

REFLECTOR

CARRIE REEDE

Reflector 1995

Shippensburg University

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Thank You To:

The Slate for being *Reflector's* surrogate mother while its office was under construction; Rich Morgan, Tim McFeely, and the English Department for bringing the *Reflector* office up to date; Kim van Alkemade for giving *Reflector* special access to the Dauphin Computer Lab; James Book for on campus visits and thorough printing advice; Dean Robert Golden, Dr. Michael Bibby, and Prof. Dev Hathaway for contributing to *Reflector*; the dedicated *Reflector* Staff members and editors who worked hard as a team to get *Reflector* ready to print, and Prof. Dev Hathaway and Dr. John Taggart for being patient, supportive advisors.

The *Reflector* is a student magazine funded by the Shippensburg University Student Association. The *Reflector* welcomes submissions of poetry, fiction, and photography. All work receives careful and equal attention. Submissions should be sent to *Reflector*, c/o Cumberland Union Building. Interested students are urged to participate and are welcome to join the staff.

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Nothing Hidden

I gasp for air at the sea's crown.
Dolphins and swordfish gather at the surface

evading the gnarled men with nets,
the ones in boats.

I don't know how long I have been submerged.
It seems like years.

On the shore the black gull pecks
a crab open ripping its guts out

to collect sand, then leaves.
Above, a coast guard's helicopter

beats down an emphatic boom
while passing low on the horizon.

The pilot: indescribable, unclear
but you, you are easily defined.

Stop here and think.
You are reading this poem.

You enjoy poetry, Yet
reasons why are all your own.

The helicopter passes and
silence starts seeping (that was an alliteration)

into the air once again.
Bright blue blanket on the sand

holds a girl in a crimson red
bathing suit (alliteration and color contrast).

You are now picturing this girl
and the blanket in your mind.

Her mother carries a picnic basket
full of sandwiches.

And in the basket lies a loaf of bread
(alliteration and iambic pentameter)

I bet you read it over again
just to make sure:

Here, I'll do it for you
And in the basket lies a loaf of bread.

The girl in the red starts singing
'Mary had a little lamb' (I bet now

you are singing it in your own head).
While I am stuck here

with the dolphins.
In the water they watch me drown,

While on the shore they're safe and sound
(cute little couplet).

-Julie Waters

Relapse

Clench

Clench

Clench

In the fists of your hands the blanket is creased tight against your chin. Dark, night, black, blind. All at once. All this time. Your mind has impregnated the eyes in your head with flash backs of the movie previously viewed. Left, right, ceiling, floor, feet. Below your feet--nothing. Black. The demons serenade you by the foot of the bed. Impregnated and born from your mind. Relapse.

-Julie Waters

Poem 3

Boredom in the eyes of women

at a laundromat, class specific,

Against the restlessness of their children,

men absent, constructs a world.

Deep in the eyes of Gloria trots

the beautiful woman she saw today on 5th and Broad.

wearing that majestic fur and those long silk gloves

and carelessly puffing away on her long cigarette,

(My! What would the environmentalists say?)

Still the woman, so elegant in her stride

with her chin held high and her eyes falling down

on every little peon that happened past her,

received the utmost respect from Gloria.

Moving past the depth of Gloria's eyes and into her mind

She imagines herself in the shoes, and they were oh so elegant,
of the fabulous Madame X.

Yes, she would flaunt her gold and silver

in the faces of all men, boasting in her singlehood.

She had earned it all herself and every man in her path

would shudder and lower his head to the depths of his guts

because he would never be as superior as she.

Boredom? Boredom in the laundromat? I think not.

This is Gloria's world, constructed.

-Julie Waters

Night

In the quiet hours of darkness and wind,
Pale moonlight casts strange shadows,
People's minds are full of dreams and sin,
And small creatures sleep in hollows.

When the world is silent and compliant,
Most find the peace they think is sacrosanct

But there are beings who live in night's still:
Insects that click, rodents that fly,
Predators that kill,
Prey that die.

At sunset, another world begins,
One cast in darkness and in the winds.

-Paul Ballas

Voice

Outside in the night-lit field, my voice goes out.
It doesn't clank and Clomp in my ears, like inside.
It doesn't scatter in all directions, bounced around chaotically
by four walls and a ceiling.
It goes out in the direction I point it: hit or miss,
it's my fault.

Most of it misses its target, carried away by the night breezes.
My voice goes out and stays out, never to return.
My words seem lost in the vastness of the space before me.
But some of it is received by the leafy trees,
who whisper their undecipherable responses back to me.

-Paul Ballas

On Being

skin rubs skin
catches, hesitates

example:

silver thin	silence	skin (so)u(nd)	
hung oval skin	sounds	skin (wo)r(ds)	
deep beauty	skin	sound	silent self
deep violet	words		
violence	skin	words	beauty
cursed garden	selfs	stripped of protection	
hung flesh upon flesh	skin	(humbled)	
oak skinned and skinny		skin of grace	
nailed to itself	beauty rose:		
	sound words		
	wound swords.		

-Beth Scroggin

hang man
hung men
one letter separates
life and death

stumbling
forgetting the pacing
falling
illusion alluding

silence always speaking
restoring order

-Beth Scroggin

Defining Silence

free from
making sound

take silence
you find

see

ice

sin

and small

I

silence
the mingling
of noise and emotion
example
stillborn son
Challenger countdown

silence
not pronounced
or expressed
as the "e"
in alone
is silent

as the "e"
in alone
is silent
but vital
(especially
in death)

-Beth Scroggin

Soapbox

Son, you have
this sundry way
of grabbing the
horns by the
bull. Fight
what you shutter
to stutter, place
your lips around
a permanent
social megaphone--
good to hound
the sound on
the found.

-a. j. shank

Meditation

Wearily, these nightmares
of time aged

rememberings outpour
their uncertain intentions.

Hard times rip up
the musicboxed tunnel,
open score mixed

with tears. A supply
of shirts aligns the

staircases: purple cups,
striped excuses. Mists
remark the, what, how.

An incessant horn
blows an humbled
impression, passing through
numbing nuances.

-a.j.shank

Rain on the Strip

sit, Think.

It is now only rain

cloudy, wet

worms & what not.

In Spain the rain

is mostly very plain.

Did you hear me?

The walrus has said

the time has come.

Let's go out.

And muddle through

the puddles.

Down the street

the neon

glistens through

the gray.

"Bring me my coat--

very warm." You

Couldn't find

your way out
of a crooked carrot.

I don't care for
the way you sneeze.

If you think
it's funny

It's not,
a nose job
is a terrible
thing to blow.

That is in
Hollywood,
you start with
the boobs and
find the
Silicon
in them.

The world is
nowhere to
be found.

Talent can be
used as a tool,
although
it isn't
as effective as
plastic.

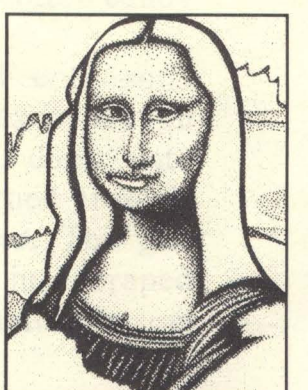
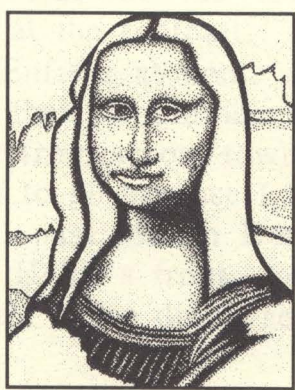
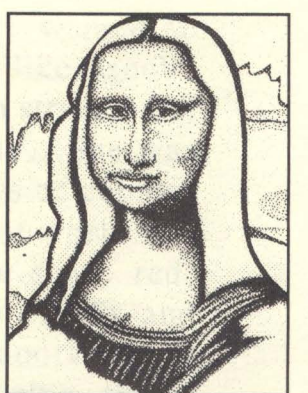
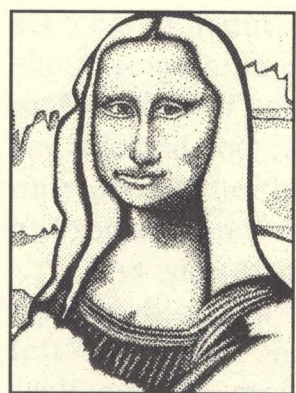
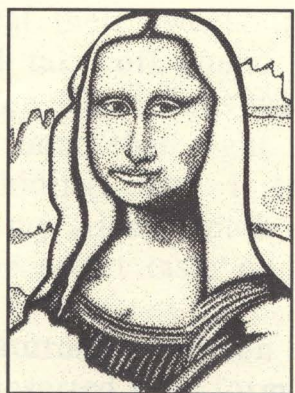
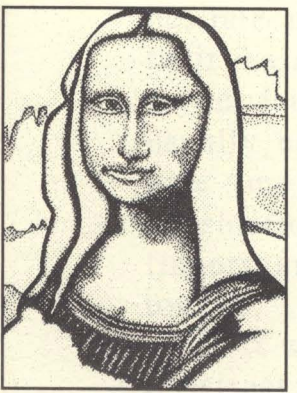
The roles are pouring
like cats and dogs,
out of the
ceiling of fate,
lucky breaks

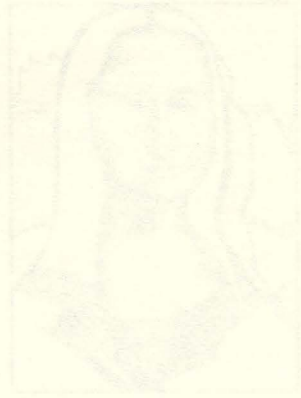
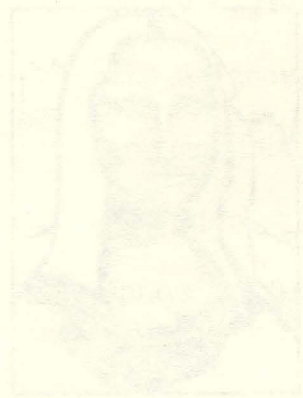
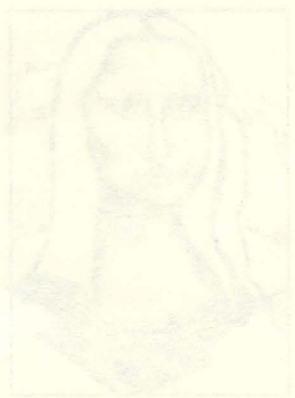
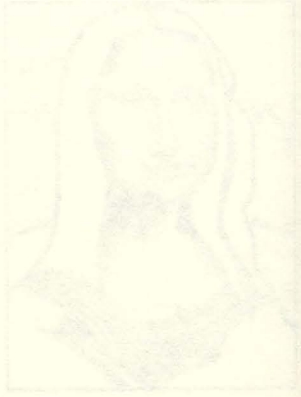
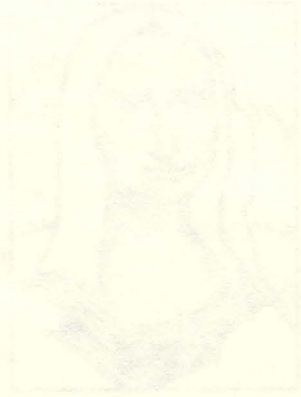
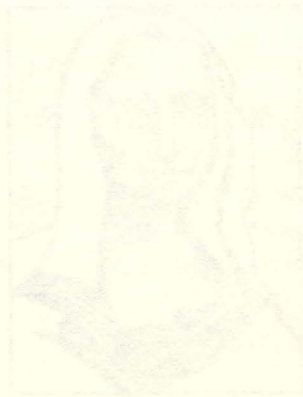
for one
Joe Q. Actor
to fall over
on his way to
the casting couch.

The marquee is
the place to be.

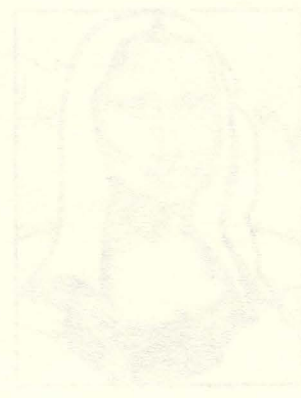
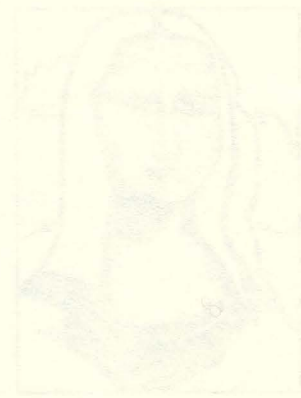
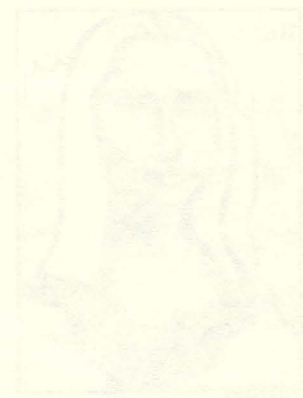
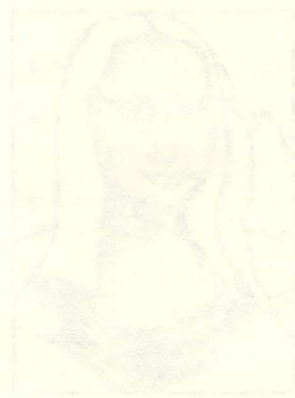
At last
the sunsets on
the strip.

