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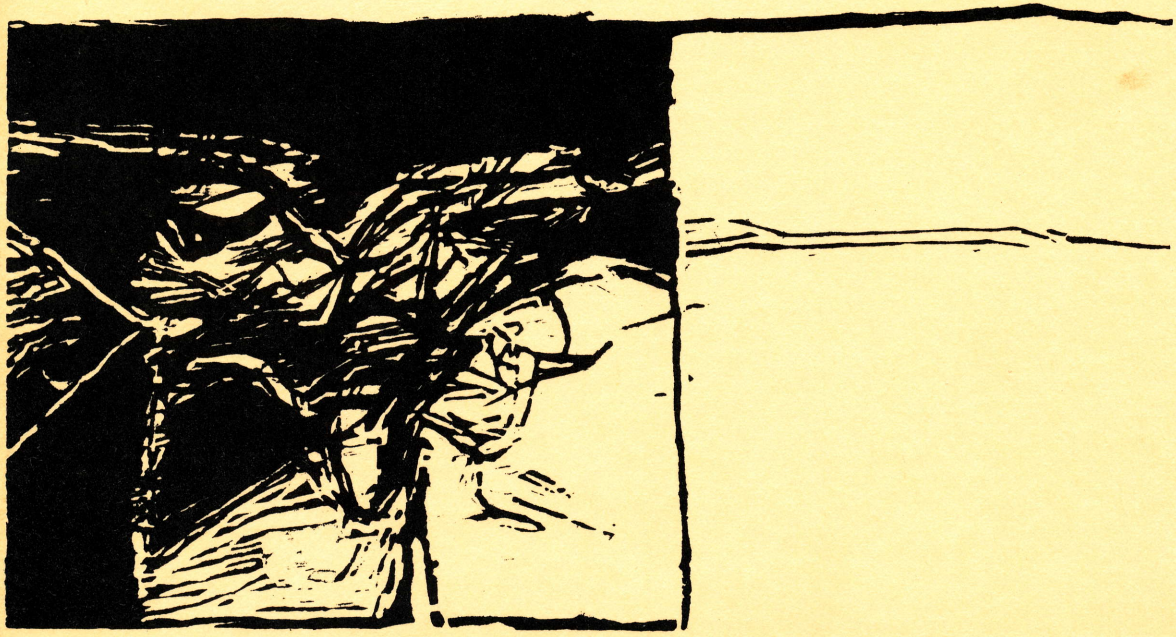

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robert creeley

interview

Interviewer: I wanted to ask you about your association with Black Mountain College.

Creeley: It was through Charles Olson, who was then rector. It goes back in 1949 or 1948. I was in correspondence with Vincent Ferrini, trying to get material for a magazine we were then trying to start. Jake Leed and myself were trying to publish a little magazine. I got in touch with Vincent through Cid Corman, who had a radio program in Boston. Vincent sent me some poems by a man then unknown to me. This was Olson. I wrote back very, sort of, brashly that he was "looking for a language", and he came back reasonably and, you know, picked up the conversation with that. I realized he was much more equipped, in a very real sense, than I certainly had realized. And anyhow we started writing each other pretty enthusiastically, all through 1949 and the middle 1950's. He had been living in Washington, D. C. at the time. Edward Dahlberg had a position briefly at Black Mountain and didn't want to stay. So after about 2 weeks he really wanted to get out of there. It was in '48 or '49--'49, I think. So they said fine, except that they wanted him to supply a replacement, because he had a contract. Olson was a friend of his, and Ed persuaded Olson to take the job. Then Olson worked out an agreement with Joseph Alders, who was then the rector of Black Mountain, to the effect that he would come for intensive periods of three to four days once a month rather than be in residence, so he took the job on that basis. Then when Alders left to go to the Yale School of Design, M.C. Richards was briefly rector, and acted as the head of the college. And then gradually Olson assumed that position. So in the middle '50's--1954--the college was in bad straits because of lack of enrollment, and therefore no money; the college was self-funding. It had a board of advisors, but no regent, no administrative personnel in other words. The faculty was the effective administration. So it depended upon its own activity to fund it. It had no endowment of any kind, except the actual property. So in any case Olson decided that one way of publicizing the college's activity would be a little magazine, and in 1954 he and the faculty provided funds for the printing of a magazine which gave me the editorship of--I was still in Majorca and subsequently in the Spring, in the late spring of that year, I came to the States to teach at Black Mountain. I taught there until mid-summer--June or July. Then I returned to Spain, and then came back again the following spring and stayed through to late fall or winter and then left to go west. But that's how it happened that I came to be associated with that college. It was Olson's interest and help and his employment of me and the other people there. . . .

Interviewer: What were the teaching practices there? It wasn't run like a regular. . . .

Creeley: No, it was run like what one may call a superior graduate school with a very intensive program. When I was there the sciences were necessarily inactive, as the monies couldn't provide for the equipping of adequate laboratories and things of that kind. But there was an extraordinary faculty in the arts. Stefan Wolpe was teaching music, Wes Hutz was teaching drama, he had been with the Jasper Theatres and the Hedgeron players in Philadelphia. Olson was teaching writing and history and various disciplines of that kind. Karen Karnes and David Weinrube were working with pottery and ceramics. Joe Fiari was teaching painting. And then people would be coming in and out. The real intensive period occurs really just a year or two years previous when a group of people came. For example in dance they had Wes Cunningham and Catherine Litz. In music they had John Cage and Lew Harrison; painting, Franz Kline, de Kooning; they had an extraordinary group of people. And the students were equally extraordinary. It was a workshop program, for a highly articulate group of people. There was no speciously formal distinction between students and faculty. It was a common situation, and therefore students had much more access to the people teaching . . . but then they respected the privacy of the people working. If you were doing something they certainly wouldn't bother you. The classes for example had a formal designation but they didn't have a formal time limit, which is one of the hardest things to work with in a university. Lord knows why should conversation stop arbitrarily in forty minutes or an hour? I remember one class Olson was teaching, a history class, based on the question of what happens to the "concept of the great man" from the 19th to the 20th century. One meeting of that class I remember started at 8 in the evening and finished at 1:00 the next afternoon. So that already is distinct from university programming as we know it. The great point is that the faculty determined the content of the teaching, not the administration. In other words you were not given a curriculum of a designed number of subjects. The faculty, in relation to the students, determined the content of courses so that already was a large step beyond the usual programming of university activity.

Interviewer: Is there anything like this in existence today?

Creeley: There are colleges trying to be like that. Emerson for a time on the west coast; Pacific Grove was trying to develop a program akin to this. Goddard College in Vermont was trying to do something akin. But I don't think there's ever been anything quite like it. Because, equally, the students were extraordinary. In writing for example there was Joel Oppenheimer, Edward Dorn, Fielding Dawson. And remember this was out of an enrollment of, when I got there, 25 students. Then there were also the people who were frankly simply interested in driving as fast as they could around the countryside. But the nucleus, the definitive group, was very extraordinary on both sides of the fence-and there was no fence. It was ideal.

Interviewer: People have said that there was a particular school or style of writing to come out of Black Mountain College. Do you think this is true?

Creeley: Well, there is certainly a particular attitude toward writing to come out of Black Mountain. It can't be identified as a style because the distinctions between the various people identified with Black Mountain are too clear. If you take Olson's writing or Duncan's writing or my own writing or equally Joel Oppenheimer's or Michael Rumacher's or Edward Dorn's, you would find similarities of concern but you would find modes that are usually quite distinct ways of writing. But what seems to have been the common denominator was the sense that writing is an occasion given to the person writing rather than one demanded by him. In other words, Olson's concept of projected verse is in the sense of the open field wherein a man's attention has to be momentarily focused; cannot move on any assumption of attitude of feeling but has to momentarily qualify all of its evidence and its intention. This way of looking at writing is common, I think, to all the people with this background. The most extraordinary thing about Olson's teaching and support was that he seems to have had the ability to give each person the articulation of his own specific nature in no mystic or untoward sense. He could create a situation wherein this or that man would literally gain the articulation of his own abilities rather than Olson's abilities so that the people came out of that background with extraordinary stability. Ed Dorn, I think, is one of the most brilliant people to come from that occasion. We take writing seriously, and we take it professionally, and we take it as a commitment in a total sense. I don't think any of the people from Black Mountain felt that writing was an activity incidental to their lives or even additive. I think they felt it was an immediate, absolute commitment to some possibility.

Interviewer: When did you first start writing?

Creeley: I don't remember . . . I wanted to write when I finished high school, but I didn't have any sense of how to do it. In college, I was frustrated and confused by the kinds of discipline and kinds of attitudes I met with. I was talking to an old friend this last winter and she remembers a conversation we had back in the 40's. We were both in college together. I was very intent on Williams' sense of how you get the thing stated in its own particulars rather than your assumption of those particulars. In other words, how do you state something so that it occurs in its autonomy rather than your assumption of that autonomy? How do you write the occasion of a truck moving through an intersection so that actually all that it has is movement in all the environment that it was moving through. And also, she remembers senses of autonomy . . . I was apparently intent on stopping things. But this was . . . I won't say it was a Baroque period of American writing, but it was a period dominated by Eliot's attitudes, and then Auden's apparently social case and irony. Anyhow, the poems I wrote in college were largely very awkward, very inarticulate, and very uncomfortable to remember. I came back from the American Field Service in the end of '45. I got back to Cambridge and my friends were putting together

an issue of the Harvard "Wake" which was a magazine which had been started to offer another place other than the "Harvard Advocate", which had large serial circumstance. I came in as a kind of contributing editor. I think the first poem I ever printed was in that issue. It was a poem called "Return", which was about 4 lines. But it was very compact; the commas are there, not stupidly--but you can see the preoccupation with punctuation. It took me a long time, it wasn't until I was out of college that I had any surety. And again, it was Olson who in the late 40's gives me a sense of how the possibility can be articulated. Because I was trying to write-- not like Williams, curiously enough, although I was much persuaded by Williams. But the poet who most interested me in terms of mode apparently was Stevens. I read him exhaustively. But I couldn't find the articulation until Olson showed me the key with that attitude he proposes.

