

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.