



Where to? What For? #43, Nancie B. Warner, Courtesy of the artist

▲ **Critical Viewing** Judging from the painting, why might an alien mistake cars for Earth's inhabitants? [**Infer**]

# SOUTHBOUND ON THE FREEWAY

May Swenson

A tourist came in from Orbitville,  
parked in the air, and said:

The creatures of this star  
are made of metal and glass.

- 5 Through the transparent parts  
you can see their guts.

**transparent** (trans par' ent)  
adj. capable of being  
seen through; clear

Their feet are round and roll  
on diagrams—or long

10 measuring tapes—dark  
with white lines.

They have four eyes.  
The two in the back are red.

15 Sometimes you can see a five-eyed  
one, with a red eye turning  
on the top of his head.  
He must be special—

the others respect him,  
and go slow,

20 when he passes, winding  
among them from behind.

They all hiss as they glide,  
like inches, down the marked

tapes. Those soft shapes,  
shadowy inside

25 the hard bodies—are they  
their guts or their brains?

### Literary Analysis

**Free Verse** What characteristics of free verse do you find in lines 15–18?

### May Swenson



(1919–1989)

May Swenson was born and educated in Utah. After completing college, she moved to

New York City, where she worked as an editor and as a university lecturer.

Swenson believed that poetry is based on the desire to see things as they are, rather than as they appear. In “Southbound on the Freeway,” however, she portrays how our culture might appear to visiting aliens.

## Review and Assess

### Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** Which images in “Southbound on the Freeway” appealed to you most? Why?
2. (a) **Recall:** Where does the “tourist” in “Southbound on the Freeway” live? (b) **Infer:** Why does Swenson use this term? (c) **Deduce:** What is the tourist describing?
3. (a) **Recall:** What kinds of creatures are mentioned in the poem? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** Compare and contrast the different kinds of creatures described.
4. (a) **Recall:** What question does the speaker ask in lines 25–26 of “Southbound on the Freeway”? (b) **Relate:** What is the impact of this question on the reader? (c) **Interpret:** How would you answer the speaker’s question?