The walk home
is long and wet.
A song is overheard
in passing...
"Happy days
are here again.
The sky above is
gray and thin.
The rain it
sprays and flays
my skin.
Happy days
are here again."
Joe Q. Actor
didn't get the part.
That's okay, Joe.
The world needs
another waiter
on the strip.
-a.j. shank





Happy days



COTTON

The only time I had seen kids with cotton candy was at the fair. This girl had it in the street, in the rain, sheltering the precious pink stuff from the heavy droplets with a transparent umbrella.

My immediate reaction was to steal it from her, but something about the extravagance of the whole thing meant I couldn't. It wasn't because she was so pretty. I didn't used to care about that. It was just the simple act of her walking down my street waving something I could never afford.

There were several things I knew I shouldn't do, but I did them anyway. If it had been any of the other girls on the street I wouldn't hesitate to steal their sweets, pull their hair and take off round the corner laughing. Their Dads would usually come round that night and give me a hiding, but I took consolation in my sticky mouth and fingers and the sweet taste on my tongue.

It was Saturday afternoon and the street was deserted apart from me and the girl who paraded towards me on the other side of the road. Everyone was at the football. We were playing Enfield at home and every now and then I could hear the crowd murmur from across town. I wasn't allowed to go because I had driven the ball past Martin Harris against Auntie Helen's front room window. Auntie Helen didn't seem

to be too mad, but she couldn't afford to fix it since she lost her job. A plastic bag was taped across the crack and it flapped occasionally in the wind. Dad said he would try and pay her next Friday.

I was sitting on the door step getting wet because I wasn't even allowed inside while Ma was cleaning. I noticed the girl wasn't like the ones I knew. She was pretty and she walked slowly up the street. She didn't look like she could ever laugh. She wore clean white shoes with heels that were too big for her.

She didn't look at me as she passed but her heels scraped along the flags and the rain padded on her little plastic umbrella. The sound seemed to taunt me. I wanted to shout something at her like "snob" or "go back to your own street," but she seemed too far away. She was only across the thin rows of cobbles but she was in a different world.

As she turned the sharp red-brick right-angle onto Collier St. and left me alone on my doorstep, I realized the most amazing thing. She had walked the full length of our street holding a stick of cotton candy and never taken a bite.

I was bored and cold so I followed her. Sometimes it was fun to follow people, to duck into doorways when they turned around. I thought I could scare her. This girl didn't turn around. She just scraped steadily along with her umbrella sort

of propped on her tiny shoulder.

She walked so slowly, in fact, that I caught up with her before the railway bridge. I didn't mean to catch her, I just wanted to see where she was going or where she came from. I felt like an idiot walking along beside her because although she didn't acknowledge me, she knew I was there.

"Where's the fair?"

She looked me up and down but didn't answer.

"Where did you get that?" I pointed an accusing finger at the cotton candy.

"My daddy gave it to me."

She spoke to me like I was stupid and I was at least four years older than her. I felt like telling her to get lost but she still hadn't tasted the candy and I figured that maybe she didn't want it.

"What's your name?" I tried to sound friendly.

"Wilkinson."

It sounded funny for a kid to use their last name. We called Jackie Boyle by his last name but that was different.

"No," I giggled. "What's your real name?"

"Miriam Wilkinson." This time she looked at me as if I was really stupid.

I remembered the name Wilkinson from over the gate of where my Dad and Ma and brother worked. Auntie Helen used to work there too.

"Do you live in the mill?"

"My daddy owns the mill but I live over there." She pointed across the allotments to the other side of the valley where a chalky drive led off the road to a cluster of orderly trees. I didn't go over to that side of the valley often. There were only a few houses over there and they seemed big and lonely and lifeless.

I thought about the name Wilkinson as I splashed along in the little river that ran along in the gutter. I could never just get wet. I had to get soaked. It seemed that I heard that name a lot. Especially when my Dad and Uncle talked on the way back from church. I thought maybe he owned our street because when Auntie Helen lost her job she said she would have to move. Dad shouted at her and told her just to wait and give the union a chance. She wasn't really related to us but she had always lived next door and I had always called her Auntie.

"Your Dad must be kind if he gives you things like that?" I looked at the candy and my eyes kind of stuck there.

She nodded her head and looked friendly for a moment. "I've got a pony and a doll's house as well." I couldn't understand why on earth anyone would want a pony let alone a doll's house, but I didn't laugh.

"My Dad usually takes me to the football. Does yours?"

"My Daddy is very busy," she

said as she glanced across at her house. We were walking parallel to it along Arkwright St. and I could see white walls through the fir trees.

I thought about how busy my own Dad was. Sometimes he didn't come home till I was in bed and he was always tired and angry. he talked a lot about the Union and he argued with people all the time. Sometimes Uncle John and some other men would come round and I would have to go to bed. I didn't get to see him much anymore.

It was better when I was really little and he worked at home in the attic. He had a loom up there, a lot of folks used to have them. I used to help him by spinning cotton with the wheel and loading the shuttle so the weaving was quicker. He used to tell me things about when he was a boy, and about how far away the cotton came from, and why it cost so much. We would work until the room got dim and we couldn't see the thread, then we would go downstairs and eat. It seemed like we had better meals back then. We didn't have to save our money and Dad didn't have to worry about losing his job.

"What do they make at your Dad's mill?" I had asked the question at home before but they usually just looked at each other and said things like: "Not enough, son!" or "Whatever's cheap."

"They used to make pretty things but now they just make

blankets and bandages."

We had turned the corner onto Main Street and were walking down the hill. I was still in the gutter and the little stream was welling up behind the heels of my boots and coming in through a hole in the sole.

"Why don't they make nice things anymore?"

She looked at her ladylike white shoes which were now grimy and wet, and shrugged.

We went to the mill once with school and they didn't seem to be making much of anything. A man called an overlooker showed us a long noisy machine that rolled across the wooden floor and could do the work of thirty people. I remembered because they called it a Jenny. I thought maybe they named it after the girl on our street who died there. She got her arm caught in a machine in a place called the devil room. My dad said that wasn't why they called it jenny. He said every mill had one and they were all called Jenny.

I had switched positions so I was next to the hand that held the cotton candy. From the new angle I could smell it. I thought about offering to hold it for her but she wouldn't have looked complete without it.

We started the incline up the other side of the valley and I could tell she was heading home. It occurred to me that I had a right to know what she had been doing on my street.

"Why were you out walking in the rain?"

"I wanted to wear my new umbrella." I never thought of wearing an umbrella, I always thought people just held them. She said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world, so I thought I must have been wrong.

"Why were you walking down our street?" I tried not to sound too suspicious of her but I think it came out wrong.

She answered in her usual sharp way, "I wanted to see some of my daddy's houses."

I hated the way she said it. She didn't know what she was talking about. They were our houses. I was angry and I wanted to do something that would make her cry. I wanted to rub some mud in her face, or kick her, or break her stupid umbrella, but I didn't want to lose the sweet stuff.

"They're our houses." I muttered.

I realized how close we were to the gates and the white pebble drive that belonged to her house. More than ever I wanted the candy.

"Don't you like cotton candy?" I asked through clenched teeth.

"It's prettier than real cotton."

I didn't care how flaming pretty it was, I cared about how it tasted. I was about to tell her when I realized she was right. I didn't mean the color like she did, because I didn't much care for pink. Real

cotton was dusty, it got in your hair and it stuck in your throat. It made people cough and made them ill. It didn't dissolve like the pink stuff.

We came to the gate and she opened it.

"I'm going now," she stated, "you can't come in."

She closed the gate and looked out from behind the bars. I didn't want to go in anyway. The place looked miserable and empty. I stood and watched her scrape up the driveway towards the house and I felt kind of sorry for her. She didn't seem like a kid at all. A tiny dog ran out towards her from somewhere in the garden. It was a stupid little thing with a bow in its hair. It looked like some kind of fluffy rat. As she bent to stroke it the candy was removed from the safety of the umbrella and exposed to the heavy rain until it shriveled and seemed to bleed.

She dropped the stick against the chalk chippings and ran towards the house as the pounding on her umbrella grew louder and more frequent. The wet dog took a lick from the mush and followed her, yapping as the color drained and mingled with the water on the driveway.

As I started to run downhill towards the cozy rows of houses on the other side of the valley, I wondered if she had any friends and why she was unhappy. I stopped to catch my breath at the corner of

Arkwright Street and looked through the oncoming dusk down the long straight road. A group of men huddled around the mill gates. I was close enough to recognize the familiar overcoats of two of the figures, but too far away to read the signs that they carried.

As I turned for the warmth of home, I heard the deep muffled roar from the football stadium and I guessed we must have won.

- David G. McCabe

Elysian Fields I Have Never Known

My blood is in my head
my soul is on the ground
i feel I am ready to die
take me god, if you can

The river runs deep and
clear with the color of
blood. Won't you bathe
in it with me?

Fluid movement of that
which contains life
precious life
touching my bare leg
my shoulders pushing forward

Pushing forward the movement
setting my body on fire
feeling the current cut into my
spine and washing down

This frame covered with my own
desire to dance and to become
to grasp my own soul
to taste that which needs not be

And god won't you dance?
come wrap those arms
around me and stand before me.
dance with me, if you can

- Paul Koufufus

Oscar Wilde

where are you tonight?
and what did you see on the frontier?
is it what I would have seen?

We are a nation that is lost--
Nothing more than a child
who swims past its ability to return.
Did you enjoy your travels and
who taught you to drink so well?

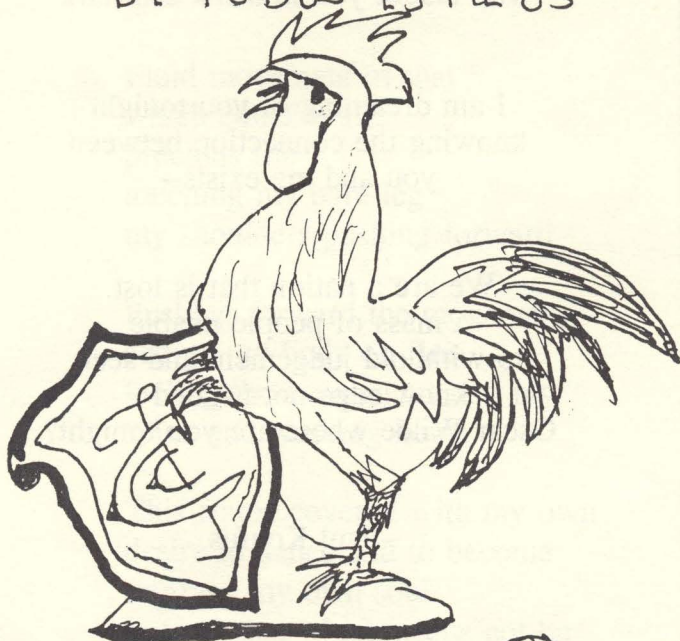
I am dreaming of you tonight
knowing the connection between
you and me exists--

We are a nation that is lost.
a mass of people unable
to withhold judgement and seek
knowledge not handed--
Oscar Wilde where are you tonight?

-Paul Koufus

1^a GRAN FABRICA DE NAIPES

DE TODOS ESTU OS



GALLO

de
Don Clemente

Handwritten signature or address

El Gallo #1

Tonight, my son cries
in the cold winter night,
dry and bitter, lifeless like
the walnut trees outside.

Tonight, my son cries in the room
next to mine, and I jerk up, tired
but steered by the nightlight
and repetition.

My son cries this cold night
in the room next to mine,
and the sweet smell of medicine
lingers in the room and clings
to my night shirt.

Finally in silence,
I sense somewhere
another child cries, perhaps
your son or daughter, perhaps
a child in your neighborhood,
a child with no one to comfort him.

And I repeat the motion
of my hand on a child's
forehead as I make my
way back to bed,
to the warmth
of my wife's body,
as it pressed next
to mine. And I wipe the
excess medicine from
a child's lips.

I fade into sleep
where nothing will remain in
the morning but the vague motion
of arms and legs and a cry
piercing my night.

-Jaime R. Juarez

2



EL DIABLITO

El Diabillito #2

Sometimes, I do not fear you,
as I should,
as 'ama has told me I should.
Sometimes, I find comfort
in your company,
welcome your marvelous mischievousness.

You become my friend, help me breathe,
be happy, almost childlike--
it really is a terrible thing.

You are unthinkable,
ugly, all red, with an ass's hoof,
a rooster's claw (great conversation
pieces over shots of tequila and beer).

Meanwhile, how is it
God's fallen angel
is so sexy
to all the *chavalas*,
maybe it's the horns
and pointy ears,
or that phallic tail.

