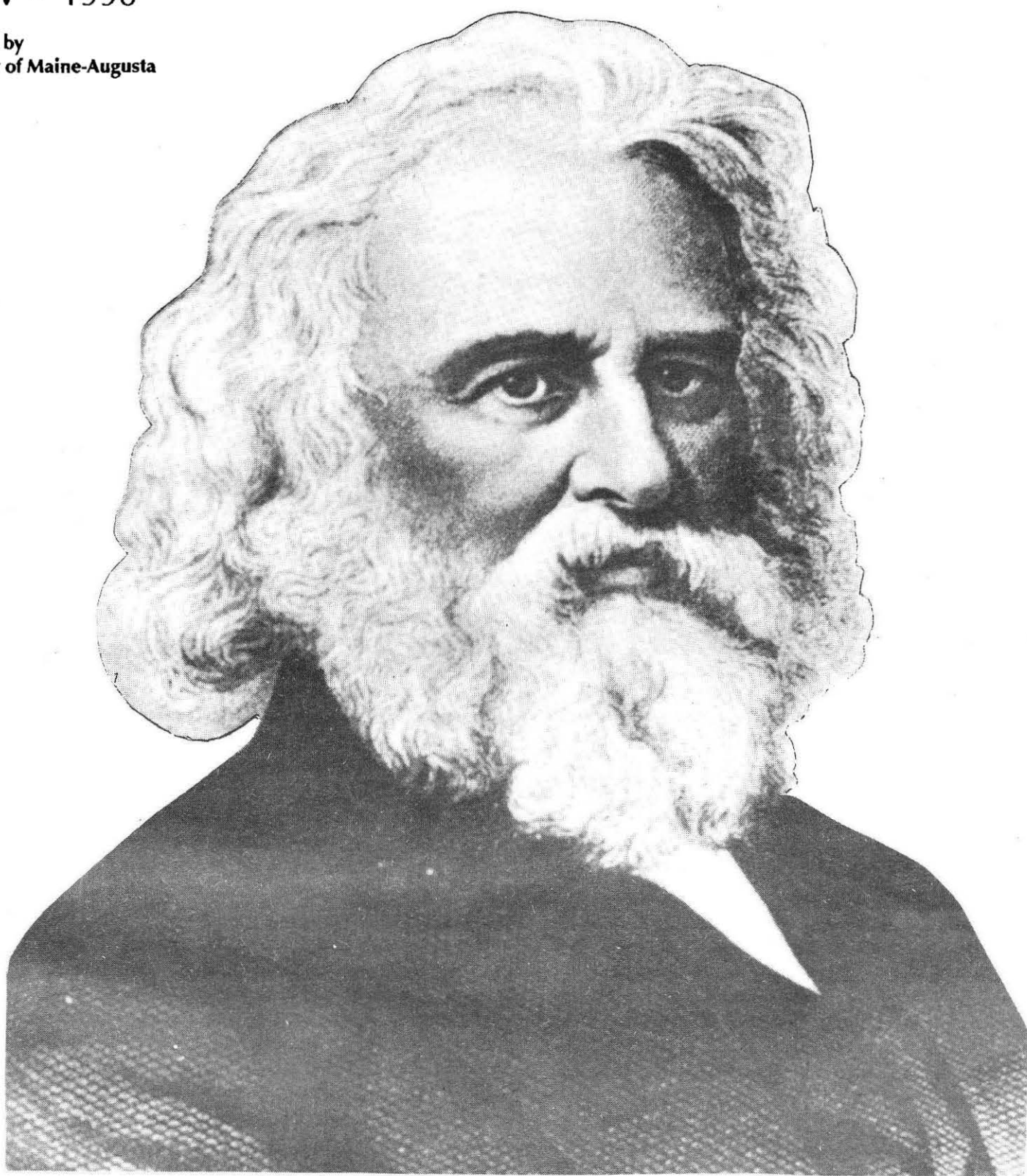


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*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

(from a Psalm of Life, 1839)
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Longfellow's Verse:

"this world is only the negative of the world to come."

Longfellow lived a full and fairly placid 75 years, exactly one-third of them in Maine. Born in Portland to what passed for gentry (grandfathers judges and generals), at a precocious 16 he traveled up the muddy road to Brunswick to attend the new college opened there, Bowdoin. His father, a lawyer and briefly U.S. congressman, was a trustee. Longfellow, always decorous, even a bit of a dandy, did not make waves—he learned his languages, dabbled in verse, and because he felt constrained by the Congregational clergy of the college, founded the first Unitarian society (which signaled his life-long cheerful and optimistic view of human nature).

The class of 1825 turned out to be a bumper one, including President Franklin Pierce and up-from-Salem Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although Hawthorne later gave Longfellow the idea for *Evangeline*, saying it did not suit his own talents, and the poet did write a moving elegy to the novelist, the two were never fast friends. A classmate wrote, "Longfellow was one of the literary club, while Hawthorne was one of the drinking club." It figures. After graduation, the brooding Hawthorne sequestered himself, staring at his soul, for twelve years in a Salem garret, then went on to write some of our darkest masterpieces.

And sunny Longfellow? He went on to become "popular." First, however, Bowdoin offers their green graduate a post as professor of modern languages, a new field—and he a crisp nineteen! Longfellow accepts, and in a move unthinkable today or unless your father is a trustee, dispatches himself to Europe for three years of pleasure and traveling "to prepare himself." He puts off as long as possible working as an academic, or working at all, but by the fall of 1829 he does settle in to his duties at Brunswick. (He held his later professorship at Harvard only 18 years, and retired himself at 47.) In 1831, a Portland debutante, Mary Storer Potter, becomes his wife. He translates texts from French, Spanish and Italian (literal renderings), but is not thrilled by rural Bowdoin, and within five years is back in Europe for two more years of touring. Here, in Rotterdam, his young wife dies of a miscarriage, the first of the very few dark clouds that were to scud across his life. He returns in 1836 to take up his Harvard position, and except for the infrequent visit, his ties to Maine are severed.

The residue of Maine left in the imagination is not substantial—a trace (no more) of the Indian, a passing reference to tourmaline, a fascination with forests, an elegy to a Bowdoin professor, "Parker Cleaveland" (written 40 years later, printed here), and the one truly Maine poem, the achingly beautiful hymn to Portland, "My Lost Youth" (printed here). Lots of wood gets burned in fireplaces, and lots of masts sway in generic harbors, but both *idées fixes* could be drawn from his fifty years in Boston. Basically, our boy was bookish. Mostly, he wrote about what he read about, and in the accepted "poetic" manner freeze-dried and vacuum-sealed by the English neo-classicals and Romantics of a century earlier. Like most romantics, he did (or said he did) a lot of longing for the past, but again like most, he preferred to keep the longing generalized. Thus, apart from two references to Deering's Woods, the "city by the sea" in "My Lost Youth" could be any port town. We're not talking "realism" here, even though American Realism had pretty well established itself by the time of his death in 1882.

I spent the entire summer reading every poem he ever wrote. Let's face it, he's awful. After you fight through the thickets of archaic pronouns (thou-s, thy-s, thine-s) used long after Americans stopped using them, the quaint verb forms (dost-s), and the ubiquitous invocations ("O, Life," etc.), you still sink into the syntax of the longer pieces like *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, or *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, until you think you have drowned in goo. Longfellow was a long fellow. The modern reader needs oxygen. The overwhelming impressions left after total immersion are bewilderment at his former popularity, and irritation at his dishonesty. He's smug, corny, prudish and phoney. To put it bluntly, I just don't believe he *feels* what he says he's feeling. Worse, I sense that he does not *believe* what he says he's believing. (On the other hand, I half-hope he isn't feeling and believing these things. Oscar Wilde once said to a fellow, "My dear sir, you are so unutterably *sincere* that I cannot believe a word you say." Like that.) Longfellow is "on automatic." Once he gets cranked up, no one is better at creating the glossy *surface* of a poem. His rhythms (his "rolling numbers," he called them) are relentless; his insipid rhymes are predictable and emerge as if from a cornucopia; his tattered imagery would embarrass lesser men. It's like pushing pedals on an old player-piano—you exercise a bit and all the music just comes out. You don't have to know how to play, and the music sounds the same every time.

