Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

73

ISSN 1052-4851

Poetry Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature

Volume 73

Michelle Lee
Project Editor

THOMSON
GALE

Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn. • Waterville, Maine • London

Poetry Criticism, Vol. 73

Project Editor
Michelle Lee

Editorial
Kathy D. Darrow, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Jelena O. Krstović, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Noah Schusterbauer, Lawrence J. Trudeau, Russel Whitaker

Data Capture
Frances Monroe, Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services
Laurie Andriot

Rights and Acquisitions
Edna Hedblad, Sue Rudolph, Shalice Shah-Caldwell, and Timothy Sisler

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Lezlie Light, Mike Logusz, Dan Newell, Christine O'Bryan

Composition and Electronic Capture
Gary Oudersluys

Manufacturing
Rhonda Dover

Associate Product Manager
Marc Cormier

For more information, contact
Thomson Gale
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
Or you can visit our internet site at http://www.gale.com

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 91-118494

ISBN-13: 978-0-7876-8707-6

ISBN-10: 0-7876-8707-3
ISSN 1052-4851

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Poetry Criticism (*PC*) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Thomson Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (*NCLC*), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (*LC*), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (*CMLC*), *PC* offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Thomson Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by *PC* supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, *PC* is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Thomson Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *PC* volume.

Organization of the Book

Each *PC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by the title of the work and its date of publication.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *PC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *PC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *PC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order all individual poems, book-length poems, and collection titles contained in the *PC* series. Titles of poetry collections and separately published poems are printed in italics, while titles of individual poems are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

Citing *Poetry Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Linkin, Harriet Kramer. "The Language of Speakers in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.*" *Romanticism Past and Present* 10, no. 2 (summer 1986): 5-24. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism.* Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 79-88. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.*" In *Interpreting Blake,* edited by Michael Phillips, 32-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism.* Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 34-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series
Thomson Gale
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *PC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *PC*, VOLUME 73, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

American Poetry Review, v. 26, May-June, 1997 for "Love and Frangibility: An Appreciation of Robert Creeley" by Heather McHugh. Reproduced by permission of the author.—***boundary 2,*** v. 6, spring-fall, 1978. Copyright © 1978 by *boundary 2*. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher.—***Cambridge Quarterly,*** v. 4, summer, 1969 for "Address and Posture in the Poetry of Robert Creeley" by Kenneth Cox. Copyright © 1969 by Oxford University Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the Literary Estate of the author.—***Charles Lamb Bulletin,*** October, 2001. Reproduced by permission.—***Chicago Review,*** v. 19, 1967. Copyright © 1967 by *Chicago Review.* Reproduced by permission.—***Comparative Literature Studies,*** v. 34, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by the Pennsylvania State University. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—***Concerning Poetry,*** v. 2, fall, 1969. Copyright © 1969 by Western Washington University. Reproduced by permission.—***English,*** v. 50, summer, 2001. Copyright © by the English Association, 2001. Reproduced by permission.—***Nineteenth-Century Literature,*** v. 47, June, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Used by permission of University of California Press, conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.—***Northwest Review,*** v. 38, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by *Northwest Review.* Reproduced by permission.—***Poetry Review,*** v. 71, December, 1981 for "A Place, A Habit and a Heart" by Heather Eggins. Reproduced by permission of the author.—***Review of Contemporary Fiction,*** v. 15, fall, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by *Review of Contemporary Fiction.* Reproduced by permission.—***Sagetrieb,*** v. 3, spring, 1984 for "If To Is: Robert Creeley's 'If You'" by Dirk Stratton; v. 7, fall, 1988 for "Robert Creeley: 'A So-Called Larger View'" by Leverett T. Smith, Jr. Copyright © 1984 by the National Poetry Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the respective authors.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *PC*, VOLUME 73, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Blunden, Edmund. From ***Leigh Hunt: A Biography.*** Cobden-Sanderson, 1930. Copyright © by the Estate of Mrs. Claire Blunden, 1930. Reproduced by permission of PFD on behalf of the Estate of Mrs. Claire Blunden, www.pfd.co.uk.—Clark, Tom. From "From Robert Creeley and the Genius of the American Common Place," in ***A Poetics of Criticism.*** Edited by Juliana Spahr, Mark Wallace, Kristin Prevallet, and Pam Rehm. Leave Books, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Leave Books. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Edelberg, Cynthia Dubin. From ***Robert Creeley's Poetry: A Critical Introduction.*** University of New Mexico Press, 1978. Copyright © 1978 by the University of New Mexico Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Faas, Ekbert, with Maria Trombacco. From ***Robert Creeley: A Biography.*** University Press of New England, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by McGill Queen's University Press. Reprinted with permission of McGill-Queen's University Press. In the U.S. with permission of University Press of New England, Hanover, NH.—Ford, Arthur L. From ***Robert Creeley.*** Twayne, 1978. Copyright © 1978 by G.K. Hall & Co. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Kato, Shuichi. From ***A History of Japanese Literature: The First Thousand Years.*** Translated by David Chibbett. Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979. Copyright © Shuichi Kato, 1979. Translation copyright © by Paul Norbury Publications Limited, 1979. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.—Keene, Donald. From ***Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century.*** Henry Holt and Company, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by Donald Keene. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.—Keene, Donald. From "The Man'yōshū and Kokinshū Collections," in ***Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching.*** Edited by Barbara Stoler Miller. M.E. Sharpe, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York. Used with permission of M.E. Sharpe, Inc. All rights reserved. Not for reproduction.—Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai. From "Kokin Wakashû or Kokinshû," in ***Introduction to Classic Japanese Literature.*** Edited by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai. Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1948. Reproduced by permission.—McCullough, Helen Craig. From ***Brocade by Night:*** **Kokin Wakashû** ***and the Court Style in Japanese Classical***

Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Barbara M. Bibel
Librarian
Oakland Public Library
Oakland, California

Dr. Toby Burrows
Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library
Nedlands, Western Australia

Celia C. Daniel
Associate Reference Librarian
Howard University Libraries
Washington, D.C.

David M. Durant
Reference Librarian
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Nancy T. Guidry
Librarian
Bakersfield Community College
Bakersfield, California

Heather Martin
Arts & Humanities Librarian
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library
Birmingham, Alabama

Susan Mikula
Librarian
Indiana Free Library
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Thomas Nixon
Humanities Reference Librarian
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis Library
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Mark Schumacher
Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Greensboro, North Carolina

Gwen Scott-Miller
Assistant Director
Sno-Isle Regional Library System
Marysville, Washington

Contents

Robert Creeley
1926-2005

American poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, and editor.

INTRODUCTION

Associated with both the Black Mountain school of poetry and the Beat Generation, Creeley is known for poems that are highly personal in content and unconventional in form. His poems are typically short and spare, consisting of several two-line stanzas that are broken in the middle of a sentence, or sometimes even in the middle of a word. His principal influences include Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, and William Carlos Williams.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Creeley was born May 21, 1926, in Arlington, Massachusetts, to Genevieve Jules Creeley and Oscar Slate Creeley, a successful physician. Shortly after Creeley's birth the family, which included Creeley's older sister Helen, moved to a farm in West Acton, Massachusetts, not far from Boston. At the age of two, Creeley suffered an injury to his left eye and lost the eye three years later. His father's death in 1930 left the family in reduced circumstances, and his mother went to work as a public health nurse. When he was fourteen, Creeley enrolled in Holderness School, a boys' boarding school in New Hampshire, where he displayed an interest in writing; he soon began producing articles and short stories for the school literary magazine. In 1943 he entered Harvard University, but left soon afterwards to serve as an ambulance driver for the American Field Service in India and Burma. After the war Creeley resumed his studies at Harvard, but withdrew from the university a year later without earning a degree. He later enrolled in Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where he studied under Charles Olson; he earned a B.A. in 1955. In 1960 he was awarded a master's degree from the University of New Mexico.

In 1946 Creeley married Ann MacKinnon and the couple lived first on a farm near Littleton, New Hampshire, then in the south of France and Majorca. They had three children: David, Thomas, and Charlotte; the marriage ended in divorce in 1955. Two years later, Creeley married Bobbie Louise Hall and became stepfather to her two daughters, Kirsten and Leslie, and had two more children, Sarah and Katherine. Creeley and his wife collaborated on a number of books over the next two decades—she providing collages or monoprints to accompany his poetry. Creeley's second marriage ended in divorce in 1976. A year later Creeley married Penelope Highton; the couple had two children, William and Hannah.

In addition to his writing, Creeley also edited several literary journals and taught at a number of colleges and universities over the course of his career, including Black Mountain College, the University of New Mexico, the University of British Columbia, State University of New York at Buffalo, and San Francisco State College. In 1988 Creeley held the bicentennial chair of American Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland, and in 2003 he became Distinguished Professor of English for the graduate program in creative writing at Brown University.

Over the course of his career, Creeley received numerous fellowships and grants, including a D. H. Lawrence fellowship, two Guggenheim fellowships in poetry, a Rockefeller Foundation grant, a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and two Fulbright grants. His awards include the Levinson Prize, the Shelley Award, the Frost Medal, the Walt Whitman citation of merit, the Bollingen Prize, the Before Columbus Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award. His poetry collection, *For Love* (1962), was nominated for a National Book Award. Creeley died in Odessa, Texas, on March 30, 2005, from complications of pneumonia.