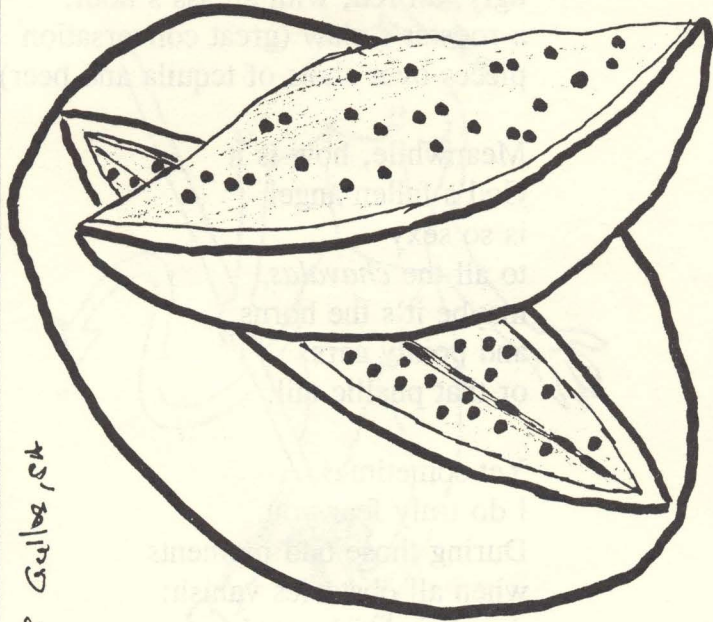
Yet sometimes,
I do truly fear you.
During those odd moments
when all obstacles vanish:
the air is brisk, cool,
and carries a hint of acidity.

Everything seems easy.

It is these moments,
I should fear you,
because it is then
when I want to go naked,
roll and piss on the ground,
let go a wild cry
and go for the throat.

-Jamie R. Juarez

28



Posttimpase Guillot, SA

LA SANDIA

La Sandia #28

We sit and talk
about nothing,
lament the few
remaining summer days.

You so palpable
so cool
in a summer dress,
I want to
freeze the instant.

I split a watermelon.
The sound engulfs the kitchen;
the caged parakeets chatter,
annoyed by the sound
or perhaps the sweet
sticky aroma of the fruit.

I pick out the seeds,
each black, slippery, hard,
as numerous as the stars:
offspring for another summer.

We share the heart,
string and sponge,
the prize
we fight over,
the irresistible piece
we both crave.

-Jaime R. Juarez

It's Like This, Cat...

The grey skies are moving
Swiftly past
With scamperings of blue clouds

Constantly shifting their shapes

And I sit and smoke

Pondering my life's history
Listening to your rising
Euphoric purr

Content with the minutes of attention
I can spare you each day

Out of my selfishness
That you cannot see
Unable to penetrate all the darkness

So for that I am grateful.

-Suh Reininger

Untitled

My body, worn from last night,
like every night.
I read once that routine combats loneliness.
My habits don't fight much of anything,
I wake every morning like a cigarette,
left to burn down to its end.
Unattended, the dying embers of unashed smoke
are as grey and lonely as you would expect.
I am dead today.
Memories make me miserable.
Remembrances of what I was,
can't replace what I am.
Salvation creeps through my head.
I inhale it like the scent of my lover,
lying naked beside me
as dawn slices across his angelic face.
It is his innocence I smell,
pure and virginal.
I am only young when he is in me,
reaching deliverance,
pushing out until there is only white.
But he is not mine,
and I am not young.

-Kristy Olsyn

Untitled

Intertwined, strangle.
The mind, taking and giving.
My mind has a masculine side,
I want without wanting to give.
And they fight (all ten of them),
over me, the woman, the feminine me.
All ten, are there ten? All ten little men.
Are there ten?
There's a decemvirate in my head and I want it dead.
It's mental suicide, I'm stronger than ten men.
It takes more than ten of those little men,
to take me, to rape me.
Long live the queen.
God save me, I am the queen, I am no queen.
Will it ever rain again?
I want more puddles to stomp in.
My mind is muddy and sick.
All cloudy brown and shallow,
lacking depth and clarity,
but you still can't see the bottom.

-Kristy Olsyn

Live

Living day to day

I like to watch the moon.

Smelling the Autumn air

delights me,

as does watching the moon.

People move

so quickly,

lives end

so easily;

to have not

watched the moon.

Can you smell

winter approaching?

Let's dance in the fields

beneath the shining sun,

dream of the snow

yet to come.

Follow me and live;

life has just begun.

--Allison Verdelli

DRIVING INSTRUCTION

He was late. John checked his watch again. 7:15. His instructor was supposed to be here at 7:00. John was outside on the porch swing. He leaned back, sighed, and kicked the porch railing to increase the velocity of the swing. For two hundred and fifty dollars you'd think that they could get here on time. He heard the phone ring inside. He made a move to get up, then stopped when through the window he saw his mom pick it up. He couldn't hear what his mom was saying, but he supposed that it had something to do with the driving instructor. Maybe the instructor couldn't make it. His mom hung up and came up to the window.

"The instructor just called, he said he'd be a little late," his mom said, her voice muffled by the two inch storm windows.

"No kidding," John said, mainly to himself. His mom turned and went to the kitchen. She picked up a dust cloth and started to dust the chest that held all of the family China. She seemed to dust a lot more since dad died. John once heard that forty percent of all dust was dead skin, and wondered if there was any connection. He looked towards the cul-de-sac that was in front of his house, which was strangely desolate. It wasn't but two weeks ago that he attended his first Easy Method driving school course. He sat through two films that emphasized the importance of wearing a seat belt, and three that told the dangers of drinking and

driving. The last day of the course they'd given him a written exam. He passed that without missing a question.

But now...this was the hard part. The actual driving.

A red sedan caught his eye. It stopped at each house, as if looking for a correct address. On the front and side of the sedan was written "Warning. Student Driver."

Great.

Finally, the sedan pulled into the driveway, a tad too fast for John's taste, and stopped with a screech. The driver's door opened, and from it the instructor emerged. Some Led Zeppelin song which John couldn't place blared about a million decibels from the car. The sound temporarily distracted John from focusing on the instructor himself. He was a tall man, whose long hair seemed to be blowing with the music. He wore a pair of jeans, a white shirt, a tie featuring Marilyn Monroe in a red swim suit, and a denim jacket. John let out another sigh, his second of the day, as he pictured himself beside this hippie turned driving instructor and imagined him trying to share a joint during the lesson.

"You John Galbrith?" the instructor shouted above the music.

"Yeah."

"Hop in."

John tapped the window and waved good-bye to his mother. She mouthed "good luck." John got into the driver's side of the car while the instructor got in on the other side.

He wondered if his mom saw this character that supposedly was his driving instructor. He wondered if she'd care that his life was in immediate danger. Maybe she would. Dad wouldn't have let him go. Dad would've probably called the police as soon as he was out the driveway and have them followed. Maybe not. Who knows.

It was either John's imagination or he smelled incense inside the car. Almost involuntarily he reached out to turn the stereo down to a level which would not damage his ears. He turned to offer a small smile to his instructor. At closer look, he looked much more respectable. Yes, he was unshaved, but he did wear a tie, and though he wore a pair of jeans, they didn't have any holes in them.

"You ever drive a stick, kid?" he asked. He took a rubber band from the dashboard (there were plenty in assorted colors) and drew his hair into a ponytail.

"Only a couple times, sir, in a parking lot."

"Great. Put it in reverse and let's get this thing started," he said.

John asked whether he should turn right or left.

"Whatever you want, kid." The instructor smiled.

John, knowing that the right was a difficult road with plenty of turns, made a left. In the next twenty minutes, John only missed a gear once or twice; each time the instructor, who had yet to introduce himself, seemed not to notice. In fact, it seemed as if he was sleeping. After they had gone about ten miles,

he finally spoke.

"Don't you like Led Zeppelin?"

"Huh?"

"Well, I just noticed that you turned down Zeppelin when you got in. Just wondered if you didn't dig them or what."

"I just thought it was loud."

"Oh." The instructor put a foot on the dashboard and pulled a cigarette from his jacket. He lit it by cupping his hands around the end of the cigarette, like someone out of an old Bogart film.

"You're doing all right, kid. My name is Chris."

John didn't know how to respond, and instead just kept his eyes on the road. They were in the country, both sides of the road were lined with fields of wheat. They reminded John of when he used to go kite flying in the fields with his dog. His dad liked to fly the kite low and make Roland go nuts. Roland used to bark and jump at the kite, as if it were some strange bird that he discovered. One time the kite took an unexpected dive, Roland scampered back, whimpering, scared to death. He and his dad laughed for about an hour. Later that night they tried to explain the story to mom, who could only look at them strangely as they broke out in another laughing fit.

"You have a stick at home?"

"No, it's an automatic. My friend Matt has a stick, though, and he's let me drive before."

"Oh."

John used to like to think that one day his dad would buy him a car

with a stick shift. One day they'd go out on some desolate road and his dad would teach him how to drive it. When he got good his dad would turn to him, grin and say something like, "Now it's time to teach you how to really drive a stick shift" and have him drive 85 miles per hour. His dad would urge him to go faster and faster. The wheat on the sides of the road would become a large blur, everything would be going by so fast, his breath would quicken, but both he and his dad would be smiling. Then a rabbit would cross the road, John would hit the breaks, sliding the car and making it do a 360. "You got it, kid," he'd say with a wink. "You got it."

"You feeling okay, kid?" the instructor said, throwing the cigarette out the window.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Next instruction we'll go into the city. That's a bit more difficult than these straight roads."

John wanted to slam the gas pedal and just drive away. He wanted to keep accelerating, keep going faster and faster, never stopping. He flexed the toes inside his shoe to try to get rid of the incredible urge to press them down and drive until he crashed.

"You want to watch your speed there, son."

John took his foot from the gas and slammed the brakes. Both John

and the instructor were forced forward, like some slow motion film of some crash test dummies. John wanted to shout, he wanted to scream. "Don't call me son" he yelled, but only in his mind.

"I'm sorry, I thought I saw something in the road," he whispered.

"That's okay, kid." John could tell that Chris really thought it was okay. "Time is just about up anyway. Turn her around and let's head for home."

John didn't remember driving home, but did remember getting out of the car and standing in the driveway. The instructor gave him a time which he'd be there tomorrow and promised to be on time. John watched him get into the driver's seat. Chris winked at him as he turned Zeppelin up again to insane loudness. The car pulled away, and John swore he could hear Robert Plant's wailing even when the car was barely visible.

John watched the car as it disappeared into the small-town horizon. He blinked, and was surprised when a tear came down his cheek. He felt cheated in some vague way that he couldn't put into words. Somehow the familiar horizon didn't give him the same type of comfort as before, but now just made him feel alone and out of place. He sighed, turned, and made his way to his house.

-Keith Collison

7/15/94

Lying on the bed I've made
With lies, and with uncertainties
I gaze into the comfort of fog.

Periodically, neon light shelters me
From the sharpness of black and white
Surrounding this old motel room.

I've been in and outside myself,
Never knew there were so many layers
Underneath such a shallow skin.

Outside the door they are coming
As always, under false pretense,
I heard them check in this morning.

I've always heard them when they've come,
Coming once more to change me
When I've yet to scratch my own surface.

Lying on the bed I've made,
They won't break the door down--
It always just seems to open.

Lying on the bed I've made
In yet another motel room
Where neon light shelters me
From the sharpness of black and white.

-Jennifer Gracey

HAZY LUMINESCENCE

As clouds drifted slowly by
Delicate fingers of sunlight shone
through the weather-beaten barn boards
whirling dust

Heaven I thought if
this a utopia ever
was. Like

a warm shroud where I can
live now.

Because I
want (need) to
see only through the cracked
walls of my soul.

-Becky Lock

Untitled

A noon-day splash of sun lights up
a tiny country cottage
breathing light resurrecting the dead wood.

Shadows shriek as the darkness fades
dark little men scrambling away
bullying crows winging from great owls.

In the garden, flowers raise their lips to be
kissed by their undying everlasting
king, spread out beneath him like
willing peasants ready to
love and serve
'til the land turns white.

Then the tides go out, the water
shallows, leaving black
bone. The little men return
to hack and prod abject remains.

-Becky Lock

VICTORY

As flighty flakes of snow
wander by on inconsistent gusts

The memory of honeybee scents
in summer meadows tries to
invade this winter year

But I resist
determined to enjoy the cold
Rough blue jeans
combat rigid flakes.

My footprints disappear before I even move.

A sleigh and a dark horse await me
and I take my place.
We careen through frozen pine sentries.

No voice.
No breath.
The air
too searing
to breathe.

A wicked
night drive
to a place
Unknown.

