



GRADUATE SEMINAR

STORY

DENNIS COOPER

"A DISQUIETING GENIUS."—VANITY FAIR

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SHORT STORY

DENNIS COOPER



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Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Begin Reading	1
About the Author	
Other Books by Dennis Cooper	
Credits	
Cover	
Copyright	
About the Publisher	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Jerk” previously appeared in the book *Jerk* (Artspace Books, 1993).

“Ugly Man” and “The Boy on the Far Left” previously appeared in Scott Treleaven’s art catalog *Some Boys Wander by Mistake* (Kavi Gupta Gallery, John Connelly Presents, and Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 2007) and in *Dennis Cooper: Writing at the Edge* (Sussex Academic Press, 2008).

“Graduate Seminar,” “Santa Claus vs. Johnny Crawford,” “The Worst (1960–1971),” and “Three Boys Who Thought

Experimental Fiction Was for Pussies” previously appeared in *Dennis Cooper: Writing at the Edge* (Sussex Academic Press, 2008).

“Knife/Tape/Rope” was originally the text of a performance art work of the same name created and directed by Ishmael Houston-Jones in 1985.

“One Night in 1979 . . .” previously appeared in the anthology *Thrills, Pills, Chills, and Heartache: Adventures in the First Person* (Alyson Press, 2004).

GRADUATE SEMINAR

Artist: . . . and that's a work on paper entitled *Mirror Not Mirror* from my recent show at Hilton Perreault Gallery. Any questions?

Art student: I wonder if you would mind talking about your older work, especially *Railroad Tie* (1972)?

Artist: Do I mind? Yes. Do I know it's expected of me? Yes. Switch to slide tray number two, please.

Art student: I know you must be tired of talking about *Railroad Tie*, but, speaking as an aspiring artist, it changed my life, so—

Artist: Yes, I'm sure it did. Changed mine as well, as you are no doubt aware. Please show the first slide.

Artist: That's Ty Wilson, need I say, who, according to the history books, collaborated with me on *Railroad Tie*, and who is now of course very famous, more famous in fact than myself, even though he never made a single artwork on his own and did nothing with regards to *Railroad Tie* apart from appearing in it.

Art student: And being the coolest guy ever.

Artist: I'd love to argue that point, but a court order prevents me. So, for those of you who live under a rock, in *Railroad Tie* my work's celebrated (he said ironically) thematic interest in mapping the accidental (in quotes) was adapted to a mode of presentation that was soon to be, shall we say, au courant thanks to my pioneering efforts. Specifically, I photo-documented a teenaged boy's hitchhiking trip across the U.S. And there he is now hitchhiking. Next slide, please. And there he is getting picked up by the infamous trucker. Any questions so far?

Art student: Did you explain your art project to the trucker?

Artist: Naturally I explained the art project to the trucker, and, yes, he really did say, "So, if I understand your art project, I can kill this boy, and that would be okay because it's for art, right?" And, as I testified in court, I said, "The term art is being redefined as we speak, so it would be difficult for me to answer that question. Therefore, you must answer it yourself." Next slide.

Artist: I'm going to go through these quickly because you've all seen them a hundred thousand times. That's Ty being drugged. Ty lying unconscious in the back of the truck. Ty's reaction upon being relieved of his manhood . . . and of course, finally, there's the trucker killing Ty. Any questions?

Art student: What was it like being in prison for eight years?

Artist: What was it like? Well, my friends Andy and Jasper and Roy spent those eight years getting very rich and famous, and I spent them making dinnerware out of tin cans. And the millions that *Railroad Tie* earned on the art market went to a charity for victims of violent crime. And, of course, the late, illustrious genius Ty Wilson spawned a cottage industry of posters and documentaries and tribute songs and memorabilia that makes Jim Morrison seem like Bobby Rydell, a name you no doubt have never heard before in your lives, *which is my point*.

About the Author

DENNIS COOPER is the author of the George Miles Cycle, an interconnected sequence of five novels that includes *Closer*, *Frisk*, *Try*, *Guide*, and *Period*. His post-George Miles Cycle novels include *My Loose Thread*, *The Sluts*, which won France's Prix Sade and the 2005 Lambda Literary Award for Best Men's Fiction, and his most recent work, the highly acclaimed *God, Jr.* He divides his time between Los Angeles and Paris.

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