

KENNEBEC

A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING

Bartels

Bradley

Coursen

Greenspan

Johnston

Kennedy

Kestenbaum

Kindred

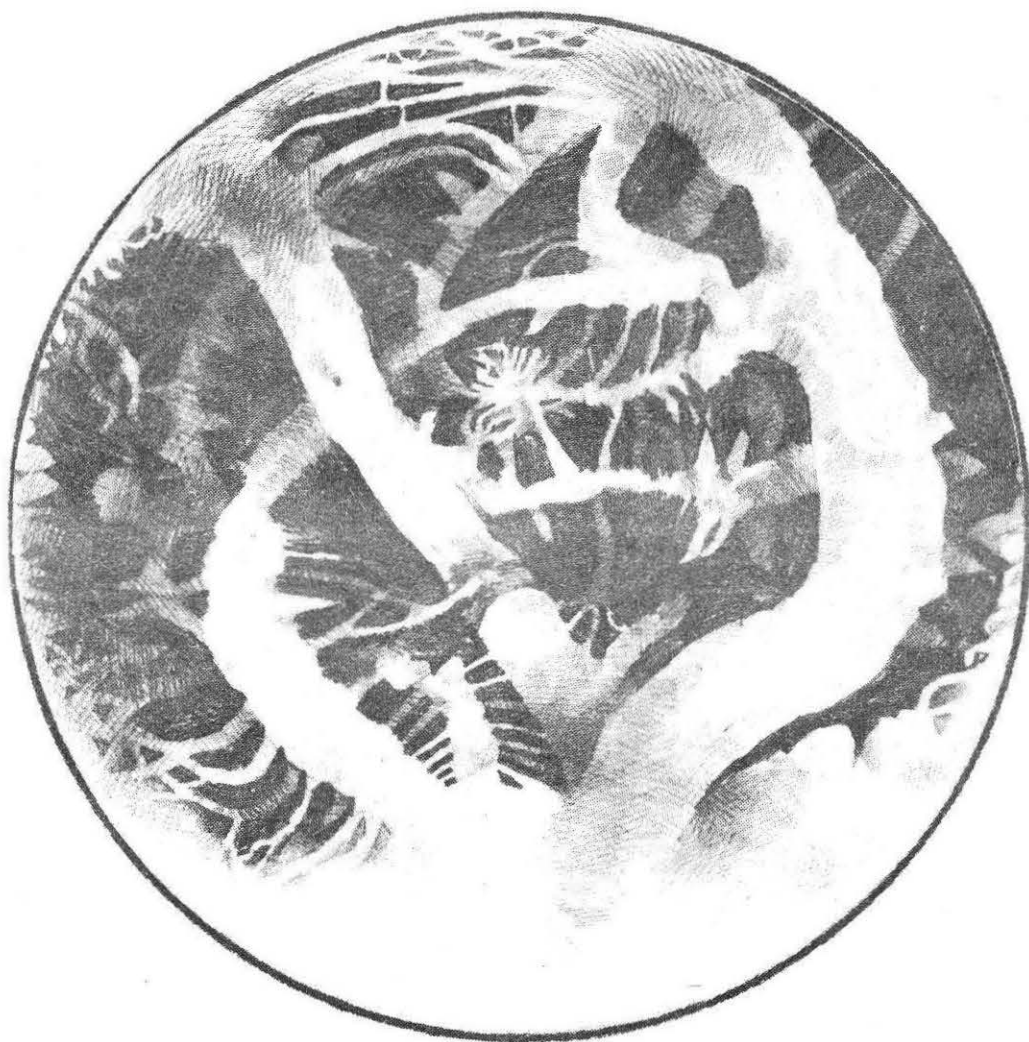
Ladenheim

Larkin

Larsen

Liscomb

Lignell



McKenna

O'Flaherty

Phillips

Pohl

Pollet

Rawlings

Sanborn

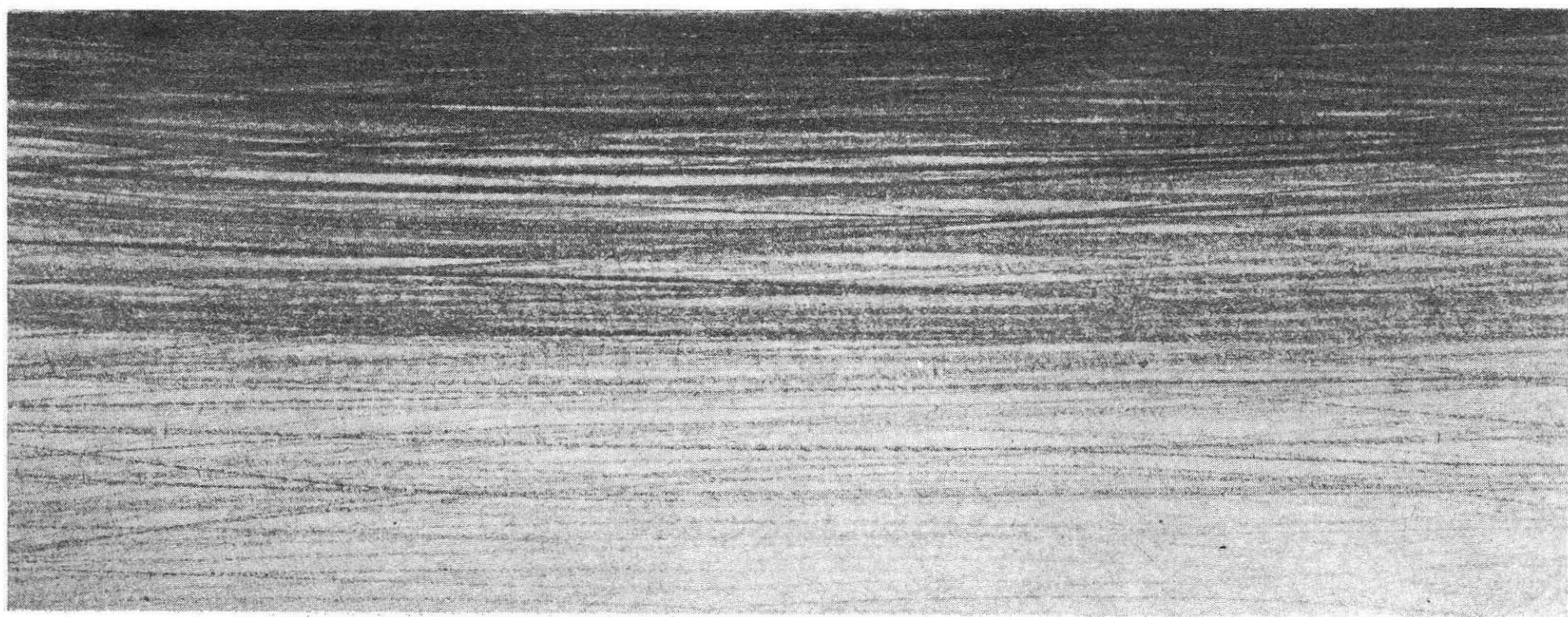
Saum

Sharkey

Tagliabue

Walker

Ward



Well, Hans...

*well, Hans, it would be just that day
the sink invisible
every dish crusted
even the cups unusable*

*the baby dragging her laden diaper
through the sawdust in the living room
leaving a trail, two trails really, one visible
one a blind man could follow*

*it would be the very day
the vice-grip slipped
off a stripped and bugged tailpipe nut
to knock out your eye-tooth*

*it would be then
just then
your long-lost preppy chum
would appear from nowhere*

*bottoming his leathern Porsche in your rutting driveway
and come to the door
swaddled in the double cashmeres
of inherited and married wealth.*

*what could you do —
trying to shield that raw red nerve
from sight and air —
but grimace and mumble:*

*it's just the day,
it's not like this —
I haven't sunk so low
to lose my smile.*

Sylvester Pollet
East Holden

Through the Window

It was one of those careless mornings when I awoke with you, the sun a factor against the drawn curtains of your room. We kissed and you told me, smiling, about the teen-ager, a neighbor obsessed with watching you undress. You had found this out from a downstairs roomer. I suggested perhaps he was just a people-watcher, a student of your individual idiosyncracies. You told me at least he was a constant watcher, observing you sew and curse each time you flubbed a stitch or pulled a hem. You thought perhaps he was delighted when you would lightly come to the window and water the flowers, cautiously, gently bending, pouring the correct amount into each pot — marvelling at the precision with which you filled each one to its proper level.

You did not think of him as a voyeur. In fact you were certain that when he watched you undressing he blushed, felt timid and often looked away, not wishing to violate the virtuous relationship he'd established. You mentioned that though he beds down only ten meters away from you, you would never know the warmth of his young body; though not handsome you are certain he would have made a lover of merit.

I thought how you could now know his jealous anger as he watched you smile, lounging on your bed in mid-evening with gentlemen visitors who often stayed after the lights had been turned off and the house grown quiet, the neighborhood rolled in a blanket of fog. This passive hurt burned in him but he could never confront you with it. A silly adolescent's dream. He will grow up, take a wife in deep love, but it will be your image, your flowers on the sill, your cat and sewing machine, your wonderful silken arms curved across sunlight — it is this which will provide the fire that will burn his soul and consume his wife's passion.

As a man, in a time many years from now, he will pull into the driveway below your window. You will be long gone — moved to the country or perhaps west. The landlord will tell him. He is in town only briefly. He returns to the driveway and stares up at your window. There is a strange lasting feeling that makes him return more than once. Inside the window nothing has changed, though new venetian blinds close off the foreign interior. He is his youth he finds in that window. You are his captive. You are gain and loss. He presses you close. His wife cannot touch him, cannot violate his union with you. When he returns to her she mentions a fanciful male preoccupation with childhood. Her tone is dry and clinical. He grows upset, is strangely impatient with her ignorance — but he will never tell why he returns to this place, to you.

He will return — two, three more times before a fire levels the building on a summer's night. He reads about it in his newspaper, the story picked up because of the loss of life — an elderly couple, asleep at the time. Identifiable by dental records only... he reads this, wondering if it was your room. He sees you smile, strange and sweet from the window, but not at him. You are smiling at someone behind you in the room. But he recalls how he would steal that smile, hold it for days when you two were parted. He thinks of the house he used to live in, still standing, awkward, alone across the drive-way below the window that has not vanished.

Spinner O'Flaherty
Waterville

around town

*elvis presley
norwalk shoes closing
shrinks daughters
seed diminished in vigor
like that like that
immune is no uncle aunt no creative
drift of an expanding universe of stars kites
and around the river
thread twisted round the horn of africa*

*gravid splice the legendary horse rock lost the horsepull
draft pairs work honest in the open arena*

*were a yaw yawn
smashed her hipbone
a son seventeens electrocuted
like holes through my memory
like water on cast iron
like skowhegan pizza*

Lee Sharkey
Skowhegan



Photo by Bruce Armstrong

Sparrow Hawk

*Small god
of telephone conversations
Downeast,
His eyes encompass a landscape
while the stream of a dialect
passes through his feet.*

*His head,
curved with killer's wisdom,
finds no murals
on the horizon
nor pointillism
in the barrens.*

*He finds
the myopic head of a mouse,
the naivety of a banquet,
and leaves the wires
in the clutch of the wind.*

Kris Larson
East Machias

Buck Fever

*sit beside
a woodfire
all night long
in silent communion
with half a pint
of Southern Comfort
only to
stumble
before the paper,
a hunter
still numbed by the cold,
another victim
of buck fever,
cursed to catch
only a glimpse
of form
stretching across
the page,
leaping through
the trees.*

Doug Rawlings
Mt. Vernon

For Someone Who Calls Regularly

*In the dark I await you,
Knowing you will ring into my dreams,
Knowing how in half-sleep I will stumble
Alone in my flannel nightgown
To pick up the receiver —
Knowing it will be you.
Not the death of a relative,
Not the urgency of a loved one,
Not the surprise of someone old or new
Miraculously ringing into my life —
Only you, who know me.*

*Never fear,
I will always answer.
I will always listen
To your heavy breathing, your obscenities
Victims, like lovers, are faithful
And each never knows
What to say, what to do.*

Barbara Bartels
Brunswick

The Skowhegan State Fair

(THE SKOWHEGAN STATE FAIR)

*Night. We drive through the underpass to park in the center of the race track,
walk under the pounding hooves through a corrugated metal tunnel. We are mini-
ature golf balls. The warning bugle and then the race. Horses smooth, held from
cantering by leather trace. Men fly behind, tails blowing in their faces. Dust rises
up, powders car windshields, the grandstand, the wrinkled skin of fortune tellers
on the midway, the breath of children, already sticky with cotton candy and fried
dough.*

*Foam. A flash of hair. Muscles moving under satin. Crazy eyes glaring white
as a mouth snarls open and teeth clamp at the trace. A jerk, a toss of the head.
The stride is broken; then the whip. They love to run, I tell myself, they're bred to
run, need to run, need to win.*

*But why do they need to run this way? With blinders on and tongues flaming
from the bit, pulling carts and whipped if they skip a beat. The sound of hooves
on dirt, skin against leather, a whispered curse in the ear.*

*My great-grandfather, Willie Kidd, bred and raced trotters, and watching them
circle the track, I feel his blood in my veins.*

*On the midway. Fried dough, genuine lemonade, hamburgers, pizza, French
fries, cotton candy in bags and on the stick. Bumper cars, the Cobra, a merry-go-
round and ferris wheels, the Bavarian Slide, the freak show — 1/2-woman/1/2-man.
The pygmy pig. Burlesque, sword swallows, a solid gold Rolls Royce inside a
tractor-trailer you can see for only \$2.00. Carnies hawk, then stop and stare from
sleep-hungry eyes ringed in red. Animal stalls with sheep in coats with hoods,
milk-white cows, black-faced lambs.*