-Becky Lock

January 26, 1995

your knee in my back
tall egos crush small rebellions
face scrapes pavement
fragile limbs in painful persuasion
i yield
to steel

-Jennifer Holmes

Wincing

for four long years i never never is longer than four
years but when you think about the difference between never
and ever you lose track of time long years i never liked to
 hold pistols in my hand or fingers the danger of
being caught fuelled my pessimism i never got to lick the
steel for four years i wondered if i could put the barrel
in my hole beneath my nose and fill it with my pink tongue
would the fire stop? i want the fire to grow and melt my
lips around the piece so i could never let go of the deadly
weapon my sudden impulse to swallow meaningless
why should i walk a thousand miles just to pull the trigger when
i know the bullets lie a thousand miles behind me in a pile
next to a railroad tie deep in speckled weeds i need to
taste the sour steel for one long night content to hold it
and polish it feel its cold shell warm its hopes of
contributing to a revenge ill blow gently on the hammer
reminding it of its power subconscious power to destroy
i don't believe in honesty the shrunken missile will find me
 my throat to my heart as the bullet sinks and drips out
of my lower back just below the scar i have from when you
once scratched too hard id rather die put at least
two bullets in i might like what i feel

-Dustin Hess

Nine Hundred

when i wonder about what goes on when my children move
away what will i do nobody will play with me when i
need exercise on a Sunday afternoon when we usually throw around
a football with my wife watching from the patio deck they
will buy footballs to throw around wherever they live they
can play with their children i could never go to bed
early my boys came in late and i had to smell their breath
and their fingers what did i do when i was little i
stayed up late to watch the star spangled banner on the public
broadcast station where the little girl ran through the posies
i must have been practicing you have to practice
staying up late when youre young its too late to practice
anything when your children move away if youre not good by then
and then is the end of practicing so theres
nothing to do now that were alone it used to be theres
nothing to do unless we were alone my wife is my friend now
that im older and my friends dont like bingo and neither do i
theres just not much to do unless i stumble upon some
grandchildren i don't really want any ive already
laughed cried and suffered enough that should last a while
the memories will have to be enough i dont want any
new memories ill never have enough time to remember them

-Dustin Hess

I want to
drip
like honey from a spoon:
My words
sticky-sweet on the page,
their tendrils
sweet on the tongue.
The burnt amber
ceaselessly dripping,
dripping,
like honey from a spoon.
Slowly taking their time,
the sounds that flow into words
at their honeyed leisure.
Thick and thin,
semi-transparent poetry.

-Jennifer M. Boeree

The Partygoers [29 January 94]

1

Yibbidy yibbidy I am going going
gone

to the party of no return

I won't dance no thanks no way.

Traders,

love merchants gone the direction of dinosaurs
and poets.

shady shady partygoers under

streetlights that search the soul

snowpossessed rooftops icecovered sidewalks
we shadows slip along.

Talking like thieves walking like sailors

walking together lonely to Washington Street

Cold and huddled

the Stragglers nobody waits for no one

in this world.

Passed the coin-operated laundry

getting closer.

The moonlight mimics our pilgrimage

Knock knock

we ain't come seeking Sir Thomas a Beckett.

A quiet girl laughs

her echoes toss themselves against stony brick buildings

Suicide sentences.

have you been to many parties? Say
been to a few.

2

Everything's quiet but footfalls on dead

cement no one waits for nobody, not now.

We come upon a house

THE house

silent till the opening of the door

music meanders inebriated into the empty streets

with prophetic streetlamps watching

what silent moon can't see

peering past two-story houses of deadly suburbia.

Too early

people in the kitchen

playing cards

drunkenly

sitting on the stair dazed, smoking.

Gotta bring a glass or gotta buy a glass

no money in the pockets

no justice in the world

no beer in the hand

(but it tastes like shit anyway--

who bought this shit?)

Yeah the music's okay that is...

you can stand it and

There's some cheap movie playing, the television on,
buzzing.

a cheap beer on the cheap coffee table

plastic astray stolen.

Some Chinese guy and some Aryan guy fighting bloody

Some scantily clad chics looking like twins

the television on, buzzing. We stupidly laugh.

3

Retreat! to the chair in the corner

people pouring pity

start up a conversation

but don't wanna talk.

I pick up a playing card and

stuff it in my pocket the drunks

won't miss this ace, hey?

Hey no blind flashlight in the face

(it's The Law, man.)

Who the hell invited

the fuzz?

Kids who look like KINDERGARTNERS

looking like some gradeschool cupcake party

gone wrong,

holding beers and

it's a NOISE VIOLATION (no noise)

Underagers bolting fast but I'm
sitting in the chair
in the corner like a scared rabbit

who the hell invited the fuzz?

Sitting on the floor smokescreened
go to the kitchen get stepped on
talk to incoherent friends
seven-beer friends are
no friends at all.

Rescuer--drinks too much
poets constantly trippy
Climbing along the couch you
ought to have been James Bond in another life.

The auburn hair girl--it's dyed
and her lookalike friend
looking for their coats in the corner
life of the party leaves before twelve
Drunken laughter stumbling
through the kitchen door
into the living room spilling beer
breaking a gaping hole in smoky chattering silence
slow breathing
unlimited conversation

produced by close slow breathing bodies the
masses.

4

Queen Victoria leaves the scene
dressed in black and blue and white and nighttime
wandering through a forest of houses
settled
on their haunches

sullen unlit windows staring vacant
at glittering snowpiles

garbage remnants cigarettes beercans

stop to get a tab from one

(help a dialysis patient)

passed the convenience store jungle of downtown

passed apartments huddling together

And we: speaking wayward sentences to
the darkness to the starless evening, winter
wandering on our way
like pirates like partygoers.

So I'm writing this down

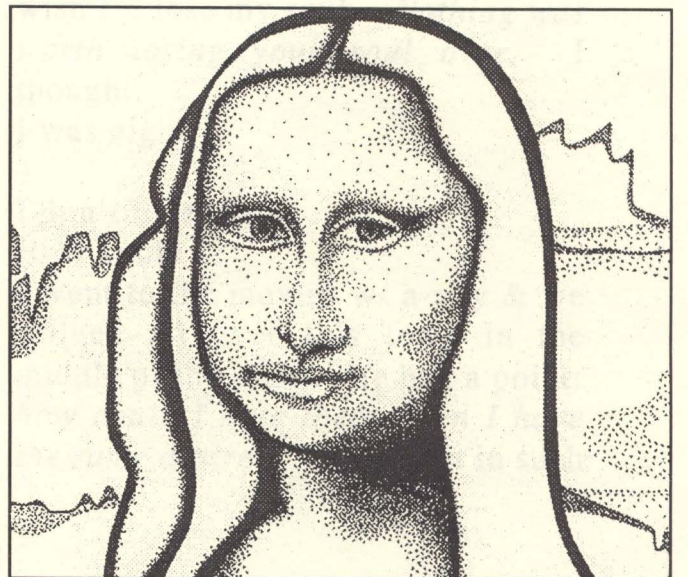
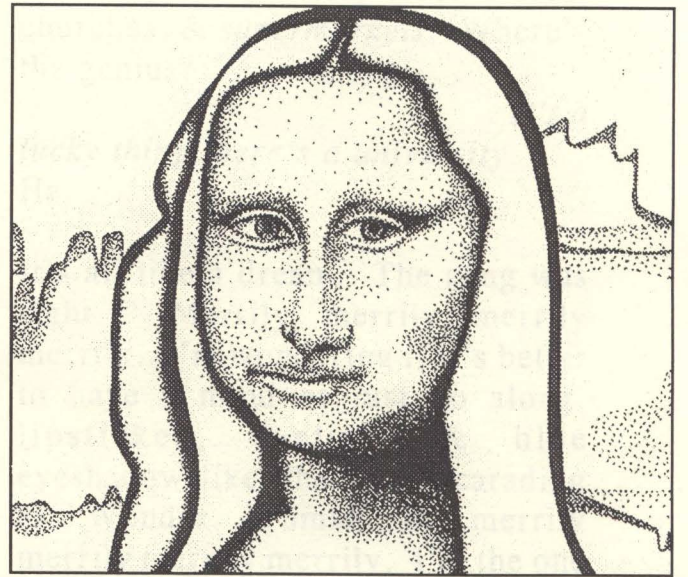
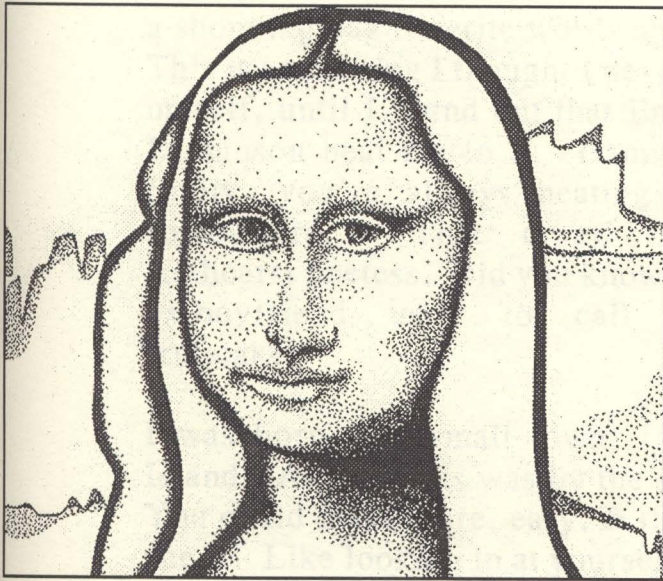
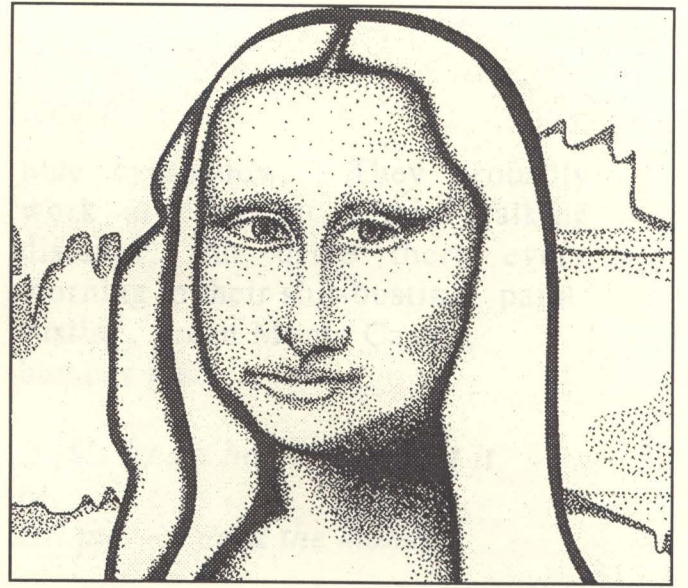
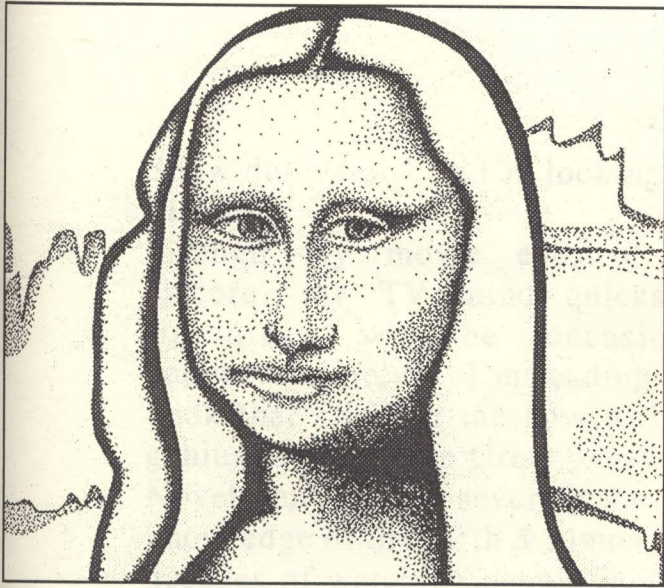
in the dark.

-Jennifer M. Boeree

Tia Juana

going to tijuana! going today
going to take you and me with you
we'll take the car and i'll let you drive it
through many contiguous states!
into the ocean if so desired!
we'll creep lowly
creep lowly
into sin city
capital of the whole sin continent!
yes with aunt jane as our guardian devil
we'll sip slowly
sip slowly
tequila because we may
and we may buy cheap cigarettes
mexicanos greeting us
everywhere in sin heaven
wanna buy a "rolex"?
americanos? si?