But let's be fair. Or at least polite. In his longer pieces, Longfellow spoke of his

"legend style." One critic describes it as an "atmosphere of dreamy distance." Now for polite. An excellent critic, Edward Hirsh, circumlocutes in this way:

Like much 19th c. poetry, Longfellow's seems in retrospect leisurely, even too relaxed. The slow development of ideas, the elaboration of details, the multiplication of parallels, the explication of the already-evident . . . destroy some of his poems and in varying combinations and degrees characterize most of them.

Hirsh goes on, his academic manner as distant from his meaning as Longfellow's language was from his emotions: "The language, too, bears the stamp of its time in its tendency to expansive statement, its often predictable vocabulary and phraseology, its fondness for literary diction . . . and the addiction to poetically picturesque subject matter." Enough polite. With Longfellow, the graceful quickly becomes glib. Such plush just doesn't cut it with people who really *like* to read (rather than be read to) and actually love language. After people began to heed Ezra Pound's call to "make it new," and after 1912, the Great Divide of Modernism, when Harriet Monroe began to publish the "new" in her *Chicago Poetry*, the taste for Longfellow and his unwearied optimism soured. Modernists spent a lot of time denigrating him and others in the 19th c. canon. He fell. John Greenleaf Whittier fell. William Cullen Bryant. James Whitcomb Riley. But others stand, and the taller for being contemporaneous with those just mentioned: Poe's poetry, some of Thoreau's, some of Melville's verse, Stephen Crane's poetry, some of Whitman's (despite the wind bellows), and of course, almost all of Dickinson's, America's finest. When I think of these tormented Americans grappling with their tortures, Longfellow's ick just irks.

However, in an odd way, Longfellow is *ours*. Why that should be is a puzzle, because he was not in any sense a "man of the people." Hardly earthy, certainly decorous, prim, a bit aloof, academic, a formal distance in his life and tone would never allow us to speak of "old Hank" as we easily say "Walt" or wryly, "Miss Emily." One reason may be that he has sunk so deeply into the national consciousness, that he got to so many of us so young at our wooden school desks with the inkwells, that as we read along we are surprised when we bump into a phrase so American that it is as familiar as our own hand: "*Thy fate is the common fate of all,*" we read, "*Into each life some rain must fall.*" Did he say that? Or: "*Oh reader, stoop down and write/With thy finger in the dust.*" Or: "*Under the spreading chestnut-tree/The village smithy stands.*" Or: "*Hardly a man is now alive,/Who remembers that famous day*" ("Paul Revere's Ride"). See what I mean? Try this quatrain: "*Lives of great men all remind us/We can make our lives sublime./And, departing, leave behind us/Footprints on the sands of time.*" That one will always get you; the "sands of time" may not mean much when you're ten years old, but what's important now is that you've *known* it since you were ten years old. There's a guilt in all of this, especially if you're literary. Here's the grand old man, the sweet-singer of our youths—not like the crabby National Monument Robert Frost, or Carl Sandburg who needed a haircut, but Longfellow. You're supposed to *revere* his work, even if you can no longer read it. I feel guilty even as I type. He's ours.

He can be silly and not know it, and write something like "Poet's Calendar," in which every month speaks in its own "I." He's ours. He can string out his clichés: winds do a lot of moaning in the eaves, for example; rivers flowing remind him of—surprise!—Time; everywhere there is the sentimental claptrap of cemeteries, gravestones with their messages about "Life," and scores of fires in fireplaces, and of course the "Seasons" which (remarkably) change. What's called the Pathetic Fallacy sits on every page (Ruskin's "cruel, crawling foam," human qualities attributed to the inanimate). There's the breathless hyping of emotion in his parallelism, the collected exotic names (Coromandel, Chimborazo, Potosi), and the soaring rhetorical questions ("Where are the old Egyptian Demi-gods and kings?"). Brooks "babble" without embarrassment, cataracts "roar" unashamedly. And pages of tides—you know what that leads to: time passing, thus thoughts of mortality (our lot) and its opposite (his hope). It's NutraSweet, but it's still *ours*. Especially when you come across a line like "*Let us then be up and doing*" and feel "American" all over again in the old way we no longer permit ourselves. When you taste the forthright flavor of a line like, "*In the long sleepless watches of the night,*" there is a faint stirring that feels patriotic, an atavistic whisper, that half-ashamed, half-proud feeling at Fenway just before a ball game when you stand and cannot sing but sort of mouth "dawn's early light"

and "perilous night" and you wait resentfully for "bombs bursting in air" because it is all engraved too deeply, too long ago, to erase. All rhetoric, of course. Not good, but still ours. True, when you get the *best* of Longfellow laid in front of you—all excerpted from the famous pieces—he's even pretty darned good. But basically, the rest is 19th c. kitsch. It's Rod McKuen.

I like to place him in the tradition of "popular poets," every one of them more "popular" than "poet." *Hiawatha* sold 10,000 copies on its first day out in London alone; over a lifetime, Longfellow was more popular than Tennyson—both there and here. Brit royalty hauled him in and did to him whatever retrograde thing it is that royalty does to heroes. Massachusetts children presented him with an armchair made of wood from the original "spreading chestnut tree." Although he is a dote better than the following, he illustrates the writer-reader love affair they managed. Martin Tupper (1810-1889), an Englishman, made a handsome living singing the glories of the Anglo-Saxon race and composing ditties for special occasions like Queen Victoria's birthday. Mrs. Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), also English, was a bit more sophisticated, but filled her verse with tears (lots of lachrymation) and never once departed from a bourgeois Brit value. Her children died early (which she exploited), and her husband deserted her (understandably), but she was a folk classic. "The boy stood on the burning deck," and so on. And in America, the syndicated Edgar Guest, like a bad guest who would never disagree: moral in every poem, subjects general (home, Mother, children, friends, weather), genial tone—a literary Norman Rockwell.

Longfellow is always finding "something unsubstantial, ghostly" in things, but he never tells us what these phantoms or spirits or whatever are. True, he occasionally visited the spiritualist's table in Boston, but he was too much the Unitarian to push the matter, and too shrewd to thump a zealot's tub. Maybe too influenced by dreamy Washington Irving? He thought it "poetic"; I find it "pretend-profound." Case in point: compare Wordsworth's convincing classic, "Tintern Abbey," or better, "Intimations of Immortality."

Longfellow must have had the best hearing of any poet who ever lived. He's always hearing things, usually far away. He "hears the crowing cock" a lot. He hears the lark and linnet call. And the wren. But mostly he's an ocular observer, and his real forte is the striking visual image: the blacksmith sweating at his forge; Hiawatha wrestling with his father in a wonderful Freudian tableau; Priscilla, "the loveliest maiden of Plymouth," mounted on a snow white bull and off to her wedding with John Alden. And this is fitting. Sight is the puritanical sense; unlike tasting, touching, or smelling which require one to get up close, sight allows the luxury of information without intimacy. There is some voyeurism: callow youths peep at the pneumatic Evangeline in church; and even Gabriel, the chosen one, lurks outside her darkened window as she mounts the stairs and enters the bedroom with "curtains of white" carrying a lighted lamp. "Ah!" Longfellow exclaims, "she was fair, exceeding fair to behold, as she stood with/ Naked snow-white feet on the gleaming floor of her chamber!" Longfellow is good at this kind of scene. "Little she dreamed that below," he writes, "among the trees of the orchard,/ Waited her lover and watched for the gleam of her lamp and her shadow."

His women are idealized creatures, vapid Evangeline more than most. Longfellow just goes goofy: "Sweet was her breath as the breath of kine that feed in the meadows." When you stop gagging, we can get back to the story; the halitotic girl has work to do, milking. "Patiently stood the cows . . . and yielded their udders/ Unto the milkmaid's hand." Right, yielded. Once finished, "gentle Evangeline" sits "close at her father's side . . . spinning flax for the loom." This distaff dream-child knows how to prepare for a fellow: she has a clothes-press "ample and high, on whose spacious shelves were carefully folded/ Linen and woollen stuffs, by the hand of Evangeline woven./ This was the precious dower she would bring to her husband in marriage." Soon, of course, the bucolic village is burned, and the lovers separated, but not before she spends a grotesque night on the beach sleeping on the bosom of her dead and stiff father. It's great stuff. She makes her way to the Louisiana bayous, searching for Gabriel the Good, but fails because Gabriel is out hooting around America somewhere, and the reader suspects that he doesn't really want to be found—despite the dowry. And who could blame him? One yearns to sit her down, talk to her about her accursed virginity, tell her to "give him up, honey, he doesn't want to be found," and then re-title the poem, *Doxology to a Doxy*. Alas, no.

