

## The Conformist

*Marcello's encounter with Lino involves what Aristotle called anagnorisis, when a character moves from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge.*

—David Forgacs

Though I must have willingly posed for them  
I'd never seen so many photos of  
Myself—most, torso-less or beheaded—  
Among paddles, straps, vibrators, and clamps.

His will specified, under strict orders,  
To throw out, without opening, the scuffed  
File cabinet and all its contents from  
The bedroom's back closet. *Who had the will*

*For this?* Link to a new language I tried  
To master, contain, our tenth grade teacher's.  
Italophile, who knew Montale, Fo,  
And *Macbeth* by heart, yet was shamed into

Early retirement. More family than  
My family: trips to New England colleges,  
And box seats at New York plays, or Country  
Kitchen's chiffon pie and sign, "Spurn Sinful

Enterprise" that provoked ironic chuckles.  
I helped to clear out his fourth-floor walk-up:  
Of disembodied and glued Polaroids  
Affixed, and appropriated atop

Glistening nude bodies of cover boy  
Centerfolds. So many hairless smooth pics  
From *Blueboy*; buff, hairy chests from *Honcho*,  
Sailors and firemen staring back—*my* face.

PETER COVINO

Yet, I was grateful for the money. Paid  
Some credit card bills, even one student  
Loan, and took Gonzalo on a trip to  
Mexico to visit distant cousins . . . .

Sometimes when I feel him lording over,  
Hovering still, I try to fight him off  
By kicking air, though he's not easily  
Scared away: catnaps, on the couch or in

The bedroom, behind green brocade curtains  
Heavy with cigarette smoke and secrets.  
At his mahogany writing table,  
Eyes shut, I remembered soiled bed sheets

At Thanksgiving break and stories about  
Sweaty Saturday afternoons in Houston,  
When his father dragged him to the ball game  
As he clung to his static transistor,

Fantasizing curtain calls opposite  
Aida. I noticed a sealed letter  
Was tucked in the blotter fold, neatly typed  
On front: MR. ARTHUR TERRELL SMITH III

43<sup>RD</sup> STREET, SUNNYSIDE. Don Allen,  
While driving back to Beaumont, remembered  
"No one had notified cousin Arthur;  
Aunt Cora passed late last Thursday night.

Little Pearl had seen her have a rather  
Severe heart attack." Staring at the ash  
Heaps and the Chrysler Building, I thought  
Arthur missed a good letter. Now that night,

When I only had my license two weeks  
Makes perfect sense—screeching phone call that drove  
Me to the place Don Allen calls Manhattan  
Island. Arthur's face was bruised, his shirt blood-

PETER COVINO

Covered and gin-soaked, sprawled leather-clad on  
A Bowery sidewalk, without a wallet...  
As promised, I wore jeans, to his "heathen"  
Burial service, the Auditorium

Palled in dark suits and chords from Bach's "*Bist du  
Bei mir*" while colleagues assembled at the  
Podium searching for adequate words  
Between plastic gasps and long convoluted

Sentences from Faulkner, Bennett, and Wolfe.  
When my turn came to speak I wanted to  
Tell how sallow he'd become with wires in  
Orifices amidst hospital smells

Of urine and pungent bleach. I wanted  
To help his end along. I wanted to  
Tell everyone so. But, instead, I read  
On from Olive Schreiner's *African Farm*,

Arthur's favorite, telling them about  
The chickens that picked at Willy's limp, slumped  
Body and didn't eat. I told how Arthur  
Expired the hour after Christmas,

And about scattering his ashes at  
The foot of the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, though  
The can of remains wouldn't quite open  
And I had to break it apart against

The guardrail and the ashes, in swirling  
Wind, blew into my mouth. Down south Don Allen  
Writes "he sees Tomkay and Granddad often";  
He signed his letter love, telling Arthur—

"We hope we'll see you for the holidays;  
My mother and family are doing fine,  
The boys are about grown. Everyone is  
Taking Aunt Cora's death reasonably well."

## To Whom It May:

Enthusiastically

It is a pleasure to among the top  
At Bed Bath & Beyond

He's an excellent philosophical sleep  
A (teacher) motivational force  
Key to her [*sic*] success  
Among other skills his work at Bed  
Bath & Beyond's truly exemplary

He's fired and hired folded and restocked  
In one essay  
Towels were especially publishable  
He held the door  
Open for 17 ideas miraculous number  
By any account—  
Undoubtedly she [*sic*] exploits  
The imagination—its tectonic grammar

His work ethic (with) bears  
Likewise stylized conceits  
Its hair and texture

Do not hesitate at any rate  
Should you

Sincerely,