Interviewer: When you first began writing, did you start with poetry?

Creeley: And prose. I remember taking courses with Delmore Schwartz in which we were writing stories. I wrote a lot of stories during the 40's. I wrote both equally then. I married very young and we lived for a year on the cape, and then we moved to New Hampshire. We tried to buy a house in Littleton, New Hampshire. We lived there for roughly three years, and during that time I was writing both prose and poetry. But I was really writing, you know, prose more than poetry or stories, and sending them out, trying to find publishers for them, magazines that would take them. I was very influenced by Dostoevski, and by Lawrence and Stendhal. I wanted a kind of an "I-ness" or singularity in the prose, but I wanted it to be stated again in all its activity rather than in some psychological assumptions. There are two stories that were really a breakthrough. One, "The Unsuccessful Husband", shows very clearly the Dostoevski influence. Even the title is the Dostoevski kick. The first story I think to break through for me was a story called "Mr. Blue", which was a "true story".

Interviewer: How did the distinctive rhythms in your poetry develop? Were they influenced by any other writer?

Creeley: They come from senses of Williams' writing. Senses that prove, paradoxically enough, inaccurate. I was reading Williams' poems with a sense of the endstop or the terminal juncture, but he wasn't writing then that way, because I heard him read and realized that he wasn't using the endstop manner. But for me it was the way to articulate the particular rhythmic unit. I read of Poe's sense of the line in a lecture called "The Rationale of Poetry." He speaks of the character of the line and speaks of the antiquity of rhyme as a way of stating the rhythmic unit of the line. The line comes, in his estimation, in order to qualify what the rhythmic unit is. For me the endstop is serving the same function; it's trying to articulate the base rhythmic unit in each basic circumstance. But I think rhythm comes from the way emphasis comes to you. The pitch and the breaks and

the feelings are registered in the way you stress. We have a highly stressed language, so it's useful to make use of that fact. Again, Poe doesn't believe it's possible to write poetry in French because it's unaccented.

Interviewer: Do you think your poems are better understood and appreciated when read aloud?

Creeley: Yes, I think all poetry is better understood when read aloud. Not didactically, but at least the modes of poetry are more interesting when read aloud because that's what they are written to . . . propose. I've the sense that poetry is most intensely that which has to do with sound, and rhythm, and semantic content. The sound and rhythms are measures of the of the emotion. They are what actually qualify words in the most intensive manner.

Interviewer: How about the rhythm and language in The Island?

Creeley: Well, again, it's spoken. I can't think of writing without thinking of speech. All writing to me is the transcription of spoken possibility. I don't see it as much as hear it. I never thought that there was such an absolute distinction between prose and poetry that one need not pay attention to rhythmic orders in prose, whereas one had to in poetry. I think that prose has a more various organization of rhythms; it doesn't have to deal with structure in the same sense that poetry does. But rhythm is always the situation, because language is a time art.

Interviewer: It seemed as I was reading The Island that there was a rhythm to the thought, as well as the language, and that is something I found unique . . .

Creeley: Well, Robert Kelly makes an interesting poet. In an interview he was trying to explain his interest in what he calls deep image, and he's also trying to qualify what he thinks is "active" in the situation of a poem. He refers to Eisenstein's manipulation of image in filming. So that Eisenstein gets a rhythmic situation in image by repetition and cutting and whatnot so he gets a rhythmic circumstance in the actual visual image. And Kelly feels that this is equally possible in poetry; you can get a rhythmic circumstance from the occasion of the image as it occurs in parallel with other images. Everything has the possibility of rhythm in so far as it has the possibility of an appropriate parallel or an appropriate duplication. This is what rhythm is all about: the balance of equivalents.

Interviewer: What are you looking for in your prose? What I mean is, for example, Ginsberg told us he was searching for the development of the consciousness.

Creeley: I think I would feel that too. I think that I would very much agree with that. But the activity for me . . . it doesn't have an absolutely clear

purpose except that one wants to do it, at least in one's various moods one feels one's stuck with it, you know, has the use of it . . . or not the use of it, because, again, there is a need. Zukofsky, for example, speaks of a deep need. And, equally, as Allen suggests in that comment, it's an occasion which makes evident ways of thinking, ways of experiencing things that, curiously, for the writer are not otherwise to be permitted. So that you gain extraordinary uses of your own person that are otherwise most difficult to apprehend. You tell yourself things that you can't otherwise state.

Interviewer: Do you have any preference for either prose or poetry?

Creeley: No, these are just two possibilities, and each has its own occasion. There's no one side being better than the other. I don't feel quite so simply that poetry is necessarily the more accurate and highly charged form, because instances of prose can gain an experience that is equally significant to me. I realize that prose because of its structure and because of the assumptions that are often met with in talking about it, that prose tends to be the looser activity; that is, the more sprawling, the less articulate. But this doesn't seem to me to have to be the case. I always feel that one is writing words, and words are always specific, so that if they're felt to be specific, then the possibility exists equally in prose and poetry as to what their content can be. The pitch of intensity in prose doesn't have to be so carefully structured whereas poetry tends to want a certain structure. Prose can be much more coming-and-going, much more varied in its emphasis. I like that, because I think at times it's the only condition that can express some kinds of experience.

Interviewer: What makes a novel? It occurred to me that The Island could be edited down into what Salinger would call a "cracking good story."

Creeley: Well, that's his problem . . . You're not writing a "novel," you're writing something that's defining itself as you're writing it. If it's length--so-called--can be relatively short, it's called a short story. If it necessitates a longer continuity in order to indicate the outline of its relationships, then I suppose you have a novel . . . I think the better word, by the way, is "narrative," or "tale;" you're telling something. The word fiction, for example, comes from a root which means, partly, "to disguise." It involves duplicity. It has more to do with drama, I suppose, than prose. It has to do with creating unreality. The root word for prose has the sense of going straight forward. You go straight forward to the possibility and go so far as you can continue it. Fiction doubles back and forth upon itself. It's unstable in its emphasis. But no, narrative is the word; or tale, which has to do with "tally," and has the sense of counting. That sense, to me, is much more valuable than the sense of "fiction" or "novel". I think that the "novel" primarily, in contemporary reference, is a designation of the length of the work rather than a designation of its content.

Interviewer: Have you ever considered doing a dramatic work for the theater?

Creeley: I've never been able to. I've had the interest, but it's awfully hard for me to move into that dimension where one is speaking in the guise of several voices which are distinct from one's own. Duncan (Robert Duncan) is a brilliant playwright. Very extraordinary. But this is an ability that is quite distinct from mine. I have never been able to understand that projection of voices into a circumstance that is significantly an operation of my own. And I've never understood the literal, physical circumstances of the play. I don't have the kind of imagination that works simply with that kind of projection. I can't see it in that way. I can hear the voices but I can't see them. It requires seeing them in the circumstance of a stage where you can say, you know, "this is here, this is here . . ." I think anyone who writes plays has to have a very very adept orientation of that sort. Otherwise it becomes mere talking and then it's a bore. It's like going to the opera where you can't really hear the words and you can't really see the pertinence of the language to the songs. It's simply a lot of people shouting. Very beautifully, but destroying the narrative continuity.

Interviewer: Quoting from David Ossman's interview in the book, "The Solemn Art," you said that form is never more than an extension of content. Could you clarify that?

Creeley: Perhaps in the sense of morphological law, everything has a form appropriate to its own nature. The content can evaporate or go slack or go away. The shell or husk or the thing is left as a remnant, but in any case the content is the primary condition of form. Form is the issue of content. I feel that forms do not exist without the occasion of content. They can continue to exist after a certain period. You do things because some "reason" or whatever impulse provokes you; this is the content, and the act is the form of the content; the way the content takes shape. You can go on doing the act habitually long after the "content" has gone away, but at that point, there is another content, another circumstance.

Interviewer: You have mentioned your association with Charles Olson several times. How did you two come in contact with one another? Was it through correspondence?

Creeley: Yes. We were talking earlier about being in correspondence with Vincent Ferrini. It came about through my reply to Ferrini. He and Charles were in close relation so that I think he must have referred my letter to Charles, who was reasonably irritated. He got in touch with me directly. I think there were two poems he sent . . . in any case, from that point on we wrote intensively; we'd write fice or six letters a week on occasion. But he'd already published "Call Me Ishmael,"--in 1947--it was an extraordinary work of critical insight. I know when I first came upon that book some time after the initial correspondence had started, and I realized it was far, far beyond my own abilities at this time. You know, I was almost dismayed to realize how developed in intelligence he really was.

Interviewer: In the preface to "For Love," you talk about the reader you have written to. Who is he?

Creeley: Myself, primarily. I think I write primarily for my own needs, and to substantiate or to make substantive feelings and ways of articulating things that are otherwise unattainable. The primary reader is literally myself. It's those particular people who are close to me, in a very actual way. But it's awfully hard for me to understand a wider locus of people. I don't at all mean for that to be glib or self-diminishing, but I have an awfully awkward sense of, you know, who'll ever read this. For example, someone reads a poem I wrote 15 years ago. Well, my relation to that poem is much altered. My experience of that poem might now be as much as anyone else's. I no longer feel that poem to be particularly quite the same as when I wrote it. It's now taken over its own situation. But the primary reader, as I said, would be myself. I'm not at all hesitant or embarrassed to say that, because I don't see who the hell else would be the reader. I mean, I can't assume any other reader. And certainly there is no one else there when I am writing. I don't have any other reference for wanting to do it. I've had to be my own reader, along with, as I have said, particular people who have a particular relation to me or have a particular understanding.