MAJOR WORKS

Creeley published a number of poetry volumes while teaching at Black Mountain College in the 1950s and at the same time served as editor of the *Black Mountain Review,* the school's literary journal. His first widely-circulated publication, however, was *For Love: Poems 1950-1960,* nominated for a National Book Award. The volume is concerned with issues of both language and human relationships and it introduced readers to Creeley's unconventional grammar, punctuation, and syntax. *Words,* which appeared in 1965, extended Creeley's exploration of the material nature of the writing process and garnered a fair amount of negative criticism for its representations of gender-based violence. In 1968 he

published *Pieces,* which contains poems that are even more experimental, abstract, and spare than his earlier work. In 1976 Creeley published *Hello,* which presented, in verse form, journal entries from his reading tour of Australia, New Zealand, the Far East, and the islands of the Pacific. As he aged, Creeley abandoned the fragmented style associated with his earlier poetry and began writing more accessible verse that addressed such personal themes such as aging, sexuality, and memory. The volumes from this period include *Later* (1978), *Echoes* (1982), *Mirrors* (1983), *Memory Gardens* (1986), and *Windows* (1990). Creeley won the Bollingen Prize (1999), a Before Columbus Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), and a Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award (2001) following his 1998 collection *Life and Death,* in which Creeley collaborated with visual artist Francesco Clemente. His last volume of poetry, *On Earth: Last Poems and an Essay* (2006), contains more than thirty new poems and an essay exploring the verse of Walt Whitman.

In addition to his poetry, Creeley's other major works include a novel, *The Island* (1963); a collection of short stories, *The Gold Diggers* (1954); and several collections of essays, many on his theory of poetics. The most notable of these is *Was That a Real Poem or Did You Just Make It up Yourself?* (1976), which chronicles his own development as a poet.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Creeley first gained widespread recognition with the 1962 collection, *For Love,* and many critics, including Allen Barry Cameron, consider it his best work. Cameron notes, however, that criticism of Creeley's work is divided between "those who abhor his poetry . . . and think his reputation as a poet overrated, and those who find in Creeley a major figure in modern poetry." A number of literary scholars, among them Robert F. Kaufman, have commented on the poet's use of unconventional form. Kaufman, who contends that Creeley wrote in a kind of "cryptic shorthand," claims that "most of his poems seem fragmentary and discontinuous." Arthur L. Ford contends, though, that Creeley's later work refutes the claims of early reviewers who regarded his poetry as "intentionally confusing" and his unconventional syntax as simply careless. Ford notes that *Pieces* and *Words* represent the realization of Creeley's earlier attempts to make the word a tangible object. Conversely, Charles Potts expresses admiration for Creeley's early poetry, but disappointment in *Pieces,* which he considers "self conscious" and "narrower in range" than the poet's other work. Christopher Lambert has also commented on the increasing narrowness of Creeley's poetry, claiming that its highly concentrated focus "displays an irritating kind of tunnel vision, each successive volume only acting to further narrow the field of his attention." Leverett T. Smith, Jr., however, answers critics who feel that Creeley becomes "too concerned with intimate things," to the point that the "larger view" is forced out of his poetry: Smith acknowledges that Creeley operates at the intimate level, but insists that "the best of these poems resonate through the whole culture of which they are a part—its philosophy, history, politics."

The relationship between form and content was a major preoccupation for Creeley, as many critics note, and it is likewise a key focus for scholars writing about his work. Cameron, in his discussion of *For Love,* claims that Creeley is "constantly searching—because content is constantly changing—for the means that will make form an extension of content." Alistair Wisker reports that the principle underlying Charles Olson's projective verse was Creeley's dictum "Form is never more than an extension of content." According to Wisker, "Creeley has played a key part in the development of American and international poetry in the second half of the twentieth century through his work itself, of course, and through his consistent propounding of this principle."

Cynthia Dubin Edelberg maintains that the early poems collected in *For Love* "attest to the fact that he once defined himself in terms of the power of his intelligence, his relationship with his wife, and the challenge of his craft." The publication of *Words,* however, suggests that the poet wants to move beyond vague assessments, according to Edelberg, who believes that the poems in that volume "can best be understood and appreciated as elements in a process of self-discovery." Heather Eggins, too, notes that Creeley's poetry is almost always an attempt to establish a sense of his own identity and that, for Creeley, identity is almost always associated with a sense of place. Dirk Stratton praises Creeley's "scrupulous honesty," but acknowledges that this means his poetry "cannot avoid reality; instead it exposes and explores reality in all its ambiguity, sensitizing nerve endings instead of numbing them."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Le Fou 1952
The Immoral Proposition 1953
The Kind Act of 1953
All That Is Lovely in Men 1955
If You 1956

