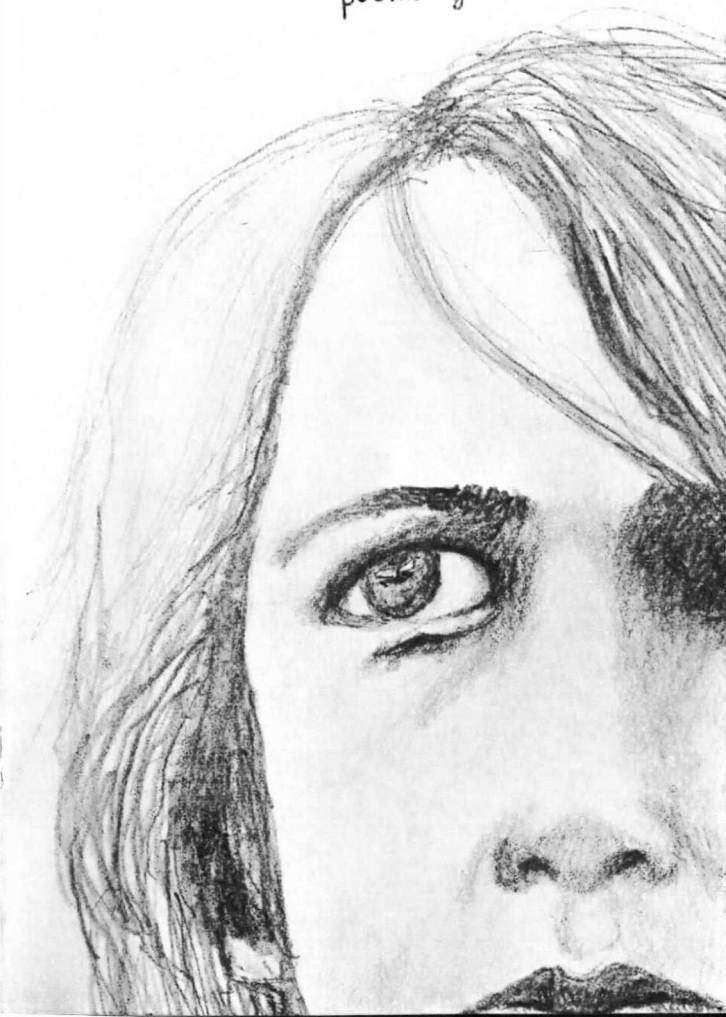


the terror of earrings

poems by dennis cooper



Am. Hi Pan  
C 77656

the terror of earrings

poems by Dennis Cooper

I don't know what I'm going to do  
but it will include the terror  
of earrings, earrings on the backseat.

~James Tate

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cover art by the author.

for Robert Davis

my dearest friend in life

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Room 304

A strange choir boy  
bathing inside  
that small room there.

Downstairs by the elevator his  
choir practices without him.  
Their thick lips reach for the sky  
wishing for a little kiss.

His robes slide slowly across  
a mahogany guitar neck.  
The air smells of roses and feet.

I can hear the water sighing.  
He is humming something delicate, old,

I hope his god doesn't try to repossess  
right now.

Save this marriage

(based on a poem and dream  
by Jerene Cline)

Mary and I share a cigarette  
in our vanilla livingroom  
in a house we have lived in all our lives,  
I am tired of hearing her sunshine voice.  
The smell of her flesh makes me carsick.  
I can't stand to watch her smile.

I leave her mouthfing John Sebastian songs  
and wander down the hall to the closet  
for a sweater.

I open its doors with bored hands  
and discover a secret room I have  
never seen before,  
dark and huge and empty and silent.

I step inside and shut the door behind me.  
Mary's and John's stale joy world is gone.

God, I wish you'd bring your painted face  
over and mime us a child  
or something.



upon reading Michael Horovitz's afterwords  
to Children of Albion

a poem filters inside you

the get together hand flower rots  
and stains the palms of your hands

another Dylan compromise

a joining of mass and flow

a poem loved to you

a mouth

a pale child burning a church

a god with machine gun arms caress you

#26      for Jimmy Stegmiller

I feel as though  
each day a poem  
gasping in my arms

lured by a particular face or movement

I remember you said the way you loved  
like a blind man combing his hair.

