

# Not Guilty

By David Rivard

The days are dog-eared, the edges torn,  
ragged—like those pages  
I ripped once out of library books,

for their photos  
of Vallejo and bootless Robert Johnson.  
A fine needs paying now

it's true, but  
not by me.  
I am no more guilty

than that thrush is  
who sits there stripping moss  
off the wet bark of a tree.

A red fleck, like his, glows  
at the back of my head—a beauty mark,  
left by the brain's after-jets.

I would not wish for the three brains  
Robert required  
to double-clutch his guitar

and chase those sounds he had to know  
led down  
and into a troubled dusky river, always.

Three brains did Johnson no earthly good,  
neither his nor Vallejo's 4 & 1/2  
worked right exactly—O bunglers,

O banged-up pans of disaster!  
Crying for days, said Cesar, & singing for months.  
How can I be so strong some times,

at others weak? I wish to be free,  
but free to do what? To leave myself behind?  
To switch channels remotely?

Better to sing.  
Not like the bird, but as they sang,  
Cesar & Robert—

with the shocked & seeded  
sweetness of an apple  
split open by a meat cleaver.

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David Rivard was born in Fall River, Massachusetts. With his first verse collection, *Torque*, David Rivard distinguished himself as a writer of volatile poems with striking imagery. In this work Rivard concentrates on the working-class tenor. Fast automobiles, assembly lines, basketball games, and drug users are all developed to tell the stories of childhood, relationships, and life that are prominent in Rivard's work, along with a sense of despair and an awareness of life's hardships.