*Teenagers from the farm with \$10 saved up from haying taste everything and
follow young girls who walk so fast their breasts bob. Eyes meet, blushes, a hand,
a touch, ride the Sky Wheel.*

*Two wheels spinning on themselves and round each other — why didn't the
junior high science teacher, trying to explain how the earth rotates on its axis and
also revolves about the sun, take us up on the Sky Wheel?*

*Up, high up and over the top, we're going to fall into vats of boiling oil, into the
arms of strongmen and the woman with a moustache, down to the racetrack and
trampled underfoot, or we'll never come down, but catch the wind and tumble on
forever, over fields and barns, losing the smell of dough and machine oil and
sweat, of axlegrease and paint and dreams lived, dreams shattered on the same
day, going higher and higher like bright red and yellow balloons that children lose,
higher until the air turns cold and we burst, two fertile eggs, spilling our colors on
the midway.*

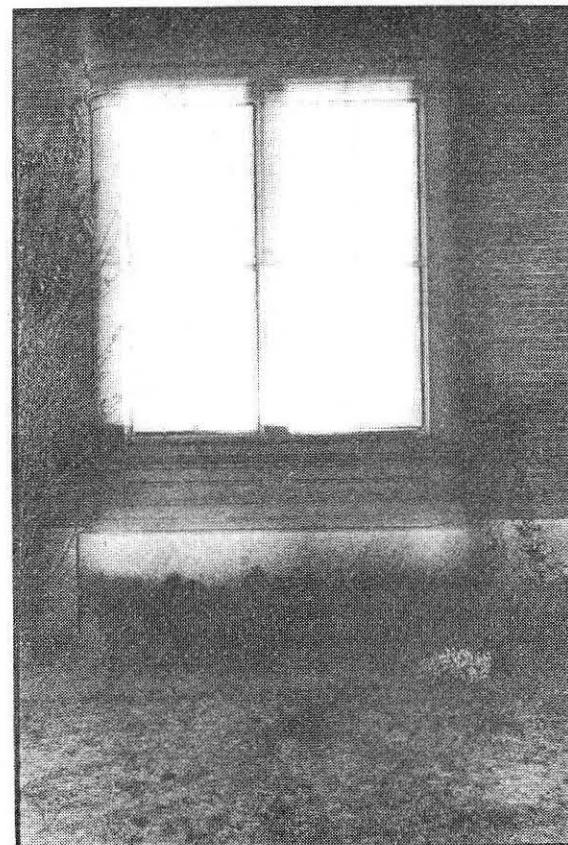
*The little girl riding beside me cries, "It's like a dream!" and I love her then, for
a moment. She knows about dreams, about falling and learning to fly.*

Kate Kennedy

For R.F., In Season

*While boys who failed to winterize their song
Cash in fair-weather chips and cry all's lost,
I wait to pun my best bet on the strong:
What bears me up is partly perma-Frost.*

David Walker
Freedom



Roberta Muldoon, John Irving's Tiresias, is a truly modern phenomenon, shaped by surgeons, not gods.

"Jenny's newest colleague was a six-foot-four transexual named Roberta Muldoon. Formerly Robert Muldoon, a standout tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles, Roberta's weight had dropped from 235 to 180 since her successful sex-change operation. The doses of estrogen had bit into her once massive strength and some of her endurance."

Tiresias was a unique figure in Greek mythology and subsequently plays an important part in Greek drama, most notably *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. The story goes that one day Tiresias saw two snakes mating and killed the female. At once he became a woman. Some years later he saw another pair of snakes mating. He killed the male and became a man again. Thus, when the most powerful male and female gods on Mount Olympus, Zeus and Hera, were arguing about who received the most pleasure from sex — man or woman — they called on Tiresias, who had been both, to settle the argument. Tiresias stated that women enjoyed sex nine times more than men. Hera, furious at his decision, blinded him. Since gods, no matter how powerful, cannot undo another god's work, Zeus tried to compensate blind Tiresias by giving him the twin gifts of prophecy and an extremely long life.

Irving commented at a reading of *The World According to Garp* at Colby College that he was struck with a real problem concerning two of his major characters, Jenny Fields, who hated men, and T. S. Garp, her writer/son who is misunderstood to be a male chauvinist because he is a super jock. Irving needed a plausible way to facilitate, explain, and connect these two opposites. His highly innovative answer was the creation of Roberta Muldoon, a modern medical miracle, a transexual ex-professional football player.

The novel's underlying male vs. female terms are developed through Jenny Fields. Garp, the protagonist, had been almost immaculately conceived by his man-hating mother Jenny, a nurse, on a dying ball turret gunner.

"Of course I felt something when he died," Jenny Fields wrote in her famous autobiography. "But the best of him was inside me. That was the best thing for both of us, the only way he could go on living, the only way I wanted to have a child. That the rest of the world finds this an immoral act only shows me that the rest of the world doesn't respect the rights of an individual."

Jenny does not know his name. Her subsequent autobiography, *A Sexual Suspect*, makes her a leader of the feminist movement. She is eventually assassinated by a male chauvinist deer hunter. One of her supporting groups that emerges is the Ellen Jamesians, a cult of women who cut out their tongues as a protest against man as rapist. A young girl named Ellen James, like Philomela of old, had been raped and then had her tongue cut out by the man so that she could not explain what had happened. Ultimately, an Ellen Jamesian who is also a childhood friend of Garp, shoots Garp to death as he is coaching wrestling, a patently male chauvinistic activity to the Jamesians. Thus, one may understand the magnitude of the problem Irving faced in believably connecting the worlds of Jenny and Garp.

A Modern-day Tiresias — According to Garp

Roberta Muldoon, ex-Philadelphia Eagle tight end, is a major and carefully developed character. She exhibits many of the traits of today's liberated woman, one of which is standing up to situations both psychologically and physically.

An example of the double potential of Roberta as a modern day Tiresias occurs when a young girl is staying with Jenny Fields at her seaside refuge because men are always bullying her. A big strong man from New York drives up to take her away from what he considers a lesbian lair. He makes the mistake of intimidating Jenny and calling Roberta a big dyke.

Roberta Muldoon threw a cross-body block on the surprised man, hitting him from behind and a little to one side of the backs of his knees. It was a flagrant clip, worthy of a fifteen-yard penalty in Roberta's days as a Philadelphia Eagle. The man hit the gray boards of the porch deck with such force that the hanging flowerpots were set swinging. He tried but could not get up. He appeared to have suffered a knee injury common to the sport of football — the very reason, in fact, why clipping was a fifteen-yard penalty. The man was not plucky enough to hurl further abuse, at anyone, from his back; he lay with a calm, moonlike expression upon his face, which whitened slightly in his pain.

"That was too *hard*, Roberta," Jenny said. "I'll get Laurel," Roberta said, sheepishly, and she went inside. In Roberta's heart of hearts, Garp and Jenny knew, she was more feminine than anyone; but in her body of bodies, she was a highly trained jock.

Thus, I believe that when John Irving created Roberta Muldoon, the pre-conscious psyche is trying to make sense of perhaps the most basic or archetypal debates, the differences, ambiguities, and similarities between male and female. These basic tensions of mankind have not really changed much since the days of Greek mythology; dead center is the questioning of sex roles and equality.

In one of the most famous modern poems, *The Wasteland* by T. S. Eliot, the male-female figure of Tiresias (Eliot's notes):

"...although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician sailor and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem."

For his central unifying character in the *Wasteland*, Eliot, in need of one who could feel and at least partially understand human sexuality from the viewpoints of both Venus and Mars, therefore chose Tiresias. Before the advent of modern medical technology and techniques only the gods, and even then only the very highest of gods, could shape such a fabulous figure.

In the scene from *The Wasteland*, which the Tiresias note explicates, a typist entertains a "carbuncular" clerk while Tiresias observes:



Donald Davis as Tiresias
in Stratford Festival's *King Oedipus*

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest —
I too awaited the expected guest...

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead).

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass;
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
When a lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

The parallel can be seen as Irving dramatizes Roberta, not as a vacillating homosexual, but rather as one who has gone from male *qua* male to female *qua* female, playing each role in turn like Tiresias, and thus experiencing "all." In a late night phone call to Garp she says:

"I'm sorry," Roberta said, "But I thought it was too late to call your mother." Garp found this logic astonishing, since he knew that Jenny stayed up later than he did; but he also liked Roberta, very much, and she had certainly had a hard time.

"He said I wasn't enough of a woman, that I confused him, sexually — that I was confused sexually!" Roberta cried. "Oh, God, that *prick*. All he wanted was the novelty of it. He was just showing off for his friends."

"I'll bet you could have taken him, Roberta," Garp said. "Why didn't you beat the shit out of him?"

"You don't understand," Roberta said. "I don't feel like beating the shit out of anyone, anymore. I'm a *woman*!"

"Don't women ever feel like beating the shit out of someone?" Garp asked. Helen reached over to him and pulled his cock.

"I don't know what women feel like," Roberta wailed. "I don't know what they're *supposed* to feel like, anyway. I just know what I feel like."

"What's that?" Garp asked, knowing she wanted to tell him.

"I feel like beating the shit out of him *now*," Roberta confessed, "but when he was dumping all over me, I just sat there and took it. I even cried, and he even called me up and told me that if I was *still* crying I was faking myself."

As Roberta grows old she becomes more closely a recreation of Tiresias, particularly in terms of her prophetic powers:

On This Hot Night

*Young woman in black on this hot night
swathes herself in mourning cotton.
Sweat streams between her breasts and thighs,
catches the soft flesh of her arms.
Sweat etches the insteps of her feet.*

*Young woman in black on this hot night
lifts her hair high off her neck.
Sweat tracks through the clotted hair,
runs down her nape and spine.
Sweat falls inside the cotton tent of dress*

*Young woman in black on this hot night
waits...
Sweat pearls between her brows,
forms tears, earlocks, a moustache.
Sweat rains within her tent
within her tent the black
night rains.*

Wendy Kindred
Fort Kent

The Widow

*His death smashed
Something in her,*

*Leaving her wide-eyed
As a vacant house.*

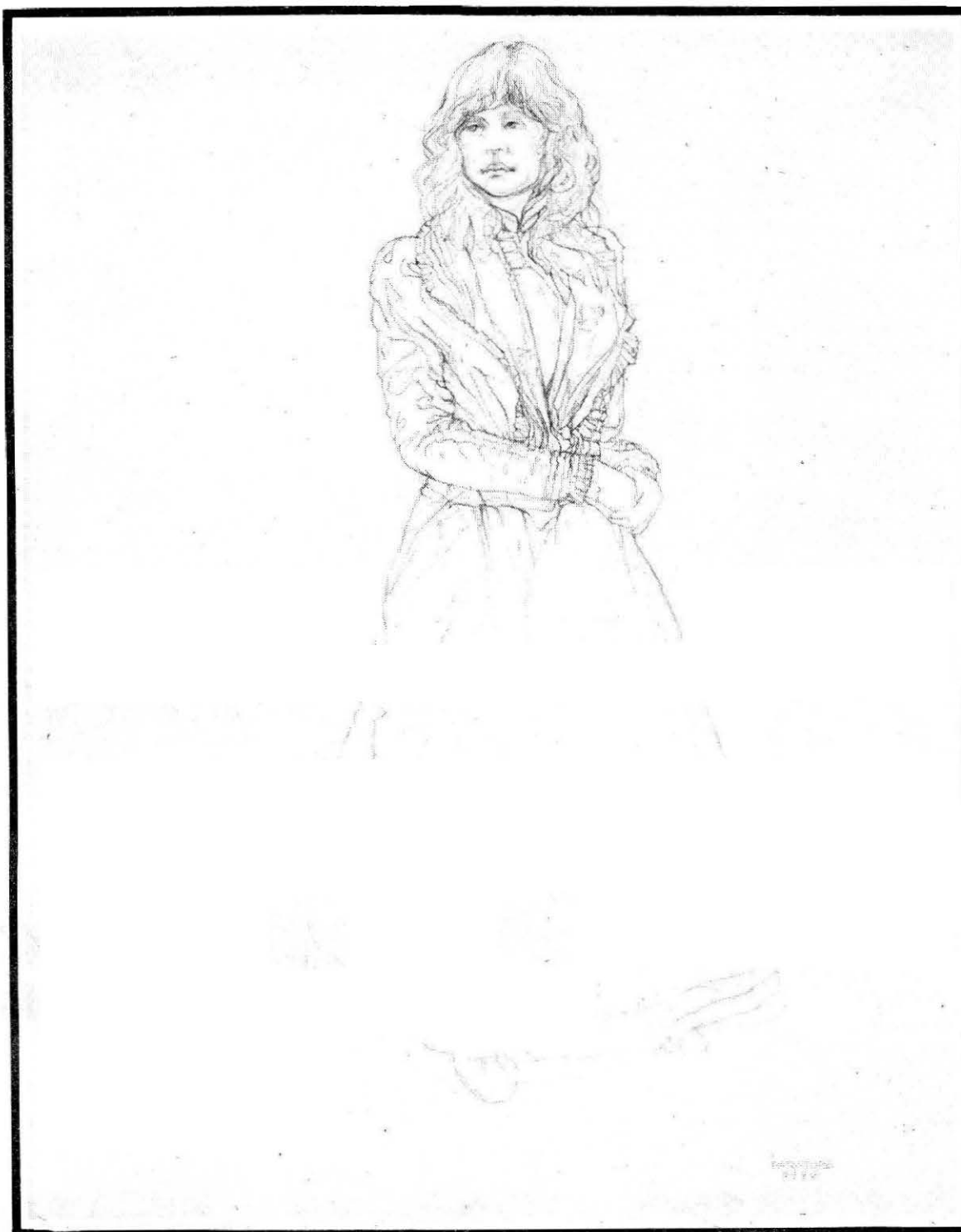
*Does she,
Behind that blank gaze,*

*Continue to seek him
Through that night*

*Of scarlet sirens?
Or does he lie within her*

Abandoned.