## Prince

Two boys play in a parking lot  
in the rain. They stand  
at opposite ends and throw cans  
at each other, then later,  
cling together under their delicate  
afros licking each others'  
faces clean with short pink tongues.

I watch them thru Dave's window.  
In his room the radio plays a  
naked California rock n roll song  
with  
a bass run the size of my fist.

Dave stands with his back against  
the window narrowing his eyes  
and pounding an imaginary drum,  
unaware or not caring that  
outside his window the war is over.

Kissing their dreams goodbye

(for Susie)

An apartment complex is demolished.  
Eleven thin albino boys gather across  
the street to watch.  
Walls fold in on each other.  
The boys stand motionless.  
A Mexican woman leans from her car to  
admire the boys and their majestic  
beauty, "They look like princes."  
Their eyes never leave the destruction  
site. Thick men sweat and pound  
until one wall remains standing.  
The boys' maroon velvet jumpsuits  
rustle in the Chicago wind.  
They seem to have no emotions at all.  
As the last wall falls their  
stares continue. The building  
is flat, dust settles. The workers  
start home with their lunch pails.  
Suddenly the boys gasp, bend over  
gagging. The boys are kissing their  
dreams goodbye. The albino princes  
are swallowing their tongues.

## Object #2

and he folds his hands into his hair.  
"I don't want to say anything." She looks at him for a moment then at her dress.  
"Fine. Better that way."  
"What?" He turns his head to glare at her, his eyes as vicious as cups of coffee.  
"I don't want to watch television or go to the movies or drink. Leave me to die, Gloria." His face relaxes and flattens,  
"And I do....love..."  
She smiles her wondrous, thin smile,  
"Of course."

He dreams, "I'll have to kill her. My life is being wasted. There are no hopes or dreams but this one. No one would know. I've got to do something..."

She thinks, "To leave here I will have to make him want it. The only reason I don't is where would I go. With who would I cry or dance? There must be a man capable of salvation..."

From their daughter's bedroom door a red beachball rolls out across the white rug. They notice its entrance and follow its noiseless progress into the room.

## April in Venice

the winter has left foam  
on the sidewalks, spring  
eats the bubbles,

the sun rings like a bell  
overhead, hot dogs smell like  
playdoh,

there is a man being stabbed  
by the restroom,  
Spanish laughter, muffled, moving  
up the beach.

## Old Friend

You and I, we don't  
love the same music  
anymore.

I go to your house,  
we watch television,  
I want to fuck you  
up your ass.

I want to kill your  
bellbottoms, kill you.

Monday afternoon, May 1973

The roses I dropped in  
the sink last week go on  
living without their  
bodies as if no one is  
waiting to wash their  
hair.

When hot thin Michelle comes  
by tomorrow she'll tell me it's  
Eric Brown trying to communicate  
with me from the grave.

The walnut heads that Cliff  
got in Polynesia are making  
their own commotion over by  
the fireplace.

I creep up from behind and  
push them into the flames.

A small moth owns our  
bedroom. We can't get to  
sleep at night for fear it  
will be dead in the morning.

This has gone on for months.  
Soon we plan to teach it to  
bring us our cigarettes.  
Then we will teach it to talk.



## A poem for a dancer at the Bitter End West

An old thin fleshed women named  
Helen tells her friend Laura  
stories that all end with the same  
punch line - "I kept waiting for  
someone else to say something."

Laura can't stop staring at the  
countless veins that crease the skin  
of Helen's legs and finally has to  
leave for fear she will notice her  
noticing. As soon as Laura has started

her car in the driveway Helen begins  
eating kleenex. The thought that no  
one knows what she is doing excites her.  
She eats faster. Laura, stopping for a

red light thinks, "I will visit her  
tomorrow. I will leave my house at  
10 A.M., I should be there by 11."

David

My sister cries  
with her monthly cramps.

In her arms David lies  
trying to nudge her  
into quiet.

His smooth back  
wavering  
beneath her arms.

His young, softly pocked  
face at her neck  
whispering something  
from a sad movie,

"It will be alright, baby."  
"Stay with me, baby."

Poem for Robert parts 2,3,4,6

2.