Interviewer: Could you say just exactly why you write? Is it out of necessity, or inspiration . . . could you give it a word?

Creeley: Well . . . no. Because there's no other thing to do at that point, I suppose. The occasion seems to be "inspired" insofar as one can't locate precisely where it's come from. I found at times when someone wrote asking if I had a poem for them, that I would submit to their magazine, or even in times when there was an occasion I really wanted to respect, I found that to want to write a poem had nothing to do with it. There's no occasion that you can really demand of yourself that seems to be adequate. They simply come and go . . . no, it was not an easy life. In fact it was a literally difficult life, against the better judgment of myself, and certainly of those close to me, such as my first wife. You know, there was a lot of confusion as to what literally does this offer as a life. One rightly or wrongly does have those misgivings at times. To write poems in this country is not to be engaged in an activity which offers much occasion for relation with other people. In the fifties, when I was coming into some articulation as a writer, it was a highly impossible time for writers. Really, I remember one time in San Francisco being picked up with a friend who was just over eighteen or nineteen. He looked very young, and we were sitting in sort of a diner; there was another friend with us, and there was a curfew in San Francisco at that time, and so a policeman appeared in the doorway and shouted across the room at this friend Ron, where people were sitting having coffee and whatnot, and said, you know, "where's your ID card, you're underage," and it pretty much humiliated him; you know. All of a sudden the attention of the whole place suddenly shifted to him, and he

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felt very embarrassed and humiliated. Anyhow, I tried to intervene, in a sort of stupid sense; I ended up in jail for the weekend. I remember I ended up in the lineup, and they asked me what I did, and I said, you know, "I'm a poet," I remember the reaction, of course, was a very kind of snickering laugh--the assumption that therefore you're homosexual or you're queer. It wasn't even homosexual, it was queer in the sense that you were completely outside the normal, or normative, or functional or responsible, or respectable conduct of life in the United States of America. I got that kind of qualification very frequently. I mean, you're some kind of . . . not a nut, but some kind of person who is taken to be in some sense absent from the usual human race. Well now, we enjoy a period where poets are almost as popular as baseball players, but I don't think that has much to do with it, either. I think the function of poetry is on the one hand something more decisive than that, and certainly to be avoided. If you're given the possibility its yours, and if you don't use it it's your decision also, but I mean it's a life; it's one way of being in the world.

Interviewer: Would you explain what the function of the poet is in society or in relation to his reader?

Creeley: That's . . . I am almost thinking back to . . . I really have grand ideas on that subject. Pretty much formed by those who have preceded, such as Pound, who says at one point in an essay that artists are the itinerant of the race; that poets have a way of articulating experience that is common to all men at some time and place in ways that precede the common understanding of that circumstance. For example Allen Ginsberg in the middle fifties anticipated the statement--the experience was already there--but he anticipated the articulation by at least, I would say, at least five years. I don't think that the impact of his registration, let's say, has as yet caught up with the body politic. Poets are given to communicate circumstances of the world that are highly intensive, and highly invaluable to that world if it will permit them to exist in a way significant to the persons involved. Again Williams says in a lovely poem: " . . . at what passes for the new . . . you will not find it there, but in despised poems . . . yet men die every day for lack of what is found there." In other words he's not being sentimental about the occasion of poetry, he just means that the most intensive articulation of human feelings and human circumstances is to be found in poetry. And that is what I would argue equally; that the most intensive circumstance of the feeling and the possibilities of feeling in the world, perhaps, to my mind, are to be found in poems. I don't mean that as simply a liking for poetry, or something as loose as that; I think it's a real sense. I also have a sense of the figure of the poet as he goes back in antiquity. Poets have had a unique function in the history of our world; there are times when the poet and the "prophet" were equivalent figures, and it wasn't simply for the entertainment of the public. It was just that these gifts are parallel: one's given to say things and therefore to see things that are curiously unique in the experience of the world. I don't know how that happens, I don't think anyone knows how it happens. But it does seem to be the instance. Again, how could you define the situation of

someone like Allen, who as I say I think articulated the circumstances of people in such an extraordinary range. Mort Sahl for a time looked very interesting, and he spoke very, you know, really fondly and sharply and hip-ly about the circumstance of existence in the late 50's, but he was a commentator. He was talking about the experience; he wasn't speaking from experience, and he didn't have the articulation of the experience in a significant manner. A poet speaks from a state of possession, and therefore has a curious content which is distinct from all other possibilities. He is speaking in the act of some possession which informs him, I don't know how. I don't think any physiological means has yet been devised to qualify it.

Interviewer: You spoke earlier about the problem of describing a truck moving through an intersection. How do you cope with that in prose and in poetry?

Creeley: That part of writing has to do with what you might call the possibilities of articulation. Thinking of the circumstances of my writing, there's often the assumption that because of its character, e. g. "free verse" or whatever it's called, that there's some kind of permissiveness involved, or some kind of looseness. But what I'm speaking of is the necessity of being able to say anything that one will be "called upon" to say. Therefore, I was extraordinarily interested in how things might be articulated so that I would be, in that pathetic sense, able to say anything when and if I had the occasion to. I was interested in how things could be articulated; how particular kinds of feelings or circumstances could be articulated. It's hard to make a rule, because you never know quite when you are going to have need of this ability. But it seems to me that prose and poetry equally require intensive periods of concentration and attention so as to gain the use of articulation as it is demanded by the writing. So I read as much as I could, and . . . well, not carefully in some perverted way; not like reading carefully for an English class . . . but read to see what it was that was happening in prose that I respected; not so much how to get the tricks of the writing, but how it was to get the kinds of experience: how did Lawrence gain that density of emotion? How did Dostoevski poise that kind of dilemma of the singularity of person? How did Stendhal effect that crazy sequence of reference that led you in such an incisive and quick manner to all kinds of ramifications of thought? How do people think? How do they feel in this particular circumstance? How do they manage to make it evident in their writing? . . . that is what I mean about how that truck . . . how you can get that truck evident in the world; that is, writing. And don't take the truck into the writing as though you were taking it out of its own environment, but rather keep the possibilities of both environments together; that's the emphasis of what was on my mind. But I can't state my rules for it, because it's very much the attention of each person involved. I am dismayed because I . . . I don't know . . . I am not at all strict in certain ways . . . . But I keep wishing people would read more intensively. We have two possibilities in writing, at least at the level of writ-

ing of people at the university. One is to want to manifest one's soul, as Olson says, and the other is wanting to gain the possibility of entering into an activity which is called writing. The first is usefully and interestingly expressive, but it's like trying to fly an airplane without ever having considered what it actually is made up of, you know? Just wanting to fly the airplane. And frankly some people are going to be able to fly an airplane with that impulse. No matter how often it crashes they will finally be able to get the thing off the ground. But to my nature the more perfect way is to consider all the instances of flying that you are aware of. In other words trying to gain all the particular activities of writing that preceded you. This is where I probably was very much influenced by Pound, because his way of proceeding was to be as aware of what had happened and what could happen as you could possibly be.

Interviewer: You seem to have always had close contact with students and young people who were just beginning to write. Do you see any things that they are universally doing wrong, or that they are all doing correctly?

Creeley: It isn't even right or wrong, other than the sense of wishing that people would avail themselves more intensively of all that has preceded them. I mean it's patterns or habits, but again, there is a specious emphasis put upon "originality". Everybody's original in the sense that each person is possessed of his own uniqueness, by the fact of being himself. So that you don't have to worry about. It's how you articulate that specific thing you are. But again, you learn this by seeing how other people have managed the articulation. Not to lean on it, but I simply feel if people paid more attention to what's preceded them they would have more articulation of their own circumstance. Not as rules, but the more intensively you are involved in some activity the more you have the use of that activity. I suppose that is the only universal wrong I would feel is evident in contemporary writing. Writing has swamped in some cases the kinds of imagination that were previously evident in other disciplines. I remember someone telling me that at San Francisco State not long ago there were over 2,000 people enrolled in one or more creative writing courses, and that there were 500 majors in creative writing. That, to me, is a very real measure of what the possibilities of creative writing really are. No one is going to publish the works of 500 writers a year from one university. What are these people actually being given? Possibly, they are being trained to read more intensively, more pleasantly, more usefully. But I mean to persuade them that they are going to learn to be writers through this agency is very, very unfair, I think. I don't think that the university form produces writers of a particular calibre. I think if you are going to write not at all simply, you will find your own access to the possibility--but oftentimes the university breeds a lot of false habits and false hopes for people involved in writing courses; I question that kind of program . . . . It's the same thing that happens in painting; the painters turned out by university art school programs are largely embarrassed to do anything more than teach painting in turn. It's an awfully self-defeating kind of circumstance. It tends to cheat them of whatever articulation they might have had.

Interviewer: Salinger has said that you are a reader first and then a writer. Would you agree with that?

Creeley: I'd say that they were very similar acts. Duncan at one point said he couldn't remember if he read something or wrote it. They tend to be very equivalent attentions, that is in writing you are reading what you are writing, and in reading you are writing what you are reading. They are very parallel attentions, and I think that in that sense Salinger is accurate enough. One comes into the activity by reading, and then slowly gains the articulation that permits him to write.

Interviewer: What previous writers do you think are the most important to contemporary writers of prose and poetry?

