

# Self-Portrait

By Robert Creeley

He wants to be  
a brutal old man,  
an aggressive old man,  
as dull, as brutal  
as the emptiness around him,

He doesn't want compromise,  
nor to be ever nice  
to anyone. Just mean,  
and final in his brutal,  
his total, rejection of it all.

He tried the sweet,  
the gentle, the "oh,  
let's hold hands together"  
and it was awful,  
dull, brutally inconsequential.

Now he'll stand on  
his own dwindling legs.  
His arms, his skin,  
shrink daily. And  
he loves, but hates equally.

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Before he was five, Robert Creeley had lost the use of an eye in a freak accident and his father to a heart attack; not surprisingly, his poetry conveys an acute sense of the body's frailty and the anguish of isolation, yet it also records the joys of love and family life. His verse is instantly recognizable—brief in its individual lines and overall length, and often so terse as to be opaque—while concerned to trace the puzzlements of the mind and heart as they move through experiences

of intense intimacy. Much influenced by jazz musicians and action painters, Creeley stressed the process of writing over any finished product.

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