At the edge of the lion's paws, in  
the shadows there, caravans of  
smooth skin become angry and throw  
a retarded child against a flagpole.  
The crack of skullbone appears as  
a terrified laugh in his black eyes.

When the victim has stopped  
breathing, two boys from the west  
coast meet at the beach and bite  
each others' mouths, fall  
into love.

3.

Robert, in his subtle wisdom,  
to him death is only as important as  
which shirt he will wear today.  
He does not worry about endings,  
he frees thousands of butterflies  
he has hidden up his sleeves.  
He carries the hard breath of love  
in his chest.

The night is another one.  
Smiles have come few and cautiously.  
He brushes his hair into a scarf.

His eyes fall like casual matchbooks  
to the dresser and the fine, old  
bottles he has collected.

(continued)

In an evening surrounded by rock  
he is alone in his room.

He pretends Peter Pan is watching  
him undress.

He draws back the bedsheet  
like the eyelid of a dead child.

#### 4. A face in the window

She lowers her eyes.

She traces diamonds in the bottom  
of a fishtin with her thumbnail.

She starts her evening with  
a glance in the mirror and the thought  
that Frank's wrists were blind.

Thursday by herself sitting  
by the bedroom window eating sardines.  
Love is a vague control.

The night is like a paraplegic  
grandfather who funnels his total  
energy thru his eyes.  
He rolls into the room.

The night watches her and love  
defend themselves, props itself  
up in her bed moaning.

She covers her eyes. =  
She walks over to the bed, bows when  
stars appear, lowers herself to night,  
begins to masturbate.

#### 6.

Tonight a young stranger asks to use our phone  
and stays for hours calling everyone he knows.  
He whispers  
but whispers are dead. There are no more whispers.

## Church

After James Dean in Rebel Without  
a Cause ends we lie naked in bed, his  
blond hair falling into my eyes.

I slip my arms around him.  
He slowly and deliberately braids  
my hair. His laughter is mechanical.

Two months together has left us  
like soft robots, responding to whim  
with lifelike abandon, fucking  
and changing our clothes.

We have to think up games to get  
excited. Tonight he falls back on the  
bed screaming, "Touch Cleopatra!"

It works. I turn him over, divide  
his fat and go straight for the ruby.  
His penis pretends it is an asp and  
weaves its way into my fist.

He starts squirming. I lean over  
to kiss his jewel. I find myself  
kneeling over him. Hell, there isn't  
any God.

## Poem on The Waltons

When a star falls  
over Waltons' mountain  
gasps from beneath the porch  
of wild haired boys, stopped midwhisper.  
A line of faces upturned in amazement.  
The gentle glow of gas lanterns  
on tablecloths.

Flour patties rolled into quiet  
fists cook slowly in a shallow pan.  
John Boy's eyes spark,  
poems swirl within his grasp,  
his arms flail, face cracks, laughter.

A woman, his mother, her pale wrists  
sleeping in a worn blue apron.  
A goat scratching at the wooden  
links of his pen.

Childrens' faces turned to learn  
the nature of this noise.  
A father's thick hand touches John  
Boy's hair and lifts his face to him.  
A father and son stare frantically  
into each others' eyes.

#34

I have to explain it to Jason, at ten years old, begging me to take him across the universe to the planet where dreams are transformed into flesh.

Where creatures with immense heads open doors with their thoughts.

Where the U.S.S. Enterprize lisps thru a thousand galaxies.

I have to be the one to destroy it.  
He must be content, as I was,  
with a trip to Europe.

I crouch beside him glancing frantically towards his eyes. I speak quickly.  
"William Shatner, who played Capt. Kirk on Star Trek, is now fat and middleaged. Spock had rubber ears."

#36

A boy who works in a railroad yard  
and limps. He lifts off his  
tank top and poses in my bed.

Under the sweep of a Panama  
rotary fan I accept his fury. I accept  
the 21st century and its mechanics.

This boy is a robot. I find strands  
of nylon in a wound on his thumb.  
When I touch him between his legs

his eyes light up.  
Soon our bodies begin to betray us.  
Smoke shoots out of our navels.

I call to him, "Casey, over here!"  
He staggers into my arms. I hold on  
to his haircut for dear life.

