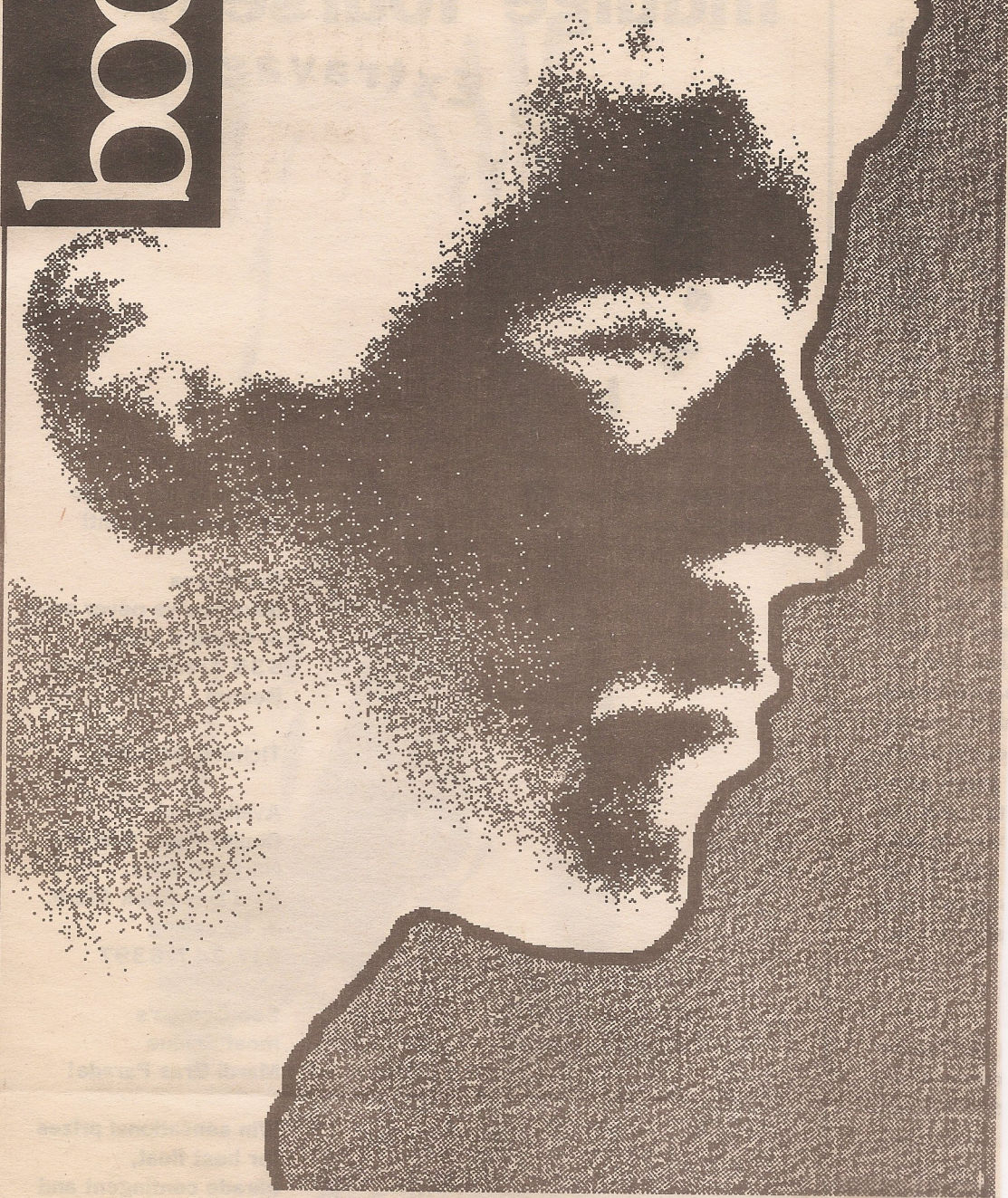


books



# Lou Reed

**A walk on the wild side**

**Between Thought and Expression:  
Selected Lyrics of Lou Reed, Hyperion,  
New York, \$10.95.**

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## by Wickie Stamps

In my youth, I'd meet my boyfriend, an Irish Catholic boyfriend, at a sleazy bar. We'd sit for hours in this dive, getting shitfaced. Usually we'd end our evenings with him threatening to kill me, and me retorting "No you won't, because I plan on killing myself first." Invariably, Lou Reed's song *Walk On the Wild Side* was droning in the background. We'd end our charming night at the bar by staggering to his crash pad that had a mattress on the floor, *Playboys* scattered everywhere and dirty dishes piled high in the sink. There I'd either jerk him off or give him a blow job and he'd give me the best oral sex a man can give. During these orgies, he'd usually talk to me about how much he wanted me to have sex with other women. Of course, he wanted to watch.