Creeley: Well for me--again, I speak very much from my own uses--in poetry, thinking of the last fifty years, they are Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. In the generation following, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Olson. Then in a more contemporary reference, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg. A little more contemporary would be Ed Dorn, ... There are many other poets I respect, but these are the ones who have been decisive for me personally. Olson says that each one of us has his own kin in concentration. I was very involved with Coleridge for a time, and I suppose I must have heard of Keats and the other people, but I was wary of the richness; I didn't have the possibility of that richness, that texture. I like the Elizabethans extremely. The ones I suggested and then people like Wyatt, and Donne . . . Donne, I don't know. I was impressed by him, but he never really hit me very hard. I was much more interested in poets such as Camp, and Wyatt. Shakespeare in the sense of the beautiful articulation of the language. And in prose there are about four: Lawrence, Stendhal . . . and then earlier Dostoevski made a very great impact . . . at one time I read a great deal of Gide. I read everything I could get of his. Beckett, I think is an impressive writer. But then equally I am very involved with people like Edward Dahlberg, who has a peculiar --not peculiar in the sense of strange--but an <u>intensive</u> qualification in their own needs that lends itself to a very extraordinary prose. He, I would feel, is very impressive. I am <u>not</u> so drawn to writers such as Hemingway, Faulkner . . . I keep thinking of Olson, Olson saying that Faulkner was for him a kind of socializing of Dostoevski; an American Dostoevski. I like Poe. I think Poe is a very impressive writer. And I like Fielding very much. I liked Stern very much at one point. I like Swift. I like the . . . I won't say the great stylists, but I like some very specific kind of intelligence in prose, and I find that in Faulkner, curiously, a very decisive style, but I don't find a very decisive intelligence. But I <u>do</u> find a very decisive intelligence in Stendhal. I think that my measure for prose would be Stendhal, on the one hand, and Lawrence on the other. And Joyce, for example . . . but Joyce, well, his intelligence didn't interest me after a certain point, whereas the intelligence of Lawrence even in its most loose and distorted kinds of statements still is always persuasive to me. I think

someone like Kafka had tremendous impact, but one doesn't move from them, whereas I moved very much from these people I've mentioned. Personally.

Interviewer: Ginsberg when he was here seemed most impressed with Walt Whitman . . .

Creeley: Yes, I curiously left him out. I find I began to read him much more intensively than I had when younger, again my nature led me to a more intensification, although God knows Whitman is certainly intensive . . . . And another poet I forgot to mention is Hart Crane, who had great effect on me at one point, and whom I continue to deeply respect . . . . Whitman, he's the basis of American poetry . . . and Melville, for God's sake I left out Melville. This is a kind of dilemma, this trying to remember everything or at least tag everything in quick fashion. You get involved in a train of thought and have to ignore it . . . . I may do what people say Joyce did; that is, he so created a "world" that an alternative to it's statement is . . . I mean, you couldn't write another book like Moby Dick, it would be absurd. And you couldn't write another book like "Song of Myself." There's such a particularity of occasion in these men that only a highly, highly involved person such as Allen on one hand or Robert Duncan curiously on the other can move from Whitman in the literal sense, I mean who can pick up the emphasis on striking the strings old Whitman sang from. It's only permitted to a very few people to move from such intense justification or use of occasion. Whitman I feel would be the mainstay of American poetry just as Melville I would feel to be the mainstay of American prose. These are the primary persons in our literature.

Interviewer: People at the present time seem to be wildly enthusiastic about T. S. Eliot. What do you think of him?

Creeley: I just never personally had much . . . my own nature was so distinct from what he was proposing as relevant that I never . . . . I mean, you take two poems that were written within a year of one another, Williams' "Spring and All" and Eliot's "The Waste Land," you'll see the distinct disposition of those two men of that time, 1925 or 1926. Eliot is moving in a direction of thinking in the world that I just can't use. He writes--like you say--he certainly writes well, but he is moving with reference to history and time and content in time in ways I don't . . . I've got no use for, that's all. He is obviously a highly articulate poet, but he is just not saying anything of any particular interest to me.

Interviewer: Going back to the rhythm in your prose and poetry, someone said that you wrote in a counterpoint style. Would you associate your rhythms with musical rhythms?

Creeley: Well I used to listen to an awful lot of music in the middle and late forties, primarily jazz: Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, Al Hay, Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie; I was fascinated with what they were doing with duration, that is, how by virtue of accent they were creating an autonomous situation for the melody. That fascinated me, and I learned a

lot from that kind of I suppose you could call counterpoint. I remember reading recently an interview with Dizzy Gillespie in Paris Review number 35 wherein he speaks of what he means by rhythm, or beat, and he says precisely that it is a question of the accents, or the stresses. And I learned an awful lot about that conduct in poetry from listening to those peoples' music. I think I was listening really to the accentual system of those people playing; I had no sophistication in music. I was listening then to the path of rhythmic circumstance rather than to the melody . . . they were really telling how you could accent something in a variety of manners.

Interviewer: Do you see any trends or general directions modern, contemporary poetry and prose seem to be taking?

Creeley: I think it's significant that "deep image" has not only survived but but continues to be an intensive interest for many people writing. There are two modes that interest me personally; the so-called feedback, the use of feedback to create linguistic situations apart from semantic situations. Ted Berrigan, for example, uses this manner, as well as Ashbury; he writes a poem in which the content is particularly the experience of the linguistic circumstances of the words. That's very interesting. It has to do with a very interesting set of linguistics, and that may reveal something of interest. It obviously has in Burrough's prose. He gained a very interesting situation by virtue of what he calls the "cut-up" method.

Interviewer: Could you explain what you mean by the "deep image"?

Creeley: I feel that what the people involved with it mean is a circumstance in writing that will allow images that are primarily subconscious or deeply unconscious to state themselves. The people who first fostered this sense of writing felt that American writing had become too dry and too intellectually articulate. In many ways. They felt that its surface had become too . . . almost too clear, and they wanted to get a more resonant echo of the subconscious or inner experience; they wanted the interior experience to be more evident in poetry, and they felt that the very emphasis on technique was preventing this. Bly, for instance, recalled poetry as, say, Lorca or the French symbolists . . . he wanted the experience of poetry to be of that order, again and almost deliberately went out and tried to create poetry in that order . . . . In any case that seems to be what they are involved in. The deep image seems to be an image coming from an intensively interior experience . . . . Do you have a cigarette, by any chance?

Interviewer: Let's see . . . I finished up all the questions I had written down about an hour ago . . .

Creeley: They're the best questions I've heard in the last two weeks. No, they're good . . . but apropos, of teaching, the only awkward thing I feel about it is that its awfully hard to propose things to people before they have

reason to want these things; know what I mean? Like trying to force attitudes or modes before they have any reason to need them. It isn't to put them up or down, in the qualifying sense. It's just that until some intense impulse is obvious . . . I mean who wants to make arbitrary writers out of people?

Interviewer: How do you find time to do the writing?

Creeley: It's very funny. I've had friends think of that, and I find that I tend to write more when I'm involved in some kind of life or pattern of life that lets me feel used, or actively used, or usefully used. So that when I'm on a so-called vacation I sometimes find I can't write at all because I feel so . . . alack. Others, say, as Olson, Roberts, certainly, Duncan, or Allen, I think, equally, can be very distracted by teaching, or something, where I find it's useful provocation for attention and it tends to stimulate attention all along the line. I think it would wear out. You get to times when you just don't want to talk any more about things, and really want some time out. But this doesn't necessarily mean you can use it for writing. You can just sit and look at the clouds.

Interviewer: How do you go about writing? Do you work in spurts, or do you work at one thing at a time?

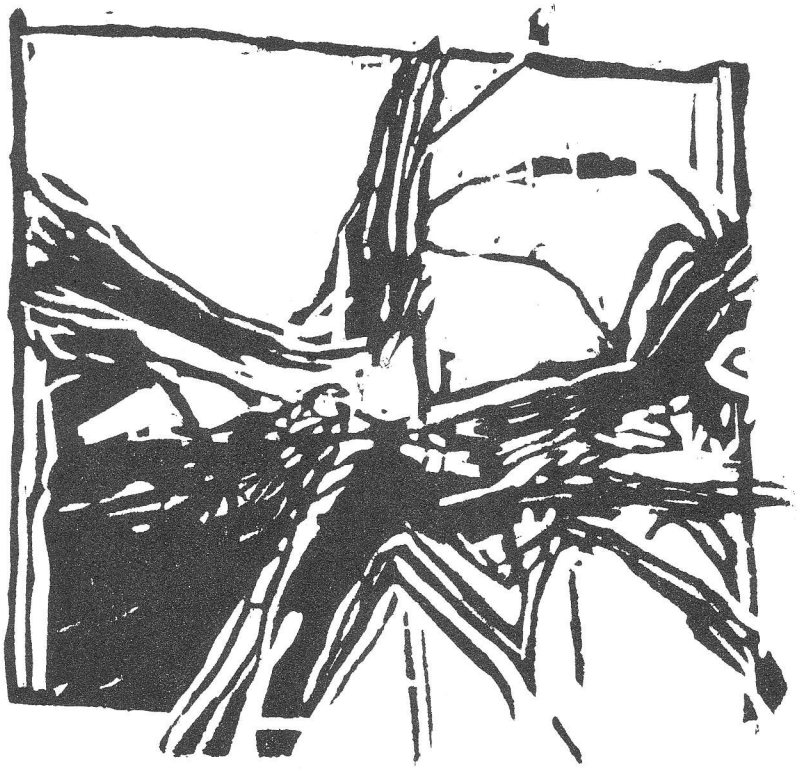
Creeley: Yeah, I tend to write in spurts. When I was writing that novel, for example, I wrote in four distinct periods. I began in Guatemala, and then in New Mexico I wrote the second section. Then in Vancouver I wrote the third section . . . that book was written literally a chapter a day, but over a period of two years. And I write poems pretty much the same way. I usually sit down with some kind of possibility and write as fast as I can, and then go back and see what seems to have happened or what's worth the trouble of saving or what, you know, seems to have come of it . . . but it tends to be in stops and starts. For myself, there's no virtue in trying to write something every day, because it would simply lead to the production of bad habits and bad work. If there's no inherent reason to work which is an impulsive circumstance, it would seem, then there's no possibility of work.