In 1843, Longfellow married again, to an independent-minded Boston socialite, Frances (Fanny) Appleton. Her father, one of the richest men in New England, was one of the principal financiers of the Massachusetts Industrial Revolution, his dough deep into the company towns. He just up and bought Longfellow the Craigie House on Brattle Street, where he resided the rest of his years. (George Washington's headquarters during the siege of Boston.) Life was, as ever, smooth, and the Longfellows at-home Wednesday Evenings were legendary, as

the likes of Charles Eliot Norton, James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes convened and chowed down.

Then two tragedies struck. An infant daughter died. There is no hint of this in "The Children's Hour" (that odd upper-class practice of reserving a special one hour each day for the children); instead, he "hears the patter of little feet." But Fanny's brutal death by burning, in 1861, almost brought him under. She was wearing a filmy dress when hot wax from a candle caused the dress to explode in flames. She rushed to Longfellow, who struggled to smother them. Sadly, his efforts were insufficient. Longfellow himself was so badly burned that the scarring on his face made shaving impossible, thus the full beard of his last 21 widower years. Some eighteen years after Fanny's death, he wrote "The Cross of Snow," about missing her and the "martyrdom of fire." Other than that, he never approached the subject with any directness. Some have speculated that his fascination with fires flows from the event, but it dates from decades earlier and fires are always seen as comforting.

Unlike Eliot or Yeats or Frost, Longfellow was not a poet who got much better over the years. He became institutionalized, our "national poet," certainly safer than Whitman (and he rhymed). Most commentators agree that canonization was just fine with Longfellow. Many, like me, think that Longfellow—from the first free of financial pressure—spent a lifetime hiding out. What better place to hide than in a poetry of Generalized Emotion and mainstream morality? And then later, in Enshrinement?

He writes of a man who would "wall himself round with a fort." Elsewhere, writing about visiting a "little church among its graves," he sounds the familiar escapist chord:

*Here would I stay, and let the world
With its distant thunder roar and roll;
Storms do not rend the sail that is furled;
Nor like a dead leaf, tossed and whirled
In an eddy of wind, is the anchored soul.*

He kept the sail furled, and avoided striking the individual note which might give away the person. With three exceptions, the "storms did not rend the sail," and when they did we hear little about it. One critic who wrote an introduction to his works says it right out: "Longfellow was afraid . . . His fears remained nameless, inexpressible . . . He made a small but strong fort of verse." As a crowned bard, "he was hiding in the crowd." His letters, fairly dull, and his diaries, do tell us of insomnia, severe headaches, lethargy, and more than your usual amount of melancholy. *Something* was in there. But he cannot name it. His complaints are symptoms, not causes. He was afraid. But of what?

**Terry Plunkett
Hallowell**
teaches at UMA

1807	Born Portland
1821	Entered Bowdoin
1825	Graduated Bowdoin, agreed to become professor of modern languages there
1826-29	Traveled in Europe to "prepare himself"
1829	Began teaching at Bowdoin
1831	Married Mary Storer Potter
1834-36	Again toured Europe; wife's death there
1836	Began professorship at Harvard
1839	"The Psalm of Life" (in <i>Voices of the Night</i>)
1842	<i>The Village Blacksmith</i>
1843	Married Fanny Appleton & settled in Craigie House in Cambridge
1847	<i>Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie</i>
1854	Retired from Harvard
1855	<i>The Song of Hiawatha</i>
1858	<i>The Courtship of Miles Standish</i>
1861	Fanny's death
1863	"Paul Revere's Ride," in <i>Tales of a Wayside Inn</i>
1882	Died at Craigie House

(Ed. Note: Each year KENNEBEC reviews a Maine writer from an earlier generation. Previous subjects include Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Wilbert Snow, and E.A. Robinson.)

My Lost Youth

Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town.
And my youth comes back to me,
And a verse of a Lapland song
Is haunting my memory still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

I can see the shadowy lines of its trees,
And catch, in sudden gleams,
The sheen of the far-surrounding seas,
And islands that were the Hesperides
Of all my boyish dreams.
And the burden of that old song,
It murmurs and whispers still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And the Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.
And the voice of that wayward song,
Is singing and saying still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

I remember the bulwarks by the shore,
And the fort upon the hill;
The sunrise gun, with its hollow roar,
The drum-beat repeated o'er and o'er,
And the bugle wild and shrill.
And the music of that old song
Throbs in my memory still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

I remember the sea-fight far away¹
How it thundered o'er the tide!
And the dead captains, as they lay
In their graves, o'erlooking the tranquil bay,
Where they in battle died.
And the sound of that mournful song
Goes through me with a thrill:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

I can see the breezy dome of groves,
The shadows of Deering's Woods;
And the friendships old and
the early loves
Come back with a Sabbath sound,
as of doves
In quiet neighbourhoods.
And the verse of that sweet old song,
It flutters and murmurs still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."



Graduation silhouette, 1825

I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the schoolboy's brain;
The song and the silence in the heart,
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain.
And the voice of that fitful song
Sings on, and is never still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

There are things of which I may not speak;
There are dreams that cannot die;
There are thoughts that make the
strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor into the cheek,
And a mist before the eye.
And the words to that fatal song
Come over me like a chill:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

Strange to me now are the forms I meet
When I visit the dear old town;
But the native air is pure and sweet,
And the trees that o'ershadow
each well-known street,
As they balance up and down,
Are singing the beautiful song,
Are sighing and whispering still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

And Deering's Woods are fresh and fair,
And with joy that is almost pain
My heart goes back to wander there,
and among the dreams of the days that were,
I find my lost youth again.
And the strange and beautiful song,
The groves are repeating it still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are
long, long thoughts."

H.W.L.

¹This was the engagement between the *Enterprise* and *Boxer*, off the harbour of Portland, in which both captains were slain. They were buried side by side, in the cemetery on Mountjoy. H.W.L.



Inhaling Longfellow

Growing up in a small Maine town during the 30's gave most of us who underwent the experience a last glimpse of the 19th century. Many of the families who lived in the village kept a cow or two and a flock of hens. Life was simple but rarely easy. Three or four generations often lived under the same roof. By Thanksgiving, cellars were lined with barrels, burlap bags and jars—all filled to the brim with fruit and vegetables from the gardens. Meat and fish were hanging smoked or laid away in brine. From then until spring, wood fires crackled through the long cold evenings; it was a time for popcorn and apples, stories, games, the Bible and hymn singing, and in my case at least, poetry.

My grandmother was the family poet. She not only wrote poems but memorized and recited dozens of her own as well as those of others. Apparently these activities did little to curb her appetite because she worked on all of us from time to time, urging one of us to write a single verse, or another to memorize the opening stanzas of *Evangeline*. Over her years, there were ninety-six of them, I believe that only my Uncle Clarence and I came anywhere near meeting her expectations, mainly as listeners, although both of us could recite from memory the first two or three verses from a half dozen or so well-known works.

The standard fare was Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell—probably in that order, at least in respect to the amount of attention given to them. My grandfather, who ordinarily managed to disappear during poetry sessions, usually hung around when *The Village Blacksmith* was on the program. The lines, "his brow is wet with honest sweat, / he earns whate'er he can, / and looks the whole world in the face, / for he owes not any man," were so in tune with his own work ethic that he would linger in the doorway to the next room until the passage was over. My younger brother would rarely listen for very long to anything but *The Song of Hiawatha*. The sounds of names such as Gitche Gumee or Minnehaha usually made him giggle; this, or any other response for that matter, always pleased Gram. If there were all-around family favorites, they were probably *Snowbound* and *The Children's Hour*. I don't remember that we ever thought of Longfellow and Whittier as two different authors.

As the 30's ended and I entered high school, I did acquire a familiarity with other poets, both American and British, but to this day the words of those New Englanders remain engraved in my mind. I understand that it is not fashionable among scholars and critics today to give them a very lofty position among their contemporaries. In my own case, it is probably the memories which accompany the words that I appreciate.

Do children today memorize and recite poetry? I don't know; I did and I hope that I'm the better for it.