We eat more mescaline. He laughs too  
hard at the pale backbone of my jokes.  
In my bedroom we sit too close together.



## A television poem

When Ray Charles visited The  
Tonight Show first Ed McMahon made  
funny faces he couldn't see.

Then Johnny stole his dark glasses  
and kicked his chair out from under  
him.

Then when the audience was really  
enjoying Johnny's antics he looked  
down at the lump of black genius  
writhing pathetically on the floor  
and said, "Come on Ray, play us  
some blues."

## A Brief Plan

I am standing thigh deep in  
a Eureka river.

In my open hand an apple  
is rotting.

Young George is writhing his  
delicate body in the water at  
my knees.

His slick brown flesh is like  
a marvelous prehistoric mammal's.

He is the perfect friend.

He says he's going to be a  
priest someday.

My attention is half his, the  
rest of the time I am terrified  
of decay.

This apple's slow death is a  
crude hand mirror.

I do not agree with its opinion.

George will be sixteen in three  
months and as my gift I am going  
to marry him.

I plan to kidnap him from his  
parents.

We will live here among the hills.

We will eat the bark of trees,  
pinecones, pebbles.

I am not afraid of love.

I will be happy with the small,  
cool kisses of my young husband.

I will smear the blood from  
George's battered rectum joyously  
over my body.

## A Night For Jim Morrison

Immense, slippery creatures are coming into town with thin, dynamic black women astride their backs. The women are mute and stare meaninglessly thru milky glass eyes. Their purpose in entering the village is something foreign even amongst themselves. They do not think, "I want to ride into this village." They merely enter town.

To the beach

Steven and I drop by, frail lumps  
from our summer jobs, to eat  
cheese sandwiches and smoke Larks  
in the sand.

A slender tanned boy  
stands embracing himself.  
I want to swallow his breath.

We stretch out cautiously on our bellies.  
Our pale flesh scorches and  
lifts from our backs.  
Our rinds split.

We are like gaudy cripples  
surrounded by casual enemies.

These tanned boys of Santa Monica  
are not afraid of how famous  
they will be tomorrow.  
They do not fall into themselves,  
they use their fists.

March

"All this fantasy, Christ, I wish  
all this God damned fantasy crap  
would go away. I'm all for reality.  
Give it up. There's no fantasy. I don't  
believe in fantasy."

- Theodore Moss

In dark windows on my street  
boys crouch amid stars fingering  
their bow ties. Older boys crawl  
from between their legs.

★ ★

A spider made its web  
in Kevin's hair while he was  
waxing his surfboard.

He has a tattoo on his arm  
that says "A violent man is ,  
after all, a violent man" in  
red and green letters.

He is too gentle to look at  
himself in the mirror. He is  
afraid he would see a cement wall.

★ ★

I'm hungry.  
I lay down in the roller coaster  
tracks at New Pike.  
If I lay here long enough

(continued)

angels will come out of the sky  
and give me gum.

★

★

I take a clown with me to  
the bar. We dance.  
People notice us, begin to stare.  
It is the moment I've waited  
for. I climb up on a barstool  
and read them my poems.

The clown finds his way to  
me and slips his arm about my  
waist. My audience cheers at this.  
I believe they are applauding for  
me. I look at the clown.  
The clown is smiling at me as if  
I were another clown.

## Justice

Father says when I sleep  
bricks are dumped on my head  
and I have to fight my way  
out.

Mother says all the golden  
things I will never own visit  
me when I sleep, it's like  
dropping in on a cloud.

I say it is one of their plans  
to keep me in their house.  
I think they hide pills in  
my milk and when I have fallen  
asleep they carry me into  
a secret room and beat me  
with sticks.

## Five Poems for Michael

### 1. Arizona Sunrise

At the mesa  
I lean back on sharp elbows  
to eat Michael's hair  
in handfuls  
like strands of a Cherokee blanket  
Gagging on small, crisp mouthfuls

Arizona's great desert  
shifting beneath his back  
He looks at me  
with his fucked up  
blue eyes

The dryness of wind has turned  
his lips to toast  
I eat breakfast at the corners  
of his mouth



## 2. At Venice Beach, Calif.

In the heat  
fat babies on apartment building  
roofs searching for casual mothers  
poach below the knee

Handsome boys beneath the pier  
cowering ~~knee~~ deep in an oil slick  
slip a thin brown finger  
up each others' asses,  
beckon with scarred smiles  
pale East Coast boys

The splintered rib cage  
of an ancient amusement park  
flickers nearby,  
the frail arms of its roller coaster  
reach skyward

I wonder from Michael's arms  
what death must feel like  
to the touch,  
whether it makes the hand dance  
or causes it to form  
quickly  
into a fist.