The Whip 1957
A Form of Women 1959
For Love: Poems 1950-1960 1962
Distance 1964
Words 1965; enlarged edition, 1967
About Women 1966
Poems, 1950-1965 1966
The Charm: Early and Collected Poems 1968; enlarged edition 1969
The Finger 1968; also published as *The Finger Poems, 1966-1969* (enlarged edition) 1970
Pieces 1968; enlarged edition, 1969
Hero 1969
Mazatlan: Sea 1969
In London 1970
St. Martin's 1971
Change 1972
A Day Book (poems and prose) 1972
Listen 1972
Thirty Things 1974
Away 1976
Hello 1976; also published as *Hello: A Journal, February 29-May 3, 1976* (enlarged edition) 1978
Presences 1976
Selected Poems 1976
Later 1978; enlarged edition 1979
The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975 1982
Echoes 1982
Mirrors 1983
Memories 1984
Memory Gardens 1986
Places 1990
Windows 1990
Selected Poems 1991
Life and Death [with Francesco Clemente] 1998
If I Were Writing This 2003
On Earth: Last Poems and an Essay 2006

Other Major Works

The Gold Diggers (short stories) 1954
The Island (novel) 1963
A Quick Graph: Collected Notes and Essays (essays and prose) 1970
Whitman: Selected Poems [editor] (poems) 1973
Mabel: A Story, and Other Prose (short stories and prose) 1976
Was That a Real Poem or Did You Just Make It up Yourself? (essay) 1976
Collected Prose (prose) 1984
Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence. 10 vols. (letters) 1980-1996
The Collected Essays of Robert Creeley (essays) 1989
The Best American Poetry 2002 [editor, with David Lehman] (poetry) 2002

CRITICISM

Allen Barry Cameron (essay date 1967)

SOURCE: Cameron, Allen Barry. "'Love Comes Quietly': The Poetry of Robert Creeley." *Chicago Review* 19, no. 2 (1967): 92-103.

[*In the following essay, Cameron attempts to account for the widely varying critical assessments of Creeley's work through an examination of* For Love.]

"We live as we can, each day another—there is no use in counting. Nor more, say, to live than what there is, to live. I want the poem as close to this fact as I can bring it; or it, me," Robert Creeley says in his Preface to ***For Love: Poems 1950-1960***—his best and most complete collection of poems.[1] We live, in a sense, in a creative-destructive continuum: the fleetingness, the continuity, the eternal cycle of life and death are inescapable. Each of Robert Creeley's poems, however, reflects an attempt to give order or emotional stability to at least one moment of life's disparate experiences.

Although a talented short story writer and novelist, Creeley is best known as a poet, having published over the past sixteen years eight books of poems: ***Le Fou*** (1952), ***The Immoral Proposition*** (1953), ***The Kind of Act of*** (1953), ***All That Is Lovely in Men*** (1955), ***If You*** (1956), ***The Whip*** (1957), ***A Form of Women*** (1959), and ***For Love*** (1962). Yet despite these numerous offerings, comment on his poetry is still sparse, and what there is of it is extremely limited in scope. Negligible discussion may be justified, to some degree, in that Creeley is a relatively contemporary poet and, perhaps, not as fully established as, say, Allen Tate. Nevertheless, those who do venture comment (mostly in the form of book reviews) tend to fall into one of two well-defined critical camps: those who abhor his poetry, such as John W. Corrington, and think his reputation as a poet overrated, and those who find in Creeley a major figure in modern poetry. William Carlos Williams has written, for example, that Creeley's poetry has "the subtlest feeling for measure that I encounter anywhere except in the verses of Ezra Pound." While the praise of such an established literary personality may have various motives (perhaps, only to promote the sale of a particular book or collection of poems), it would have been difficult for Williams, whom Creeley almost adulates, to have offered anything but praise. In a letter I received from Creeley (March 28, 1965), he explains, to some extent, his relationship to Williams as well as to Denies Levertov and Robert Duncan, both of whom have also offered extended praise of Creeley's work:

> Denise and I shared an intense interest in Williams—from which we both take a clear root in our own work. The acquaintance with Robert Duncan comes a little

> later, by way of ORIGIN, but is equally important to me. . . . It is simply, that, as writers, we each of us wanted a way out of usual senses of form so adamant in the early fifties, and took Pound and Williams as our center. . . . And we were very committed to a common sense of possibility—in Williams, Pound, and too, in Olson's Projective Verse.

Because of the valuations of such figures as Williams, although their praise may very well be genuine, and also because of the almost diametrically opposed derogatory views of other commentators, it has become necessary to make observations that, it is hoped, will resolve accurately Creeley's position as a poet in contemporary American literature.