-Jennifer M. Boeree





Explain

to be a good girl and to

to take care and the will

to be a good girl and to

to be a good girl and to

to be a good girl and to

to be a good girl and to

to be a good girl and to

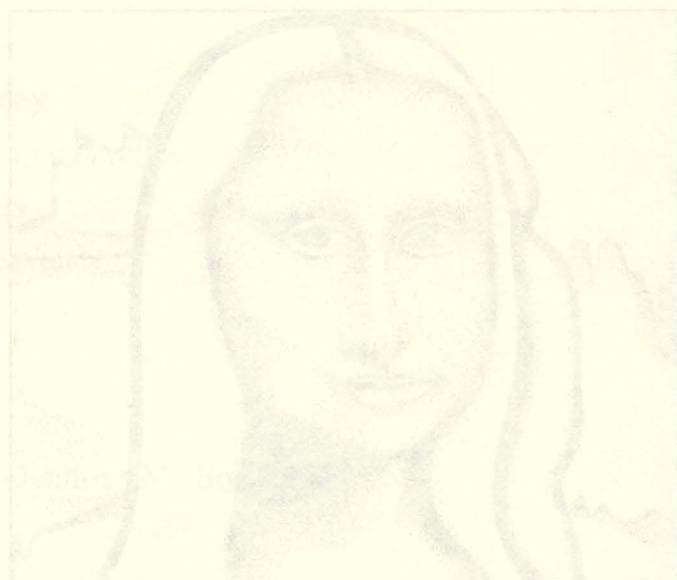
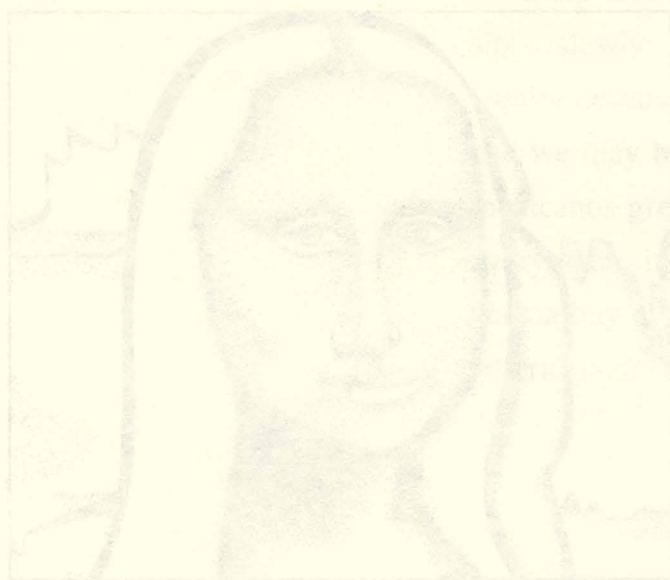
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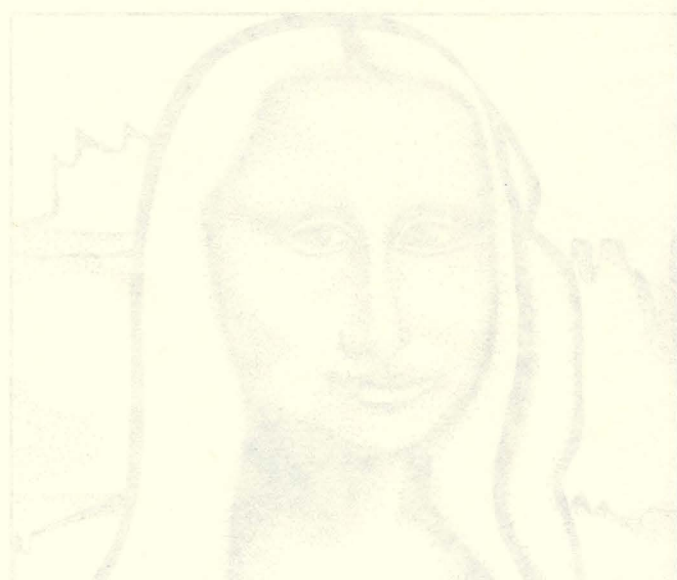
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to be a good girl and to



SHOW: DON'T

Show don't tell. So I'm looking at *the scene* through my movie eyes. I'm camera, my TV mind quicksand lightning, w/ the occasional commercial break. I'm reading this book that's telling me how to be a genius & create the Great American Novel out of my severely limited knowledge of the earth & almost two decades of watching people think & eat & sleep, & listening to words, cutting out slips of India brown from a shopping bag to write words upon. This is something I thought I devised myself, until I found out that Emily Dickinson beat me to it. Damn it, Emily, you're always beating me somewhere. That crazy little Amhearst poetess. Did you know my ex-boyfriend used to call me fruitcake?

I was born in a small town, Long Island. At least this was by the sea. You could drive there, easy, & there she is. Like looking in at yourself in a mirror. Sea in winter. Now I live in a small town. Biggest body of water here is a pond. Trailer park town. Outside. Downtown. Fleshy women in polyester shorts & Fifty-fifty k-mart t-shirts grow old in green lawn chairs outside abandoned downtown stores, baking in the sun. Circus buddhas with wet black eyeliner & maybe red-orange lipstick mouth & always

blue eyeshadow. They probably work at checkout within walking distance, but drive there every morning in their shit-busting, paint-rusting, green Monte Carlos, bumper sticker:

*If this was a horse I'd shoot it
or
Hit me -- I need the money.*

This is a town whose foundations rest on pizza parlors, video stores, churches, & *supermarkets*. Where's the genius?

*It's a
lucky thing there's a university.*
Ha.

It's all like a dream. The song was right. Merrily merrily merrily merrily. I'm wondering if it's better to have a mind or just go along, lipsticked, eyeliner & blue eyeshadow like Shamu mascarding as Wonder Woman...& merrily merrily merrily merrily. I'm the one who used to think if I wished to look like the pretty girl in class & got my wish I'd lose my soul. *Nothing was worth losing your soul over,* I thought.
I was eight.

I don't hate them.
How could I?

I went to the movies w/ a guy & we walked all over this town in the middle of the night. He had a point: *how could I hate them when I have the same desires?* He said it in such

a way as not to actually reveal which desires these were. I know which desires direct the genesis of five grimy children peeking their faces around the door of a trailer. How much more are you, anyway, except maybe you learned a little philosophy or painting or maybe you read James Joyce instead of TV Guide?

Janet, author of this book that's telling me how to be a genius & create the Great American Novel out of my severely limited knowledge of the earth & almost two decades of watching people think & eat & sleep, & listening to words, says

SHOW DON'T TELL

& she's absolutely right (but only on this point).

I'm Kerouac's

Writer-Director of Earthly movies
Sponsored & Angeled
in Heaven.

I have Jack's BELIEF &
TECHNIQUE

FOR MODERN
PROSE pinned on the wall in front of my computer where I can see it, should I lose the faith for a moment. Imagine my surprise as I walk into the domain of another writer & he has the very same thing pinned on the wall above his Smith-Corona word processor ("portable," he says). Instantly, he is my brother. We share the same religion.

RE-LI-GION.

I taught a boyfriend the "show-don't-tell" mantra, applying it to a poem he was writing. He followed the advice. Quite stunningly.

Unfortunately, the poem was written to some other chick he had hopelessly fallen for years before me. Somewhere along the lines of religious, undying devotion, etc. I still keep it with me, hidden between layers of my own poetry. There are lessons to be had everywhere.

Too bad

I was the one
who was had.

Gray day. Just as equinox, when the sun's neither here nor there. D(epression) day. Did someone blot out the cigarette sun somewhere between reality & me? D e a d.
Zero.

Cold air hit somewhere between lung & throat w/ a deafening boom. Day when breathing hurts.

I had a dream this morning. It was so real that when I woke up I thought that was where the dreaming just began. Crazy. The Shakers wanted us to live each day as if we were granted another hundred years of life & knew we were to die tomorrow,. [What's that have to do w/ simple furniture?]

It's 2:13 & I'm awake on the Monday morning listening to the humidifier hum-boil-steam, wishing I could sleep. It's 2:16, so I ring up Henry. "What the hell?" he says, groggy out of dream on the other end, sounding almost Mexican in his confusion.

"Did I wake you?"

"Who the hell?"

"It's me, Henry. It's Jan."

"Shhhiiiiit. You woke my uuuup."

He starts coughing, hacking up a lung & I know he's reaching for a pack of Jacks (@99 cents / pack).

"It's

. . .

2-something in the morning. Who died?"

"I can't sleep."

I hear the lighter Click. Lit, & he sounds relieved. "Hey. You dressed?"

Slow

questioning

"no."

"Whatever. Come on over."

Receiver click home.

I clothe myself with what's on the chair beside the bed as I grope my way to the bathroom in the magical dark. I go, then I'm gone. I get keys & coat & wonder what the hell I'm doing exactly

& I drive over to Henry's house

as if in reply.

I walk up twelve stairs, landing, left, thirteen stairs in virtual darkness & I'm greeted by orange light coming from a bulb in the ceiling. Place looks like a bomb shelter. I come to room 20, where I see a newspaper article scotch-taped to the door:

JESUS SPOTTED
IN SANTA MONICA.

There is a picture of Jesus & he looks alive & well.

A thin ray of light is visible under the door of room 20 & I knock. I listen as Henry hacks & drags his ass to the door, drawing aside bolt & chain after inspecting me through the peephole to make sure I'm not . . . who knows . . . Jesus from Santa Monica & pissed at the turn the

world's taken as of late. He peeks his head around the door.

"Hey. Welcome. Come on in."

He is unshaven, but it suits him.

"Want a beer?"

"Will it help me sleep?"

"I've got some wine?" It's like a question and I wonder how I'm supposed to answer. Either he has it or he doesn't.

"Beautiful," I say, following his lime-green pajama-ed ass to the kitchen. He flicks the fluorescent lights & I blink, it's like a police interrogation. I see he's wearing a t-shirt of Salvador Dali's *Spain*. He scratches the back of his thigh as he leans over the counter to get two coffee mugs from the cupboard. Puts them on the table. Goes to the icebox & surprises me w/ a good wine.

I know a good wine when I see it -- no screw top.

I make a base comment on the fact & he flashes me the NY state bird from behind the fridge.

He gets out a tub of Philadelphia brand light cream cheese which I know he has bought by mistake. Henry's got a figure like Gandhi on smack. He's getting out Ritz crackers while I stare at the place where his dark hair meet the back of his neck & realize I'm attracted to him. He's telling me that the wine was for a chick & I casually ask if he fucked her. He says no.

No screw top . . . yet no screw.

He pours wine into the two coffee cups. I get the one w/ a cartoon of a

naked man walking down a theater aisle. It reads: MOVIE BUFF. He takes the one with the daisies. The wine's good, so I decide to say so.

"The wine's good."

He takes another sip, analyzes, face of indecision, shrugs.

"Yeah."

After seven crackers, Henry puts down the butter knife. I reach for it & lick off the cream cheese.

"Hey. You hungry? I can make soup. Crackers. Toast." He's just run down the list of all the things he can cook. I shake my head no & finish off my wine. As I put the coffee cup in the sink I notice one wine glass there & its mate on the counter by the drainboard, broken into smithereens in a dustpan next to a wet paper towel.

"Anything else happen this evening?"

We're distracted by a door slammed in the next apartment. The sugar bowl vibrates, walking a little distance along the kitchen table to his right. He puts his hand on it. "Motherfucker."

He sighs, "I can't write. I can't get laid . . ." I follow the India brown eyes as they move to the ashtray in the bedroom / living room. Smoke rising in thin tendrils. He points. "You noticed . . . ?"

"Yeah, I'm glad though. You're like the PMS poster child when you don't have a smoke, Hen."

Henry laughs dry from behind the mug, chugalugging the last of his

wine. He starts to feel good after the second one. "Mmm. Lemme show you the last thing I did." Helps me take off my jacket & throws it on the coat tree as he walks past like he's suave Cary Grant. He meanders over to the desk, pulling the chain on a fluorescent light that he took from above the sink.

("When am I going to wash dishes in the dark?" he said.

I said, "When are you going to wash dishes?")

The Smith-Corona purrs, turned on.

Tacked on the pale yellow wall is Jack Kerouac's BELIEF & TECHNIQUE FOR MODERN PROSE. He's printing up a poem & I notice he has Jack's #4 circled. Squinting at the list, I ask: "Why's #4 circled?"

He doesn't look me in the eye, looking for a book on the shelf above.

"I circle the ones I need to work on."

#4 reads:

Be in love with yr life. Feel pain seize soul. Win. "You're not in love with your life? You need to 'work on that one'?"

Henry's looking at me, right at me, head cocked sideways & down, looking all smart-ass. "I live in a dump. I can't write. I can't get laid. Do I look like I'm fucking *in love* with my life?" He hands me a copy of *Septuagenarian Stew* (stolen) & walks into the bathroom, closing the door.

I take the poem from the portable

Smith-Corona. I drop to the floor to read it / wonder how many people have made it on this perverse, grass-green shag carpet. I listen to the sound of water running in the bathroom sink & hear the medicine cabinet open & close

. . . imagine him with a box of razor blades reading GILLETTE super stainless & a little yellow sunburst reading The spoiler.

. . . see the spill like red wine river over-flow as he collapses into the bathtub, hitting his head.

. . . see the spill like red wine river trickle down at the place where his dark hair meets the back of his neck

"Henry?"

The water's still running.

"HEN-ry?" Silent. & afraid to move. I hear the water running & my heart beating somewhere in my warm stomach swimming with red wine & cream cheese.

The bathroom door jumps open. I jump. He looks out. Face & hair wet.

"WHHAAAT?" He's pissed.

"Nothing." I'm startled.

"Did you read it?" He's drying his hair off w/ a Holiday Inn towel: white w/ green stripe down the center. My face stings prickly hot. I can feel it work through my scalp

to the neck, down my back & arms, ending in fingertips.

"You okay?" He's still in the bathroom doorway. Puts down the towel. Picks up a glass of water. Tosses back two aspirin. I begin to breathe regularly.

"I thought you were dead."

"Nah." Thinks for a moment. "Jesus, no."