### 3. Michael playing guitar

Michael,  
his hair tied back tight  
against the skull  
His face like Rimbaud's  
Searching  
Playing long, calm woman  
voices on his acoustic guitar

Lenny curls over a massive  
keyboard threading together  
Chicano rhythms  
with veins of thin, pulsing  
moog liquid

There is a prophetic warmth  
in the room  
Michael smiles at me from  
behind his cigarette with  
the dark and nervous  
expression of a child who  
has dazzled his father

#### 4. Balboa Island

My father's threats  
following me  
from his office and  
into the street  
and that word QUEER  
spat out  
of his tired mouth  
like the end  
of a cigar

I turn, scream NO  
so loud it cracks  
my father's windows,  
my father's head

I go to Michael but  
he doesn't understand  
my energy  
We exist miles apart  
in his bedroom  
I want desperately  
to kiss him  
He is just bored enough  
to let me  
We burrow  
into each other  
like fat worms

## 5. New York City

Saying goodbye  
in the Orange Julius at 45th St.  
with a copy of Shelley under  
his arm

I start kissing the warm  
flutter in his wrists, a plea  
His clean smile  
in my ears

Smooth shoulders  
under his ski sweater  
rising, falling into my hands  
like perfect moons

He thanks me for  
so innocent a revenge,  
that he leaves behind  
the image  
of a James Dean angel

I lie that I want to  
remember him  
as a perfect being

My hands moving over him  
My fingertips noiselessly  
searching for scars  
in his lean body

Photographs of my Summer

(for Robert)            "Some kinds of love  
                             are mistaken for vision."  
                             -Lou Reed

Blood in the mouths of the boys on Sunset  
and when they climb in,  
the playful, ageless odor of chocolate  
and marijuana.

Their magic lies somewhere  
in the vague smears  
of their idols.

A second hand illusion.

★                    ★

David's mother dead  
tangled up in the front  
seat of her car.

David with his fist up  
screaming at the sun,  
"Fuck you, you lanky  
bastard!"

★                    ★

I am too fat to exist  
and lie on my stomach across  
the bed writing poems  
to satisfy hot tongues  
in my chest, occasionally my head.

(continued)

I'm only satisfied  
when my friends torture me  
with the limpness of wrists

and I can beg my imagination  
for the gentleness of a boy's lips  
to soothe Adonis from his cave,  
his sparkling nuances.

\*            \*

Walking thru Robert's house.  
His soft laughter all around.

Feeling calm in sight of  
his sweaters on the coffee table.  
Cautious not to break  
the surface of his friendship.

Joan Baez records in the bedroom.  
Robert's father talking slowly  
to himself.  
Cigarettes pancaked on the kitchen  
floor.  
The ashes of a sigh everywhere.

\*            \*

I'm too drunk to unzip Julian's  
blue jeans so he places  
my large hand there  
in the small warm.

Wondering at my strange,  
kind words  
with darkness all around his eyes.

I spend half my life  
chasing mosquitos  
from his legs

(continued)

My hips are tents.  
Beneath me  
he performs miracles.

For Don Johnson and Dale Hong

David was brutally blond.  
When he threw the guitar  
at Steve his feet skidded  
out from under him.

No one in the room ran  
to catch him falling back  
noiselessly into the  
drumset.

Steve swerved to avoid  
the guitar and saw David's  
head hit the corner  
of the bass drum

and "his eyes go crazy and  
his skull thud."

It was the sound of angels  
knocking on wood  
in the summertime.

Dennis Cooper was born January 10, 1953 in Pasadena, Calif, currently resides in Arcadia.

He writes the rock music column for a local newspaper, The Eagle.

His favorite poets are James Tate, Anne Sexton, Tom Clark, Jim Morrison.

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