Charles Danforth
Augusta
is Academic Dean at UMA
& grew up in Castine

The Village Blacksmith

Under a spreading chestnut tree
 The village smithy stands;
 The smith, a mighty man is he,
 With large and sinewy hands;
 And the muscles of his brawny arms
 Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
 His face is like the tan;
 His brow is wet with honest sweat,
 He earns whate'er he can,
 And looks the whole world in the face,
 For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
 You can hear his bellows blow;
 You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
 With measured beat and slow,
 Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
 When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
 Look in at the open door;
 They love to see the flaming forge,
 And hear the bellows roar,
 And catch the burning sparks that fly
 Like chaff from a threshing floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
 And sits among his boys;
 He hears the parson pray and preach,
 He hears his daughter's voice,
 Singing in the village choir,
 And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
 Singing in Paradise!
 He needs must think of her once more,
 How in the grave she lies;
 And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
 A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,
 Onward through life he goes;
 Each morning sees some task begin,
 Each evening sees it close;
 Something attempted, something done,
 Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
 For the lesson thou has taught!
 Thus at the flaming forge of life
 Our fortunes must be wrought;
 Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
 Each burning deed and thought!

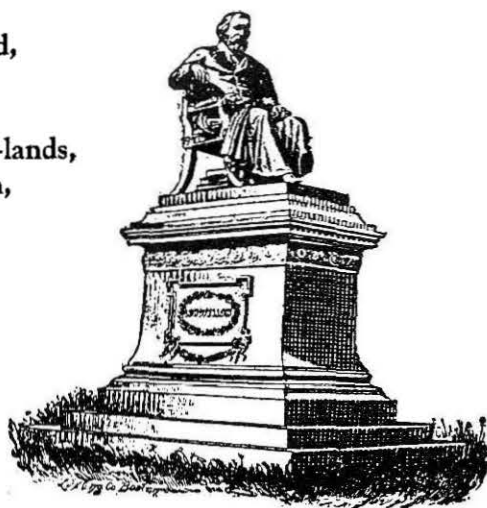
H.W.L.

Hiawatha: Did Longfellow Know Indians?

Should you ask me, whence these stories?
Whence these legends and traditions,
With the odors of the forest,
With the dew and damp of meadows,
With the curling smoke of wigwams,
With the rushing of great rivers,
With their frequent repetitions,
And their wild reverberations,
As of thunder in the mountains?

I should answer, I should tell you,
"From the forests and the prairies,
From the great lakes of the Northland,
From the land of the Ojibways,
From the land of the Dacotahs,
From the mountains, moors, and fen-lands,
Where the heron, the Shuh-shuh-gah,
Feeds among the reeds and rushes.
I repeat them as I heard them
From the lips of Nawadaha,
The musician, the sweet-singer."

from the opening of *Hiawatha*



Although Longfellow-bashing can be fun, I consider his influence as an ideologue too serious for mockery. *Hiawatha* offers us a revealing look at the cultural values of 19th c. white society. As a romantic portrait of the "noble savage," it influenced popular thinking about American Indians. This creative exploitation of tribal legends not only distorts the native heritage for fancy, but confuses authentic indigenous traditions.

He wrote *Hiawatha* at the height of the "Great Transformation": steamboats, railways, hundreds of factories, waves of immigrants washing up—all brought about a national market economy. The incessant demand for new land and cheap natural resources led to campaigns to force the aboriginal inhabitants from their ancestral territories. The following view, expressed in an 1838 literary journal, is typical: "The moment the New World was discovered, the doom of the Savage Races who inhabited it was sealed; they must either conform to the institutions of the Europeans, or disappear from the face of the earth . . . The Savage tribes who held this continent by an uncertain occupancy, roaming over its vast regions as hunters, or in deadly warfare with each other, had no right, in the nature of things, to shut this half of the world against the introduction of civilized life."

In contrast to the western frontier, where natives struggled to defend their homeland against invading white aggressors, New England's Indians had been subdued by force of arms during the preceding centuries. Impoverished, languishing on minuscule reservations, the small remnant tribes suffering their miserable existence were considered harmless. Whites generally believed in the "inevitable and speedy extinction" of Indians. Indeed, it became popular to write about "the last of the Mohicans," and so on. In a rather gloomy account of Maine's Indians, a regional historian penned this melodramatic musing in 1833: "Now since the deeds of the savage no longer make us quail, the feelings of humanity may predominate, and we may . . . indulge the tear that steals impassioned o'er the nation's doom; To us twig from Adam's stock is dear, and tears of sorrow deck an Indian's tomb."

Infatuated by Europe's romantic movement, however, and reflecting their own dissatisfaction with modernization, some American artists expressed their growing alienation by creative escapism. Longfellow was one of these. Romantics, celebrating "otherness," they idealized the exotic, glorified the past, and worshiped nature. In the USA, a "country without a past," they turned to nature as "untamed wilderness" and imagined Indians as "living fossils from a primeval period."

A burgeoning nationalism also was responsible for this sudden interest in Indian traditions. Rather than tapping into Europe's history, some artists employed Native American culture to legitimize the new nation's ideological roots. This "nativism" developed as a reaction against the influx of poor European immigrants, especially Irish Catholics, which among some WASPS resulted in a virtual xenophobia. As a result, Indians were "in."

Not surprisingly, these trends affected Longfellow. One of his classmates at Bowdoin published a poem about a local 17th c. Abenaki sagamore, titled "The Fall of Worumbo." In 1825, Longfellow followed suit with "The Indian Hunter." Especially influential was cultural anthropologist Henry Schoolcraft. Arguing that it was important "to rescue from oblivion the annals of a noble-minded, but unfortunate and persecuted race," Schoolcraft was one of the first American scholars interested in "Indian history." Serving as Indian Agent for the U.S. Government at the Ojibway reservation of Sault Ste Marie from 1822 to 1841, Schoolcraft was married to the daughter of a local Ojibway woman and white fur-trader. He knew tribal lore and spoke the language. From the early 1830s onwards, he published accounts of Indian legends, which Longfellow read. In 1837, Schoolcraft observed: "The early history of the aborigines is taking a deeper hold on literary attention in America." In 1839, he wrote *Algic Researches* [Algonquian], followed by *Oneota, or Characteristics of the Red Race of America* (1847), and a monumental six-volume study, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting . . . the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1851-1857).

In 1855, although famous, retired from teaching, and snug in his Craigie House in Cambridge with his wife Fanny, Longfellow nonetheless heard the sneers of foreign cavaliers, and the complaints of domestic critics, "that the poetry of America is not essentially American." He decided "to do for our old Indian legends what the unknown Finnish poets had done for theirs . . ." Inspired by the Finnish epic *Kalevala* and the Scandinavian *Edda*, he sat down to create an authentic "national" poem.

Longfellow also probably read an 1848 article by Ephraim Squier, "Manabozho and the Great Serpent; an Algonquin Tradition." Squier learned this legend about Manitou Lake from Kah-ge-gah-bowh, an Ojibway (Chippewa) tribesman also known as George Copway, who recited the tradition of [M]Nanabozho, their mythic hero who brought his people great gifts such as tobacco, hunting, and agriculture. Too, the poet used personal experiences. According to his brother's biography, Longfellow saw "a few of the straggling remainder of the Algonquians [Wabanaki] in Maine," and in 1837, as a professor at Harvard, he "witnessed the display of [Chief] Black Hawk and his Sacs and Foxes on Boston Common; and a few years before he made the acquaintance of the fine-tempered Kah-ge-gah-bowh [alias George Copway], the Ojibway chief, and entertained him at his house, trusting not unlikely that he might derive . . . some helpful suggestions."

Thus, almost a quarter century after the new consciousness began, and with some (white) academic knowledge and some personal experience, and he nearing fifty, this poet-of-the-north in 1855 gave us *Hiawatha*.

There is no doubt that Longfellow grafted his poem on the Ojibway legend of the culture hero Nanabozho. Curious, however, that he used the name of a legendary Mohawk chief Hiawatha ("Seeker after Wampum"), founder of the Iroquois Confederacy. Indeed, in a letter to his German translator, Longfellow acknowledged this: "Hiawatha is Iroquois. I chose it instead of Manabazho [sic] (Ojibway) for the sake of euphony. It means 'the wise seer, or prophet'—Hiawatha the Wise." Of this deliberate confusion, a critic later wrote: "if a Chinese traveler, during the middle ages, inquiring into the history and religion of the western nations, had confounded King Alfred with King Arthur, and both with Odin, he could not have made a more preposterous confusion of names and characters." I agree.