I read the poem. It's brilliant & I tell him so. I ask to borrow the Bukowski book I'm still holding. He asks me again if I want soup. I don't want soup, but I guess there must be something about my face that makes me look like I need some soup. All I want is Henry. Henry & soup. Henry & crackers. Henry & toast. Henry & red wine in a coffee cup @ 2:52 in the morning. I stand up, stretch & get my coat, saying nothing. Henry follows me to the door like a lost boy in lime-green pajama pants & a t-shirt w/ Salvador Dali's *Spain*.

I'm drawing back the bolt. I'm sliding open the chain. I'm greeted by

JESUS SPOTTED IN SANTA MONICA.

Now I'm grabbing Henry around the waist. I'm kissing Henry. Henry is kissing back, looking beautiful in the orange light of this bomb shelter as we say nothing.

-Jennifer Boeree

Ignite Your Imagination

I wander through the maze of trees
Absorbed in nature's nostalgic innocence
Following the path of the gypsy butterfly
In all its passion and eloquence

A philosophical breeze embraces my skin
And whispers in provocative admiration
Dew drops fall like random thoughts
Reality dissipates to an insignificant sensation

In a universe created in the depths of my mind
I am vaguely aware of the paradise I'll find
Where beauty is seen through nonpartisan eyes
And peace is an element incapable of compromise

Jump off the water and dive into a cloud
Make fantasy come true by speaking it aloud
Individuality prevails like an eccentric flower
There are no gods, love is the highest power

The only paradox in the situation
Is that this exists only in my imagination
So if you want to ride this flight
Come with me and let your soul ignite.

-Michelle Blandy

At the Red Bat's Nest

Midnight you come.
I slink into the dark
with frost footsteps behind
no guilt in my blood.

We coalesce as your
henchman drives, the tavern
close within our sight
Temptations compile.

Inside the local drunks
deem from their errant eyes
the intents of our artful
movements, caresses.

The stares of others
twist in a whiskey glass
sipped before closing
Talk takes us

as passengers in a Monte Carlo,
your hands in my crotch,
we leave Harrisonville
lit by the light of a radio.

- Scott J. Spearly

The Martian Motor Company

Cats drink from hubcaps
when the rain gutters
overflow with that slick
mold they know as water.

Out here, wet
as these felines
are hungry, I come
to this place
in need.

Miles down the road
my vehicle pushed
its last piston.

I have no money.

Not a quarter
for the phone.

Glass surrounds
the office with
an impenetrable fog.

Inside, a cigarette
burns a steady stream.

Footsteps track mud
through another door.

A shop radio plays
doo-wop above the buzz
of fluorescent lights.

I hear no wrenches drop.

No diesel powered
equipment plundering
among the rusted
wrecks.

Silence here
is farther out of place
than I am looking
for a phone without
coin slots.

Who would I call.
Where in this void
would I tell them
to find me.

Who will come to say
I have trespassed
to a place
I have no business
being at all.

-Scott J. Spearly

A Short Letter to M. Honer

Dear M.

I'm in a band that plays a flavor of blues
my harps can't keep up with. I have Tupperware bowls
of Golden Melodies and Marine Bands
with notes that won't bend. Send me a leather harp.
One that can take the heat of my truck dash
and the moisture my mouth leaves trapped in your
wooden cores. Send me titanium reeds.
A blues machine Sonny Boy Williamson
would throw the dirt off his grave for.

-Scott J. Spearly

The Laws of Libido

In all of us
a secret government
rules by instinct

ignorant of principles

human nature instills

in lesser lobes of the brain.

It is a fascist regime.

Past lovers oppressed.

New ones await defeat

in peaceful protest.

The laws laid down

change with chemical

imbalance,

psychosis

self-induced by liquor

or the hoarse whisper

of foreplay.

It is then our government

becomes a land,

an eden of obsessions.

Judgement replaced by touch.

A carnal crave

like that of a voyeur

with victim in sight

steers our consciousness,

a fatherland, licentious.

Ability to reason

lost.

-Scott J. Spearly

Urban dreamscape

Perpendicular crosses: means of parking measures
envisioned during scenes of abandoned farmhouse gas
pumps.

Barefoot girl's skirt dances in the wind
As music projects from the sun.

Faces transform in a sea of haze

Abundance of flora growing timelessly
crossing picket fences drenched in white
acoustic drones marching in sing-song fashion
along rows of posted metal
on a barren stretch of road.

Perpetual reality in an unforgiving world.

-Eric Risch

i Almost

i Almost
sat downhere and wrote you
another
poem. -but-then
I realized
-wiSed
thathat wouldbe
sucha sucha waste ofmy time.

a poem (Almost written)
would have to
(have to, almost)
getta reply- a smile
or aCry- but this poem
(almost written)
I know only too well
wouldget nothing of that sort
-thus its abort
it Would getyet
a dry Blank smile
(promising nothing)
and a distantly glazed eye
as theFeeling thefeeling
slides downandoff the greasEy
coating of your insides
(covered with flies)
where the shattered men lie
goodbye-weepingWhy
they've tried (god knows)
just as I- clutching-theLies
topierce the rigidfrigid barrier
between allelse and you andI.

this poem (Almost written)
would flyBy the slippery wall
of your selfand cling there
stuckwet to the slime
a mate to the grime
but neverEver penetrating
the wallsof the small

place you call
regretfully and pitifully
all-
yourself.

do not cry
my dear do not dilute that beer
do not smoke that joint
or walk that way
wherever you run
(do you come now?)
you still be alone
a bit of tarry blackstone
slippery and gay
far-away
with nothing
nothing to do
or say
far-away.

-James P. Wisdom

Sure

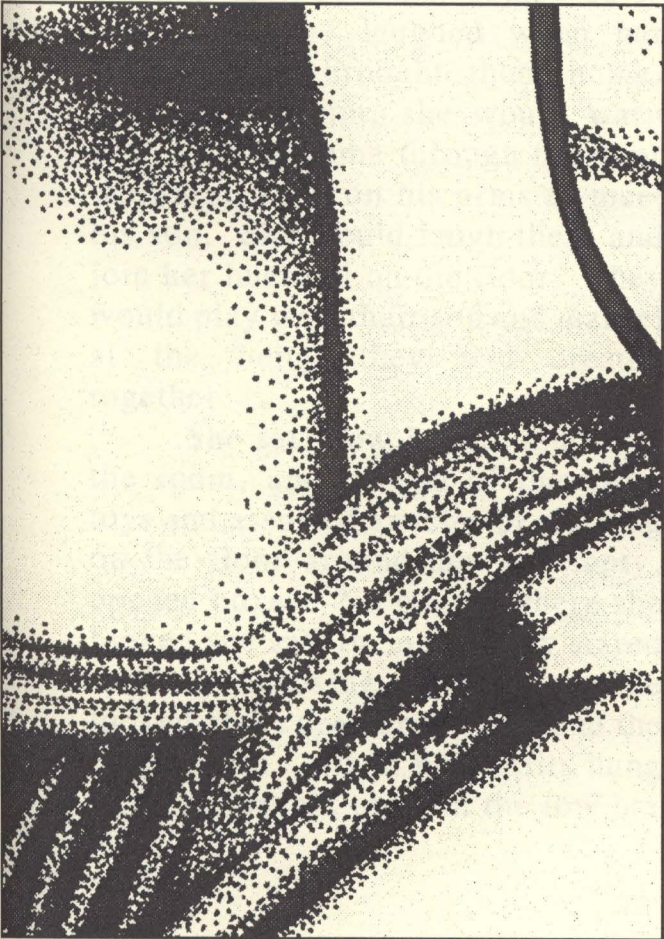
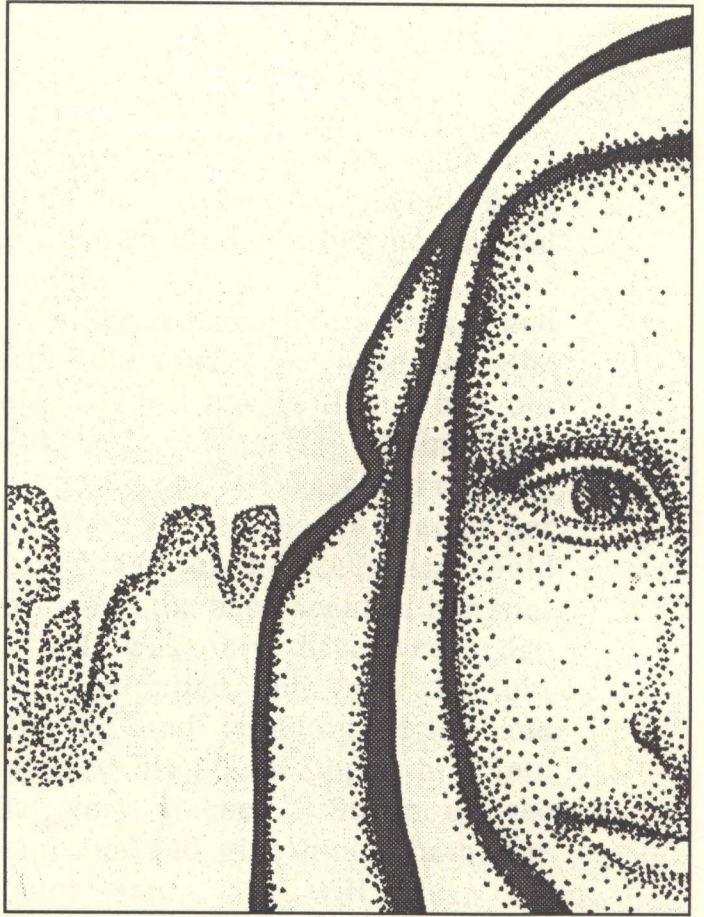
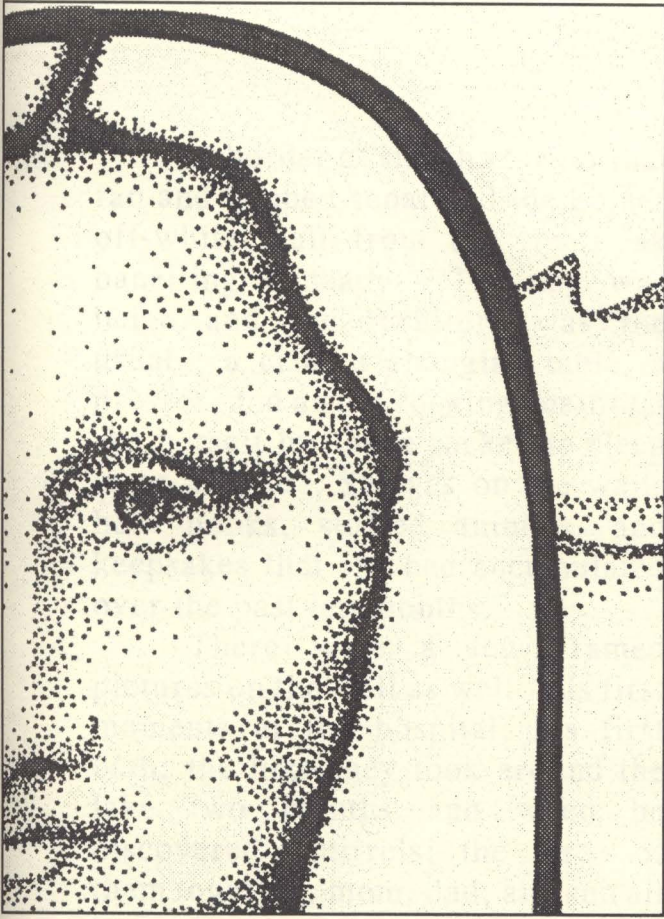
Peering into the wind tunnel
my feet are kinda light...
with no socks at all.

fetal position, swollen
into a breeze;
My lungs fill up clean.

"Right on" I say
(a bit of slang meaning content
or groovy, whole connected)

You ask if I'm o.k.
I say yes real fast.
and I do not lie.

-Sarah Strahorn





BOXES

A border of smiling turtles that ran and hopped separated the higher off-white wall from the light oak panelling beneath. The rug was beige and the furniture was the usual: a crib, a changing table, a dresser, and an old rocking chair that she herself had been rocked to sleep in as a child. Shelves on the walls held books, stuffed animals, and keepsakes that she had accumulated over the past ten months.

There were a few framed pictures on the wall as well: his first moments at the hospital; his first bath; the hike they took around the lake two months ago when he discovered squirrels; the three of them together, mom, dad, and son all wearing matching baseball hats. His hat had been so small compared to theirs and she laughed when her husband had brought them home. You'll spoil him, she would warn each time he came through the door with a package on his arms to meet his son. She would laugh then, and join her husband on the floor. They would play with their son and marvel at the being they had created together.

She sat, now in the middle of the room, and instead of the usual toys and assorted articles of clothing on the floor around her sat empty, opened boxes. No matter where she looked she saw them and they stared at her, accusing, waiting. She looked at the dresser drawers and the open closet. All of his outfits hung in there, except one, on the low bar

her husband had installed when they set up the room so that he could hang up his own clothes when he was old enough.