I

For Love brings together, in a more or less chronological order, the poems written between the years 1950 and 1960. Consequently, in this one important volume of poetry, it is possible to see a line of clear development in Creeley's poetic art. He has, of course, continued to write and publish poems since 1960 in various quarterlies, but they have not been collected. For this reason, as well as for its accessibility, the present discussion of Creeley's poems will be confined to ***For Love.***

Although diverse in theme and technique, the most consistently outstanding feature of the poems in this volume is their pervasive personal aura. Indeed, as Aram Saroyan has suggested in his review of Creeley's novel, *The Island* (*Poetry,* CIV), Creeley "insists" upon being personal in *each* literary form that he uses: novel, short story, letter, and poem. He allows his own consciousness or personality to dominate, to dictate formal procedure. Creeley himself claims that his distinction between literary forms is only a technical one—based on external, not internal form. "Form," he says, "is never more than an extension of content," and what is meant by this famous statement he makes explicit in a poetry review:

> One tends to value any kind of statement for what one can take from it as a content, or a state of feeling some way about something, a viable association between what the statement has 'said' and what terms of response it can gain in who hears it. We learn young that the way in which some thing is said, the tone of voice, the literal words used, and all the relations implied in the context of their use,—all these say 'things' too. It is equally a commonplace that in a poem such content may have, finally, a greater value for the reader than the literal facts the poem is otherwise making clear.
>
> (*Poetry,* CII)

In his own poetry, form is consciously, by design, an extension of content: "It does not really matter how you write a poem, so long as you write it." In other words, whatever "things" are to be "said" in a particular poem will determine how they will be said: the content of what is semantically involved will function to a great extent in how the statement of it occurs. The tone of a particular phrase, therefore, is just as important—and sometimes more so—for communication as the actual literal meaning of the words being asserted. Form itself, of course, never remains the same, for it is reshaped or reformed each time a poem is written to suit Creeley's personal disposition at that critical moment of consciousness. Actually, his concept of form is not altogether different from Mark Schorer's concept of technique as he explains it in "Technique as Discovery";

> When we speak of technique . . . we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying, and finally, of evaluating it.
>
> (*Approaches to the Novel,* p. 249)

For Creeley, from does all of these things. It is, in short, simply an extension of content—of his experiences. But Creeley's content reflects sharply the world in which he lives—a shattered world in which all sense of value has been lost. As a result, there is in his poetry, as there is in Levertov's and Duncan's, what M. L. Rosenthal calls a "renewed emphasis on the feel of specific moments of awareness, as if they were totally detachable from the rest of life" (*The Modern Poets,* p. 268)—an attempt to give order and value to at least one moment of experience. Such a concern not only accounts for the frequent use of an epigrammatic form—a particularly suitable poetic form for emphasizing the primary of the poet's response—in Creeley, but also for the use of the vernacular in many of his poems. Vernacular language is a deliberate attempt on Creeley's part to recapture the immediacy of the actual experience he writes of, such as **"I Know a Man"**:

> As I sd to my
> friend, because I am
> always talking,—John, I
>
> sd, which was not his
> name, the darkness sur-
> rounds us, what
>
> can we do against
> it, or else, shall we &
> why not, buy a goddamn big car,
>
> drive, he sd, for
> christ's sake, look
> out where yr going.
>
> (p. 38)

II

Although his concept of form is important for an overall understanding of his poetry, equally important is Cree-

ley's view of life and the significance he attaches to relationships, not only with people but also with the world in which one lives. He describes his own life in *Yugen* (7. 13-18) as

> one in which relationships, rather than the hierarchies to which these might refer, are dominant. What is meant by politics, marriage, education, religion, or love itself, become modalities, terms between, people, the *you* and *me* of the subjective universe. If it is not *my* hat, then possibly it is *yours*; or if not yours, *his,* or *hers*—or *theirs,* a collective enterprise, yet one (as religion or philosophy, at present) given meaning by a *possessional* insistence. The hat itself is an occasion.
>
> (13)

Not surprisingly, then, a hat becomes the occasion, subject, or modality for one of his poems, **"The End"**:

> When I know what people think of me
> I am plunged into my loneliness. The grey
>
> hat bought earlier sickens.
> I have no purpose no longer distinguishable.
>
> A feeling like being choked
> enters my throat.
>
> (p. 39)

The hat, in this instance, has lost its value as a term between people, as a modality for an inter-personal relationship. Consequently, the poet is left with only a sense of choking depression. The mood of loneliness, of isolation, is accentuated by "me" in line one preceding a slight hesitation at the line-end, and also by the emphatic, isolated "I," with its increased stress beginning lines two and four. The inadequate, negative value of the mood is made clear by the double negatives of the fourth line. But the poem itself serves positively—as all of Creeley's poems do—as a "form" or term between poet and reader.