In conclusion: Fifty years later, the Ojibway staged a "Passion Play," based (ironically) on "their" traditions as described in *Hiawatha*. Not surprisingly, Nanabozho's traditional position as culture hero was usurped by the "prophet" Hiawatha: "To them, it has always been a matter of great pride that the poet . . . immortalized their leader as the central figure . . . With the utmost eagerness they welcomed the idea of a national play based on his version." To the Ojibway, *Hiawatha* had acquired all the sacredness of honored tradition. To me, inserting this imaginary lore into their authentic culture, these Native Americans created a paradox which causes me to think twice about bashing Longfellow: fiction has become fact, making it tough to ridicule the Harvard bard for his poetic license without also undercutting the victims of his epic excess.

Harald E.L. Prins
Hallowell

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By the Shores

I.

By the shores of the Platte
the name Hiawatha leaped out at me
as I rummaged in the phone book.
And I thought, his mother knew
and put upon her infant the charge of nobility.
I closed the book to the random name
and went to the library for the chosen one
and came home to my silence
by the long past and near past
and sat on the shores of living places.
I saw the Kennebec again.

By the time I was born Longfellow's
better part of town had turned worse.
But from the start, over me a seven-foot wingspan
pushed the warmth of upper air
down to where I stood, contemplating a pin
from the Five and Ten for beauty
to prime the hard-wearing cloth of my dress,
taking home every worn book in the library,
a harvest for the cargo pockets of my mind.
Zen asks, What's dream, what's waking?
I was the land where lavender blooms in green moss.
The flower and the stone were the same to me.
Dream and waking met in a higher waking:
Reason, verve, fragrance—all one.
My parents were proud of my featherweight achievements
in the grades. They fine-tuned me to
metronome markings in the knowledge of good and evil.
I was never kissed or hugged.

II.

And the seasons moved on.
Things got better for us.
I took piano lessons.
The lowering sky of Maine held off snow all day
to give us the surprise of a blazing sunset
and the burnished floor of the porch
continuing the gold leaf of autumn,
a few chairs subdued of summer talk,
the weave broken in places.

By the shores of the Kennebec
cold winter light conditioned my muscles
in the fortress of my upstairs bedroom.
At the chipped white table,
homework done, practice put off,
books of my own increased in momentum and pages.

Would you believe I wrote about men and women
when anatomy beyond my own
was girl paper dolls modest in underwear?
My friends and I dressed them, speculating
on what "loving too much" meant
in the stories our mothers hid from us.
We never dreamed the clue was in our brothers.

III.

Memory isn't something you lose, like your way.
It's never out of mind, leading more and more
into becoming more and more
the future as it passes through the heart.

I heard myself reciting in class,
stumbling over Gitche Gumee
because my eyes wouldn't pull back,

maybe I should say the corners
pulled to my best friend Imogene
making funny faces.
I dreaded Minnehaha to come
because practicing it at home
we doubled over laughing.
What if I had married the boy whose initials
carved with mine in a heart stood for years
on a tree cut down to make room
for a bigger Cony High?
By the shores of the Charles I walked
dark streets after evening classes to save
a nickel (the whole ride home cost a dime).
By the shores of the Thames, Martin.
The man I married.

IV.

*As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman.
Though she bends him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows,
Useless each without the other!*
We taught, we worked, we moved about.
*Love is sunshine, hate is shadow,
Life is checkered shade and sunshine,
Rule by love, O Hiawatha!*
Rock fields to cross, frightening winds
that distorted well-intentioned words.
*Half is mine, although I follow;
Rule by patience, Laughing Water!*
We lived our bothness,
I and thou, and the I not thou, the thou not I,
in humped and broken lines, half lights
and agitations. In warmth and comfort
and excitement beyond the human size we made together
touching on something that changes everything
itself unchanged—all the familiar
extraordinary of an ordinary pair of lives.
Infinity in a small frame.
*First a speck, and then a vulture,
till the air is dark with pinions . . .
First a shadow, then a sorrow,
Till the air is dark with anguish.*



Longfellow, 1841 Cambridge silhouette

V.

By the shores of the Platte
no sweet smelling cedars,
by any other name no roses.
*Face to face we speak together,
But we cannot speak when absent,
Cannot send our voices from us.*
The harrowing. The harrowing.
*I will come and sit beside you
In the mystery of my passion!*
All that was unspoken!
*Do not lay such heavy burdens
In the graves of those you bury . . .
For the spirits faint beneath them.
Only give them food to carry,
Only give them fire to light them.*
And quietly the quiet came,
the slow beautiful contact of presence
extending itself into flawed self, frayed,
without clues to its luminosity,
only luminous.

VI.

Morning after morning the senses
catch in the pincers of distinct detail
till the time when for the first time
what's not there becomes a human condition
apart from action.
Waves of memory rise and fall.
A wave in fact is time and motion;
in truth is crest; tower
lightning-racked, lightning-lit
exposing a tunnel of amethysts inside,
the very rich hours of pinnacles.

I lock fingers with the water
slipping through my fingers
by the shores of Gitche Gumee.
Nostalgia is empty, memory approaches
imagination's high ground.
Remembering the future by it,
creating it every day before me, learning
every human heart is like my own,
moment to moment I approach wholeness.
*Heard the lapping of the waters,
Sounds of music, words of wonder;
"Minnie-wawa!" said the pine trees,
"Mudway-aushka!" said the water.*

**Ida Fasel
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All quotation is from Song of Hiawatha.*



Longfellow to Hawthorne, 1847: "This success I owe entirely to you, for being willing to forego the pleasure of writing a prose tale, which many people would have taken for poetry, that I might write a poem, which many people take for prose."

From *EVANGELINE*

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighboring ocean
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

This is the forest primeval; but where are the hearts that beneath it
Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of the huntsman
Where is the thatch-roofed village, the home of Acadian farmers,—
Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands,
Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of heaven?
Waste are those pleasant farms, and the farmers forever departed!
Scattered like dust and leaves, when the mighty blasts of October
Seize them, and whirl them aloft, and sprinkle them far o'er the ocean.
Naught but tradition remains of the beautiful village of Grand-Pré.

Ye who believe in affection that hopes, and endures, and is patient,
Ye who believe in the beauty and strength of woman's devotion,
List to the mournful tradition, still sung by the pines of the forest;
List to a Tale of Love in Acadie, home of the happy.

H.W.L.

Ever an *Evangeline*?

Eight years ago, I hurled myself along icy roads to remote outposts, such as the South Solon Meetinghouse, with four poets on a grant called "Spirit of Place: 200 Years of Maine Poetry." The readings would often begin with the opening lines of *Evangeline* being bellowed from the belfry or back choir loft and the people, huddled in thick overcoats, would turn to better hear the sad, familiar, tale set among "the murmuring pines and the hemlocks."

Many of us know Acadie through Longfellow's imagery: a peaceful, pristine peasant land nestled in a fruitful valley near age-old woods and the Atlantic, where the "richest was poor and the poorest lived in abundance." Unfortunately, the poet never visited the land he made famous and thus the evocative "this is the forest primeval" owes more to his memories of Maine, or possibly shows shades of Sweden, than to the actual Acadian scenery. A tide-washed plane dotted with whispering willows, would have described it more accurately. His biographers all agree: there were no murmuring hemlocks, and few pines, on Nova Scotia on whose Bay of Minas lay Longfellow's Grand Pré.

I have heard it said that poets make dangerous historians because the poet's fancy becomes the reader's fact. Ever since 1847, when *Evangeline* first appeared, considerable controversy has surrounded its historical accuracy. Scenery aside, how well does Longfellow fare against the record of the past? Who were the Acadians? Why were they dispersed from their apparent Eden?