Interviewer: Do you have any special projects you're working on right now?

Creeley: Oh, I have some I'm thinking about. I'm very interested in trying to write another . . . I like prose. Poems seem to have taken over the earlier stories; but a long prose narrative gives a wild feeling. It's like something that can happen every day. Even if nothing is happening, something is ahead in time, which is very intriguing. I lived in Guatemala for two years, and I was fascinated and horrified by much of what we met there. I thought to tell a story of that circumstance without trying to impose upon it any particular attitude of interpretation, but simply to tell the accumulation of events and things and persons and context that were eminent there. I'd like to try that, but it tended to become too self-conscious and

too intentional. A friend of mine, John Richards, works very intensively. He has about 750 pages of a new novel in hand, and I was seeing him off and on during this period, and sort of stimulated by his company I came back and started working on this. But this really doesn't feel right yet, everything tends to be a little off-kilter. The steps don't seem to be quite possible as yet so you tend to force the circumstance rather than to admit it or articulate what is evident. You begin to look for things: what can I put here. And if something is not intensively or obviously there you tend to create a false reality. Outside of that, I'm simply working on poetry as best I can.

william knief, interviewer



landscape III

berry klingman

DAY OF CHANGE

My name is June
bug. I feel splitting

bamboo when the wind
hits. My legs cannot

smooth to the flight
of birds. I want soon

for this chamber
to pass. I need the length

of the snake. I have
seen so much.

--james bertolino

AUTOPSY OF AN OAT SACK

Walking I found
a one-storey house
collapsed in a heap,
grey in a burnt field.

Between charred boards,
an oat sack lay.
It had been carefully
split open
like a pig's belly.

I bent down, worked my hand
into the swollen stomach--
wet oats, an ear of blackened
corn, a child's doll
with strawberries on its skirt.

I retrieved the doll,
cradled her in my hands,
walked her silently
through the hard,
red afternoon.

--thomas mckeown

landscape II berry klingman

On a Dirt Road, after Reading Shelley

Thinking of you, I walked
among roses,
then ran from the field.

Some hear trumpets
tapering to the pitch
of thorns,

it spurs them on
they say.

Let me, here,
be content,
facing pines
and their patient green.

--john judson

On emerald close hills

On emerald close hills
that only play at being
mountains
the spread clouds seep
down to the fine bodied
Iban youth
at the river

the youth bends over
the brown water of
Sungai Binatang
the water bulbs over
the shallow-crop rocks
and pushes down to
the seas

the seas
mother forth
the hill
the clouds
the youth
the river
and build another Borneo
below its rolling surface
beyond my view
real and present

--j. mcleod

AFTER ANOTHER'S CHAOS

I don't know where
this diamond discipline
will lead,

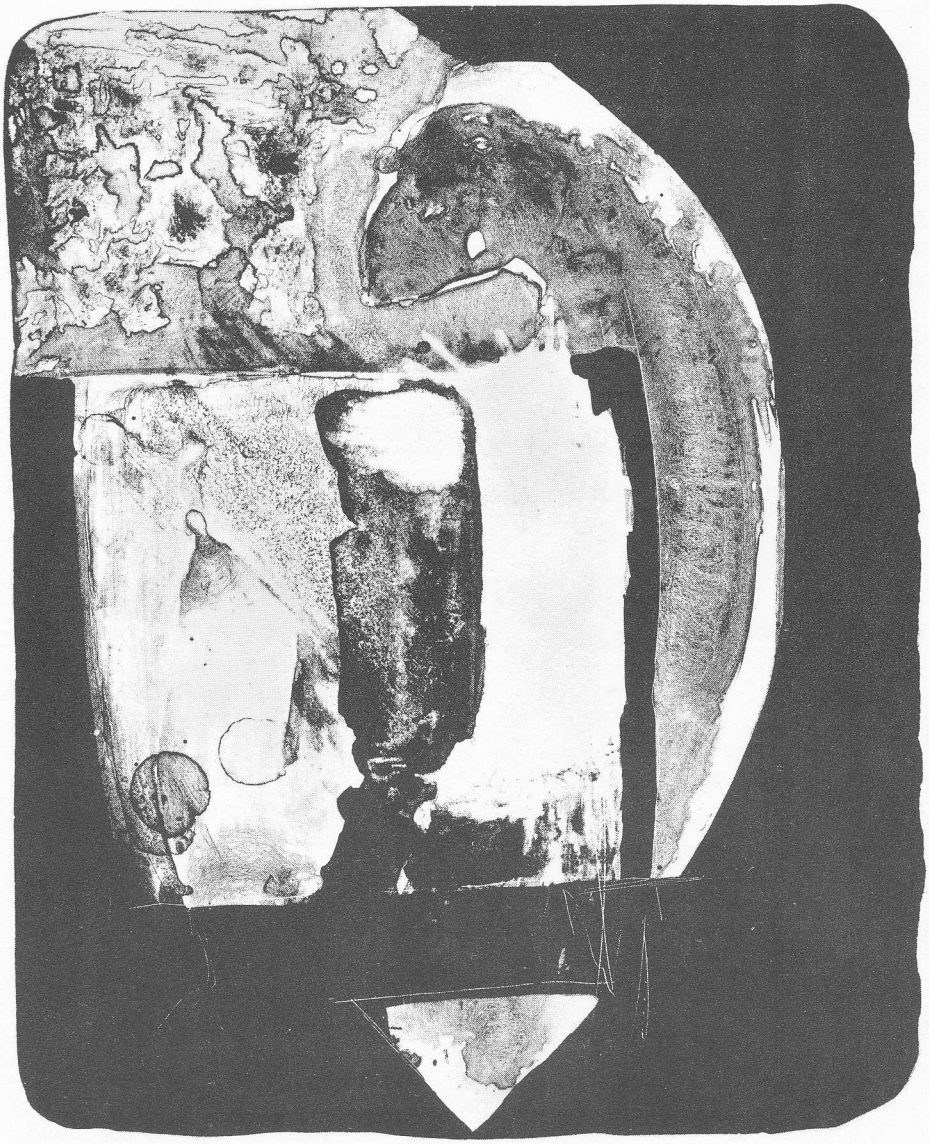
from its constant frostbite
nothing nonchalant
can warm.

Against the river flow
of excitation's swell
that's gone

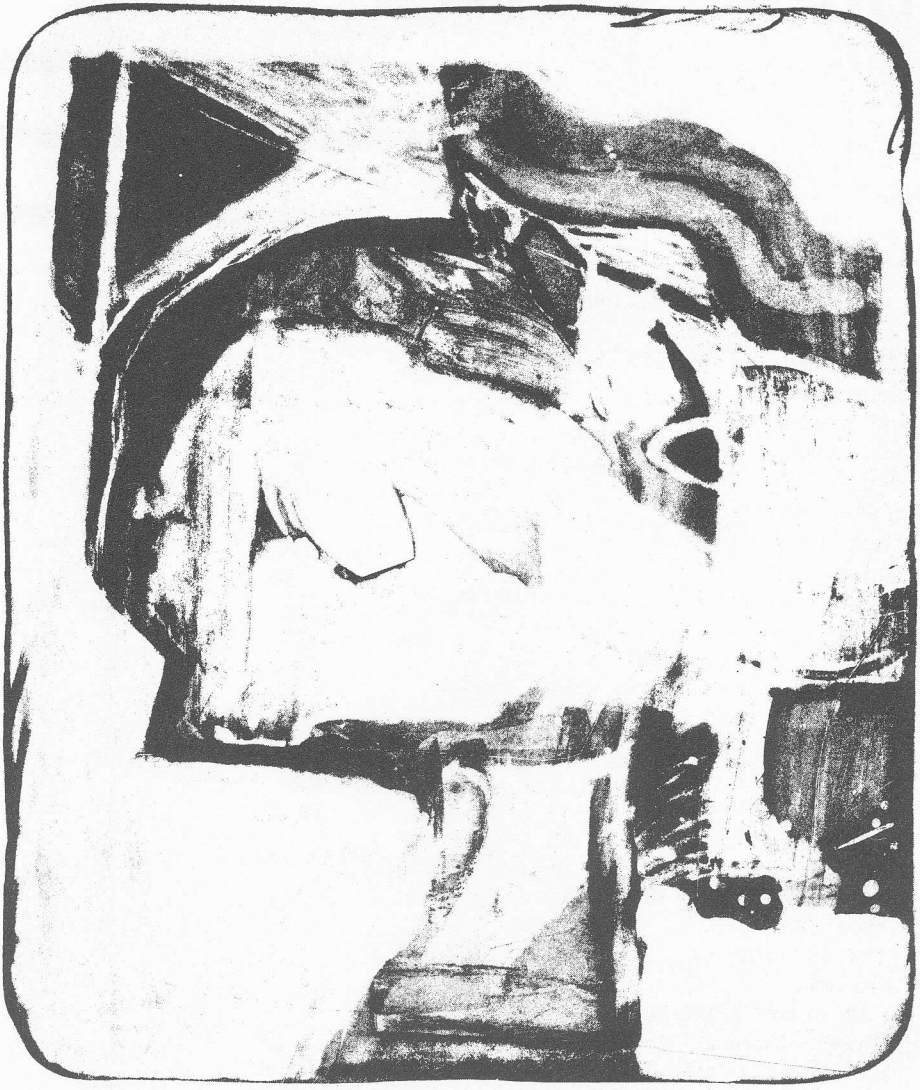
down to the sea, the cloud
that bursts on earth
thunderously,

the soft collapse
of breath like nervous wind
on nowhere,

here rigidly like cocks
of iron we turn but stay.
--joan white



berry klingman



berry klingman

book shelves

One (hi hun . . .)

do soldiers really laugh so much?
lennon speaks.
sell products
win friends.
a spy
a state secret
parliament in session
talk of plots.
russians with moustaches seem likeable.
another one!
france is old, yellowed.
but paris in the 20's was young, mebbe
teach me to think in poetry.
crazy jean,
wonderful ti.
kesey stole your throne.
words hard to read
and philosophical problems are solved after breakfast.
a day is eventful, regardless.
(bed)
why did he try it?
why not?
THIS is how wales grew!
Ulysses thumped terse pomes
and a quiet, beautiful monk
found god in himself
in the eastern world
(it is allowed there).
who is black today
who doesn't talk about it?
three across, four down
is this really the new germany?
bible on its ribs before tour eiffel.