In many of Creeley's poems marriage, like the hat in **"The End,"** also functions as a term between people rather than a hierarchy or universal concept. In poems such as **"The Crisis," "Just Friends," "The Way," "A Marriage," "Ballad of the Despairing Husband,"** and **"The Interview,"** marriage operates as a concrete occasion for an inter-personal relationship between two people. And just as a hat can lose its ability to be a term—when it ceases to be simply a modality or form and becomes a hierarchy, or end in itself—so marriage can also cease to be a convention for personal relationship. In **"The Letter,"** for example, where the tone of the poem, framed in personal implications, makes the experience more communicable, more meaningful, by creating a strong point of identification for another individual man, marriage has lost its value as a mode:

> I did not expect you
> to stay married to
> one man all your life,
> no matter you were his wife.
>
> I thought the pain was endless—
> but the form existent,
> as it is form,
> and as such I loved it.
>
> I loved you as well
> even as you might tell,
> giving evidence
> as to how much was penitence.
>
> (p. 97)

The dash, coming at the end of line five and coupled with the normal slight hesitation at the line-end, expresses effectively by its visual impact the sense of endless pain.

Because of his compelling concern with the importance of immediate, concrete personal relationships—between friends, lovers, a man and himself, and a man and his world—such elements as landscape and weather play only a complementary role in Creeley's poetry. They, too, are to some extent modalities or forms, serving only as background for the particular relationship incorporated in the poem. In **"The Innocence,"** for example, a short epigrammatic poem in which the rhythm and tone quite as much as the literal words do the work, the landscape functions solely as a backdrop to express a sense of relationship between the speaker and himself:

> Looking to the sea, it is a line
> of unbroken mountains.
>
> It is the sky.
> It is the ground. There
> we live, on it.
>
> It is a mist
> now tangent to another
> quiet. Here the leaves
> come, there
> is the rock in evidence
>
> or evidence.
> What I come to do
> is partial, partially kept.
>
> (p. 24)

The whole poem, in a sense, is an attempt to define that which can never be defined. We can know an abstract concept such as innocence only through concrete objects that possess or symbolize it—the sea, sky, ground, leaves, and rock—perhaps because they lack the qualitative taint of humanity. Yet it is also a mist, and our associations with these concrete objects are colored by our own perceptions and experiences of them; and, as a result, the sense of man's experience as an enigma is suggested in the final stanza with the pun on "partial."

The poem succeeds in its expression by the careful framing of the lines, "there / is the rock in evidence / or evidence." In other words, the rock may exist, not as a symbol of innocence alone, but as innocence *itself.* The isolation of the phrase, "or evidence," heavily stressed and beginning the last stanza suggests just such an answer.

III

Creeley's concept of life, of the universe as a subjective reality, accounts for the permeating personal quality of his poetry as well as for some of his formal techniques. But it has an even greater significance in relation to what Donald Hall (*Contemporary American Poetry,* pp. 17-26) describes as an entirely new movement in poetry. Although Hall doesn't single out Creeley specifically, it would be safe to say that the principal members of this new movement, in addition to Creeley, are Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, Paul Blackburn, and Charles Olson. Primarily subjective in tone, although not strictly speaking autobiographical in the Wordsworthian sense, this new type of poetry is a reaction to the objective theory of poetry as formulated by T. S. Eliot. Because it is an attempt to reveal, through particularized images of immediate personal experience, universal subjective life, the kind of poetic knowledge acquired in such poetry is experiential, rather than impersonally or historically conceptual, involving psychologically the total man.

Creeley doesn't believe, of course, that he can communicate what he *actually* experiences, but he does believe, as Warren Tallman has suggested in *Tish* (7. 7-12), that we have *corresponding* experiences or objects of our own, so that, as he communicates his, we can understand them in light of ours. Actually, this process works something like an image, which has been defined traditionally as a literal and concrete representation of a sensory experience or object that can be known by one or more of the senses. Whereas an image depends for its effect upon an already known sensation, in Creeley's poetry the personal experience revealed in a particular poem depends upon an already known similar subjective experience—not necessarily only the sensory. The reader's facility in identifying the experiences, of course, makes the poems more accessible and meaningful for him.

One word, however, is often meant to do the work of the traditional imagery of phrase, and, frequently, the images or associations suggested by these words cannot be transformed into abstractions or concepts. You must fill in, so to speak, the image and the experience suggested by it with your own experiences. Sometimes, too, the whole poem, the entire poetic experience, is an image of this sort. **"Love Comes Quietly,"** for instance, is a good example of an economy of technique which gives the whole poem the quality of an "experiential" image:

> Love comes quietly,
> finally, drops
> about me, on me,
> in the old ways.
>
> What did I know
> thinking myself
> able to go
> alone all the way.
>
> (p. 151)

The positions of "quietly," coming at the end of the first line, and "finally," beginning the second line and isolated by commas, coerce the reader into filling in the image with his own personal experiences of quietness and finality. The word, "alone," beginning emphatically the last line and accentuated by the slight hesitation at the line-end of the second last line, reinforces the initial tone of the poem. In its almost practiced simplicity of style, the entire poem succeeds in creating a singularly impressive mood.