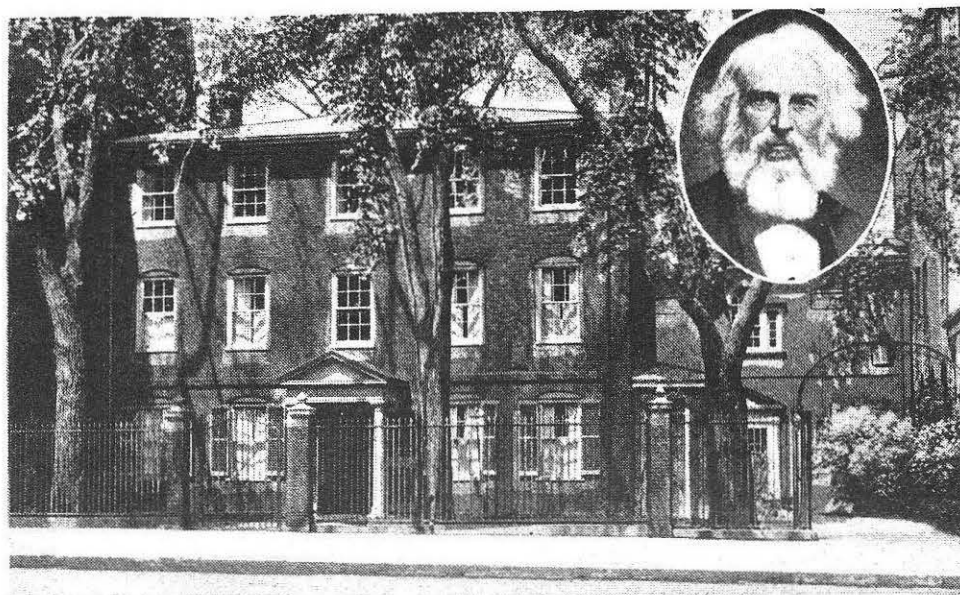
The facts are simple: Acadians hail from the coastal provinces of France; they were Bretons and Normans whose vanguard settled on the peninsula in 1603. They were farmers caught in the battles for empire. In 1713 Acadie (which besides Nova Scotia included parts of New Brunswick and extended as far south as the Penobscot) became permanently a British possession. However, nearby loomed Louisbourg, the seat of the French armies, and thus every time the two powers fought, the Acadians were caught in the middle. Finally, in 1755, the British decided that there could be no assured possession of Nova Scotia, no lasting peace, without the removal of what they considered "the fifth column."

Longfellow first heard of the tale of two Acadian lovers separated by force and

fate from his former classmate Hawthorne in 1839. Six years later he began the work, then called *Gabrielle* (the name he eventually gave to his invisible hero), after reading two historical accounts of the dispersal. The first, by Abbé Raynal, printed in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, chose Acadie as the locus of the perfect primitive society: he molded the Acadians after Rousseau's "noble savage" to prove that people were innately good and that only the caprices of society corrupted the soul. Longfellow acknowledges that Raynal inspired him to portray Nova Scotian farm life in Edenesque terms. For him, the Acadians, as exemplified by sublime *Evangeline*, act out an alternate form of the fall from grace: humanity remains an unsullied *tabula rasa* through constancy and faith.

Thomas C. Haliburton's *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* supplied the poet with the description of the actual dispersal. Many sequences in the poem closely paraphrase the records from the past, such as the proclamation read in church which informed the men of Grand Pré of the decision to take them away, and the moving account of how the Acadian farmers, like pilgrims "with songs on their lips," descended to the shore from where they would be shipped to their unknown destinations. However, Longfellow chose not to mention the reason for this callous British act of scattering an entire population, estimated at 6000. In the eyes of many historians, and especially 19th c. Nova Scotians, this was an unfortunate, nay, inexcusable act which "is injurious to the character of a whole nation." Yet, for Longfellow, the myth-maker, recognition of the ambiguous position on the Acadians and, in American and English eyes, their seditious behavior, would have destroyed the Raynal-Rousseau dream. Longfellow had to serve up a syrupy past in order to showcase his "optimistic" (religious) philosophy.

The tale Longfellow heard one night at dinner described two lovers as having wandered, for years, throughout New England. In his mind, the idea expanded in both space and time. Chaste *Evangeline* chases the shadow of her would-be lover for 38 years through most of the Union. Her near-solitary sojourn allows the poet to paint a broad canvas of American scenery, while at the same time



Longfellow home, Portland, from an antique postcard

suggesting a comparison between the Acadians and the wandering tribes. Like Evangeline, many Acadians found their way to Louisiana while others settled in the great cities along the Atlantic, such as Philadelphia, where the now-aged maiden finds the plague-ridden body of Gabriel and, through his death, release from her life-long quest. Again, like Evangeline, many Acadians moved many times. Unlike her, however, their "restlessness" was *not* the result of chasing after the chimera of a "perfect love," but was forced upon them through the unkind acts of Protestant Americans who did not want to have to deal with these French-speaking, Roman Catholic, refugees. Longfellow is singularly silent on the issue of bigotry, even though it could have provided his long-suffering saintly heroine with some character-building adversity.

Longfellow's epic presents a flawed history. In vain we look for motivation, whether political, social or psychological. Instead, we are provided with acts of Fate propelling a simple-minded empty slate over the continental USA. Neither sublime Evangeline, nor her elusive Gabriel, achieve human proportions. Which is why *Evangeline* works perfectly on the level of myth: no real character traits obstruct the identification of Evangeline with Faith, Constancy, Simplicity, or whatever other moral value one wishes to imbue her with.

It is on the level of myth that *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* has entered the collective memory. It does no longer matter that she was not a true historical character, nor that Longfellow took poetic license with both Acadian scenery and past. Her legend has taken on a life of its own. She has so excited the imagination that in 1931 a large group of women, dressed just like Evangeline, made a pilgrimage from Louisiana, Gabriel's father's post-dispersal home, to Nova Scotia; the next year a group of Acadian "Evangelines" made the trek in return. Her legend has become part of the Acadian and Cajun cultural patrimony. In the Maritime Provinces a newspaper carries her name, while in Louisiana a state park carries the same. Her influence on the Acadian identity has been so strong that one French-Canadian historian called her "the incarnation of Acadia." Unfortunately, acceptance of *Evangeline* implies an acceptance of an idealized, sanitized, pre-dispersal past and a cruel fall from grace perpetrated, for no apparent reason, by another "race."

Poets indeed make dangerous historians for the poet's imaginary past may become a legend whose influence will last.

**Clara Schröder
Hallowell**

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*Still stands the forest primeval; but under the shade of its branches
Dwells another race, with other customs and language.
Only along the shore of the mournful and misty Atlantic
Linger a few Acadian peasants, whose fathers from exile
Wandered back to their native land to die in its bosom.*

Parker Cleaveland

*Written on Revisiting Brunswick
in the summer of 1875*

*Among the many lives that I
have known,
None I remember more serene
and sweet,
More rounded in itself and more
complete,
Than his, who lies beneath this
funeral stone.
These pines, that murmur in low
monotone,
These walks frequented by
scholastic feet,
Were all his world; but in this
calm retreat
For him the Teacher's chair
became a throne.
With fond affection memory loves
to dwell
On the old days, when his
example made
A pastime of the toil of tongue
and pen;
And now amid the groves, he
loved so well
That naught could lure him
from the grateful shade,
He sleeps, but wakes elsewhere,
for God hath said, Amen!*

H.W.L.



A Tale In Six Photographs

Come along into the yard, Audie. It's much too fine a day to stay inside. I'll bring my picture album and we'll look over the photographs I have of the twins . . . That's right, I have six of them, my most cherished possessions. I don't often show them to others, but I spend hours studying them by myself. Excuse me . . . No, it shan't happen again. You stay. I've had these little breakdowns every so often since the tragedy, but I'll be all right now. I insist that you see the pictures. You were Jay's roommate and best friend that year—aside from Julie, of course—and between us there should be no secrets, eh?

Funny the way he took to Yale. We knew he had the ability and all that, Lord knows, yet we wondered how he'd fit in, adjust—country boy from Maine, you know, much of what he'd learned gained from undisciplined reading . . . Yes, Homer was one of his great loves. Many hot noontimes in the fields I'd listen to him read aloud from the *Iliad* while we lunched together. Elbow to elbow against the old oak in the west field, me nagged with concern over what was left to hay that afternoon while he picked through details of ancient combat. Of course, once long ago I'd read all that myself.

Look out over that meadow, Audie. Ever seen anything like that for comforting the soul? the edge of that wood, there, darkly vivid against the sky. A little brook runs behind those rocks; deeper in the forest there's a glassy pond. I worked hard once I'd found this haven to build it up and then hold onto it, to hew what needed to be hewn, to make a sanctuary here for my family. In this most-favored place Jay and Julie romped through their days . . .

These six photographs, frozen moments in time, tell it all. Let's sit at that table; the umbrella will protect us from the sun. More lemonade? . . . Sure, there's plenty . . . Here you go. Now. This is the first. Whole damned family. It was taken over beneath those trees. This is my Jane, their mother. She glowed then, brimming with life, thriving on those family gatherings—cook for days getting ready, driving us all to distraction with her fussy, amiable care . . . That's my brother Walter at the time of his only visit up here. Loveable but prissy; the twins found him fascinating. But then, they loved everyone. They had a way of only seeing the good in people, of detecting the faintest gleam of gold in a pan of residue . . .