Two (ooo . . .)

revolution is too happy in paintings.
airplanes should be killed- not men
even those clap upon hearing they lost more
men than we did.
nazis finally ended (at least officially).
write
is that family still waiting on mount olive?
we must beat the goldbergs now
we have already dealt with the joneses.
speak correctly in school.
justice is only a word.
sex can be funny- it should be (at times).
but 20 years ago the future looked warm in the north atlantic.
how easily ice covers hope.
mississippi seldom says anything important.
venice is a drag (when seen through hearsay)
another southern request?
michelangelo is not dead.
dale carnegie is.

Three (eee . . .)

the boer war should not be remembered.
1966 passed with usual indifference.
jews,
moslems,
protestants,
catholics
are involved.
did british literature die with donne
or blake?
sure wasn't reborn with michael chaplin.
frank sinatra got stoned
as dusk snuck home to honesty
and circus tents arent true
they are condensed now.
civil war will break out soon.
hindu and buddhist are confused.
the pope knows he's right
and spaniards and italians
still think of god as a man!

--uh, david wilson uh, june 6 1967

The Cave

I want to say
that living

as we do
in this base-

ment, we have
the earth

for our roof,
a bunch

of flowers
in bloom

year-round
for our table.

And I want
to say

that living
as we do

by instinct,
you bring out

the animal
inside me.

--william r. slaughter

berry klingman

david norton

THE PURCHASE

This was my ambition:
to own & live in

a 200 year old Colonial;
to barter with contemporaries

for chances
to bicker with memories,

to re-enter
armed with the cool gigantic force

of dead anger.
Making messes of the past,

re-making everything
in my own images.

The house I chose
has a slate roof,

many gables & towers.
Late-Victorian.

Built at a time
when nothing was happening

in families
except their decline.

--russell banks

MAGPIES AND THOREAU

Here fifteen miles
from the nearest town
perhaps I would find quiet
and leave desperation behind
and by the slough -
my smaller Walden pond -
shout Simplify
a latter-day Thoreau
but
    I hadn't reckoned with the magpies.

Henry David liked the sounds of nature,
wrote a whole chapter full of them.
Now I don't mind, in fact I quite enjoy
the head-shaking nostril-clearing
splutter of horses
and there's something satisfying
about the moist crack of snipe flies
squeezed between fingers
after they've bitten you
but
    magpies!

Henry David liked brave Chanticleer,
even epigraphed himself a kind of braggart
cock crowing
the virtues of Walden,
thought men glad to rise
at the cock's shout -
then he let slip
that he had never been wakened
by that lung-bursting ear-flinching cry.
But it's less fierce than magpies.

A whole family of them
wheeled and swooped from the trees
perched with the dawn on the fence
outside my window
wailing loud rusty creaks
like badly-tuned fiddles
in the hands of superannuated amateurs.

Henry David had a young forest
reaching up to his sills, he said -
nature up to the armpits
you might say
but me
I won't even tiptoe through the bean-rows
except maybe to creep up on magpies
to throw them deep into the forest
by the scruffs of their noisy necks.

Thoreau exulted he had no path
back to the civilized world,
but that's what I'm taking
back to the desperation.

At least the desperation's
quiet!

--peter stevens

I saw you
shining
turtle-temperament
happy-adaptable
to human scenery

I felt you
lonely
raw-bleeding
helpless
in the dark

I saw you
shining
turtle-temperament
happy-adaptable
to human scenery

--and
some can't
let others
love them

--patricia brieschke

a glimpse from the outskirts

A short story by

Dan Flanigan

They all had their mouths wide open. Like a rhinoceros yawning each stood in its place, waiting for food. It was ridiculous, even absurd to see them standing there so patient and fixed forever. I dumped a load of dirty underwear and a cup of soap in one. It began to shudder and slosh as it digested.

Three a.m. is a lonely hour in a laundromat, when you are faced with nothing but rows of ugly white washers and mammoth turquoise dryers. There is only the false, clean smell of hard soap and water. I had no business there except to wash my clothes and escape my apartment with its two rugs and gas stove. The hour and the place were such that the loneliness was welcome, for an intruder would have immediately brought fear.

I had stuffed the washer too full I knew, and the clothes would most likely not come clean, but with two days before payday, I had to save my money. It would be nice, of course, if a girl would come in, maybe with green eyes and brown hair, and talk to me. There are hundreds of girls where I work. It is a huge factory and they all bustle around doing thousands of different jobs. Some are beautiful, some are near it, most are just plain, and some are downright ugly. The pretty ones interest me with their pretty twitching butts and blouses pulled tight over their breasts and their automatic smiles if you acknowledge them with a discerning look. Most of them have husbands or boyfriends who pick them up after work. They're always bustling around and looking pretty with me heaving and sweating, a streak of dirt on my nose. I take some of them out sometimes, when I've known them for awhile, but it never amounts to much. We date for awhile, then slowly fall away.

I sat down at a table strewn with ripped up, year old magazines and started to write. I write quite often in a small, tan notebook. When one is full, I put it in a drawer and start another. I don't know why I write. I'm not at all intelligent or weighty. In fact I'm below average. It gives me something to do, I guess. Sometimes I wish I could write something im-

portant, but I never will. I have nothing important to say. I have always admired students. We have two colleges in our city and I live near one of them. I often see the students going to school with their notebooks and neat clothes. It seems that they are really doing something important. I'm not quite sure though. I once knew a student very well. He was very intelligent and had a lot of important things to say. He didn't like students. He mocked them all the time. Sometimes I thought he didn't like anybody in the world. Once he told me that I was the only human being he knew. I didn't understand him.

Two little, chipmunk looking men suddenly busted through the door. They startled me and the fear rose up. I pictured them killing me or kidnapping me. It was ridiculous but my mind works that way sometimes. One came up and asked me for change for a quarter. I did and he and his chipmunk friend went to make a phone call. I pictured them calling their fellow kidnappers to discuss their plans. It turned out they were calling a cab.

My clothes had been washed and rinsed twice so I took them out of the rhinoceros. They were still dirty. I wanted to cry but I took them out and stuffed them in a dryer. It would take too much time and money to redo them. I sat thinking of death at 100 miles an hour in a steaming dryer.

A bunch of tough looking guys came in and sat down at the table where I had been writing. You wouldn't think it possible that so many human ghosts would haunt a laundromat at four o'clock in the morning. I was scared but I stared at the dryer and lit a cigarette. They were talking about some wild party they had just been to, and about who could drink the most and fight the best and "punch" the most girls. I knew they wouldn't bother me. I could tell they weren't as tough as they looked, but I still felt uneasy, like something was going to happen. It did. One of them picked up my notebook and was reading it. He read it aloud: "I feel lonely tonight. I think sometimes that no one knows who I am. Of course my boss does, but only my name. When I talk to someone, they don't listen. I have nothing left but a draining ache. . . ." They laughed and cried mock tears. Then the one who was reading threw it into a puddle of coffee that someone had spilled earlier.

"Whoever wrote that was a real weirdo" he said.

I couldn't do anything. I sat there my eyes glued to the dryer with the clothes whirling around and clanking against the dryer's sides. It was so easy to be exposed and exposed by a few punks that didn't even care. The dryer stopped and everything was silent. The punks were wishing that whoever they were waiting for would get there. I took my clothes out of the dryer and stuffed them into a laundry bag. My notebook was lying there helpless in a pool of lukewarm coffee and ashes. I couldn't go over and pick it up. I was afraid. I wasn't afraid of them physically. I would fight them if I had to, but I couldn't stand the contempt and scorn in their eyes when they saw that I was the "weirdo".

There was nothing I could do but come back in the morning. I stepped outdoors and the wind whipped into me. I drove slowly back to my apartment with the smell of hamburger grease, two rugs and a gas stove that heats the center but leaves the corners cold.

Sun touched I sit on a
frail box beside the garden
tools waiting for the noon
whistle.

All around me spring sweats
in labor, I hear root push
in deep tunnels, stir in a
bird's egg, smell dew on a
thrust of buds, feel thorns
of a climbing rose.

How many springs lie piled in
the cellar of my mind, in baskets
of unplanted bulbs, dried seeds,
a litter of odds and ends of
withered trials? Now spring shines
again from green wisteria vines.

