

GEORGE BOWERING

A Letter Instead

In real life I'm too shy to talk to people.
But every once in a while I wish I could sit and yak it up with, say,
Joe Brainard. It's always people who have died so it's
too late, things didn't work out about places and geography and times and
what you were doing for a living. Once I drove across Portugal
to meet a Spanish poet I had been writing letters to for years, and then
I guess I was looking for an excuse, because the woman I was with
didn't want to give any of our holiday time to such a person,
never read any of his poetry, he probably was not up to her standards,
so I made a left turn maybe fifty kilometers from Badajoz, mumbling
inside my own braincase about how I didn't measure up, and maybe
it wasn't shyness after all, but not measuring up, not fright but
dissatisfaction, and that can't be right, it was she that used long words,
not I. Once with a friend who didn't mind, I drove north from Boston
to see a recent ghost I loved. but I could have dropped in on
Larry Eigner, with whom I had been trading letters for years,
but could I do it? Yes, I know, lots of people couldn't do it,
including the ghost, but this was what it always was. How many
front steps had I stood on, how many times had I gone home
and written a letter instead? I'll bet Joe Brainard never met
Larry Eigner, never even stood on the street and looked up at his tower
window. I'll bet we could have helped each other, I could have
held his hand, while with his other hand he stuck his finger on the doorbell.