The boy with the stubble of beard? That's John, the twins' older brother. He's a lawyer in New Haven. Haven't seen him now since . . . well, for several months. And I'm sure you recognize these two blondies. They were thirteen then; marked right here on the back . . . Sure, hold it right up close . . . Yes, she was lovely as an angel. See, she was singing when the picture was taken—probably "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," her favorite, not as a hymn, but in a kind of jazzy version of her own. She was a regular Billie Holiday the way she could do things with a song . . . I tell you, you can't imagine how straightforward and uninhibited she was. Always that way, loving and loved. Hearing her sing always brought tears . . .

Idyllic? Well, I suppose you could say it was that, if you mean living in bliss that seemed it would be eternal. Look at that panorama out there! Olympus, and we were like gods absorbed in our revels. Like gods we seemed blessed with the power to control our destinies, to remain uncorrupted by growth or the passing of time. Reality was here, in this photograph, and though we would change in appearance, our relationships, we thought, would endure. So we thought, blind as we were in our unconscious pride. But you see in each of these pictures, even in this first one taken in our innocence, a hint of the devolution of our family . . . You don't see? Study the twins. She's nearly turned from the camera, only glancing at it, and everyone's eyes are focused on her. See the faces, their expressions. Look at Jay . . . Yes, as you say, a "look of adoration." Human beings could hold no greater fondness for one another than the twins knew. They were two parts of a whole. But—can you understand?—there was, as time would show, a terrible distinction in the styles of their devotion, perhaps, as it turned out, in the depths as well. It hurts to examine this picture, this scene of such apparent serenity, and know the ironies it reveals. Let's turn to the next.

If photographs can be considered symbols, microcosmic capturings of the truth of the world in which they were taken, then this one which I snapped myself contains subtleties to drive us mad.

Their fourteenth birthday party, taken on that grassy slope alongside the brook. Magnetic—the prince and princess, sun-deities in their resplendent golden crowns, encircled by eager, subservient courtiers . . . School friends, neighbor children. I arranged them around and below Jay and Julie, highlighting the twins here at upper center, at the crest of the bank . . . Surely is, a magnificent scene! See how they sit, arms entwined, eyes only for each other. You could hardly tell them apart except for her flowing hair . . . Their friends doted on them. This shows all, the way the other children are looking up at them, comfortable

in the warmth radiated by the twins' mutual affection. Wonderful, Audie, and unique—they never fought or quarreled, bound together without offending or slighting others. A memento of that wonderful year, this picture, royalty showered with munificence from all. They induced neither envy nor scorn; no eyebrows were raised at their closeness. Their relationship was not usual, perhaps, but it was not supposed, then, unnatural . . .

Of course I say that word softly—and with reluctance. But I know no other word to use . . . Don't protest, my boy, until you hear me out . . . Their mother and I? We encouraged their oneness; we felt it was a boon for which our family was exceedingly fortunate. No thought, not for an instant, of hubris, that overwhelming pride before envious gods—and each of us was familiar with the concept; we were, in fact, enthusiastic students of Greek literature and philosophy. Our pride blended with our thankfulness that we had such children. How could any gods take offense? we would have wondered had we thought about it at the time. Now I wonder if their ire is aroused simply by the sight of human joy.

We watched Julie and Jay grow into rounded and capable teens. An interest taken up by one would soon attract the attention of the other. Music, literature, science, athletics; they plunged into many areas and their involvement in a field usually led to mastery. We knew, Jane and I, that we had something special and we began to plan for their college educations.

Only John, their older brother, a worldly and disdainful boy, brought any form of discord into our lives. He kept at the twins to "split up," to find different friends and interests that would separate them. He thought their closeness didn't "look right" and seemed "weird," and since someday they would have to go their own paths, becoming too close would make their futures difficult. So he said. His mother and I were irritated by his interference; we thought him spiteful, perhaps jealous of their bond . . . No, the twins laughed at him, gently of course, and John would stalk away in a huff, fearing they would melt his cold scorn and draw him to them with their charm.

Let me confide in you, Audie. Since I'm unraveling the bitter tale of our family to you—after all, you too were once attracted to Jay—doesn't it seem right that I should reveal the whole truth as I have perceived it? . . . You don't impose, so have more lemonade and swing around so the sun's not in your eyes. I'm an ancient mariner; it purges me to talk, to remember. Our problem, if a real problem in truth existed, began to show itself during those "wonderful" high school years. To anyone outside the family those must have appeared sublime days for us. We prospered then; the dairy supplied two counties. Jay and Julie lighted our lives, their exuberance infusing all but John with laughter and good will.

It was John's cynicism alone, you see, his acid persistence, that upset us. How absurd it was to dream of anything, uh, unseemly in their conduct. We go through life yearning for such pure bonds as theirs appeared. John though, who had graduated from high school and was working a year with me on the farm, would not ease up on the twins. He couldn't tolerate the idea that someone somewhere might be critical of a brother and sister who were thoroughly, perhaps too zealously, in love. To this day I can't figure John's motives, whether from envy or from honest, misconceived intentions; but he was relentless in his verbal abuse and finally withdrew from Julie and Jay completely—and at last from his mother and me. In spite of the horror that would follow, the gulf between John and us over the twins remains as wide today as ever.

Darkness began to enshroud our lives. Not yet a pervasive gloom, mind you, for John's contrary way faintly countered the gaiety of the twins. Valiantly they tried to win their brother back with outrageous jokes and pranks. They would ignore his insults and shaded innuendoes, which only enraged him further. But damn his soul, the agony he caused his mother!

I show you the first photograph again, the family gathering. See her there, my Jane, beautiful and happy. In the following years that radiance would turn to solemnity; she would become dismayed by John's harping at the twins, his Cassandra-ravings against what he called "their nauseous, sacrilegious, just-plain-queer love" . . . Where is Jane now? you ask. Well, let's say she's away for awhile—no telling when she'll return.

This picture is of her and the twins before the kids departed for college, he to Yale, as you well know, she to Radcliffe . . . Yes, again they stand together. Wouldn't it have been more natural for their mother to be in the center? . . . Very good color, yes—see how clearly it shows the sadness in their eyes, the grief of separation. They couldn't really understand it, the need for parting. In some ways they were terribly innocent and naive. Recipients of large scholarships, yet clutching to childhood, to the togetherness they had imagined would never end. I gave it little thought at the time, for I felt it was a stage they would outgrow. They had known an—"idyllic" did we say?—youth that I prayed would make them strong and poised against the barbs of life.

Jane's perplexity, though, worried me. The emptiness reflected in her gaze is not so much despair at the twins' leaving, I think, as a stark vision planted in her



Drawing by Phil Paratore

mind by that devil John. He'd become so persistent in his baiting by early that summer that I sent him away, banished him if you will, in order that he be kept from destroying our peace entirely. He roamed around the country for a few months and later joined the army. Finally he went to Bowdoin, worked his way through—that much I can say to his credit—and then went on to law school.

Jane had become so morose by the time Jay and Julie went off in the fall that I made her see a psychiatrist in Boston. I don't recall the technical terms, but she was suffering from a fear of calamity, of impending doom, that could not be clearly defined and which had no evident tangible origin. But I knew it was the specter in her mind formed from John's picking at the twins' relationship.

When Jay left for school, a few days earlier than Julie, our world crumbled at last. Jane wouldn't speak; she confined herself to her room to dwell alone with her phantoms. Julie spent her last days home waiting on her mother from dawn to bedtime. It all seemed silly to me, and you can believe it was very unpleasant. Then Julie left too, but only after ardent persuasion by me, and I buried myself in work and in an effort to bring Jane around. Gradually, after the kids had left, she began to come out of it. At least she emerged from her room, but there was little spark to be found in her manner.

Shortly before Christmas we received a card from Julie asking that we make up the guest room for the holidays. She wanted to bring home a young man she had met at school. Where had the years gone? Our princess had become involved in a serious romance—he was a senior there at Harvard, name of Peter Tracy.

See, Julie and Peter taken Christmas Eve. She was full of hell that night; you can see the way she's teasing him, her face with that puckish look that tears me apart whenever I see the picture . . . I liked Peter very much, yes. Jane did too; it

showed in the way she regained some of her old vitality, though she never said much to let on—I think for fear of implying a comparison between Julie-and-Peter and Julie-and-Jay, if you see what I mean . . .