Susan Phillips
Taos, New Mexico



"Roberta lived long enough to grow at least comfortable with her sex re-assignment. Approaching fifty, she would remark to Helen that she suffered the vanity of middle-aged men and the anxieties of a middle-aged woman, 'but,' Roberta added, 'this perspective is not without advantage. Now I always know what men are going to say before they say it.'

It is within this framework that I believe Irving subconsciously recreated for our own time the inherent natural problems found in Sophocles and Eliot. According to David Daiches in a headnote to *The Wasteland* in the Norton Anthology, Eliot, "writes about spiritual dryness, about the kind of existence in which no regenerating belief gives significance and value to men's activities, sex brings no fruitfulness, and death heralds no resurrection." Irving, in *The World According to Garp*, creates a modern *Wasteland* in order to convey the same loneliness, mis-used sexuality, and barren existence of the 1970's in the United States.

The obsessions and questions of one age are apparently not very different from those of another and may be seen in the dominant art form, whether the drama of Sophocles, the poetry of Eliot, or the novel of Irving. It is here that the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious makes sense. The view by W. B. Yeats that artists in any medium and throughout time are those who receive, perceive, and subconsciously organize the archetypal symbols into a given form was illustrated most clearly for me in a student session with Robert Frost many years ago. Frost had read from his poems. A student asked if it were true that "Stopping by Woods" was his death poem. Frost smiled and said,

"That's what they say," in his best New Hampshire accent.

The student persisted. "Well, is it?"

Frost replied again, "That's what they say."

The student, distraught and angry, asked belligerently, "But you wrote the poem, right?"

To which Frost immediately replied, "Nope."

The student was stunned. Frost went on, "My hand wrote it. I had been up late attempting a sestina on New Hampshire that wasn't working, and so just before I gave up for the night that little poem just wrote itself out. I didn't even think about what I was writing."

The student sat down.

Frost had given a lesson, whether playfully intended or not, concerning what a poet does and does not do. Once again, the White Goddess image arises; that is to say, the personification that poets give to their non-conscious inspirations. In many artistic epiphanies, primordial images float up and are put in order, harmonized, almost without invitation. The symbols which exist in the unconscious become visible in dreams and creative moments, periodically float to the surface of our consciousness. But perhaps most strongly for the artist.

Obviously, Irving did not consciously attempt to recreate Tiresias in modern garb. What is important is that he *did*, in effect, give us consciously or unconsciously a modern variation on a very ancient theme.

As human beings we "understand" on many levels. The relative strengths and importance of our subconscious, our unconscious, and our conscious wide-awake world cannot be clearly measured. As David Leeming neatly sums it up:

Most of us have dreams of falling from great heights, dreams of being lost or left behind, dreams of conquest — sexual, athletic, or whatever. Nearly every society has myths which explain these themes on the group level. To be sure, dreams are in part products of the individual's personality and environment, but Jung has shown the individual's psyche cannot be divorced from the psyche of the human race as a whole. Dreams are also products of inherited themes which are buried in the very depths of the human psyche. These are themes — archetypes — which are when we come across them in literature, for instance, "strike a chord" for no apparent reason. So myths spring from the particular problems and concerns of a given race or tribe, but on a deeper level their source is the universal soul of the human race itself.

I submit that Tiresias is an archetypal theme that reappears once again in John Irving's *The World According to Garp*, as Roberta Muldoon — transexual.

John Newell Sanborn
Unity College

Sources:

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Time Out of Mind

He heard the pickup struggle up the hill and subside behind the Ford, which was on chocks. It had no wheels. But he'd try to do something about the Ford this week, before the snow fell. There must be some wheels in one of them junkyards hiding behind high wood fences in the backroads of Hatton County.

With the beer can he stamped rings all over the formica table till it looked like a quilt. Hallie was all right driving the Chevy — if it broke down she wouldn't have far to walk, either to the diner or back home.

He flinched as the heavy outside door slammed open against the trailer and an old-fashioned woven-splint basket scraped across the scaling linoleum. He shut his eyes, not wanting to watch his mother's ballooning bosom and solid hams swarming over the doorsill.

"My Lord, what you doin' sittin' there drinkin' beer in the middle of the day? Where's them kids, didn't you git them up yet?" She heaved the basket up onto the counter and began to lay the baked goods and groceries around it.

He supposed the old lady was doing her duty bringing stuff every day and taking care of the kids. Holding the empty can against his face, he surveyed her from half-closed eyes as through a tunnel under the blue-black smoke. She snatched his cigarette from where it lay scorching the chrome trim. Still, he said nothing. But someday, just someday, he was going to get his shotgun from under the bed and use the whole crew for a shooting gallery — one clean sweep. And the old lady would be first. Made a man feel like garbage, his wife and mother making such a big deal of running everything, getting in the money and groceries. *It wasn't his bitchin' fault he was laid off when they finished the goddam bridge.* He reached in and shagged another can from the fridge. If he wanted to have a few beers to pass the time, who was going to stop him?

Not the old lady, for sure. God, she was ugly enough in the old days when she wore housedresses, white ankle socks and arch-support shoes. Now, in baggy stretch pants and his father's old workshirt, she was hideous.

Not like that Mrs. Brewer on TV. She was plump too, but pretty, always all dressed up. She wore jewelry and makeup and all her teeth, though he couldn't tell if they were homegrown or store bought. With all the sleeping around they did on soap operas, rich ladies having affairs with pimps and bartenders, he could just as well be Mrs. Brewer's illegitimate son that she had to give away because she wasn't married then. That was the way rich folks operated, just took off half-assed and did things nobody else could.

Sonny smiled and sipped at his beer. They wouldn't give a baby to anybody in Hatton County, that was for damn sure. To drive a log truck or pick potatoes?

"Sonny." He came back to earth and saw his fat dumb ma standing in the bedroom doorway holding the baby, Donnie. Little Ellen peeked around her big purple butt. Ma always wore a smile around her grandchildren, but Sonny remembered the glint of hatred and malice in her tiny squinty eyes, gleaming out from clumps of fat, when she punished him, clenching her teeth when she hit him.

"I've had enough of your backtalk," she'd scream, knocking him to the floor with whatever she could lay her hands on — wood or pan or whatever. "Now you're goin' to get it. This is for hittin' your sister! And this is for talkin' back to me! This for runnin' off when there's work to do!" He'd try to dance away from the blows, hanging on to her sleeve so she couldn't swing good.

"Yeah — whatcha want?" He swigged the beer.

Then, he remembered, she would go to her room and cry, coming out with her eyes all red, stopping by the rocker or bench where he huddled, tearless, hating her. "Sonny, it's for your own good. See if you can do better."

Did she think that all those pies and brownies and crap could make up for those years? *Frig her! Didn't go with beer anyway.*

"These kids are a mess," she said, squinting her little pig eyes at him.

He turned and stared out the streaked window. He didn't have to answer her. If she wanted to help Hallie with the kids and the trailer, he didn't care.

Guess she didn't remember when he'd told her he was going to have to marry Hallie. Just like when he was a kid, she'd grabbed the nearest weapon, which happened to be a stick of stove wood. Dodging, he'd caught her wrist, feeling his fingers sink in the doughy white flesh.

"Fed you and gave you a good home... Now you want to get married... **MARRIED...** to that whore!" She wailed like a stuck pig, mouth a round asshole in a ripple of wrinkles. Suddenly she'd realized he was gripping her wrist and stopped in mid-shriek, surprised. He'd squeezed 'til she dropped the wood.

At least now she never yelled at him, not like when, before he moved out, her rage would build up and boil over — explode. He grinned, staring out at the thin pines swaying over a few brown oak leaves scurrying in the eternal whining wind. He thought what it would be like to see her blow up, greasy white blubber broiling around, bits of her flying up to stick on the dirty ceiling, dropping on the pot burner to sizzle like frying bacon. He knew how it would be — he'd seen plenty of GI's blown up in Nam, guts and things all over the place.

"What're you smirking about?" she demanded.

"Come to daddy, Ellie," he coaxed, ignoring her as she set the baby in his high-chair. He leaned over to Ellie but the room moved and Ellie shied away. He straightened slowly. Wow, he's sure had an early start this morning, started drinking after Hallie went to work.

Ellie backed away, sucking her thumb, and let her grandma help her into a chair.

"Why in tarnation did you leave these kids in bed so long? It's almost dinner-time. Sonny, you hear? Donnie's so wet he near about floated out of his crib, and

it's cold in there." She rummaged in a clothes basket for a clean diaper. "Next year if they take Ellie at the daycare center, I'll pick up the kids and drop her off and keep the baby at my place 'til I go to get her. At least I'll know they're up and clean and fed."

Why the hell doesn't she shut up, he thought. She knows damn well I won't answer.

Leaning over, he pulled Ellie onto his lap. She smelled of baby powder and vomit but not as bad as his mother, breath stinking of rotten teeth and corruption.

Ellie pushed at him and wriggled down his shin. Maybe the old lady would mop the floor after she got the kids cleaned up. God knew Hallie wouldn't. He watched Ellie climb into her chair, making hard work of it, tongue sticking out.

Earlier this morning when he picked her up she hadn't acted so independent. He'd had a beer on an empty stomach, then poured orange juice for her and put a little whiskey in it. Nothing like a little whiskey to warm you up on a cold morning when the oil burner had been out all night. He'd warmed Donnie's bottle and taken it in to him in the bedroom. Probably should have got him up and changed him, but as long as the kid stayed under the covers he'd keep warm. *It was only when they got out into the air they got cold.*

Then he'd taken Ellie into bed with him, first rinsing out her glass so "Nosey Nellie" wouldn't smell the whiskey. Hell, a little booze never hurt anybody. His bed was still warm and he snuggled up with Ellie. Her bottom was so little he could cup it in one hand. He kissed her neck and stroked her all over, and she wiggled against him until he finally sighed and clutched her to him.

He thought of sister Annie. She'd been older when he'd begun fooling around with her. The other boys put him up to it, really. His mother and father never talked about things like that. Still, he figured they had to know about it or they couldn't have had him and Annie, could they? It was like it was something good they kept for themselves and tried to keep from the kids. So naturally he had to find out what it was. He knew they did it, and not just in the dark like the other boys said their folks did. When his pa and ma went to their room after Sunday dinner for a "nap", he listened at the keyhole for the squeaks and whispers.

They'd lived in a funny old house perched on a ledge just big enough for the house and barn. Worthless brush dropped off hundreds of feet. His father long ago had sold all the lots fit to build on, one by one.

Many a cold morning he'd shoveled and sanded the steep gravel drive so the old man could get the pickup up and over the hump to the blacktop road. He'd always liked this home, a small, shingled dollhouse sitting snugly on its shelf, deep gully behind, the bottom carpeted with emerald green pines. That's where he and Ellie would go someday.

Of course he and Annie never went quite all the way. They just fooled around. Once, long after, when Annie was married and they were all at the old place, some holiday or other, he and Annie cleared the dishes while the others walked out to the barn to see some new kittens. *She was still a good-looking woman and he kind of patted her butt.* She turned and knocked him halfway across the kitchen with her soapy fist.

"Damn you and your messing around and nobody ever telling me anything. When I got married I didn't even know if I was a virgin. If I ever catch you alone with one of my girls I'll kill you, so help me God."

He'd leaned back against the wall, rubbing his jaw.

"Ah, come on, Annie. You liked it as much as I did 'til you got — turned into a woman. You were damn pretty too. You knew what it was all about. And you never said anything before. What're you so mad about now?"

"I didn't know. I didn't! I didn't! I was just a dumb kid and desperate for somebody to care — starving for love. Love — hah! When I found out what it was — I never did it again until I had to. And even after I got married I never liked it. I can't stand to be in the same room with a crud like you."

She jerked back to the sink. "I wonder why God ever let you come back from Viet Nam."

He shook his head to throw off the memory. Ellie was eating cereal, peeking at him through her tangled hair. He winked at her and tried to stand up, but he had to grab the table to keep from falling.

"Where you goin, Sonny?"

Ignoring the old lady, he walked carefully past Ellie, caught hold of the door-frame and eased himself out the door and down the trailer's cinder-block steps.

The back door of the Ford was open. He fell in, on his stomach, feeling around for the pint he kept under the seat. Turning on his side, he propped himself up and took a swallow. Behind the pines the sky was blue — bluebird blue, soft but bright — just like the time he and Annie lay behind the house fooling around.

That was a long time ago. Then the stinking war. And he'd had to mess around and get Hallie pregnant; drinking, playing around on his mustering-out pay. Some day they'd realize the good life he gave up for them, the life he might of had. Some of the guys in his outfit had even married town girls, got jobs that paid a decent living.

If only he could get a job. They could barely eat on what Hallie made at the diner. And it seemed like by the time she got home and got the kids fed and in bed she was always too tired. Frig her! What was he supposed to do? He was a man, wasn't he?

He rolled over and slept, his mouth dropping open, saliva staining the torn seat-cover.



For the Love of Henry

(To John Berryman, xxx's and ooo's)

Oh Henry love, I need your tunnel pain,
the drainpipe echo of it, the trickle-drizzle
of your health, or the way you gutter butter,
evaporate in marinade, — of course,
that clink of drink on ice, how nice and cool
your kisses reek — they spice my blowzy life!

