**Proviso**

Janet Belding

Is it actual experience

or its contrail

which admittedly has widened

flattened, become in essence

a long strand of clouds?

Is it the boundary that existed

once

like a river,

stagnant in summer

but still holding

sunlight head-on?

You waded through the subterfuge

as if tadpoles were still there,

triggering an overexposure

of the world as it used to be

not as it is now.

Life now exists in brief and

glorious marquees:

rattlesnake under the picnic table,

fried peanut butter sandwiches,

a missing gearshift knob from

an old Corvette that someone tells you was yours.

You wish you had the photographs,

but no one ever has a camera.

Thin gray snapshots fastened with

white triangles on

black paper in someone’s

photo album.

It occurs to you this

is a flea market find,

a flimsy bound gallery

of strangers:

kids on the front lawn of a

church,

women holding babies,

an old man at an old upright piano.

You engage without emotion.

You observe, contemplate,

and move on.

They leave you alone

until next weekend, if you’re nice.

I’m always nice,

but you’re talking to the walls.

You sit in a chair with a tray attached.

Someone hands you a mirror

and asks you to comb your hair.

You’ve heard somewhere

reflection

is healthy,

if it’s not overdone.