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The Selected Letters of Robert Creeley. Rod Smith, Peter Baker, and Kaplan Harris, ed. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2014. h / bk 467 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-24160-2. Price £44.95.

That Robert Creeley was one of the most important and influential American poets of the twentieth century is magnificently confirmed by this handsome selection of his letters. The book spans sixty years of correspondence and delivers an enriched sense of how friends, family and (some) literary feuds profoundly shaped Creeley's life, work and poetic imagination. The fact of this book, its bulk - despite its being only a selection of Creeley's letters - shows clearly, and with new care and detail, the importance of the act of writing for Creeley. As much as in his famously anxious and hesitant poetry, these letters catch him in the act of thinking through what is this world we inhabit, how does our attention to it shape our sense of being. At the end of a late poem, "Goodbye" (Life & Death, 1998), he writes: "I want no sentimentality. / I want no more than home." After reading these letters we get even closer to Creeley's clear-eyed avoidance of sentimentality and his restless desire to find somewhere he could call home.

His "persistent restlessness," as he calls it in a letter to Louis Zukofsky (29 Dec. 1964; 286), is the recurrent theme of these letters. This is evidenced not simply in the startling number of different homes from which Creeley sent these letters, but also in the fascinating (and rapid) switches between registers and concerns in the letters. An early letter (15 Apr. 1950; 27-8) to William Carlos Williams epitomises Creeley's quick-fire style of restless correspondence. It switches from discussion of reading W. B. Yeats, to Ezra Pound and the issue of "false history", from the "nature of reality" and what constitutes "the REAL American culture", to struggles - as editor - with recalcitrant contributors to the journal he was then putting together, and it starts by examining his loneliness working as a chicken farmer in New Hampshire by noting that "I couldn't live here if my own language wasn"t whole." Creeley's concern, as these letters make clear, is with an immediate and extensive experiencing of the world he inhabits.

This lends this book - because it spans the whole of Creeley's career - a strong feeling of a life lived both fully and assiduously. There is also, because of this, a powerful sense of Creeley's practical and pragmatic (that

is, unsentimental) attention to things in the world (whether books and ideas, say, or chickens and household exigencies). But such attention shimmers with emotional and symbolic significance, marking Creeley's thinking about the world as vital and important, asking us to look at it with a renewed clarity of detail and feeling for what really matters. We encounter, thus, a request to his mother (15 May 1945; 8) to send a new glass eye to him in Burma (where has was stationed on Army service), having "cracked [...] quite mysteriously" the one "which I got in Calcutta." Or, in late 1961, we feel the bitter reality of the accidental death of his step-daughter, Leslie, bite so hard that in letters to various friends (Charles Olson, Jack Kerouac, Denise Levertov, William Carlos Williams, Ed and Helene Dorn) it is almost inexpressible. Having briefly sketched out details of the "impossibly tragic thing which happened" (251) to the Dorns, he writes: "So that says it, please." The powerful wrench of his tragedy is felt precisely in that "please"; however painful the occasion, sentimentality will not help. These two examples - the oddly surreal, the tragic - show how this book works not just as a profound record of a poet's singular vision but also how it tells a larger story of the concerns that have animated twentieth-century thinking.

All of this, then, is to affirm that the editors have managed, with grace and finesse, to carry out the three aims for this book that they set out in its introduction. First, they tell Creeley's "story"; next they "track his thinking" over six decades, and finally, they tell a "larger story" (xxvii) of twentieth, and twenty-first, century America. There are omissions, and a sense (because we see only Creeley's letters, not those of his correspondents) that we are seeing only one side of the story. This is especially the case with Creeley's various disputes with editors and critics, or with Kenneth Rexroth over the affair he had with Rexroth's wife. But, there are new things revealed throughout this book - previously unpublished letters to Olson; ones that give far more detail of his friendships with Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Ed Dorn, with Louis Zukofsky and - wonderfully - his friendship with Denise Levertov, where both act, in turns, as each other's poetic mentor and pupil; and overall, there is a gradually unfolding trajectory of a literary life moving from unsettled restlessness to one - finally - grounded in home and delight in his young family. Given the fact that the Creeley-Olson correspondence from 1950-52 runs to ten hefty volumes, it is hardly surprising that this Selected Letters is - despite its bulk - partial. What

is remarkable, though, is the monumental achievement of the editors in selecting material that brings the whole of Creeley's work and concerns so vividly alive. Here (unlike Ekbert Faas' biography of Creeley, which is partial in another sense) Creeley's voice is clear and tells a fascinating story, one central to American poetry since 1945.

Creeley's wanting for "no more than home" comes to be acted out across the span of this volume, through its attention to the everyday specifics of his life as he lived it. In the final letter (actually, email) of this book - to Michael Kelleher, written just three weeks before he died - Creeley details driving to the Mexican border ("the Rio Grande") and delighting in the "glorious physical scene" (423). He ends by exclaiming "—would that the world were all so specific." Documenting the man and the careful specifics of his poetic attention, this *Selected Letters* is an essential companion for anyone reading Creeley.

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