I'm whittling away beneath the knife of words
you wield, between the slice of bottled self
you shelve and the slice you serve the world
sauteed, with mushrooms over rice.

The whole show of it! Eat. Eat and Die!
I'll die too! Go underground, with lye
dissolve your bleachy bones
and sprinkle sediment on my ground round,
(Hold the pickle! No Tomato!)

Oh but I hate though —
the way you had to do it, did it,
the way they let you, made you,
make your bed. It wasn't warmed
by Mr. Bones, no, no
electric blanket wombed you up
like Mother, and God forbade the
sheepskin other, a father's firm embrace —
instead a bullet through the head.

Henry, I know there's not much space
on these tiny quilted squares, this cover's
hemmed and stitched with death, and yet
I wonder, might it convert, reversible?,
sometimes some seem to think so, yes,
life laces death as well —

it's all a magic trick
just like those drinks you down.
They fill you up with numbing sounds.
A bass guitar unplucks your face,
your jowls droop, drown out your breath,
your brain, the fitting pitch of excellence,
inexorable, a single note sustained,
goes baritoneing, all alonely,
its shooting hooting like a loony owl.

Maybe life's a porcelain cup
slowly filling up with death.
More than halfway there, these days,
we're soon to Boom, four horsemen,
masked, a cratered tomb, thunder claps,
black slanting sun... Man unkind, enfin, done in...
God melting down like a starved dog,
we clear off, onyx out, night fog —

(But what we want and ought to know
is everything we ever guessed and never asked.
After the Blast will there be Sex?)

Henry baby, all those parties, panties,
petticoats, brassieres — they've changed
a bit in style since your wild libidoeed
years. But not the silky bodies, advertising's
left them quite alone (although a little more
is shown) the sexy moans still trilling low
like beams from orange moons you've known.
The thrilling brights of blood combed through
with alcohol, "Last Call!" the pasty lights,
a plethora of diphthonged, woolly tongue,
so easily flung for momentary bliss —
it's all still rife! We're still
turned on like true component systems crooning
lusty Henry songs — my life throws kisses
to all your wives and all the women's toes
you've nibbled on... all the eons long
of scores compelling passions over wisdoms.

Timing of tennis balls ticked off in
Mountain Moments / movements slow, exact,
precise the jabbing light of eye on lobbing
ball. Like sun on skin or sky on eye,
the flashbulb vision follows through.
The mind feels out expectantly the body's
true intention — did I mention (too)
that space that lacking form doth spot
and drip, crowd and limit, lugging down
upon the muscle's flex, and hexing, cramps,
shrugs off ecstasy and then reflects?
Is this the "End of tennis" or
"The Beginning of the Dark?"

Is poetry a lark, a pigeon or a dove?
What's the connection of
the ice, the drink, the bridge, the love,
the gift gone mad?? I'm so sad it had
to be this way, you see, it means a lot,
it being three important things —
"the possum treed," "the crises in the ghost"
and "the love of the done."
My game's both deuced and won
from all the dreamy songs you sings and sung —

yet one ribald note rings.
Enter that sultry bitch, MS. Suicide,
a child bride with thighs too wide, too pink,
and deep inside your fate you can't escape
her rape. She'll get you first and last,
she'll get you there and back, and I suspect,
before and after death the pain of extra loving
will go on and on and on singeing your fingers,
striking matches, shrieking shouts of "Forest Fire!"
And your desire won't extinguish with your dread...
the deer all red, their eyes in patches,
circuits shot, and everywhere between
the fallen pines the stench of human rot.
The burnt birch crackle, the grackle's
airless cry, tissues of sky, an earth
gone inside out — my molten candy lips
will gout. My flesh will straighten out.
All petrified, I'll run through sticks of it,
search you out, build lean-to housing,
gather spattered pumpkin seeds, pine cones,
wasted milkweed for decor —

Oh —
and if I find him, find him, through the smoke,
I'll mount and marry Mr. Bones.
I'll give him shelter, cloak him, feed him,
make him live with stops and starts
this every/always life enthroned
with diamond tiers of dying...
.....the instant's never/moment
pops up again in parts. In shades of winter's
black and white. On deck. In spades.
A splash of ice behind your severed head.
Rung white, your crystal eyes.
I know the distances to silence, I know.
I know you're dead —

But I Must Try
To Somehow Energize,
(despite, somehow, the jump —)

Your Broken Henry Heart To Pump
and somehow pump me somehow up.

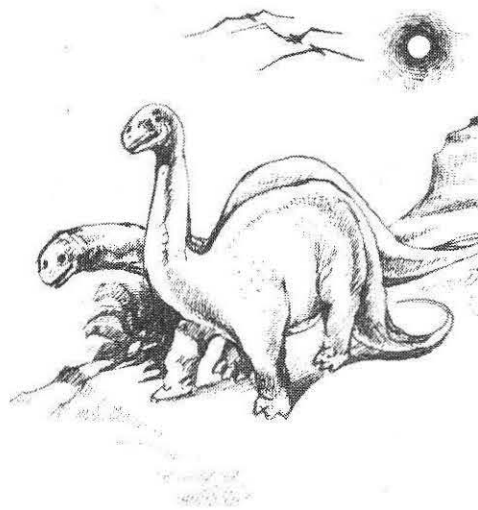
Somehow. Forever. Somehow up.
For Somehow ever pump me up...
Pump Me (Somehow) Oh Somehow Up.
For somehow ever pump me up
pump me some ever how for up
forsomehoweverpumpme up —

Oh Me —

FOR SOME LONG EVER HOW ON UP-PUMPED!
-YEAH!

And that may take care of the millenium

Doodling away
in prehistoric times,
dreaming, scribbling on the cave,
drifting
whistling away
in predynastic times
or singing a ditty to make
the gods envious,
taking it easy before and
after politics, shuffling one's feet,
doing one's jig,
watching the stars,
listening to the drums,
enjoying the girls
and the poems
in momentous and transient time,
we made the best
we could of It
and let it go
at that.



EDITOR'S NOTE: Henry is the major character in the many
volumes of Dream Songs by the late John Berryman.
Henry and the character called "Mr. Bones" sometimes
function as personae, sometimes as alter egos, for
Berryman in his work.

Deborah Ward
Portland

Maine: The

Conversations with:
Jennie Cirone, sheepfarmer
John Hedman, potato farmer

JENNIE CIRONE

I was born, 1912, in McKinley, near Bar Harbor. My parents were lighthouse keepers and I lived on Nash Island off Addison with my sister and seven brothers for 18 years, since age 3.

It was great living on the island. We had barns, hen houses, and our house next to the lighthouse. There were no trees on the island, and a boat house where we hauled our peapod lobster boats.

Q. — Were you lonely there on the island those 18 years?

Oh no! I don't think we ever sat down to a meal that there wasn't anywhere from one to a dozen guests who had come over by boat. All of my brothers and sisters had their friends over, often with their families. Some stayed months at a time. And then there were relatives who wanted to get away from Portland in the summer time. So the house was always full.

For school there was one teacher who used to come right down the coast and stay at all the islands and lighthouses for two weeks at a time. Then she'd go back and start all over again. We had maybe four weeks of school all winter.

The only problem was that just as soon as a teacher came over to stay with us and teach, one of the boys would marry her, and that would be the end of that! Quite an education. Four out of seven of my brothers married school teachers.

Soon they started sending us to school on the mainland. I went, but didn't like it and quit when I was 13. I got in a peapod and simply rowed back to Nash Island and told my father I wanted to go a-lobsterin' and wouldn't never go back to school. So I did.

Q. — You went lobstering alone at age 13?

I started haulin' traps when I was 10 years old. Nothin' to it really. Bait the traps with heads, put a pot in the water, mark it, and haul it up. My sister and father would go out in one boat one way around the island, and I would go in another boat the other way.

I once got caught in a squall at age 13. The winds and chop was so rough that you could see air underneath lobster boats where the trough of the wave was. The whole keels were exposed. I kept wonderin' if my strength was goin' to hold up long enough for me to row ashore. And it was tricky rowin' into high breakers. I'd have to time it and coast in between breakers. There were three big waves and then a fourth which flattened out. Then it would all repeat. I had just a split second to catch that fourth wave and coast into the slip. But I never missed. The same thing went on when I went out. We used peapods which were double-ended. When a sea came astern of it, it would lift, unlike a square sterned boat which would cause the wave to break into it.

My father was a big, strong man, but he used to always get seasick. And mother... The only thing I felt sorry about was when I headed in from a rough day of haulin' traps. A sou'wester blew up and I was tired. When I got home, mother asked me to take her a-fishin'. I was tired from beltin' the wind all day, but she says, "Nobody ever takes me fishing."

I tied her up to a buoy and started to haul some traps. My mother never let go of the boat at all. "I want to go home," she says.

Well, I finally took her home after tellin' her, "When I tell ya that you're takin' a chance, believe me next time!" She never asked me to go fishing again, and that's bothered me all these years.

I still go out lobsterin' every summer.

Q. — Did you ever help run the lighthouse?

Oh yes. Sometimes my sister and I were the only ones on the island. Normally, we used to have to do lighthouse service like polishing the brass and cleaning the lens and light so they wouldn't tarnish every day. We had to put the light out at sunrise, and turn it on at sunset. It was a red light.

Then we had to wind up the bell. We cranked it up just as you would a clock and then it would go by itself. It would tick and tick (the mechanism that ran the bell) and it had three prongs on it. Everytime a prong hit a lever, the bell would ring out. Every 30 seconds, BONG. My sister and me would cheat once in a while by taking out one of the prongs so she'd run a third longer. But mother lived in the room next to the bell, and she'd be tapping. She knew it the minute that bell stopped, but they were used to it — it didn't keep them awake at nights.

Father has rescued a few ships in trouble. One was a freighter who ran aground in-between the two islands. And once a sardine boat capsized, and some fellas drowned.

When I was little, I used to also have to scale off the paint from the light tower before putting on a new coat of whitewash. My father put me in a bolster chair and hoisted me up. He says, "Okay, go ahead and start right in."

I was petrified up there and yells, "My hands won't let go!"

"Don't be foolish," he says.

"I tell ya, my hands won't let go!"

Well, that was it. My father let go the rope and let me drop 10 feet down the side of the tower. I was about 16 years old. After that, my hands *did* let go and I went to work.

We was always busy doin' something on the island. We either made toy boats, or sleds, or traps. Never a dull moment, really.

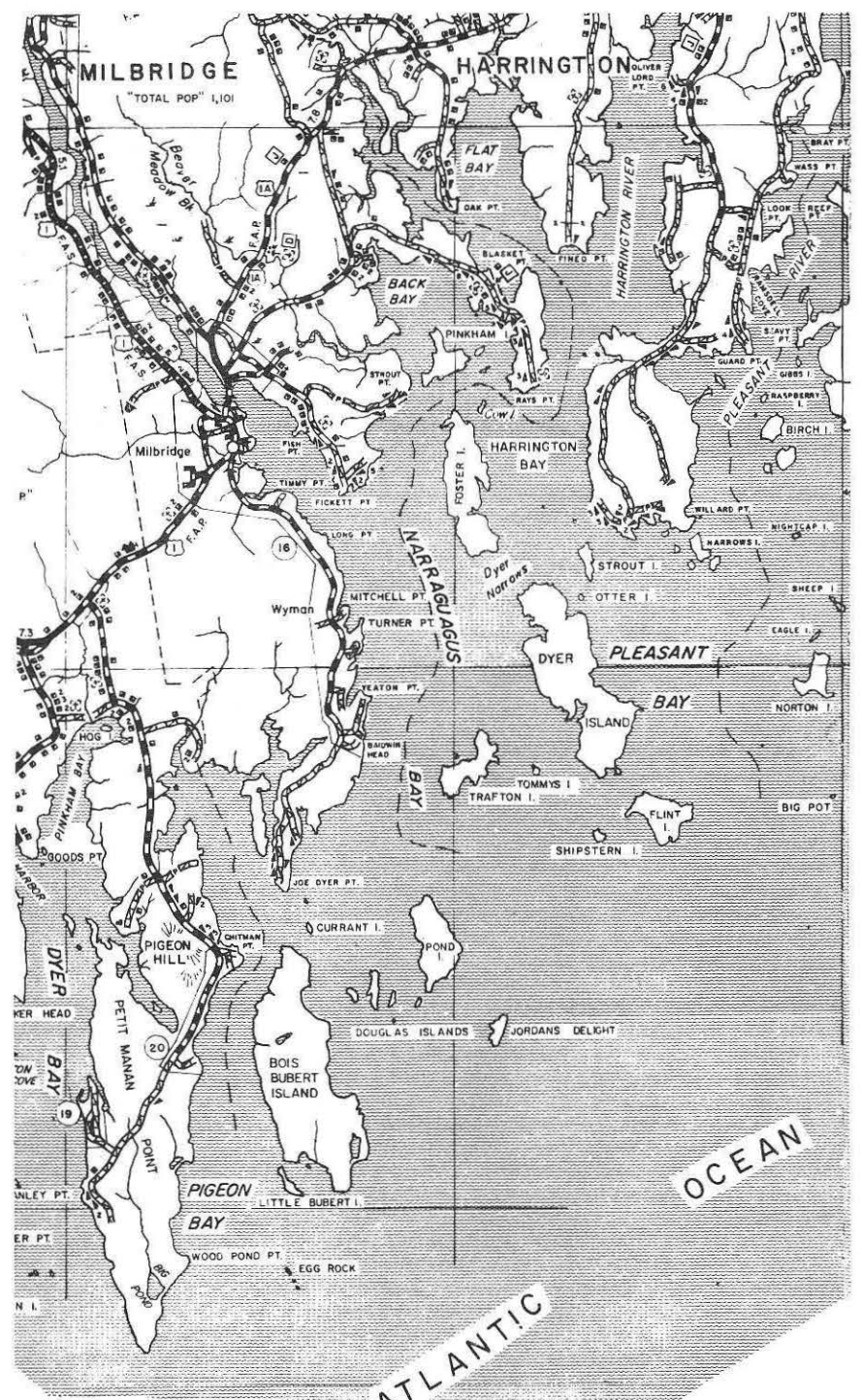
I had a brother who was always gettin' me in a mess. He's always bettin' me things, and I'm foolish when it comes to bettin'. One time, we had just gotten a bow and some arrows. "I bet you can't hit that window in the house..."

