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The Supreme Theme

Alicia Ostriker

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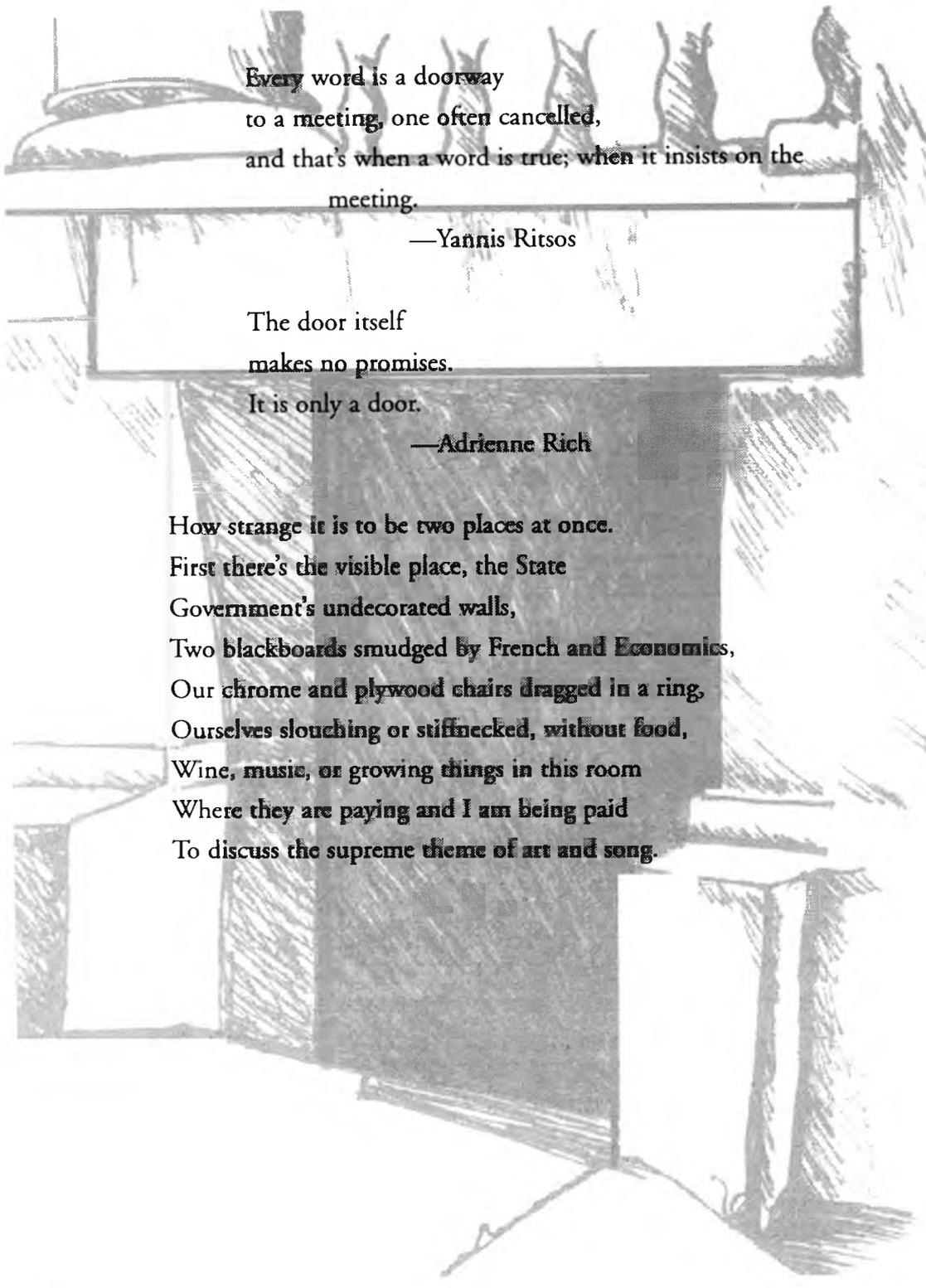
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THE SUPREME THEME

Alicia Ostriker



Every word is a doorway
to a meeting, one often cancelled,
and that's when a word is true; when it insists on the
meeting.