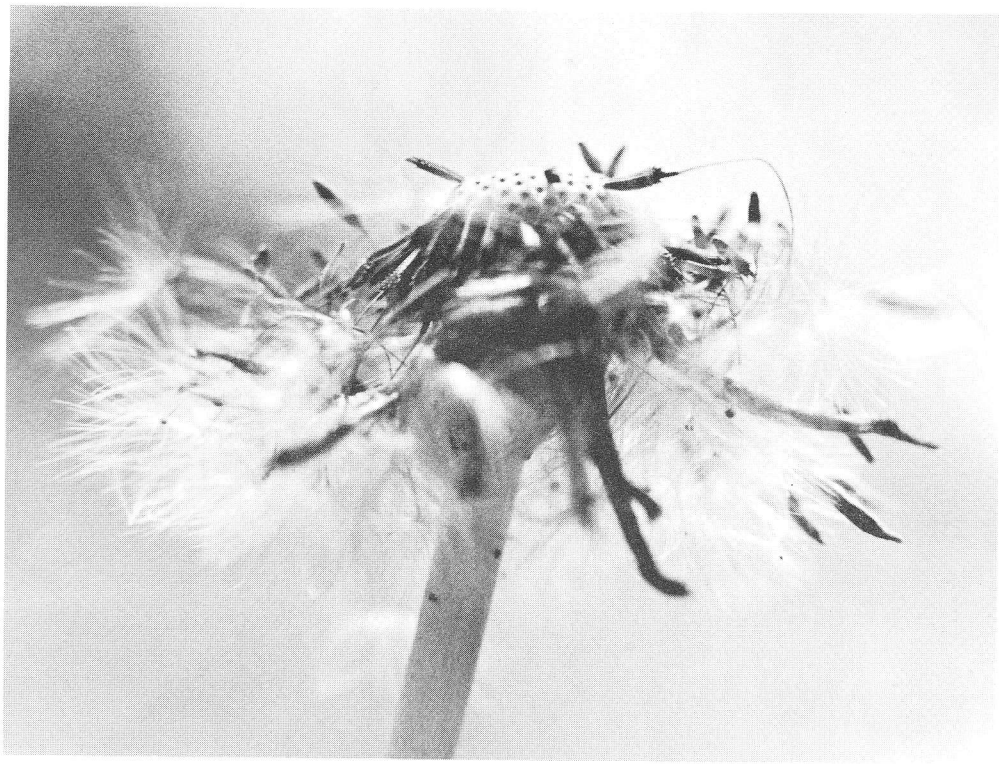
Sun touched I sprawl in slow motion
on honeysuckle clouds, deaf to the
growl of accusing bees.

--james hearst

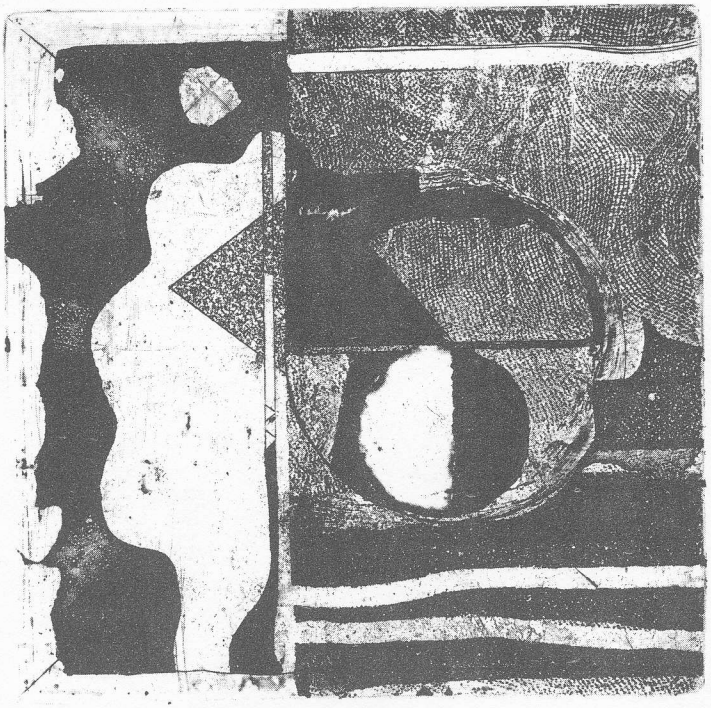
A WAY TO MEASURE

How stupid to try to measure
life by time like yard goods
in a store, so much plaid and
gingham and chintz, so many percale
sheets 70 inches long, piled on
memory's shelf to be added up
on inventory day or cut down or
sewed together to fit the occasion.
Maybe the clear sound of a bell
on a quiet morning, or the taste
of a lobster claw as you suck the
meat out, or the slick arch of a
cat's back under your hand, or the
breath of a cornfield on a hot day
in mid-summer, or the kiss from a
young girl when you are too old to
expect it, should mark your sun dial,
or maybe a loop-worm should just
measure you for a new suit.

--james hearst



les schnick



david norton

for mona

Laughter is running
As racing,
it is impossible
for one to overtake the other,
is hapiness.
Collapsing
in slow
motion
into each other
is goodness.
Falling,
light falls within us
as we fall into the light

--tom clark

EXPANSIVE MUSIC

She walked as one who walks
in the same direction
every season.

A bird flew by:
she saw the long blue shadow
of a wing.

It stroked a tapered house
with cupola,
and music floated down
like harpsichord's.

Frail and tensile sounds.
Plowed field beside the house.
Broken clods, and glass.

Lifting a jagged piece
like solid glass, as cool
and green, she held it while

she walked, and felt
the strange and alien calmness
of inanimates, the jell
of death like a hardened song.

She did not know
she was observed from the high window
by a sleepy watcher, warm
and wavering between
desire to test the windy cold
and play the harpsichord which stood
idly beside.

--joan white

WIREPHOTO

The boy whose father is a prisoner
tries to smile
and not spoil the picture.

--april d. knief

CIRCLES

sad-graspers
mad-clutchers
coloring inside
western circles
with flat strokes
stuffing misery-hollows
with patterned hopes

to still
the sense
of emptiness

sad-graspers
mad-clutchers
what of those
who
leap the blind void
and
color outside the lines

flecking pale strokes
on the bare ass
of a no-name lady

to steal
the suspense
of emptiness

--patricia brieschke

THE FACE OF THE AFTERNOON

Hot summer day on which
Tens of little children happy
Their way through a
Seriously constructed fountain dedicated to war

I walk slowly past
A middle-aged man
Smoking a pipe carefully and
Sailing a white boat on the dirty pond

The afternoon bears
Down on me and I
Listen carefully for
The sounds of laughter in the bushes

The afternoon contents me
Though I have
Been raging at
Everyone throughout the cold morning

The afternoon is warm
A time to make love and
A time to remember
That love was but yesterday's afternoon

You see the face
On the laughing faces
Of small babies and
The toothless grins of unbelievably old women

The afternoon is you
The green trees grow
The flowers shine in
The warm sunlight of you

I walk alone with
A beautiful friend beside me
And I crack the old cement
Around my mouth and

I become the afternoon

--john stocker

EXCREMENT

Success, that ephemerity,
sheds seeds of death;
    like the fleck the beetle mounts,
    it gathers likenesses
        until girth
        exceeds distance

--lillie d. chaffin

TROUSSEAU FOR ONE NIGHT

Listen how a silk dress falls,
how stockings crumple and slide.
See these blond brushed shoulders. blush.
Feel where satin becomes satan.
taste the lace
down my face.

--april d. knief

GULF

Law, my man's gone, she said. He plum took off
a chasing girls. I don't care what he'll catch.

I dunno, he said. I keep remembering
when I was ten times the man I've come
to and there oughta be someway, something.
Down this creek I been on, I'm knotted net.
Caught. I'll drown. Drown.

--lillie d. chaffin

berry klingman

premortem

eric chaet

It was a long time ago. Early this morning. Right around sunrise (he recalls, rocking back and forth, listening to the creaking noise). He was warm then, and comfortable underneath the covers, smiling and content and fast asleep, just about to wake up. And (he thinks) moaning a little in his sleep. The blue-jay screamed and he was moaning not so pleasantly and turning from his side to his back and rubbing his bottom back and forth into the warmed sheet, luxuriating. And his long nose twitched a little between his chubby cheeks, and a lock of hair tumbled over his forehead. And he and his teddy-bear body were just about unconscious and quiet again when the blue-jay screamed. And his thin lips--which had been smiling, or at least twitching upward on either side with the pleasure of being asleep early in the morning in early spring, and warm and cozy--straightened out into neutrality. And his stubby fingers (he imagines) pushed at the thin-lipped mouth and annoyed it. (It's hard to remember, but he guesses that) that was when a speck of blue peeked out from beneath an eyelid. Then those stubby fingers pulled the chubby, little cheeks downward so that the blue eyes could see the world from beneath the unperturbed eyelids, and, one at a time, those eyelids were forced up. And his blue eyes were astonished. Then (he recalls) he stuffed his tiny fists into his ears and shook his head--with eyelids creeping back into their natural position--back and forth. Mournfully. Then the round body began to roll toward the left and stopped within one roll of the bed's edge. And a white, chubby leg probed the air and discovered the floor. And he rotated clockwise on his stomach in a quarter-circle, another leg probing and settling, bent at the knee. And, suddenly, his body was pulled white-naked from beneath the covers with his back-of-the-neck hairs all rubbed the wrong way by the covers. And (he imagines) he shuddered with joy as those back-of-the-neck hairs relaxed.

There seemed to be no real weight on his knees; it was as if he were suspended, perhaps an inch off the floor. Only, suddenly, there was weight on his knees, and he slipped the weight off them, or rather it shifted itself, and it ended up on his flabby, white bottom. And the blue-jay screamed. And that (he guesses) was when he awoke.

With his big eyes opened, he made a face at the blue-jay scream--a Stan Laurel look of sorrow--then put his hands palms-downward on the bed and pushed down hard and marveled at the fact that he was rising away from the familiar floor. And, presently, he was standing.