She reached into a drawer and pulled out a fuzzy green sleeper. she folded it and placed it in a box but brought it out quickly again. The cardboard smelled sharp and raw and she pressed the sleeper against her nose, breathing in to see if she could still smell the baby scent of her son.

It was only three weeks ago that she pulled him from the tub, dripping and laughing, dried and powdered him, and zipped him into that very sleeper. Steam up the bathroom and give him a bath, the doctor said. It will clear his congestion and cool him down a bit. The bath seemed to help. His fever broke and he was breathing easier when she carried him, clean and sturdy, down to the study to kiss his daddy good-night.

She remembered how he held his son, close to his chest and kissed the top of his downy head. He tossed him in the air, and her son giggled. He had a way with their son. Even when he was feverish her husband could always make him laugh.

She heard a branch snap outside as the neighbor's children ran up and down the shore of the lake outside their house. Startled, she looked at her watch and around the still empty boxes. Wait, everyone told her. Wait until you're ready. You've been through so

much. No one understood that she couldn't wait. She was in the house all day, work was impossible, and she couldn't bear to walk by the room, to see the still smiling turtles and the empty crib. She looked around the room and sighed.

She had lain him in the crib that night, pulled the blanket up and patted his dry, diapered bottom. She watched as the cold medicine overtook him and his lashes fell on his newly flushed cheeks. She felt his forehead; warm but not hot. Her husband called her into bed. He's fine, he said, let the medicine do its work. The exhaustion from five days of battling fever and cold convinced her to go to bed. One more call. He'll be fine, the doctor said, it always seems as if the first child's very first cold is the worst. He chuckled.

He hadn't been chuckling when he took her and her husband by the arms and led them into the small room at the end of the gleaming white hall. I'm sorry, he said. It was just too late. He went without air for too long.

She remembered the numbness, the hands that had clenched at her heart and mind and would not allow her to make a sound. She remembered the hysterical sobbing of her husband as he clutched at her and demanded "Why? Why us?" There hadn't been any pain, the doctor said. She looked at him in disbelief, and spoke. My husband, she said, my husband is in pain.

The madness of making the

arrangements. Her parents. His parents. The casseroles. Yes, I want him in the turtleneck and overalls. That's what he wore, not a suit. The phone calls. The never-ending line of tear-stained faces. She had to face them alone. Her husband merely sat.

The horror of the words. You can have more. Oh God, the pain. You're holding up so well. Who was holding her up? It certainly wasn't her husband. He was such a beautiful baby. Are you blind? He still is. At least he didn't suffer.

At least he didn't suffer. She wanted to scream at them, at all of them. What do you mean he didn't suffer? You don't think he was suffering as the fluid filled his lungs and he struggled to get his last breath as I was breathing so peacefully down the hall? Don't you think he suffered when the panic set in and he hurt and his mommy wasn't there to make him feel better?

A dog barked outside and she looked at her watch, shocked. So late! Where had the day gone? Once, her days had a rhythm: wake up, eat, wash, play, eat, nap, eat, play, bathe, sleep. Over and over. She shared a rhythm with her son.

She heard her husband pull into the long driveway and turn off the car. The car door, then the front door, opened and slammed shut. She forced herself out of the room and went downstairs.

Her husband was standing in front of the window in his study looking out over the lake, his

overcoat still on and his briefcase still in his hand. She reached for the briefcase and took off his coat. He jumped at her touch as if he were afraid. She was used to it now. She left the room and went into the kitchen to make dinner.

She reached into the cabinet to pull out a can of soup. As she leaned against the counter, her hip bones jabbed into her skin. It wasn't long ago that her hips still held the extra weight of her pregnancy. Her husband would poke at her grinning, and say that she was saving up for the next child. She would bat his hand away and reply that it was a mark of her motherhood. Their son would laugh in imitation of them. She saw her reflection in the window over the sink. There were hollows under her eyes and her cheeks no longer had their healthy fullness. She thought she would make sandwiches with the soup.

When she pulled her hand out of the cabinet, she realized that she grabbed a jar of strained peaches instead. She turned around and looked at the empty spot on the kitchen table. She looked, horrified, at the peaches in her hand.

He loved peaches. He loved all his foods. Like his daddy, he was an eater. She remembered sitting in the kitchen, spooning peaches into her son's mouth. Spoon, scrape the chin, spoon again. He should have eaten more peaches.

Anger began to seep into the helpless longing that filled her mind. She looked at the peaches in her

hand and threw the jar to the floor where it smashed. The peaches oozed onto the floor in between the shards of broken glass. She reached into the cabinet and pulled out a jar of beans and threw them to the floor too. Quickly, she pulled jar after jar out of the cabinet. Beets, corn, pears, peas, spinach--God how he loved spinach, apples. She hurled each jar onto the growing mound on the floor. The hard smell of the vegetables mixed with the over-sweet scent of the fruit. Her stomach turned at the stench.

Her husband flew into the doorway, his eyes wide with shock. Her lungs burned as her breaths came quicker. Silent hot tears ran down her cheeks. "Anne!" He walked around the mess on the floor and stood next to her. He looked at the floor, helpless. "Anne, I miss him too. I--"

She turned to him, crying. "I hate him!" she cried and he recoiled at the words. "I hate him! He was my life. Every day was ours. He made me someone important! You," she said to him slamming her hand on the counter, "You have work. You are somebody! I was a mother, and he took that away from me."

She heard her words and doubled over. Her body was heaving now from her sobs and her tears ran into the sink.

Her husband moved to touch her and she backed away. "Every day I go into his room to pack it all away. And I see the crib he slept in. And the table. And the diaper

wipes. The damn diaper wipes are still there! I hate the smell of the diaper wipes! His shoes are in the closet..." She took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. "I have to pack it all away. But I can't."

Her husband turned and looked out the window. "Anne, please..."

"No." She dried her tears and stood square to face him. "I go up to his room to try to pack it all away. I play with his toys, I check his hairbrush for hair. I try to smell his clothes so I remember. Anything to remembr him by. I haven't even taken the sheets of his crib! I think about him, about us, and before I know it, it's the end of the day! And I'm so mad!"

She looked at her husband, pleading. "He made us a family and then took it away. What are we? What are we now? Please, I can't do it by myself." Her voice was angry, demanding. Anne grabbed her husband, forcing him to turn. He looked at the floor and she grabbed his face in her hands, forced it up and looked him square in the eye. "Why won't you look at me? Why won't you say anything? You've done nothing! You go to work, eat, go to bed. What about me? What about our son? God, Paul, it's as if you're not there at all."

Paul threw Anne's hand off him and she watched as he walked across the room, swerving to miss the mess on the floor. He stood facing the wall then turned to her.

"Just what do you want from me Anne? What is it that you want?

Don't you think I hurt too? He was my son, for God's sake. I loved him, I had plans, too. I get up in the morning and you're there and I don't know how to face you."

Moving to the table, Paul sat and ran his hands through his hair. Anne walked over and sat adjacent from him. Paul looked up at her. "Everything I've ever done I've done well. Everything I've ever wanted, I've gotten. We had such a good marriage, such a good life. I did well at work, we bought this house. We made a son, Anne. You and I, together. We loved and that love produced this being...this small person who in one instant just completely changed my life." Paul stood and walked back and forth, punctuating his sentences in the air.

"I was so scared when I learned you were pregnant," he said. "But preparing and learning together, the anticipation. God, Anne, I'd never been so happy in my life! And when he was born, I was so amazed. Not only were you my wife, but you gave birth to this beautiful creature, you were a mother. Paul looked at Anne. He walked over and crouched on the floor. He looked up at her and continued. "I would have done anything for him. Anything."

He stood again, crying now. Anne could feels the tears streaming down her face, but made no move to wipe them away.

"But when it came down to it, Anne, there was nothing I could do. And I was the one who told you to

come to bed! And when you found him he was so cold, and all I wanted to do was bring him back and there was nothing I could do and...Oh, God Anne, I feel so useless. I failed him and I just didn't know how to face you. He grabbed the kitchen towel and wiped his eyes.

"I wake up and see the house, his room, and you, and I don't know how to act. I couldn't bear to look at you."

Anne stood and walked over to her husband. She looked at him, standing there, flushed face and tear-stained cheeks. She moved closer until she was pressed to him. Slowly, her husband put his arms around her. He held her, stiff at first, then with a maddening urge he clutched at her. Anne wrapped her arms around her husband and held him. They stood, together in the middle of the kitchen, and held each other, as if holding something alive would somehow erase the death from their lives.

They walked up the stairs and down the hall to his room, opened the door and turned on the light. The running and jumping turtles smiled at them. They looked at the books and toys which would never again be held by his little pudgy

hands and prepared themselves to pack them away. Her husband grabbed a box and walked over to the dresser, sat on the floor and opened a drawer. He began to pack away sleepers and miniature sweatshirts. She sat down beside him, reached into the drawer and pulled out a yellow thermal blanket. She folded it and put it in an empty box. And left it there. Paul looked in at the blanket, small and alone in the box, its bright yellow color contrasting so sharply with the muted brown. Anne looked over the box at him and attempted a smile. Paul reached over the box and brushed her cheek with his hand.

They spent the whole night in the room. They emptied the drawers and shelves, dismantled the furniture until dawn came and there remained only the smiling turtles on the wall and two piles of boxes on the floor. They made plans to give one of the piles away, but couldn't part with the other. They talked and remembered; they laughed and they cried. And when they looked at his watch and realized the time, they stood and stared at what they had done. They walked out of the room together. Anne reached back to turn off the light and close the door.

-Jessica Miller

...and I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life.

...I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life.

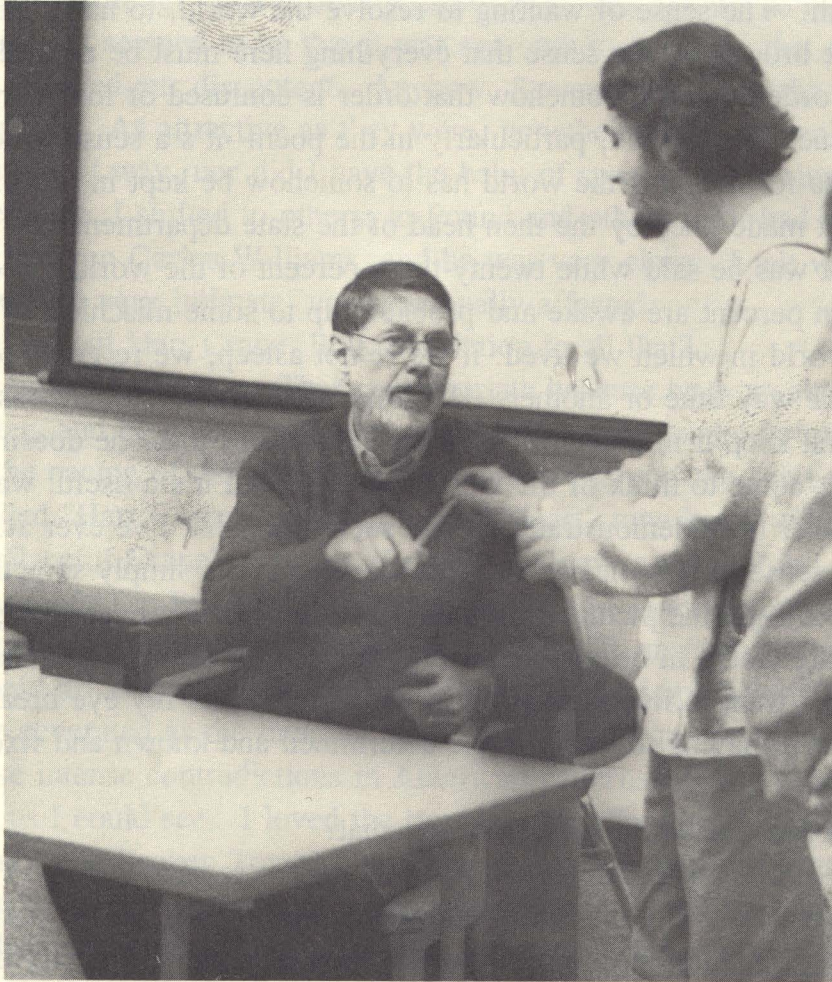
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...I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life. I was just thinking about how much I love you and how much I love life.

Conversation With Robert Creeley



The David Gray Professor of Poetry and Letters at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Robert Creeley has been acclaimed as one of America's leading poets ever since the publication of his first major book, For Love, in 1962. The following is taken from a conversation between Creeley and creative writing students during his visit to S.U. in the fall semester, 1994. Reflector wishes to thank Jessica Miller for preparing the transcription.

last minute, as I was now applying to a college which I thought had a primary instruction for reading and writing--which was Harvard, which was the haven. I'd had some monies from an insurance settlement on the loss of my eye which eventually paid for my time getting through college.

Taggart: When you were up at Harvard, did you start to get a sense of yourself as a writer?

