

Candles and Cathedrals

The many Notre Dames of France blazed
with candle constellations
nine hundred years ago but
that's just the start of it these
chiseled mountains rose from
Rouen, Chartres, and all over north France

Because candlemakers existed,
construction went into the summer nights
even if the project took two hundred years
Because carters, joiners, stone-masons, glaziers,
 had to build, to move
Because butchers and greengrocers
 had to feed the builders and movers
Because musicians, singers could not wait the decades out
to send their polyphonies not just up to God, but
to these early hardhats and townsfolk,
dragooned farmers working,
yes even by candlelight, but

That's just the start of it, we do forget
that string quartets, Erasmus, Luther, Dante,
lacemakers, servants delivering night toddies
and seeing to chamber pots--
this all was not squared away
before the sun went down, so

those slender tallow cylinders
topped by redyellow flames over
tiny halfmoons of blue heat
pushed civilization forward,

Not waiting for gaslights or Edison.