(He rocks back and forth creakily and loses the stream of thought and thinks he smells the pleasant smell of mild tobacco. He hopes he does, because that means Casey.)

(He remembers that) then he pouted when he realized he was awake and standing, and not even crawling now. Because he knew he had to go down and fix his own breakfast, because Mama was already gone, since the sun was already up. And he tottered sleepily down the stairs (--he must have taken time to dress, but he sees his white, naked body going down the stairs one step at a time, both feet resting on each step--) to the kitchen. And he poured himself a glass of grapefruit juice from the pitcher with two hands, and swallowed the gasoline-like stuff after his tongue wallowed in it. (He can still taste the filthy-yellow stuff and smell the prickly fumes and he tries to swallow the thick coat of memory on his tongue, especially the top of his tongue.) Then he chomped the crunchy Wheaties flakes and jammed the pasty Wheaties wads between his white, shiny teeth--no, they were already yellow with gasoline-grapefruit juice. (He can taste it as well now, or as poorly. He puckers up his lips at the thought and taste of it, but here comes Casey with a glass of water. Cool water.)

He felt good after eating and breathed deeply and puffed out his tee-shirted chest and marched out boldly to the back porch. Grandma was sitting there (just as he is now, in the very same rocker), her head tilted back and her eyes closed, her glasses far forward on her nose, her hair and dress faded. And he didn't know she was dreaming (just like this) and waiting for Casey, or whoever she was waiting for. No wonder she didn't want to be bothered. But he bothered her all right. He said, "Grandma?" and she said, "Philip?" and he really didn't have anything to say. He just felt that he ought to make conversation, or maybe he was curious. (He doesn't remember which.)

"Grandma, why do you just sit there and rock?" and she didn't say anything. And he said, "Grandma, it's a beautiful day out: spring and everything." And she said sadly, or maybe--not sadly--wearily, "No, Philip, it's the very end of autumn." And he looked at her as he had seen people look when they suspected the person they were talking to was crazy, because it was obviously spring, and he didn't know what to make of her remark, any more than he knew what to make of her just sitting there, rocking.

So he went outside and decided to go to the park and set out immediately, walking fast, taking a little longer stride with each step. And the gasoline taste that was grapefruit surged around his tongue again. (He puckers his mouth uncomfortably. And he's glad that here comes Casey with a cool glass of water.) But he forgot about it because, just when he was about two blocks away from the park he saw Dorothy Fischer watching him from across the street. To impress her, he began running with a long, apparently effortless, stride, and he kept running until he got to the boulevard. He hesitated there momentarily because of the heavy traffic. His

mouth was dry from breathing hard, and when he switched to nose-breathing, he had the awful taste-sensation of the gasoline juice again. (Just as now. But Casey is beckoning to him and this time he is going.) And he felt the trickling of sweat under the arms and in the crotch for the first time, and he shifted uncomfortably. Then he ran boldly out into traffic, dodging splendidly and reaching the park side in triumph.

Of course, he still had the steep, wooded side of the hill--the other side was used for sledding in winter--to climb. He placed a foot on the slope. It sank in the sandy soil. He grabbed a sapling, sank his other foot in the soil higher up, and pulled the first out. The legs were already tired. They strained to free themselves from the sandy soil to lock themselves in it a step higher up. He took fast, short strides, lifting his knees high. Progress was slow. Already there was sand in his shoes and in the cuffs of his trousers. It weighed the feet down. The spring in the legs was gone. The hips labored to control them. One after another, the knees were pulled up and driven forward, higher. The feet struggled for freedom from the sand to lock themselves in it higher up. The hands continually sought the rough bark of the trees' smaller limbs. The freed feet swung in heavy arcs from one step to the next. Movement was excrutiatingly slow. He was almost stationary. He was close to the top, though. But the knees were rising almost straight in the air. Only slight forward progress. Yet, he was almost there. And, then, he was there. He had reached the top.

His legs ached. And the early summer sun was already hot enough to bother him, especially hurting his eyes. It was around lunch time, because he was getting hungry. And he couldn't figure out what he had done with all the time up until then. His legs ached.

He lay himself down on the top of the hill and started himself down the sledding slope. The sun glared down at him. After a few rolls he stopped dizzily; but another shove started him again; and there was another earth- and sun-twirling stop; and another shove; and, finally, he reached the bottom of the hill and rested until the ground would slow down. The bright orange sun roasted him. He closed his eyes to shut out its rays. There was no telling how long he rested, but presently he felt a cold shadow and his eyes saw black, instead of dull orange, behind the eyelids. So he opened his eyes. And there were the white shoes; and the white trousers covering thin legs; and the narrow waist; and the white jacket and shirt tightly hugging the delicate ribs; and the straight nose below the pale blue eyes; and the short, blond hair. Casey drawled, "Hello." ("Hello," says Casey. "Ya hot?" "Yes, I am. I have a fever, I think." "C'mon 'n' have a cool glass a' water." "I'm coming, Casey.")

He stood up suddenly in self-defense. And he looked up at the stranger's plastic face and asked him who he was. And Casey said, "Casey," as if that explained everything, when really it explained nothing at the time. But he was glad that Casey-whoever-he-was was standing between him and the raging hot sun that wanted to pierce his eyes in anger. He sat down again when Casey did, so that he could stay in Casey's shadow. And Casey's plastic face opened and let out a smooth, drawled story that put him into hysterics and had him literally rolling around on the ground. And only

after he had finished did Casey smile, and, then, only at his antics, quite obviously. Casey told the story as if duty-bound. And he looked so frail and sleepy that it must have been the buoyant liquidity of his voice that held him up. The voice soothed him, too, and he enjoyed the mild tobacconess of it; it drowned out the rotten-sweatiness of himself.

Then Casey took him for a walk to show him his home. He went along willingly enough, since he liked the man. But they went further and further toward the railroad tracks. And he didn't like that, especially when he heard the clickety-clack of a train coming. Later, he could see it. But he kept going when Casey wrapped his dry fingers around his hand. As they came closer to the tracks, though, and the big train clackety-clacked toward them, be became frightened and he didn't want to go any closer. But Casey said that he lived just the other side of the tracks. And it was nice and cool there with lots of shade. And he could loosen his tie. And he could have some cool water. ("I'm coming, Casey," he says.) So he kept going closer and closer to the tracks with the great train bearing down on them clack-clack-clackety-clack! He became extremely frightened and pulled his hand out of Casey's when Casey didn't stop. "C'mon," Casey said. "Ya gotta go in front a' the train. After's too late." But he was frightened and refused to believe. And, terrified, smelling his rotten-sweatiness, tasting the grapefruit-gasoline in his mouth, and grimacing as the train clack-clack-bangety-bang-clacked right past him, he watched Casey lope across the tracks in front of the train. His feverish terror ended as the rear of the train approached. He couldn't stand the rotten-sweatiness, grapefruit-gasolineness, sticky-sweatiness, headachiness of himself. And he could hardly wait to cross the tracks. But when the train passed, he saw Casey's tired, sad face shaking itself back and forth, no, and his hand pouring the cool water onto the lush, shaded grass. Then he saw Casey's frail, mournful figure turn and walk away, and he realized that he should have gone in front of the train before it was too late. But he realized, too that he would have other chances to go. Casey would call again. ("I'm coming," he says, wiping some sweat off his forehead. "I'm coming." "Then c'mon.")

So he dragged his weary, creaky body back to the house and collapsed in Grandma's chair. Naturally, she was gone by then. And he dreamed and waited all the cold autumn night, and, no doubt, got another fever. But it was worth it. ("I'm coming, Casey." "Then, c'mon. Don't be scared this time." "I'm coming.")

contributors

william knief, a junior majoring in English, has been both magazine editor and interviewer but says his main interest is writing . . . eric chaet, a graduate in English at KU, has previously published prose in The Midlands, and has a book of poetry about to be published . . . this issue has the first publications of tom clark, david wilson, and dan flanigan; tom is a junior and English major; david, whose major influences are robert creeley and hart crane, has previously attended KU and San Francisco State Experimental College; dan, a radio-tv major, writes "as often as I can", mostly short stories . . . april d. knief has appeared before in the review, likes dylan thomas, has been an elementary school teacher . . . lillie d. chaffin of Meta, Kentucky has published extensively and has won the International Poetry Prize for her collection "Stone for Sisyphus" . . . james hearst teaches at the University of Northern Iowa and the Aspen School of Contemporary Art and has published five books of poetry . . . russell banks has experience as both editor and publisher of two magazines and has published work in several magazines . . . john judson has published in over eighty-five periodicals and has two books of his work . . . james bertolino is ". . . 25-married, too happy." and has published in magazines in the U.S., Africa, and Denmark as well as making a collection of his work . . . poetry is the first love of thomas mckeown although he also paints, teaches, and writes short fiction . . . joan white is an instructor at a junior college near Pasadena, also doing graduate work . . . william r. slaughter has published in the U.S. and Canada while working as a teacher at Florida Southern College . . . for patricia brieschke of Chicago, this is the first appearance in this magazine . . . peter stevens has twice taped readings for the Canadian Broadcasting Company, and has published in the U. S. and Canada . . . j. mcleod, also a Canadian, is writing out of Borneo (Rajang College in Sarawak) and has published in the U.S. and Canada . . . leslie schnick is a KU senior majoring in industrial design whose work has won prizes in recent exhibitions . . . john stocker is a former KU student now in the Navy, this is his first time in print . . . berry klingman, a senior in drawing and painting, has received his department's Ada Bechtel Heuser award for his outstanding work . . . on this issue's cover as well as inside are prints by david norton, drawing and painting junior; he currently has a ceramics and jewelry exhibit in the KU Science Library.