Well, I won the bet, and broke the window. When I came to dinner that night, there was my plate turned over with a bow and arrow under it.

Other times we'd have a calm spell and go look for wood for the fire. There was enough driftwood on the island to burn for 20 years, so we'd take out the peapods and load 'em up. My mother used to use this driftwood and put cresol on it. We called it pitchpine hardwood. We used to make biscuits and popovers in the oven. One time we put some of this wood in. It got so hot that it broke the casin' and blew the oven door right off! Today, it's harder to find so much wood since the lumber trade from St. Regis Paper Mill isn't as lively.

We also used to go picking blueberries. And gulls eggs. We'd collect hundreds of these eggs and then throw them at each other. By the bushel basket. Any my brother, who was 10, threw gull eggs at the pig till he squealed and was up to his knees in the stuff. That pig was fed on milk and eggs (when he wasn't being bombarded) and got up to 520 pounds.

And we had all kinds of animals like rabbits, ducks, geese, and sheep. They was our playthings. The greatest plaything for my sister and me was a sheep. We'd haul coal from the boathouse by sheep sled. We'd harness them up the same as you would a horse. And the ram we had was so big, that three of us would ride him bare-back.



en and Now

My sister was always gettin' into messes, too. One day, she decided to hook up the bull to the cart. So she hitched this big fella up and everything was alright until the cart started to rub up against the bull's hind legs. That bull started to bellow and run from the cart, but my sister hung right on in the cart. The cow by this time heard the distressed bull, and jumped the fence to come to his rescue. The only thing that stopped him, and saved my sister's life, was that the bull ran right into the boat house wall. His horn became embedded and he couldn't continue on through, which he would have — with my sister.

I left the island at age 21 in 1933. I came to the mainland. We had bought an old car to use to go to the movies and the circus with. It was an old 1918 hupmobile we got for about \$9.00. My brother and his wife and me and my sister would go to the movies in it in the summer. We'd take a boat over and start out real early, after haulin' traps. We had to start early to go to the movies 'cause the car would always break down, and get as many as 10 flat tires. These were the thin bicycle-like tires, and we couldn't get new ones so easy.

The routine was that a tire would be punctured, and my brother would get out and light a fire to keep the mosquitoes away. Then I would blow the tire up and patch it. Sometimes we had to put on 10 patches on the way to Milbridge. Half an hour per patch. We'd get back from the movies just in time for the next day's lobsterin'.

One day, father wanted some gasoline to sell down at the wharf. My future husband wheeled it down for him and we soon got to talkin'. Since then, Stan and I have mostly lobstered here and raised sheep.

Sheep have always been my favorites. We had them on the island before I came over. One February, we had a huge storm. The wind was so great, it shook some of the pictures off the wall. The big tree on the island was uprooted and washed out across the sand bar. It separated the bar, and since then, our island consists of Big Nash, and Little Nash. So the cattle and sheep have to swim across from one to the other.

Sheep don't like to swim, but they will if they have to. It's alright if they don't have too much wool on, but if they're heavy with wool, they'll sink right down and drown. You can tell they're in trouble when they start to swim in circles. You have to get to 'em fast or it's all over.

We had four islands and kept as many as 300 sheep on them. Let's see — there was Nash's Island, Pond Island, Jordon's Delight, and Flat Island. And we knew them all by name and character.

Now, there's Carmen, Silky, Virginia, Ester, Perfect, Girty, Aunt Jemima, Velvet, and Hurricane Tim for example. Hurricane Tim we named after my nephew's son Tim who was born in a hurricane. And then there was Disaster who was found under a snow drift on one of the islands.

You see, in winter, when we have big blizzards, sometimes the sheep are covered right over with snow. All you see is a little bank. The whole island looks deserted. And if you go over to one of these banks and dig around it, you'll find them all huddled together in a self-made cave. They sleep that way. This year, some were under snow from the 24th of December till the 16th of January. And Disaster had a bar of ice across her back and couldn't get up. I found her and took her home and saved her.

Spring is the worst time of the year for sheep. On our island, there's so many sheep grazing that they form foot paths and knolls develop in between. The frost kills the grass on top, but down below in the knoll it's all green. So they get in the knolls in winter to feed.

Now, when sheep feed in the knoll, they often stretch themselves out to get some sun and roll over. And if they roll over, with their feet stickin' up in the air, they can't get up and they're helpless. It's part of my job to put them rightside up again or else they're goners.

You wouldn't believe how hungry the seagulls are now. They're starving 'cause it's against the law to shoot them, and it's against the law to feed them. So they're overpopulated without enough food to go around. Gulls are scavengers and fishermen should be allowed to throw their unused bait out for them to eat. But that's also against the law. So they're so starving, fishermen baiting their traps are attacked by gulls who want the bait. Some have to ward them away with a stick, or shoot one to keep the others away. They're always out lookin' for clam worms and herring, and have gone as far as 15 miles inland to eat our blueberries. If this continues, they may go after very small children soon.

Anyway, the gulls, especially the black-back gulls, will set up right close to our sheep and watch for one to be cast on his back. Or, if a sheep's short hind legs are lower than the fore legs, and he can't get up off a hill or hole, they'll be in trouble.

There's usually one gull who sees this and lets out the funniest squawk-like sound. Then the whole flock comes down. They'll attack the sheep and eat 'em alive.

These gulls start in by cutting off the sheep's tail. Then they peel the sheep's hide over his head from the rear forward like you'd peel off a sock from your foot. That's the way they work. Not a hole in the hide — they just skin him and then eat him till there's nothing but hide and bones. It's amazing and horrible.

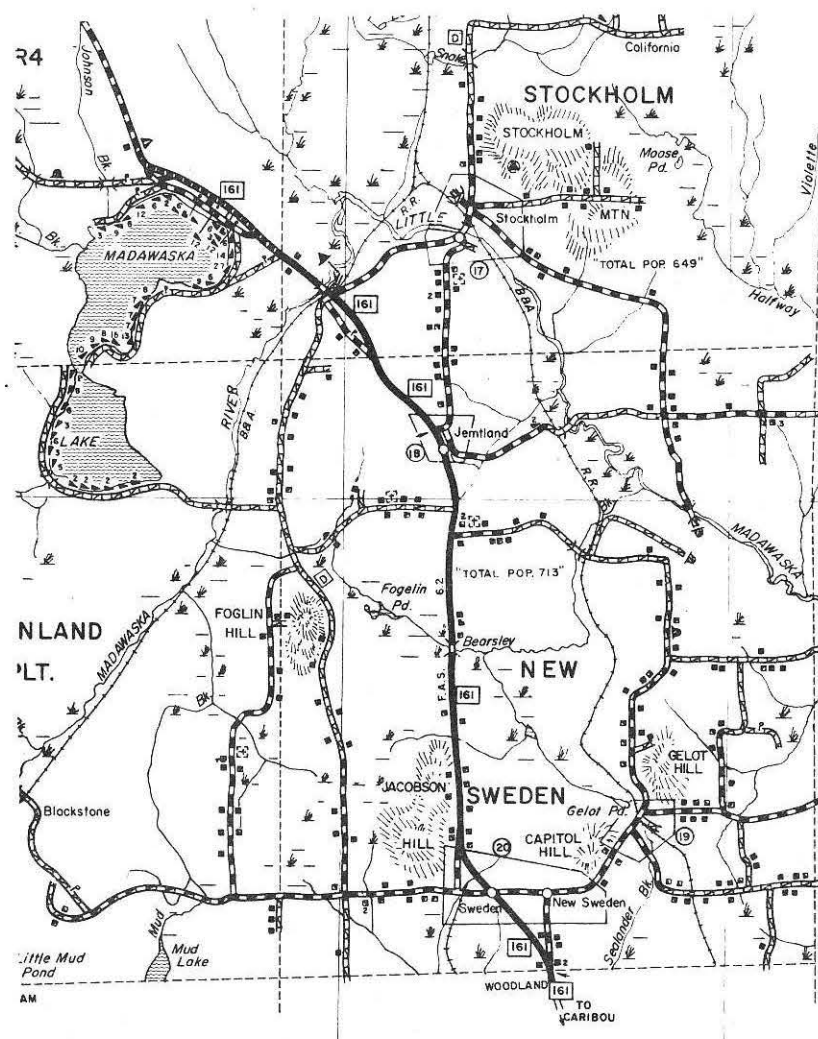
And these gulls, as well as some eagles, will often pick out a stray lamb and carry him off for dinner. They've almost ruined us in the last 5 years! The black-back gulls even attack and kill the smaller gray ones, and drive them herring gulls from their nests. They've taken over our island over there across the cove.

So that's how we make our livin'. Sheep raisin' and lobsterin'. And it's great to live here in Addison. I'd never live in a city.

JOHN HEDMAN

My family came over from Sweden in the second or third group of immigrants in 1871 on my father's side, and in 1880 on my mother's side. So a logical beginning is to tell you about my grandfather, Eric Hedman.

Eric was born in 1864 and died here in New Sweden in 1954 at age 90. He settled the land this farm is on. His father died when Eric was just 13, so he became the man of the farm at an early age.



Although my grandfather died when I was very young, he is still larger than life to me because of the stories we heard about him. In America, the national folklore has been to read Mother Goose stories at bedtime. For us, the incredible things my grandfather did on the frontier became our folklore and the substance of our bedtime stories. Every night, we'd say, "Papa, let's hear about Grandpa!!" And off he would go....

Grandpa was an eccentric until the end, absent minded, and only 5 foot 4 inches tall. Still, he had a habit of doing amazing things.

Let's take clearing the land. Our soil on this homestead is glacial and there are a lot of boulders and stones that were dragged and left here. So it was up to my Grandpa to clear the land to prevent hidden rocks from breaking plow blades and so on.

Well, the early settlers were all self taught with dynamite and explosives, which they used to blow out huge boulders. I don't know why most of them didn't kill themselves in the process of trial by error, but they didn't. And my grandfather was one of them. He took these two sticks of dynamite and dug a little hole under a boulder that he wanted to remove. Then he lit the fuse and ran away. Well, it didn't go off so he waited for what he thought was a reasonable amount of time and then figured that the fuse had just burned up. He walked back to the rock, leaned right down over it to see, and then...KABAAM!! Little pieces of rock just flew through the air and cut his face and clothes up. His eyes were filled with mud and pebbles and he was blinded — temporarily. He was a quarter of a mile away from the house when the explosive went off and crawled home on his hands and knees, feeling along the farm road that he must have known literally like the back of his hand.

(Continued on page 10)

Maine: Then and Now (continued)

"Betcha he wasn't," would be the reply. And so it went from evening to evening. My grandfather was also a great outdoorsman, loved to walk, and used to be an auctioneer on Saturday afternoons. The auctions were held 15 miles away, and he'd go to town — on cross country skis and after it was over he'd ski back.

Grandfather always had trouble with automation. He owned one of the first cars in New Sweden, and was very proud of that. He was also a show-off and bought the biggest and longest car he could find. For some reason or other, he couldn't stand to be passed on the road. We would be coming home from church and one of the neighbors would go flying by. We wouldn't let grandpa drive on Sundays, and he'd be in the back seat, bouncing up and down livid and yelling, "CATCH HIM. What did you let him pass you for?!"

And when grandpa was driving himself...

He was a terrible driver. He would be talking to you and there would be people walking in the road. It got so that they saw him coming and would dive under the nearest bush to get away. He'd go off the road and onto the shoulder before he ever realized it.

When we finally bought a tractor, he had trouble. The first time he got on it, he just went around in circles. We'd tell him, "Turn the other way." So he'd turn the steering wheel the other way and go in circles again. He'd spend whole afternoons going around in circles and condemning modern machinery. You see, he was used to a horse. You pulled one way on the reins and the horse turned and then automatically corrected itself.

Anyway, this was the kind of folklore that I grew up around.

My father got the homestead here from Grandpa and things continued on. We have always been a self-sufficient type farm with potatoes, cattle, sheep, pigs, berries and a garden. We also did a bit of lumbering out in the woods. This has continued for about 100 years here with myself the latest in line.

There was the whole business of primogeniture where the oldest son inherits the farm. My older brother hated farming and he must have hurt my father when he left. Not that father feels bad that I'm here in his place. At least I'm second in line.

After graduating from the University of Maine in Orono in English, I did return to take over the farm. Part of the reason was to continue being a part of the living myth which my grandfather had started. But also, my father quit the farm and left me a few beat up old pieces of machinery. I had traveled and had experienced a bit of city life which I detested. I had a perspective on what I had here, and so after a stint of teaching school in Van Buren, I returned to take over the family farm.

Well, I found that I was just as stubborn and individualistic as all the rest, even though I thought that I wouldn't make the same mistakes my father and others made, since I had a college education. I overestimated myself, but perhaps needed that kind of overestimation to get myself back into the farming scene. I may have been a little bit young, dumb, and stupid — but I wanted to do it *my* way and take my lumps — as well as the credit. The first year, I pulled myself out of debt and got a few thousand dollars ahead. Then, I got hooked into the farm syndrome.

