

Bob Perelman

REPRODUCTION

This poem doesn't even know what I am telling it.
You know nothing, do you hear! Nothing!

I am looking at *The Garden of Earthly Delights*,
berries on heads, assholes for flower vases,
and all the bodies pale, similar,
glazed to keep the pleasure in.

Where's Waldo? Where's now?
I can't tell, and don't know where
our machined desire fits,
but I can't ask you, you don't have a clue,
do you? And you're the one
that gets to be read.
Turn your trick.
Model your breathless pregnancy.

OHIO

You start out with the neighbors' air conditioners humming into the fresh Ohio morning. They are outside you, and this is all to the good, for subjective purposes. Judging by the lawns, the antennas and the lilacs, there seems to be little interest in verbal technique as such. But the overwhelming attention to ownership and to children makes a word mean as much out there as anywhere in here. Irony can lash out unpredictably, but that's as true in a sixteen-year-old as in a sentence. In and out are just teases

anyway: it's not bodies, but what we want to do. It's not language in some motiveless space, but the pull between letting go and getting everything tied down. Time is a factor, too, though it's quick to congeal into monuments. Mossy stones, tour buses idling in the sun, "Cursed be he who moves these bones" or should it be "reads these letters"? But that's the

standard contract issued by any finished writing, isn't it? With each word sitting pretty in its river of world with plenty of nothin and fishing poles

from here to Saturday pointing to the inalienable fish eye stared back at consciously and, not to put too fine a point on it, dead. Then where does that leave us, the supremely mobile readers and writers moving in delicious obedience to desire as if time could roll over, play dead, sit up and beg in one seamless sentence? TV paws this bone Sunday mornings: "You may boast of your macho lifestyle . . . But on the other side of your last breath . . ." The preacher thunders on 17, the Grecian-Urn-like audience sits, I

change channels, the phrases look to change the culture from the inside, and, sure, Herb, take another breath, a deep one, for us all. Like the other objects around here, a poem is a collection of moments, piled up so. The past says: it was late August, late afternoon, one of the years, it was when I was still a person. I want to learn the early words for memory, sight, for going inside and watching light paint the ceiling and then leave. There are no such words. Your last breath,

Mom, was a quick choke. You built my first pronouns. That's what they say: I can almost hear it. Houses, tents, faces, he- and she-places people live and mirror, and then they—*you*—disappear inside. I'm as much a you now as you were. It's near the end, tenth-edition light already flooding that dream of the 747 negotiating the back stairs—wings knocking against the walls—and then floating through the alley separating the bank from The Jolly Bar. It's not here, broad daylight writes, and you were never there.

THE WOUNDED BOUNDARY

I suck
the twin
breasts of
identity for
as long
as I
have memory
of myself.