

SPRIT FACES

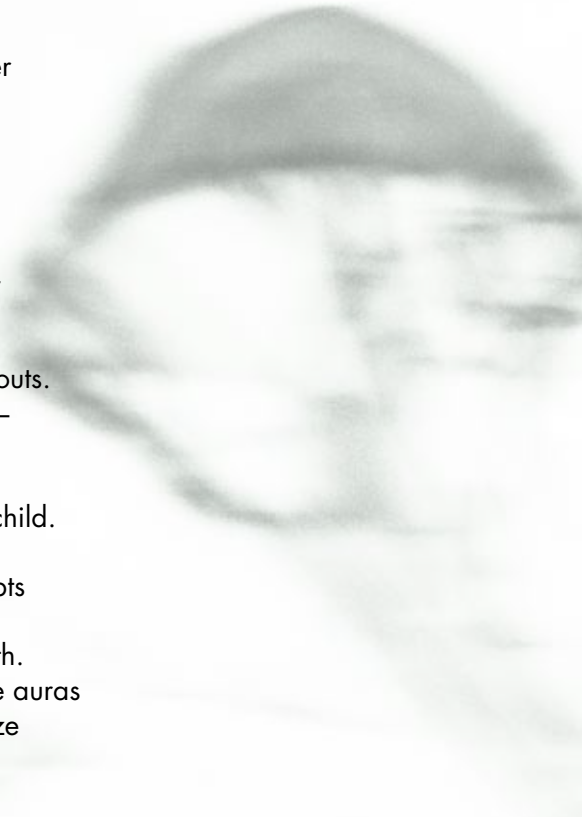
William Doreski

Touring graveyards in Chester,
Grafton, Westminster, I consider
the spirit faces engraved
by eighteenth-century carvers
probably inspired by Indian
petroglyphs at Bellows Falls.

The hot afternoon looks insipid,
cloud-hung but pale and naïve,
the Great American Holiday
unfolding in thousands of cookouts.
Not a day to regard the dead—
their faces, round and dubious,
rising from the weathered slate
like soap bubbles blown by a child.

Their expressions embody doubts
not only about the afterlife
but about the aesthetics of death.
Even those rimmed with sun-like auras
maintain at best a tentative gaze
back into the world they've left
and forward into the airiest
notion of something better.

Here's one clearly dropping a tear,
the large but simplified eyes
blank with self-pity. And here
a married couple grimace
in their separate but paired orbits.
And here angel wings levitate





a surly and unwilling old soul.
And last, in Middletown Graveyard
in Grafton, an inflated face
with pinched little features crowned
by carefully marcelled hairdo
and wearing a heart-brooch centered
under its chin attracts attention
from a pair of branch-bearing doves.

The heat dizzies. I slump on the grass
and note that the ranks of headstones
totter not like a mouthful
of unkempt teeth but like bundles
of illegible manuscript left
to fade in some further dimension
where no one has learned to read.