I'm only 27 and single, but already I have the responsibility of many 55 year olds who are married and in the middle-class "rut." — But I'm my own boss. I'm constantly making decisions. You can't second-guess yourself in this business, or you'll take to drink or give up. Most farmers are this way. They have to be stubborn and self defensive to survive. If they doubt the gamble they're taking — they're dead.

Now, you can't take the gamble for granted! If you look at the frontier mentality, at least in the movies, dramas, and dime novels, those settlers were gamblers. Everything you did when you picked up to settle a new, unknown area was a gamble. And that spirit has carried over into the Aroostook potato business that I'm in.

There is a certain mystique about being involved in a risky business, and that's why farmers frequently gloat when they've had a really good year. They have really accomplished something. They'll plant in the spring and put all of their savings into the crop, leaving just the bare necessities to get by with until harvest. We lived that way and stayed self sufficient. We'd pick berries for dinner and get our milk from the cows and our vegetables from the garden. We lived frugally. That was part of the gamble.

Many farmers turn into compulsive-gamblers — sometimes out of necessity. They'll go and push their credit to the absolute limit. They'll lie to banks and collect \$5000.00 from every bank in the County. Then they'll ask for aid from the Farmer's Home Administration and all of the other government agencies. Somehow they manage to keep going and just become that much more gritty and self-sufficient. You start to mend the kids' clothing and make the car go one more year. Then fortunately, every few years, they'll get a good harvest and knock off a few debts to keep up their credit so they can weather another series of bad years. So they're hooked into a vicious cycle. So we're all hooked.

I farm mostly on the side as a form of therapy. Most of the time I'm a school teacher. Working with kids some days is a pain and you can get strung out. Working with an inanimate object like a potato is satisfying. It's unlike teaching where there's a lot of abstracts and you're mostly dealing with concepts. There are a lot of concepts to farming too, of course, but they're more concrete.

Farming in so many ways is tangible. When you put in an acre of crops, you know exactly where you started and what you got done that day. You can sit back on your tractor and see what you've accomplished and say, "This is good!" — there's no other feeling like that.

The doctor's explanation of why he lived through it was that he was so close to the explosive that the real impact went right by him and hadn't yet built itself up to full velocity. Well, he didn't go right out farming the next day, of course, and he had slightly impaired vision afterwards, but he lived to blow up many more rocks — supposedly a little bit wiser for the experience.

My grandfather liked to take a bit of snuff every now and then. One day, he was up in the barn loft, throwing hay down to the cattle below. He was standing close to the edge of the loft, took some snuff, and sneezed. The recoil sent him head over heels off the loft and he fell three stories into the soft seat of an old sleigh beneath him!

Once again, he had to crawl home on all fours, badly bruised, but he again survived. My grandmother by this time was used to his being accident-prone and coming home that way, and probably wasn't too surprised.

In addition to the myth of his being absent minded and accident-prone was the recklessness of the man. It was often hard for us children to tell if Grandpa was really a brave and courageous man, or if he was a damn fool.

One time, he'd been cutting wood in back of the farm when he spotted some bobcat tracks. Well, he had this idea of the all-around man who could hunt, farm, trap, shoot, and fish, and he also knew that bobcat skins fetched a fair price. Grandpa didn't know anything about trapping, but felt he could certainly learn. So he set a trap by those tracks and did everything right... except he didn't anchor the trap. So he returned to find that he'd captured the bobcat one night, but that it had walked off, trap and all.

Well, he started to follow the tracks, which must have looked a mite peculiar, and didn't go far before he found the cat up in a tree. He had his musket rifle with him, but being the man he was, forgot to bring the bullets.

Well, he figured that there had to be more than one way to skin a cat, and he had no fear. Even though a bobcat, especially a wounded one, is over 30 pounds of teeth and claws and can be mean — Grandpa decided to climb up the tree after him and poke him with the gun. "It was just a cat, you know."

The cat, fortunately, just spit at him and slapped with his claw and wouldn't get out of that tree for anybody. Even Grandpa.

So he climbed down the tree again and started to rip off his buttons from his vest. He put some powder in his gun, jammed down some buttons, and up and shot the cat. The impact of the buttons was enough to sting the cat, who jumped from the tree. Somehow my grandfather managed to kill it. The story goes on that the buttonless hunter returned home, buttons strewn all over the woods and everything flapping, but with a bobcat skin. My grandmother chewed him out for ruining his vest.

Still, as a 5 year old hearing this, I was spellbound and in absolute awe! "Wasn't he scared, papa?"

I remember one spring when we still had cattle and there was a good pile of manure out in the back of the barn. We were having negotiation problems at the school between the teachers and administrators and things were starting to get self-seeking and nasty. The whole atmosphere was unhealthy so I used to come home and just put on my shitkickers and my boots. I stood out there in 90 degree heat in the middle of that manure pile and spread it around with shovels. And I was happy! That was my thing at the time and it was therapeutic.

Now there are young people like myself who farm only for a living. When I talk to them, I don't see that they're getting much enjoyment out of it. For them, it's mostly a dog-eat-dog business.

The picture that has been painted of New Sweden I find really out of fairy-land sometimes. We're painted as very good and churchy and neighborly. But the time when everybody pitched in in barn raisings has passed. People then were just pleased to be able to feed the family, make a little money, and teach the values to the children. Now with the economy having gone haywire, we're much more money conscious, and there's cut-throat competition.

There are extremes of poor and rich here because the potato market is notorious. The potato market started in the 1890's with the coming of the Bangor-Aroostook railroad. The railroad created a market in Southern Maine and Boston, and then everything expanded fantastically.

People will tell you that the potato operates on a supply and demand curve, but don't you believe it. We'd like to see it operate that way, but it's just a wild business.

For example, potato blight is devastating and can sober you up at an early age. After a bad year, farmers sometimes break down and have their little cell meetings and get together to try to help things. But, if the situation turns around and the next year things are looking up, then "To hell with my neighbors, I can get 50¢ a barrel more if I do it myself." They'll return to cheating each other and cut each other's throats.

Farmers are so independent that they bring a lot of their own problems upon themselves. We're told again and again to get into a regular system of marketing so we don't all go crazy holding to sell in the spring. But no one listens. Too independent.

And one of the worst things to happen to a farmer is to have the price of potatoes go up just a little bit. Then everybody's convinced that it's going to go up more and they'll hang on to their crop too long. This inevitably leads to a fall and hurts everyone. So we're our own worst enemies.

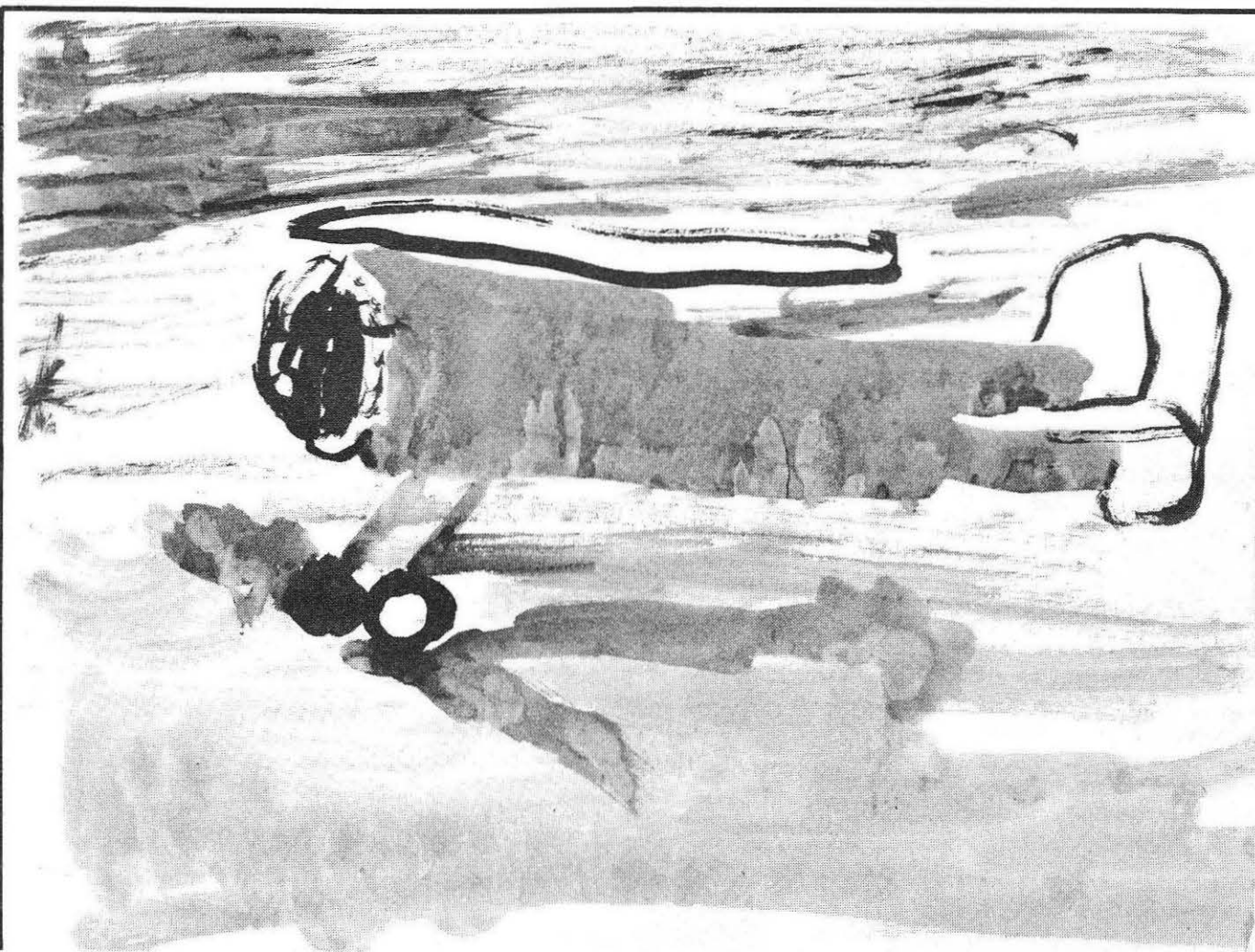
You may have noticed that Aroostook is referred to as "The County" as if no other exists. Well, there is a certain pride and mystique to the place. For one thing, it's huge in terms of New England. You could fit all of Rhode Island and Connecticut in it, and this goes along with the frontier notion of "the biggest — the best."

Still, within the County itself are self-divided patriotisms. I'm more attached to New Sweden than to the "County," and you have to take into account the French in Stockholm, the Scotch Irish in Allagash, the Acadians that Henry Longfellow wrote about in Van Buren, the French Canadians in St. Francis, and the WASP's in Caribou and Presque Isle. The County is really the ethnic section of Maine.

On the other hand, there is a certain fraternity among us in the County. I'm a Boston Red Sox fan and have gone down to Fenway Park to games. Sometimes I recognize people by face from here and we naturally think, "Oh, you're from here!" Living in the Frontier has made us too independent and individualistic to be manipulated by city life.

William L. Pohl
North Amherst, MA

Editor's note: These conversations and others are coming out in book form, *Forward* by Marshall Dodge, afterword by Robert Coles.



Boat People

Doug Rawlings
Mt. Vernon

1.
lambs
descendant
from the latest
slaughter
come ashore
tugging the war
behind them
and we ponder:
can a sapper
really hot-wire
our daughters?

2.
no need
to worry
though:
we're in america
where we've
weathered
napalmed faces
and
apple-cheeked
junkies
before.
we know
we are secure.
the six o'clock news
will lose them too.

Learning to Kill: Bainbridge AFB, Georgia

Captain Howard
was what we call a hard
ass. Few passed their checkrides with
Captain
Howard. My flight with Captain

Howard, although
a bad ride even by
my own abysmal standards,
had its
satisfactions. I fell out

of a barrel
roll, for example, and
hung from the straps, blood
pounding past my
ears, as I wondered what to

do. But I knew
that Captain Howard was
likewise helpless, unhappy
and in
pain. On landing, I savored

the yelp, like a
panic screech of tires,
as I banged Captain Howard
down hard
on top of his hemorrhoids.

H. R. Coursen
Bowdoin College

From Montville Poems:

Arthur

Arthur
Makes ax handles
When he's not drunk

Upwind
He can sneak
Behind you and laugh
Wet brown teeth
Out of his stubble

Gliding
Effortless over fallen leaves
When you're away
He will burn down your house

Annette Bradley
Unity

...And Sin No More

Jessica broke the sixth commandment when she was quite young — a few days after her fourth birthday. Right before her birthday the Manns moved from an apartment on 12th Street to their own house in a small court of houses near Limon Bay in Panama. Louise, Jessica's mother, despite the move, planned a big celebration for her. Sixteen children were invited. Two long tables festooned with crepe paper were set up under a canopy of helium balloons inside the hibiscus hedge bordering the side yard. Louise worked for days making the favors. She found directions in one of several books she brought home from the library. They were butterflies constructed of tissue paper and wire and before the children arrived at two they adorned the tables like a fragile cloud of blossoms in the spring. The children found them to be delightful ice breakers. They threw them at one another for several minutes until they were all demolished.

The birthday party was in January, the beginning of dry season. Everything was brilliant, the grass so green, and bougainvillea climbing the stucco walls such a density of purple blooms. Poinsettia bushes like small trees were covered with scarlet leaves and small globules of gold. The trade wind blew cool and dry. It rustled the leaves and banded the crepe paper. The balloons, tightly tethered, leaped about, enticed by the wind to fly away! away!

