

JOHN WALL BARGER

CAGED

I lived in an attic room with a young married couple
who worked too much. When off, they watched their shows
& smoked. I heard them arguing through the floor.
They owned a puppy they let out on some evenings.
Otherwise, he crouched in a cage behind a closed door.
Dark afternoons of the soul, he crouched & whined,
face worried with wrinkles like an old man's.
When they freed him he was so excited he could hardly breathe.
He leapt to meet them, jumping clumsily, falling,
knocking over their groceries. So they locked him up again.
One morning I climbed into the cage, beside him.
I touched his ears: caramel hand towels. I shut my eyes
& could smell flowers in the backyard, in midsummer heat.
Then I was alone. I pushed at the door with my nose.
It would not open. A sound in the hall. My own head
poked in. "Hey boy!" said my head, & vanished.
Wait! I replied, but it came out as Yip! I looked down.
My caramel fur was spotted with black sores on
my stomach & legs. I wailed all day, from that cage,
for the entire neighborhood.