IV

Creeley's formal techniques—particularly his use of the line—are an important consideration for an understanding of his art. In the Preface to an early book of poems, ***All That Is Lovely in Men*** (1955), Creeley makes the following important statement:

> Line-wise, the most complementary sense I have found is that of musicians like Charlie Parker, & Miles Davis. I am interested in how that is done, how 'time' there is held to a measure peculiarly an evidence (a hand) of the emotion which prompts (drives) the poem in the first place. If this seems hopeful, let me point to the 'line' of Miles Davis' chorus in BUT NOT FOR ME—Back is no different, but the time is. There I think we must do it for ourselves. We must, as Dr. Williams insists, find a 'measure' (a scale)—& I am, here, interested in the attempt to do this, also.

Creeley in 1955 was looking for a means, a technique, or an idiom that would at once express his thematic considerations and still afford a sense of continuity. And in 1962, as the Preface to ***For Love*** indicates, he was still aspiring to use such a means. He is, in short, constantly searching—because content is constantly changing—for the means that will make form an extension of content. And Robert Duncan in his review of ***For Love*** points out exactly where Creeley was to find his initial means—in Williams' *The Wedge* (1944) and *The Clouds* (1948):

> Williams . . . gives the young Creeley his challenge of what form in poetry must be and defines, more certainly than Pound, the particular mode or convention of the common-speech song with set two, three or four line stanzas, highly articulated to provide close interplay and variation, which Creeley is to specialize in and to develop towards his own poetic voice.
>
> (*New Mexico Quarterly,* XXXII)

In **"La Noche,"** for example, where both the senses of sight and sound are needed to take in all the subtleties, Creeley is much like Williams in his articulation of the line:

> In the court-
> yard at midnight, at
>
> midnight. The moon is
> locked in itself, to
>
> a man a
> familiar thing.
>
> (p. 50)

The juncture between "is" and "locked," defined by the line, expresses, in the raised pitch of the terminal "is" and the increased stress on "locked," the exact sense of imprisonment and resulting loneliness. The intentional splitting of "courtyard," counter to the natural facility of expression, suggests that this is no ordinary courtyard but, perhaps, a "court" of life where the poet has been sentenced to loneliness. The two isolated "a"s in line five, with the increased stress on the first "a" defined by the preceding line, and the raised pitch of the terminal "a"—between which "man" is interjected—make clear the utter isolation of the poet. In his phrasing, which seems to deny the natural ease of ordinary statement, Creeley is, indeed, very much like Williams.

Creeley is not the only contemporary poet to inherit this "operative juncture" from Williams: Levertov, Blackburn, and Duncan are also concerned with the function of the line as a technique. "It is the LINE," Charles Olson, their poetic spokesman, says, "that's the baby that gets, as the poem is getting made, the attention, the control, that it is right here, in the line, that the shaping takes place, each moment of the growing" (*New American Poetry,* p. 390). An understanding of the function of Creeley's line (which is not quite a breath line complete of itself, but a slight hesitation at the line-end) is essential to the full meaning of a poem such as **"The Tunnel"**:

> Tonight, nothing is long enough—
> time isn't.
> Were there a fire,
> it would burn now.
>
> Were there a heaven,
> I would have gone long ago.
> I think that light
> is the final image.
>
> But time reoccurs,
> love—and an echo.
> A time passes
> love in the dark.
>
> (p. 80)

The extended lengths of line one, increased by the terminating dash, and of line six express, through the sense of sight and the actual time taken to read the lines, the speaker's wished-for length of time. The dash in line ten and the pause at the line-end of line eleven also suggest quite effectively a sense of the passage of time. Creeley is skillfully putting into practice Olson's theory of Projective Verse; form here is, indeed, an extension of content.

V

Although most of the ironic, self-mocking poems, such as **"I Know a Man," "The Innocence," "The Crisis," "The Ball Game," "The Crow,"** and **"The Immoral Proposition,"** occur in the first two sections of ***For Love,*** Parts One and Two also contain lighter, more cheerful poems, such as **"Chanson," "The Conspiracy," "Naughty Boy,"** and **"Song."** But it is the last section of ***For Love*** that includes poems possessing genuine poetic maturity. While these last poems continue to deal with many of the same themes already mentioned, in the majority of them, a softened and more thoughtful tone is substituted for an abruptness and a jagged anxiety. The mood has quieted in such poems as **"Love Comes Quietly," "The Pool,"** and **"The Snow,"** perhaps because of what occasioned them. Creeley's poems, it must be remembered, are testimonies of his own personal experiences. In an interview with David Ossman in May of 1961, recorded in *The Sullen Art* (pp. 56-64), Creeley himself has confirmed this change and suggested a reason for it:

> The truncated line, or the short, seemingly broken line I was using in my first poems, comes from the somewhat broken emotions that were involved in them. Now, as I begin to relax, as I not so much grow older, but more settled, more at ease in my world, the line can not so much grow softer, but can become . . . more lyrical, less afraid of concluding. And rhyme, of course, is to me a balance not only of sounds, but a balance which implies agreement.
>
> (pp. 59-60)