Several mothers came too, dressed in organdy and ribbons. The little girls wore dotted swiss and white patent slippers with a buckled strap across the instep and thin white anklets. A big bow of watered silk like a bird or a butterfly perched on the side of each head, held in place by a brass wire clasp. The little boys all wore starched white linen shorts and shirts. And their hair which was newly cut glistened with oil and water. It was 1939 and still Before the War.

Jessica had known 15 of the 16 children at the party all of her life. Three of them were her cousins. Franklin Neuss Zimmerman, however, was invited because he lived down the street and around the corner. No one knew anything about him. His father worked for the United Fruit Co., Mrs. Zimmerman confided to Jessica's mother. The two families encountered each other one Sunday afternoon while they were walking along the Bay. Franklin Neuss Zimmerman and Jessica seemed to get along so well that Louise invited him to the party. A black woman in a blue uniform brought him at 2 and took him away again exactly at 4. Louise said he was a well-behaved little boy. The next day Franklin Neuss Zimmerman came by the house all by himself to play.

No one had ever come along to visit Jessica before. Always, before this first visit of Franklin Neuss Zimmerman, a child to play with was incidental to a visit from a friend of Mother's. When he walked in the front door calling 'Jessica!' Mother was very surprised. She called Mrs. Zimmerman who said 'Thank you for calling' and 'yes, it was all right if Franklin Neuss stayed to play for a while.'

Mother made them some orange juice and gave them each a cookie. Afterwards she read them a chapter from *Alice in Wonderland* and then she sent Franklin Neuss home. The next day when he came Mother called Mrs. Zimmerman again and then she gave them each a cup of milk and a cookie and she read them another chapter from *Alice*. But when Franklin Neuss Zimmerman strolled through the front door the third day, 'as if he owned the place' she said, later, Mother asked him, "Franklin Neuss, does your mother know where you are?" "Yes, m'am," Franklin Neuss replied; so Mother said to Jessica, "I'm going next door to Mrs. Foster's. You and Franklin Neuss can play quietly in your room. You be a good girl while I'm gone."

Jessica showed Franklin Neuss Zimmerman all of her toys and all of her games and all the dolls lined up in a row on the side of her bed. But he wasn't interested in any of them. When she reached the end of her considerable store Jessica felt a rising panic. Never before had the duties of host fallen on her unaided. She could not imagine what to do with a guest who was bored and had no mother to amuse him by tying his shoes or answering his questions.

"Is that all you've got?" Franklin Neuss Zimmerman asked.

"Yes," Jessica replied. She felt for the first time in her life the confusion of social inadequacy. "Do you want to play dress-up?" she asked without much hope.

"No! Dress up!" Franklin Neuss sneered. Then he said, "Would you like to see my dingus? If you show me yours," he said pointing, "I'll show you mine."

Jessica could hardly believe her ears. She looked at Franklin Neuss Zimmerman as if his hair had turned into little green snakes.

"Are you scared?" he asked laughing at her, and since she was, very scared, she said, "No, I'm not!"

"Then show me," said Franklin Neuss.

Jessica pulled up her dress and hooked her thumbs under the elastic of her panties.

"Not here!" Franklin Neuss hissed. "In the bathroom!"

Shamefaced Jessica led him across the hall to the bath. She shut the door.

"Lock it!"

She did. Then she just stood there. Uneasiness in ripples spread from her belly to the very tips of her fingers and settled under her tongue like something sour in a bed of spit.

"I'll go first," Franklin Neuss offered. He unbuttoned his pants. Something that looked like a stick popped out. Jessica had never seen anything quite like it. When she walked through Colon with her daddy she saw lots of naked little black boys. Her mother said not to look at them and wouldn't answer any questions except to say, "Jessica, I don't want you to look." But Daddy when she asked him said between their legs was called a penis. She inferred later it was what her mother called a dingus. But the ones she had seen were always soft and fat like worms. This one of Franklin Neuss Zimmerman looked just like a stick. She wondered if maybe it was because he was white or if perhaps he was sick.

"You can touch it if you like," he said.

She was about to when she heard a chair being set by the wall where the window was. A moment later Mother's head appeared.

Although Louise had been ever so quiet after she discovered that the children had apparently locked themselves in the bathroom, all she saw when she looked in were two faces sweet and bright gazing up at her.

"Hello, Mother," said Jessica.

"Hello, Mrs. Mann," said Franklin Neuss.

"What are you doing in there?" asked Louise.

"Nothing," Jessica said quickly. "We're not doing anything."

Franklin Neuss Zimmerman didn't say a word. He just kept on smiling.

"Why are you in the bathroom?" Louise asked. To the children she looked something like the Cheshire cat she read to them about the day before. All they could see of her was her head strangely disembodied and stuck two-thirds of the way up the bathroom wall. The window was just a vent really. "Why did you lock the door?" the head continued.

Franklin Neuss pulled Jessica's hand and said, "Did you lock the door?"

She looked at him. His dingus had disappeared inside his pants again. That's why Mother hadn't seen it. That's why she hadn't said, "Jessica! don't you look at that! Jessica, you come straight out of there and go to your room!"

Both children turned and ran to the door. Jessica turned the lock and opened it. When Mother got to the bedroom each had their hand in a puppet and were in the midst of an exuberant family quarrel. Jessica's puppet was beating Franklin Neuss Zimmerman's with a long yellow pencil.

"You're a naughty boy to eat all the cookies! So take that!" shrilled Jessica's puppet.

"Oh, don't hit me! Don't hit me, please! Please!" screamed Franklin Neuss'. His puppet cowered, the arms protecting its head from a rain of pencil blows.

Louise hesitated. They seemed so innocent. "Franklin Neuss Zimmerman," she said, "it's time for you to go home now."

"Yes, m'am," said Franklin Neuss. He dropped his puppet on the bed.

"And I think you best not come back any more."

"Yes, m'am."

That was the end of Franklin Neuss Zimmerman in Jessica's life. As soon as he was out the door Louise took Jessica on her lap and said, "I want you to tell me what you did in the bathroom."

"We didn't do anything," said Jessica.

"Then why did you go in the bathroom together?"

"Franklin Neuss wanted to see it."

"What did you do in there?"

"Nothing."

"Well you are never, never to do it again," said Louise.

This conversation between Jessica and her mother was repeated often in the next few months. Jessica always maintained she had done nothing in the bathroom and Louise continued to admonish her not to ever again.

Then one night there was an awesome storm. Terrific flashes of lightning in blazing sheets of flame consumed the sky, fusing in its molten light Jessica and the intimacy of her room to the wild tumult of the out-of-doors. A branch of the mango tree split and fell and through it all the angry voice of God shook heaven and earth promising death, promising destruction. Jessica was too sick with fear to move from her bed until it was over. She knew in that storm that one day her mother would die and her father. One day she, Jessica, would be alive and they would not be. They would not be anywhere at all in the whole wide world. She would be all alone without them. She was riven with sorrow, split open by pain as brilliant as lightning. When the storm was over she crept from her bed to her mother's and at her bedside in the quiet dark she confessed her sin. Mother took her in and let her spend the rest of the night in the crack where her mattress and Daddy's joined for they slept in twin beds pushed together.

The next year Jessica began classes every Sunday morning to learn her catechism. The nuns who taught it were Franciscans from Marseilles and they spoke with a heavy French accent. The first Sunday, after catechism class was over, Louise asked Jessica whether she had learned a lot and Jessica said 'yes, she certainly had. She had learned to say her prayers properly!' That night at bedtime she knelt at her mother's knee to pray as she always did but, except for the blessings she invoked for the list of those she loved, she said her prayers in a thick French accent. When she was done she looked up smugly and said, "That will please Him!"

"Yes?" said Louise hesitantly. And then, more frankly, for she really didn't know what to say, she asked, "What do you mean?"

Jessica took one of Mother's hands in a confidential clasp and said, "The nuns told us that if we prayed properly like they told us then Jesus will hear our prayers and answer them. They said, 'If you pray properly, it will please ze baby Jesus,'" Jessica ended nasally.

Jessica practiced her catechism every afternoon with her mother and after she and all the other children had thoroughly learned for what purposes God had made them, they began to prepare for their First Communion. That is they learned to say the Act of Contrition and they learned the function of penance to mitigate the pain of Purgatory and to save them from the torments of Hell. Finally from the ten general categories of the Decalogue, Jessica with Mother's help compiled a list of sins. It was not always easy for Jessica to match the wrongs she had committed with the language of the Commandments. Certain ones, though, were simple, like the Fourth.

"Mother, is it O.K. if I say I talked back to you 15 times?" Jessica asked. She had worried about this for days, whittling it down in her mind from hundreds to 15.

"Fifteen!" Mother said. "A hundred and fifty is more like it!"

"Mother!" Jessica's voice was resonant with anguish. How could she confess to so much badness! She had meant so little of it. And Mother was so very provoking. The 15 instances were all she had come to feel she should be held responsible for. Besides, she did intend to do better.

...And Sin No More (continued)

"Well, thirty," Mother finally conceded. She sounded when she said it very final, the way she did in the bazaar when she gave her last price and turned as if she intended to leave.

"Twenty," Jessica wheedled.

"I said thirty."

"Mother! That's too much! Way too much! It's not fair!"

"It's going to be thirty-one in about half a minute!"

Jessica was checked. She felt cornered. "Mother, please!"

"Well, twenty-five. Don't you say another word," she added as Jessica began to protest.

And so the list was made: two masses missed, and late for mass, oh, say twenty times. Jessica didn't steal, and she didn't lie, and she was quite free from envy. And she worried day and night what to tell the priest about Franklin Neuss Zimmerman. After the night of the storm it had never come up again with her mother. Finally one night after her prayers were said she asked, "Mother, what is adultery?"

"Adultery? Why do you want to know that?"

It's the Sixth Commandment."

"Oh. Well. Um, what did the nuns say?"

"They said it was fornication."

"Fornication."

"No. Fornication," Jessica repeated with a French 'r' and an extra vowel.

"Mmmm. Well, O.K."

"But what's that?"

"Well," said Louise and paused. "It's... Well, if a man and a woman are together and they aren't married..."

"Together. You mean naked?"

"Yes. Together naked."

"You mean like Frank Neuss Zimmerman and me."

"Well, not exactly."

But Jessica knew where her duty lay. Her finished confession which she rehearsed several times a day the last week was, "Bless me Father for I have sinned. This is my first confession. I talked back to my mother twenty-five times; I missed Mass twice and was late eight times and I committed adultery once."

Daddy when he heard her chanting it said, "My god, Louise, she can't confess that!"

Louise's face was all corners like a shoe box, and she said, "Yes she can."

And Jessica did.

First Communion Day was in February. Trade Winds tossed the long curved fronds of the Royal Palms and tugged at the white lace mantillas of the little girls. All the little children were dressed in white and inside the altar was covered with lilies. Everything was white and delicate. Sunshine poured in the long open windows of the nave and glinted off the gold ciborium and the shining motes floating in the clouds of incense. The bells of the mass seemed to tinkle a sweeter silver than ever they did on ordinary days. Even Daddy went to Mass that day.

Afterwards they had ice cream and cake and Daddy took moving pictures of Jessica with his new camera.

"So, honey," he said when it was all over, "what sins did you tell to the priest?"

Jessica recited her confession to him. She was lying on the dragon in the Chinese rug and Max, the terrier, was trying to lick the ice cream off her face. When she got to the last of her list of three sins her father cried out, "Louise, why did you let her do that?" He pulled Jessica to her feet. He said, "And what in God's name did the priest say?"

Jessica answered with a thick Irish brogue, for Father Murphy was from County Cork and hadn't been in Panama long, "'Go my child and sin no more and for your penance say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys.' That's what he said to everyone," she confided.

Karen Saum
York

The Timing of a Sacrifice is All-Important

1. Glow

Anyone can fall in love. Even middle-aged women in church fall in love. Someone you have never seen walks towards you, surrounded by a strange glow, a halo. You wait to hear what message the angel has for you, you stand there stuttering while the angel massages your tongue with light. Everyone else walks by and you realize the angel is visiting you, only you, no one else sees it, it's an ordinary person to everyone else. What do you want from me? you ask. You want to kiss its feet but of course you are in the middle of a passageway, people must think you are exchanging recipes. You freeze, so the angel will look at you and see its own reflection and think it has found a mate.

2. Preferences

Sometimes an avocado plant will turn into an angel. A shopping bag lady will stop you and you see she is on fire, a policeman, a motorcycle, Mona Lisa, a hundred dollar bill, the Mets, Guru Maharaji, Nixon, whiskey, this Japanese beetle which switches colors like a Zoroastrian gem — colors you see when your eyes are closed. Somebody even loves you.

3. Who, for instance?

Your mother. Jesus. Isn't that enough? Some magical evening you will cross the room like a sleepwalker. You say that has already happened, but it is over, you are resigned to lesser passions. Don't you know that love is lovelier with both feet?

4. Is love eternal, or transitory?

Yes.



Porcelain plate from angel series by Josh Nadel

5. Home study

Here are some bibliographies. Some people advocate LSD, others say you should let God into your heart; certain authorities say you should find a new mate. Stay at home and make a list of wonderful things. You are wonderful to believe in them. Look at yourself in the mirror, gaze deeply into your own eyes. You have a great heart. How full of love you are for all beings. To get love, give

love. Someone will see your melting dark eyes and think there is a halo around you. Bring the muscles that dilate your pupils under voluntary control. Dilated pupils are a sign of deep emotion. You will begin to see haloes everywhere. You will look like an angel.

6. Frankincense

Did you notice the angel smells sweet? Even its bad breath is a kind of spice. If you turn your head fast, you catch bits of perfume smoking out of the corner of your eyes. When it lights a cigarette you think of taking up smoking.