Creeley: I wanted to be a writer. I remember all through college there was a very modest return on that proposal. One teacher in the sort of classic English composition language course asked me to come see him after class and asked me what I wanted to do. I said I'd like to write, and he said suppose you keep at it; you might make it sort of interesting. And that was very large encouragement. I took one course in writing with Delmore Schwartz who's interesting, and he's a very extraordinary poet, specifically in the forties. He had great authority. At that time, he was a classic city New Yorker--city manners, brilliant humor, very invulnerable, extremely attractive man. I took a course with him in which he gave me a modest amount of encouragement. I remember one time teaching during the summer with Carl Rakosi, an objectivist. He was musing on what procedures might be in the class situation we were all going to be in and I remember him saying the last thing in the world they'll need is encouragement. Anyone hearing that might think that was a very sly thing to say. But the point is young poets--any poets--do not need it. One wants, but one doesn't need. The point is that any writer in our situation really does it because virtually there is no alternative. You don't do it because people want you to do it. No one is a poet because someone said "Hey, you want to be a poet? We need a poet." Even in the most extraordinary social circumstances wherein a poet would seem to have congruence with his or her world. For instance, the feminist movement has not gone around saying you know we need a voice--we must get a vigorous, well determined voice to be our advocate. A person comes to be that, but no one's hired them or sponsored them or given them remarkable significance. In fact, some of the elders are still waiting to be recognized as existing. To be a poet is to be a poet. No one has ever figured out why or wherefore or for what. There's virtually no background that says this person will probably be a poet. I mean a poet could be a derelict son of teenage parents, one of whom split the moment he was born, spend most of his adolescence in jail-and end up one of the great poets. Or another could be born with so many silver spoons in his mouth he could barely open it or close it, son of corporate bankers, and he's a poet. One we were talking of earlier today, Larry Eigner, was early affected by cerebral palsy and has never really left his wheelchair in his life. He's a great poet. It seems to be a kind of given that they either develop or they don't. Sort of like somebody's playing the piano or being able to sink a basket--

you may or may not use it, but it's inherited in the person so therefore it doesn't need encouragement in the sense that if it's not taken care of it won't develop. Poetry will break through in the stoniest of circumstances. I think Emily Dickinson's a classic-- eight poems published in her lifetime. She was really on, she was writing at least a poem a day! That's incredible! I mean great poems! You can't think "the poor little victim." I mean she was too busy to be a victim. No wonder she never came downstairs--she had too much to do. There's nothing in Emily Dickinson's poetry that describes a shrinking violet, nothing in her letters that makes anyone recognize anything more than a profoundly determined and capable intelligence working often with a white-hot passion and clarity. She was terrific.

Jessica: I'm studying your work and my first question is how do you work? Do you sit down at a desk for blocks of time? How long does it take you to write a poem? Do you just knock them out or do you revise?

Creeley: Basically just knock them out. It depends. Over the years things change, you begin to age and whatnot. There'd be a run of poetry almost as if it was with fishing--suddenly something would spur. I couldn't possibly tell you what provoked it, but I was reading and writing. My pleasure is reading, and my pleasure is equally writing. So that whenever it was possible, I certainly went with it. I had early an intellectual resolution. I felt most accurately that I could get something done or said or located and accomplished in a so called poem. The first time I went back and tried to revise it or recast curiously didn't work. I lost the defining impulse or whatever you call it. I just missed it, and so it was not very successful. I didn't revise to any real effect. At best, I could cut out what I thought was redundant or sometimes I would lop off the first few lines of the beginning just to make the economy get moving a little bit.

Taggart: But did you actually almost teach yourself, as it were, to come to composition with a very alert intensity because the revision wasn't doing anything?

Creeley: Well, I used Williams' insistent model. I was trying to understand what he was doing. I was using the sense that this breaking into syntactical patterns, this prepositional phrase or verb and object was breaking the line at that point where you'd expect a bonding. That was a way of breaking attention and making one move aptly and quickly to the resolution, which was now on the next line. It kept a kind of curious syncopation with emphasis and rhythm. Actually, he wasn't doing that in the poems I was studying at all. When he read them, he didn't so read them. He might have been doing it intellectually, but certainly not with the sound, which is what I was doing.

Taggart: What about that business of hanging an article out on the end of a line?

Creeley: I love that. I remember once I'd said I'd love it if I could write so that I

could walk around a building. I may be able to get up, read a line, walk around the building, and read the next line. I wanted the tension to stay put. If you said I think I'll go to the movies, and then walk around the building, there'd be damn few people here when you get back for many reasons. But if you said I think I'll go and then walk around the building, you've got a slightly better chance that someone might want to know the completion of that phrase. So you keep a kind of energy tense or expectant. It also gives you a more various rhythm because you're breaking against the kind of closure of the lining. I took the line as a mode for syncopation and also certainly for rhyming and things of that sort.

Taggart: When did you have a fairly good sense of your line?

Creeley: Well probably by the early fifties. I was listening to a lot of jazz during that period from the mid to late forties and fascinated particularly by be-bop, by the taking of a standard rhythmic period and doing changes on it reversing the order so you'd hear a space of silence and then playing off the beat, lots of things that were curiously very subtle and very informative in ways that I couldn't find in the standard instances. It isn't that all poetry in this period was such, but the poetry that still was surviving and authoritative had a lot of the almost rigorously determined patterning of the classic iambic pentameter. That's why I loved Crane. His rhythms were so various, and his pace was so particular.

Jyllian: I'm studying Nathaniel Mackey's work right now. One of the biggest problems I have is trying to figure out how many lines to put in a stanza or how many words to a line. How do you decide how many lines or how many words you put to a stanza?

Creeley: I was thinking of [Mackey's] poetry, and it has a lot to do with jazz. Not that he's trying to imitate it, but is trying to get the economy of it. I think you can, in a practical sense, put as much in a line as you choose as long as it doesn't become a too tightly packed suitcase. The test for me would be to read it aloud and see how it sounds. There's no set rule. Test it according to your own sense of rhythm and sound.

Beth: [I'm studying Susan Howe right now.] Do you think in short lines when you actually are thinking?

Creeley: I remember it was Olson who one time in a letter said you think in long periods but you speak seemingly in short physical emphatic bursts. So you need a line that reflects the latter, no matter what you do in the thinking. That was a revelation. That was very useful to me because it freed me up so to speak to use a patterning which is much like my beat. I had a hard time with the longer line because it tended to go flaccid. It just flopped. I tried the longer line and I'm sure there are poems where I even sustained it, but it was an effort.

Suh: I'm studying Olson. What are the major changes that you see in your poems throughout the years, if there are any changes?

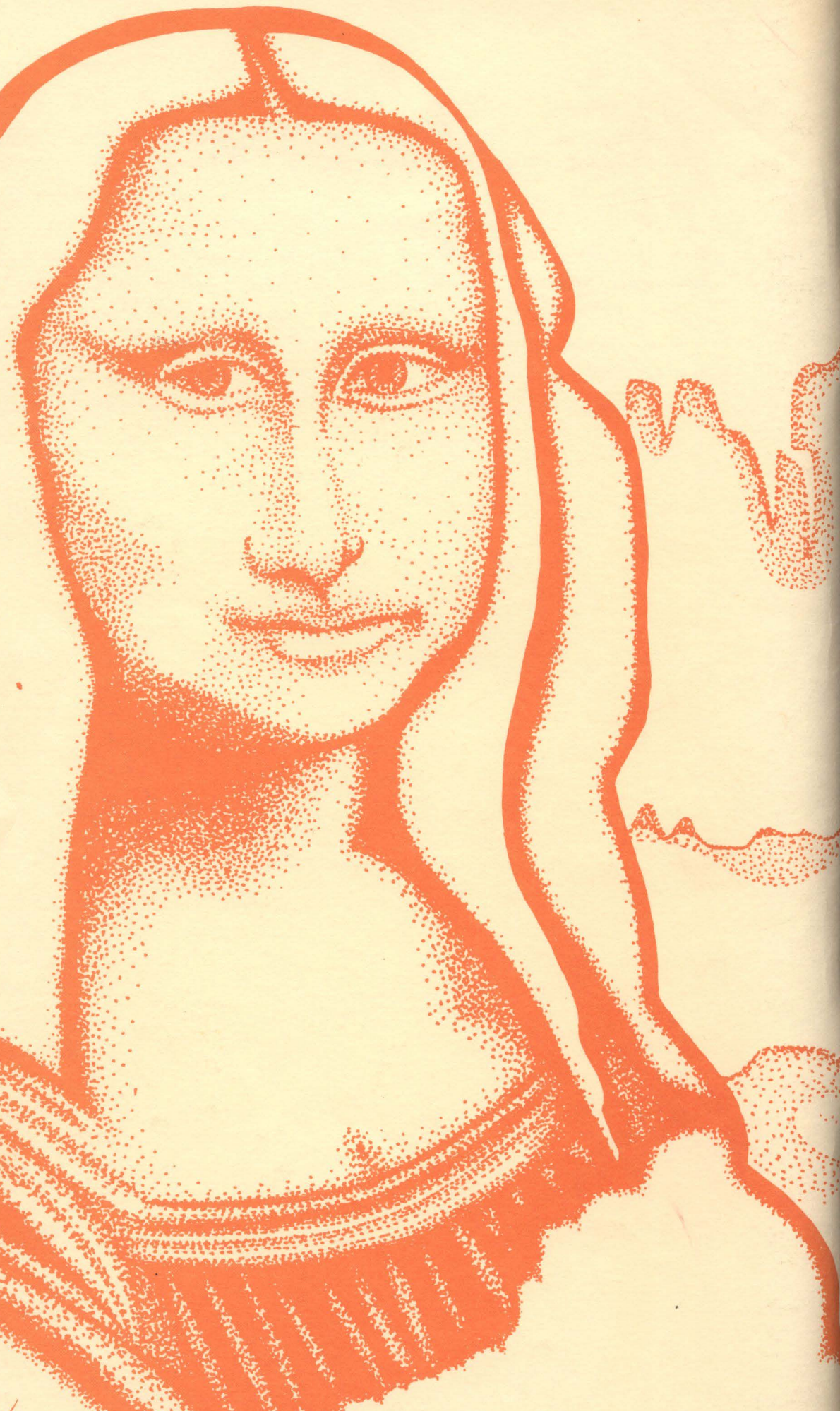
Creeley: I think a crucial time for me was Pieces. I think that the early poems are weighted or fraught by several things: the emotional dilemma of being a young husband and father and trying to find place socially and financially in the world, trying to find a way to make a living, a way to feel dignity, a way to have useful presence. Living out in the country for then almost five years made us more isolated than ever. It had its virtues for concentration and working, but they were paid for bitterly with dissolution of marriage, isolation from other people--we were living in a place that had virtually no other company to offer. We were the only foreign family for an expanse of time and I loved our neighbors, but I could barely speak Spanish. I certainly knew what that side of being an immigrant was like. So then coming into Black Mountain College and discovering this whole peer group which I had never known before and finding an ability I never thought to have or even exhibit, e.g., to be able to teach. Then subsequently about a year later after our marriage had collapsed, I headed for the southwest and landed a job very shortly after teaching at a boys' school. There I think I got really practically involved. Black Mountain had been this epiphanal moment of great peer consciousness and pleasure, but now I was in daily work, which was terrific. I taught Latin and French and English, History occasionally, on a very daily basis from 8:30 to 4:00. And I realized I can really do this, and people dug it and they actually learned. It was phenomenal. People are very generous, especially students. So I taught for three years in that pattern. Sometime in the sixties a kind of clenched fist determination in my writing began to open up. I stopped worrying about writing a perfect poem at every shot. I remember one time a friend said to me "Bob, why don't you give up the goddamn lifeboat and trust the water?" That's an almost unthinkable idea, but why doesn't one give up the lifeboat and trust the water? "Loosen up, Bob" was really the instruction. Don't take everything so seriously or so intensely and don't worry. I was not humorless, but I certainly felt an overwhelming responsibility and confusion. That was the way I wrote: either they were great or I threw them away. So I began to write a poem which I didn't even think of as a poem, which was a sequence of notation. I remember I wrote one of the most offensive poems in the period. It was discussed in the papers as to whether it was really a poem. They said that's ridiculous. How can you call that thing a poem? I said well I'm not calling anything anything. That to me is a basic measure. It's fascinating to me that if you add one and one you've got two. But now you've got three terms--you've got two singular ones and a two, which comes to three. And that's fascinating to me as a measure. I remember I was dumped on and attacked. But I survived. I didn't worry about anything, frankly. I just enjoyed this playful inclusion in writing, and I got a form that committed it.

Taggart: In Pieces, a lot of the individual poems are very narrow, literally, physically. Single words, as Zukofsky would say, dripped down the page. But you're saying even though they may look stringent they were actually done in a mood of relaxation and inclusion?

Creeley: I finally recognized that the only permission the world either would or could give me would be that which I imagined for myself. It sounds awfully pious thus put, but I remember Allen Ginsberg had an early line: "they broke their backs lifting the city to heaven heaven which was everywhere above them." No wonder they broke their backs lifting the city to heaven, heaven which was everywhere about them. How can you have an argument in paradise? Who's right or wrong, and they're all arguing about the condition of the great beyond and how can you have righteousness in paradise?

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RETTLE OR



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