I always blamed Lou Reed for my debauchery. But now, almost 17 years later, on my way home from some lesbian S/M

party or dinner with my outrageous gay male friends who were on their way to a drag show, I still turn up the volume when *Walk On the Wild Side* comes on the radio. And I still relate. Now, rather than blame Lou Reed, I applaud him for his decades of support for my esoteric sexual ways.

Lou Reed now has a book out: *Between Thought and Expression, Selected Lyrics of Lou Reed*, published by Hyperion. This 181 page book contains lyrics from Reed's works, dating back even before *Walk On the Wild Side* to 1956. (And yes, *Walk On the Wild Side* is in the collection, on page 42.)

*Between Thought and Expression* is divided into four sections. The first section, entitled "The Lyrics (1965-1990)" contains dozens of Reed's lyrics, including works sung by the Velvet Underground, his first underground band. Included in this section is *The Gift*, a short story and *The Murder Mystery*, two sets of lyrics that the Velvet Underground experimenting with sound simultaneously recorded side by side on one track. Below many of the lyrics are personal notes from Reed, which offer clarifying information. Underneath *Wild Side* Reed states, "They were going to make a musical out of Nelson Algren's *A Walk*

*On the Wild Side*. When they dropped the project I took my song and changed the book's characters into people I knew from Warhol's Factory. I don't like to waste things."

"Interviews," the second section, contains two interviews, one with dissident writer and recently re-elected president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel; the other with Hubert Selby, author of the play *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Both are Reed's heroes. The final section, "The Bells," is, according to Reed, his favorite song. And of course, there's the index or, as Reed calls it, the "Discography Index," listing each song by its title, album and date of issue.

Artist Andy Warhol, the man, his entourage and the events surrounding the Warhol phenomena, are captured in *Between Thought and Expression*. There are lyrics entitled "Candy Says," referring to Candy Darling, a well-known Warhol drag queen, who, according to Reed's notation, "died of cancer caused by hormone injections." Bur-

ied in some lyrics you'll even find Archie and Amos, Warhol's prized dachshunds. The interviews with Havel and Selby, which are filled with engaging material, are also in the Warhol INTERVIEW magazine style. They are unedited and loosely structured; they are of famous people; and, in keeping with Warhol's preference, a star (Reed) is inter-

viewing another star. Clearly, Reed was deeply moved by Warhol and that world, a fact he notes under *A Dream*, a prose piece set up like a diary entry for *The Andy Warhol Diaries*: "I wrote this trying to capture the love of the Andy I knew both inside and out."

The 70's, a time that Pat Hackett, editor of the Warhol Diaries, refers to as the "amphetamine/pansexual culture," courses throughout *Between Thought*. Typifying this decade are faceless women, who are usually getting fucked or fucked over. *Between Thought and Expression*, is definitely a ride through the wild side of the 70's.

Reed, stepping out of Warhol terrain, also offers his readers many well-wrought images and experiences that are his own. *The Gift*, a short story from Reed's college years, is a wonderfully grotesque work. Many of his lyrics present the reader with Lou Reed at his best. Consider *The Blue Mask*, a ragefully insane piece.

"Make the sacrifice"

Mutilate my face  
If you need someone to kill  
I'm a man without a will  
Wash the razor in the rain  
Let me luxuriate in pain  
Please don't set me free  
Death means a lot to me.

The Blue Mask  
The Blue Mask album  
RCA Records, 1982



But much of Reed's subject matter, beyond his Warhol material, is embarrassingly self-absorbed. His relationship with his wife, his alcoholic hazes, his obsession with the seedier side of life all err on the side of self-indulgence. Many of the lyrics are mundane and the rhymes tend to drone on in a childish sing-song fashion. And the meter is, on the whole, undeveloped. I disagree with Reed's assertion in his introduction that all of the lyrics "can stand alone from the music." Even his Warhol-style interviews verge on insider tedium.

If Reed were Warhol, a man who transformed his entire life (including boring details) into art, we could tolerate, even ogle at Reed's self-absorption. But Reed is not Warhol. Unlike Warhol, Lou Reed merely succeeds into shaping aspects of his personal life into yawns. Unfortunately, Reed, who assumes a high tolerance from his readers for his personal world, falls short of absorbing us, as only Warhol could, in the minutiae of a life.

But, despite its shortcomings, *Between Thought and Expression* is definitely worth picking up. It is a document of a time and a world crucial to gay art and history, including the women who absorbed the rage that the men of the 70's foisted upon. Even the cover, a photo of Reed with a gold overtone, has a Warhol feel. And Reed, even with his

inconsistent gifts, will always be a talented artist and a revered icon from the edges of the art world. Reed, who begins his collection by saying that "In the beginning was the word....closely followed by a drum and some early version of guitar" is right. In the beginning, for many of us, all we had were the lyrics to *Walk On the Wild Side*.★