He smelled like nutmeg. You laugh — *nutmeg?* — thinking I am talking about hallucinogens. *Nutmeg.* He smelled sweet and my heart shook. It was nutmeg, I think. His body smelled like that, it was his inside smell. I could tell when he'd been in a room. Afterwards I smelled like nutmeg myself for a year. Butterflies, you say, moths. No, I know sex smell too, a little like shrimp. Certain men have that smell, I follow them in crowds. This was personal, it was nutmeg.

I love you. I tell you about the angel. You are thinking about the time it happened to you. When you pick up the camera it happens over and over again. He had a camera. He took pictures of light. You reminded me of him the moment I met you. Not any more. What do you mean when you send a letter that says I love you? When you send it to three people? To five? After all, you're not really my type. It took a while, but now I realize. You're really not my type at all.

Kala Ladenheim
Ashville

At the End of the Road, Waiting on the Porch

*I am down at the end of the road,
waiting for you. The house has been abandoned for years, wildflowers
have taken over the meadows.
I am sitting on the porch,
nervous, knowing that you are coming.*

*And for hours I wait. I am looking
at an apple tree transformed by
insects, at the vines that are about
to take this house with it.*

*And then I see myself walking down
the road. Walking down the road to
meet me. And I look on myself like a
long lost lover, like a familiar story
retold with great sorrow. Waiting for
myself in an abandoned house, O with
what pity, with what forgiveness I
walk forward, speechless, needing no
introduction.*

Stuart Kestenbaum
Portland

Hiking at Night

*Moving carefully into the dark, I touch
The rough immediate bark, the vacant path.
I dust off the senses of the mole,
Familiar of roots and stones, varicose shade,
Things that have been buried a long time
In the depths of light. They surface now —
A fern brittle under the foot, a scent,
A finger of wind on the back of the neck,
The cry of an undefined bird.*

*My hands go before me like antennae of a beetle.
My nerves spin out like spider-silk around me.
I move like water in eroded stone,
Gathering the interrupted silence
Like a skin of shed leaves on water.*

*Later my hands drop back and my feet
Hold onto the earth by themselves,
Learning it, junction by junction.
As every cell of the blood in its capillary miles
Learns the distance it must go
So I continue,
The forest breathing in and out around me;
A planetary lung.*

Contradance

Beverly Greenspan
Brunswick

*passive solar heated
Goosepecker Ridge museum curators
sneak down to the grange
in manure trucks and unlicensed
ramblers
Montville earth people
unhitch themselves from plows
mud boots in unison
sledge hammer rhythm
swing your partners
Allemande . . .*

Annette Bradley
Unity



Ink wash by Kellie Holmes

Marginal Datsun

*Red with
egg beater engine
pulling chrome
and rust over
hills.*

*You are a
seeing-eye car
in dangerous,
blinding traffic.*

*"Sure-tired," you
caress tar and
patches of sand with
a grace that bespeaks
a maturity
beyond your fenders
(which keep falling off
on country roads)*

*Gas fumes, like old
sour breath
curl around plastic
black seats
making our eyes boil over
with tears
unasked for,
unearned.*

Jan Johnston
Winthrop

Autopsy (for my brother Stephen)

The knife cuts into still-warm flesh.
Cathode, stethoscope say this is death.
You saw ribcage, delicate trellis of bone
Vined with muscle. Organs bloom a vegetable garden.
You search for jewel-weed, disease treasure,
Wonder what made heart pulse, blood flow,
Lung sacs beat, wonder why neurons leaped
Synapse only an hour ago.

Once nightly we dreamed dragons
Beneath our beds, closed closets where
Clothes hung astray, wondered if we should die
Before we woke. Our father tucked us in bed,
Gave us his kiss, and shaped our hands
Into wedges of prayer with his hands that knew
Daily death; Sundays he dressed you
In a black cassock, sent you to the altar to assist.

Training now to doctor as he did,
You harvest heart, liver, kidney, search cause —
Cleaving the nerves,
Your hands remember his.

Barbara Bartels
Brunswick

Erebus

I wake early now. Perhaps it is because daylight comes sooner now as winter reluctantly gives way to spring. It is not that the nights are shorter, but the blackness wears thin from hard usage, like wool-batting in a comforter, and lets the chill light of mornings through. In the arid gullies of the city streets there is little else to indicate spring's approach.

The slow lightening of my room makes returning to consciousness easier and I no longer shrink from opening my eyes when I realize where I am. It is not a bad room. Not like some furnished rooms with their cracked brown linoleum and exposed water pipes painted the same chalky blue as the walls.

The linoleum of this room is a deep maroon with grandiose swirls of pink fern and is quite new. The bed is new, too, the landlady informs me proudly when I rent the room. Yet when I hand her the rent, she does not invite me in. She is a small gray woman who reveals an uneasy, rodent shrewdness. I sense she would like to have a bed like mine. She caresses its gleaming veneer lovingly, then edges about the room, seeming to sniff at the squat overstuffed chair, the ancient, zinc-lined icebox, the gas plate and miniscule sink wedged into a curtained closet.

On a shelf over the sink there are three dinner plates that match and some odd dishes arranged neatly in piles. The gas plate sits on a small cabinet stuffed with nondescript pots and pans. The aluminum coffee pot is new. I fill it and turn the flame down carefully so it will not boil over while I am gone.

I gather up towel and washcloth, a pink bar of soap in its plastic case, slipping my toothbrush and toothpaste into the pocket of my frayed robe. In the hall stale cooking odors, leaked from behind closed doors, mingle with the necrotic stink of furtive debaucheries. I listen up the stairway. The building groans. The walls flake off graffiti.

The landlady turns the gas heater on each morning at six, moments before my alarm goes off. I seldom find the water more than tepid. It is cold now, but at this hour no one raps imperatively at the door. I wash in tranquility, brush my teeth and lean across the washbasin to squeeze a pimple in the cak-framed mirror. From the toilet seat I contemplate a small black beetle scavenging the area around the metal trash cans. It finds nothing of interest and scurries distractedly into a floor crevice as I leave.

Spooning cornflakes with one hand while I hold a paperback novel spread-eagled between thumb and little finger in the other, I wonder if I shall ever be able to eat without a book in one hand. Perhaps, I think, with someone to talk to it would be different.

It is not so bad on weekdays, this existing alone. It is the Sundays that are hard. Being able to sleep late is only aggravation when one has formed the habit of early rising. In the pristine moments of Sunday dawns, then, I venture out into deserted streets strangely sanctified by their stillness. It is like being in a shadowy region under the earth. The shades watch my passing. Yet I remember one Sunday morning when a wedge of Canadian geese flew, honking, close over the roofs of the sooted buildings, an unheralded miracle of spring.

At the corner store the fat Greek sits yawning behind the counter like a stupefied toad. I buy a fresh roll for my breakfast and pick up a virgin copy of the Sunday paper from the stack by the door.

Back in my room, I try not to think of home where Sundays meant warmth, laughter, and goodnatured rivalry for the gaudy, alluring sheets. I spread them all out on the bed, my favorites — Mutt and Jeff, the Katzenjammers, Prince Valiant. I read them all, out of loyalty, then turn lethargically to the other sections. Silence wraps me in a suffocating suspension of time. I turn the pages carefully lest they wrinkle and disturb the emptiness.

But now it is Monday and there is blessed purpose to the day. I finish eating, rinse my dishes in the sink and nestle the milk carton hopefully against a fading chunk of ice. I glance at my watch. Fifteen minutes before I usually leave. I decided to go anyway. It will be a change to be first in line at the timeclock and not have to race up the stairs to the whining machines to beat the starting buzzer.

On the street the chill wind bites deeply. Beside the sidewalk a single tree casts a thin shadow over the ruptured brick pavement. Its bare branches hold its buds tight-fisted. The small shops at the end of the street are closed. Unclaimed shoes huddle without hope in the cobbler's window. The green-curtained Chinese laundry is occult and alien. Though the last patron of the neighborhood bar has long since wavered into the night, its stale-sour aroma assaults me as I draw near. In the empty store-front next to it, the faded poster of a long forgotten musical comedy leans dispiritedly in the corner, bowed inward as though gut-punched, inkblood fading. Compulsively, I read the names of the cast again, as I do every morning, though I know them all by heart. At the corner I turn up the next street and wonder if the cats will be there.

In the next block the vacant lot gapes between soot-grimed brick warehouses and separated from the alley behind by a disintegrating wooden fence. The lot is mostly gravel mottled with blackened patches of corrupted snow and weeds that have snagged a ragged flotsam of faded candy wrappers and trash washed up from the street. For some reason I cannot fathom, it is the early-morning gathering place for a rabble of alley cats.

Each morning I see them gathering in antagonistic packs. Gaunt, slit-eared and cynical, they circle with a peculiar defensive crouch, restive, tails dragging. They are not of any genus I know. Sometimes they slink from my approach or scatter explosively through the broken fence-slats. When I return at night the lot is empty.

(continued on page 16)

Erebus (continued)

But this morning, as I approach, a hunching figure shambles furtively from an alley opposite the lot. He is intent upon crossing the street and does not see me. Something about him compels me to slacken my pace to a mere semblance of motion, held by an anticipation that he is the key to the mystery.

I am close enough to see the pallor and hollowness of his grey-stubbed cheeks. His head is bare, a long fetlock of thin, colorless hair ragged in the chill wind. He clutches the lapels of a faded tweed jacket. Shapeless chinos flop grotesquely against the chicken-bone thinness of his legs. His shoes are mashed down at the back and holes in his socks expose the dirty whiteness of his heels. The flesh looks soft and vulnerable.

He is lame, combining a sidle and a hop into a queer sort of gait as he mounts the curb with an awkward, eager hobble. It is then that I see the cats. A dozen or more are skulking in, hostile and wary, through the crumbling fence.

The man (I see now how old he is) bends shakily to retrieve a battered pie-plate from a tangle of refuse and weeds. He scrapes at a patch of gravel with his foot to level it. From inside his jacket he extracts a flat-pint bottle that shows oddly white through the green glass. He unscrews the cap awkwardly, fingers stiff, stoops to pour milk into the plate. Then he pulls a grease-stained brown paper bag from his pocket and scatters its contents on the ground.

The cats, still wary, crouch toward him, then suddenly rush, fighting for the scraps. Some are circled around the plate, heads rammed together in an uneasy truce of greed. There is no recognition of their benefactor. He screws the cap back on the empty bottle and slides it into his jacket. He appears to mumble a few words at the cats but I am not sure. His features are stolid, vacuous, as he turns and lurches back across the street, disappearing in the alley.

I quicken my step. The cats glower up as I pass. A yellow tom with a festering eye snarls at me over a scrap of bone, his cold eyes challenging. Another slashes the scrap away from him. A scrabble for the last drops of milk breaks out. The pie-plate flips, upended. A gust catches it, clanks it bottom-side up on the frozen ground.

The same gust strikes my face. I shiver. I think of the steaming, rusty radiators at the factory and hurry rapidly on.

Alice Larkin
Boothbay Harbor

Burning Back the Blueberries

*After sundown
near the Maine border,
the smoke is out again tonight, every-
where
leaving trails,
and riding down rivers
of flame.*

*Women watching from windows,
men in shirtsleeves, rolled
to the elbow, light stub torches
on the barrens.
I stand in the open field,
remember my fear of fire,
knowing it takes what it can
of the night.*

*Don't ask why they gather
in the body of a smoldering bush,
move close to this flame that feeds
itself
in the month when earth swells,
all of us heavy with the tug
of new growth.*

*Dead bushes, dead fruit, the moon
is void,
and I want to ask you
why you burn back the land,
why the acres of charred barrens
will bloom in their own good time,
and why fire draws back into itself,
restoring clusters of taut dark berries
to earth.*

Kathleen Lignell
Hulls Cove

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing

Kennebec, a yearly publication, has the express purpose of offering to as wide an audience as possible a sampling of contemporary Maine writing by both new and established Maine writers. It is hoped that our selection of material not only reveals the professional competence of Maine writers, but also their diversity of interests and talent. Our newsprint folio format is a unique departure for Maine literary magazines, which enables us to print over *four thousand copies* and see they are delivered, mailed, or made available to educational institutions, libraries and individual readers. We believe that, more than anything, Maine writers wish to be read. The rest sometimes follows.

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Lawyer Riley

My first case? Well, my first years were such a jumble of divorces and bankruptcies, uncouplings smooth and bitter, that only one client really stands out. One Saturday evening, when my office was still above the Milo Western Auto, I could hear him climbing the sixty odd steps. He stood for a moment in front of the door, a shadow on the pane, and finally came in. He seemed about my age. We were alone. No introductions. "Ginny threw me out. We was to be married Tuesday. The reason we was together was the first night I asked to stay. She said, 'Oh no. We can't do that. We're not married.' But I wanted her bad and, without thinking, said, 'Then we'll get married.' 'Oh, that's different,' she says and she lets me stay. But now I'm out. Has she broke any laws?"

Well, she hadn't, of course. Except perhaps a law of love but you won't find those in any law library. It was past dinner time and rather than just send him away, I asked him out for a beer. One thing led to another and before I knew it I'd taken his case. "Breach of Promise" was the only grounds I could think of and we took it to the Dover District Court. He took the stand and told his story. His voice was low but clear and he turned in his seat and faced the judge. His short, slow sentences seemed to isolate each event, holding it up for inspection — "She let me stay. We were lovers. But now I'm out." —

I knew we'd never get by a 41-b dismissal but when her lawyer so motioned, the judge sat looking at my client for a long, long moment. He denied the motion and tried the case. We lost, of course. Shouldn't have come through the court house door. But if I've ever made a better speech... when?

James McKenna
Augusta

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