Whatever the cause, it seems that the third section of ***For Love*** contains poems more lyrical and thoughtfully unified than the majority in the first two sections. Again and again, one comes across poems, such as **"The Eye"** and **"The Plan,"** in which rhythm and rhyme wind back upon themselves, revealing the insight or experience. In **"The Rain,"** for instance, which moves quietly from uncertainty to a positive possession of the truth, everything in the poem is controlled by rhythm and rhyme:

> All night the sound had
> come back again,
> and again falls
> this quiet, persistent rain.
>
> What am I to myself
> that must be remembered,

insisted upon
so often? Is it

that never the ease,
even the hardness,
of rain falling
will have for me

something other than this,
something not so insistent—
am I to be locked in this
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,
lie next to me.
Be for me, like rain,
the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
lust of intentional indifference.
Be wet
with a decent happiness.

(p. 109)

The intentional splitting of "semi-lust" in lines twenty-one and twenty-two involves the reader's sense of sight fully in the poet's mood. The accents fall as quietly as rain itself, and the balance of rhyme suggests, through its melodious agreement, the ensuing sense of peace.

The quiet ease of many of the poems in this third section, conveyed primarily by their simplicity, expresses significantly Creeley's sense of the continuity of life and his true feeling for the conditional as well as for that which is permanent. He sees himself moving in this last section of ***For Love*** from hopefulness and evasion to certainty and a lasting possession of the past.

This brief review of some of the most significant aspects of Creeley's poetry has by no means exhausted possible comment on his work. But it is hoped that the present study has at least clarified the main sources of misunderstanding and stimulated, however slightly, some genuine interest in his art. Although there has been some pejorative criticism of his poetry, much of it has stemmed, in my opinion, from an unwillingness to accept his poetic techniques. Creeley's concept of form, perhaps, is not completely original, but his ability to put his theory into practice is admirable. He has rejected, not rebelled against, the objective theory of poetry and substituted in its place a workable poetic credo. Through the recognition of man's constant coloring of his perceptions, he has postulated that the universe, the world we know, is a subjective reality. He has also perceived—even more significantly—that in our modern world social institutions and conventions, such as marriage, education, and politics, are only "forms," excuses, if you will, for inter-personal relationships: what really matters, Creeley seems to be saying, is people. When these organizations cease to be forms, or means to an end, they can only bring chaos and ultimate loneliness for the individual.

When the old forms of art cease to have meaning or functional value, the artist must search for new means. Creeley has searched and found as all great artists have done in the past. The overall quality of his poetry indicates, beyond doubt, that Creeley is, in fact, a major figure in contemporary American poetry: he has moved in the space of ten years' work from quasi-imitation and insignificant confession to his own enduring poetic voice and maturity. And he is still writing and publishing poems. Love for Robert Creeley's poetry may come quietly, but, gratefully, it is a lasting love.

Note

1. Poems from *For Love* and the quotation from the Preface are reprinted here by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons. Copyright © 1962 Robert Creeley. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text. I should also like to acknowledge here my general indebtedness to David Bromige, whose review of *For Love* (*Northwest Review,* VI, 1963) acted as a partial stimulant for the writing of this paper.

Kenneth Cox (essay date summer 1969)

SOURCE: Cox, Kenneth. "Address and Posture in the Poetry of Robert Creeley." *Cambridge Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (summer 1969): 237-43.

[*In the following essay, Cox examines Creeley's treatment of the reader as a third party in his poems addressed to specific people.*]

> [Robert Creeley is American (born in Arlington, Massachusetts, in 1926, he now teaches at Buffalo, N.Y.) but his poetry appears in both British and American editions. Each edition since the first includes some poems previously published on the other side of the Atlantic and others not previously collected. Thus his first volume ***For Love*** appeared in Britain with additional poems under the title ***Poems 1950-65***: the additions were published in the U.S.A. last year as ***Words*** together with further poems. These further poems are to appear in Britain in ***Words*** and ***Pieces,*** again with additions . . .
>
> Creeley's writing, always subtle, at first tended towards manierismo. Quietly self-questioning it has gone further and further towards defining experience in sparse and primitive terms. It thus lends itself more easily to the kind of fundamental analysis attempted in the following article than to conventional comparisons of style or ethic. The page-references are to the British collection: ***Poems 1950-65,*** London, Calder and Boyars, 1966.
>
> Creeley's prose rehearses the technique of his poetry. A novel *The Island* and a collection of stories *The Gold Diggers* (the latter reviewed by J. P. Freeman in Vol. 2 No. 4 of this journal) are at present available. Creeley also introduced the Penguin anthology *The New Writing in the USA* (1967).]
>
> *K. C.*