

fly specks, smoke film, dust, then  
deftly I plied the squeegee, carefully  
let the sign back down \$200 sign even then ACME  
beer cans with cone tops capped like bottles  
later in the war patriotic quarts  
to save metal Lucky Strike Green gone to war then too  
outside on the stoop great oaken barrels, the empties  
fifty gallons or so of draught beer  
I remember how thick the staves were  
doubly curved four  
iron hoops fit to the bulge  
the bung replaced, loosely  
there was lettering carved or burnt deeply in the  
wood  
I forget what  
you can't get beer in wooden barrels anywhere any more  
Robert Rauschenberg  
how come they still have neon

-- R G Barnes

Claremont CA

### The Phenomenologist

Bald and silent  
a thin, ascetic man  
he was one of the ten  
disciples of P.  
taking the path of phenomenologist  
up the dim and seedy cliffs of 20th  
century philosophy.

The sun of La Jolla baked  
the rest of them  
in their ambition but he was fair  
and liked the shade.

He did not contend.  
He made no defense of anything.

He kept  
his contemplations in a pile  
of little notebooks  
arranged in order  
on a shabby one drawer desk.

Now ten years have passed.  
I suppose the rest are all professors now.

Family men. They were a school  
of pragmatists  
but he --  
he will be sitting by himself  
with a pile of notebooks in a one room flat  
hungry with philosophy  
recording in his tiny script  
the struggle to communicate  
the phenomena  
of being.

#### Another Poetry Reading

He was nervous and he struck his head  
on the microphone. They laughed.  
He read "Dark at the Bottom of Delmore Schwartz."  
They applauded. They liked him  
so he nailed his right hand to the podium.  
They did not know what to think.  
"That's o.k.," he assured them  
tearing it off, eight  
penny nail and all, waving the wound  
over the orchestra pit.  
He read "Fierce in the Whiskey of Death."  
Some cried. "What suffering,"  
moaned a professor  
with nothing to profess.  
"Do you want to see suffering?" he asked.  
"Yes."  
He took an ice pick from his shirt  
forcing the point through his tough  
right eye, popping its humours.  
"It's only a trick," he told the chairman  
of the department. "Don't leave.  
Please don't leave. Art is illusion."  
It made them all sick and he read  
"Beginning of the End in Pact with a Friend."  
Drippings from his eye dotted the manuscript.

Then he tore his pants off  
ripped open his shirt  
waved his wrinkled prick above the audience  
pissing on the floor. Some of it splattered  
the American flag and police came up the aisles.  
Without missing a beat  
he took a pistol from the rostrum  
stuck the barrel in his mouth  
turned his back on the crowd  
and sent his brains out  
over the front seats  
collapsing on his poetry.