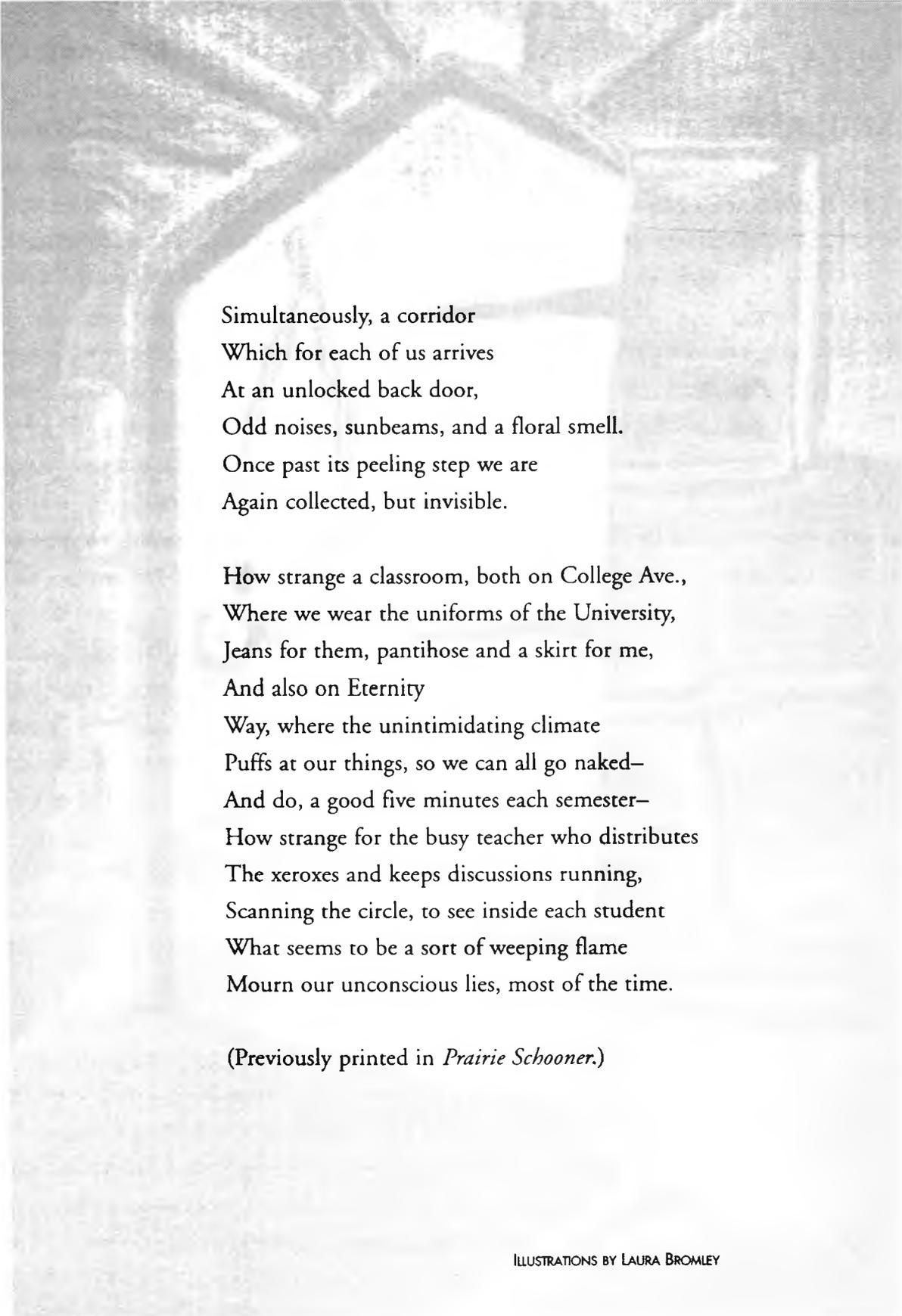
—Yannis Ritsos

The door itself
makes no promises.
It is only a door.

—Adrienne Rich

How strange it is to be two places at once.
First there's the visible place, the State
Government's undecorated walls,
Two blackboards smudged by French and Economics,
Our chrome and plywood chairs dragged in a ring,
Ourselves slouching or stiffnecked, without food,
Wine, music, or growing things in this room
Where they are paying and I am being paid
To discuss the supreme theme of art and song.





Simultaneously, a corridor
Which for each of us arrives
At an unlocked back door,
Odd noises, sunbeams, and a floral smell.
Once past its peeling step we are
Again collected, but invisible.

How strange a classroom, both on College Ave.,
Where we wear the uniforms of the University,
Jeans for them, pantihose and a skirt for me,
And also on Eternity
Way, where the unintimidating climate
Puffs at our things, so we can all go naked—
And do, a good five minutes each semester—
How strange for the busy teacher who distributes
The xeroxes and keeps discussions running,
Scanning the circle, to see inside each student
What seems to be a sort of weeping flame
Mourn our unconscious lies, most of the time.

(Previously printed in *Prairie Schooner*.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURA BROMLEY