Something happened, you see, that Christmas, something strange and eerie. In ecstasy we were in the midst of despair, and I could only sense the fact without being able to articulate it. Julie had grown and Jay had lagged behind, retarded in his emotional maturity. She was in love with Peter. Her enthusiasm and her zest were directed toward him. It was Peter who received those little signs of endearment once reserved for Jay alone. Not that she had in any real sense cooled toward her brother. His presence remained part of her happiness, I'm sure, but he couldn't understand the need for sharing her affection. He thought himself an outcast, for he was no longer the wellspring of her joy. No words were spoken as far as I know, yet Jay was as bereaved as if she had died. On the surface the three kids seemed to mingle in harmony. However, a faintly perceptible hysteria in Jay's laughter chilled me. There was a manic intensity in his manner over that Christmas holiday. He didn't mope. He spoke to no one of any distress, yet I sensed his world had been shattered by the coming of the intruder. An unsuspecting boy had driven himself like a wedge through the bond uniting Jay and his sister . . .

Julie? No, to her the world was a great playground, and as long as Jay appeared happy no subtle sign of uneasiness on his part would get through to her. They all sang and joked, laughing late into the night around the fire; that Jay's laughter bordered on the psychotic in his anguish was the furthest thing from her mind. She was not callous, Lord knows, and she was far from stupid, but she'd become so accustomed to being the center of happy scenes that she could never imagine

Continued next page

laughter not from the heart.

I watched them anxiously from a distance. What to do? I couldn't take Jay aside and say, "Look, it's all right. She's just infatuated with him; she still loves you alone. Be patient and things will revert to normal." At the time I was not at all that certain of my judgement of Jay's behavior. Besides, to have suggested the intimacy of their old ties would return would have been false and he would have seen right through me. I couldn't intercede; I sat back and waited for things to work out, basking with Jane in the glow exuded by Julie and Peter . . .

Yes, of course it's painful for me, but I must forge on to the end. If I go on telling and retelling our story, perhaps I myself will gain understanding and see what sins I committed against my family. Now you were Jay's friend, but you only knew he had some "problem" at home and that he was very close to his sister. You must have been aware of his depth, Audie, of his goodness and sensitivity. You wrote in May of that year that since Christmas you had noticed a change in him that disturbed you, and for the first time I responded with some details of his background. You know how appreciative I was—and am—of your loyalty and concern . . .

Here is a picture of Jay with his new motorcycle. I bought it for him at the end of that year, a delayed high school graduation gift. It's not the Jay of the other photographs, is it? The eyes peer through narrow slits and the facial skin has grown tight and hard. That summer he was supposed to work on the farm, whenever I could keep him from tearing around the countryside with that damned bike. He had no interest in helping me, for she had gone on a trip through the Rockies with Peter.

They meant to wander wherever they felt like going, camping out nights. While she was experiencing what must have been for her an unrestrained joy of life, Jay turned to brooding, jabbing out in reckless, futile efforts to fill a void.

He became cruel and vicious toward his mother, without shame, tormenting her by drinking and hanging around in town with any slut he could find. He'd fight with her whenever he condescended to appear, usually just to flop around the kitchen drinking beer and antagonizing her with mean remarks.

One day in exasperation, hearing him yelling at her from way out in the field, I came in and became embroiled in a three-way shouting match. To think of it now makes me positively ill. When he told his mother to go to hell for about the fifth time, I flew into a rage and grabbed him by the shirt, driven to the use of physical force against one of my children for the first time ever. I had not raised a hand even against John, though Lord knows he had often enough deserved it. But I was blind that day in the kitchen, the culmination of all my fears and doubts built up, and I shook Jay in fury.

"Wake up, son!" I shouted, my hands tugging and thrusting. "Use your head, will you? You're driving us crazy with all your damned foolishness. So Julie's gone, and she's in love with Peter—and it's not your affair, Jay! Stop dwelling on her. You're only jeopardizing her chance for happiness. Is that what you want, to ruin her life? God, Jay," I finished, "this just isn't . . . normal!"

I guess I went too far, but words don't always come gracefully when you're backed against a wall. He stared at me with a look that stilled me—and shamed me, for deep down I was well aware of the anguish he was going through. I knew nothing I could say would repair the damage, and I felt myself sag and grow small before his hateful glare. "You bastard!" he cried, shoving me away and rushing out the door. Was he appalled and humiliated? Had I unearthed the root of his confusion? I do not know.

Jane took to her bed again, betrayed by another son, her darling. Disoriented, she lost interest; I had to hire a woman to come days and look after her. With little hope or spirit I worked long hours in the fields. At night before trudging to my room I'd pause at Jane's door and watch her for a minute as she twisted in her sleep. In vain I tried to sort out the reasons we'd fallen into the pit.

Jay never came back. From the woman who cared for Jane I picked up bits and pieces about him, how he had done this or that awful thing: a couple of nights in jail for disorderly conduct, fights with town thugs, harassing motorists by weaving in and out of traffic on his motorcycle. I'd sigh and shake my head and then go off to the fields.

One last picture . . . All right, we'll walk down by the brook . . . No, no thank you; I will finish. Hear me out and don't offer solace. Come, Audie, let's sit on the bank, the same spot where the picture of their fourteenth birthday party was taken . . . On a day like today, look, you can see nearly to the end of the meadow. Two years ago a hundred head of milkers grazed there.

The last one—Julie and Peter on their return from the Rockies. They had just announced their engagement. Julie and I had a long talk beforehand. I told her of Jay's actions, of his strange despondency. I mentioned what I thought to be the cause of his misery, his love for her, for incredibly she had never fully recognized the strength of his attachment, or else it had become a thing she took for granted.

At any rate, bless the girl, in tears she offered to break off with Peter if it would save her brother! I dissuaded her—she had to live her own life, and Jay had to face reality. I felt that if Julie left home it might revive her mother, knowing Julie was happy and at peace. I gave her my glad consent and took this picture that afternoon. Their engagement was announced in the papers.

The next morning, having learned of Julie's final separation from him, Jay roared out here on his motorcycle, his heart filled with violence. First he tried to find Peter, who fortunately was in town; then he ran out into the field where Julie had joined me for lunch. He was stark mad. Julie and I could only gape at each other in horror as he approached, his arms flailing senselessly. He stumbled across the furrows toward us. Julie stood up and awaited him, her body rigid and set. I feared he'd strike her, so I placed myself between them, distraught at the bizarre confrontation between my beautiful children.

He halted a few paces from us, panting like a rabid dog.

"Julie!" he cried, his voice edged with question and disbelief. I stepped back, unable to speak, as they gazed at each other. In that moment I sensed the end of our world. I could only feel the need for saving what I could, of at least keeping her from being savaged by the animal who was my son.

She took the matter upon herself in my helplessness. Clasp ing her brother, hugging him to her, she murmured hurried, consoling words.

"Why?" he pleaded. "Why can't we be like we were? Don't do this, Julie! You can't love him!"

"I do love him, Jay," she said, dropping onto her knees in the dirt and pulling him down beside her. "I love him with all my heart and we're going to be married. My love for him has nothing to do with my love for you, which is as strong as ever. But we're grown up now, Jay, and life has changed. We spent our childhoods here, loving each other, unaware of other kinds of love. Don't you see? Jay, accept it—I'm going to marry him. Love me as I love you and wait for the time when you'll find the woman who will be your wife."

She kissed him; I was speechless. Her maturity, her wisdom, her delicate treatment of him!

But poor Jay, my troubled boy, only snorted in his scorn for her plea. He jumped up, glaring down at her in wild-eyed distraction, his head shaking limply to deny her words, then turned and ran toward the house. Julie arose and came to me. Our hands joined in a kind of solemn ritual. We watched Jay careen down the road on his motorcycle.

As though struck with a psychic revelation, Julie pulled away from me, a look of terror in her eyes. "Wait . . . !" she gasped.

"What . . . ?" I began, too numb to catch on.

"I've got to go after him!" she cried, already running.

I guess she knew he had not heard, would not accept what she had begged of him, and she was certain of his madness.

She had not run fifty yards when we heard the explosion, saw the surge of flames and smoke above the trees.

I hurried as fast as I was able, my whole being crying out against the world as I ran, but she had beaten me to the spot by several minutes. Beside the inferno lapping around and devouring a tree, his body lay in a disjointed heap.

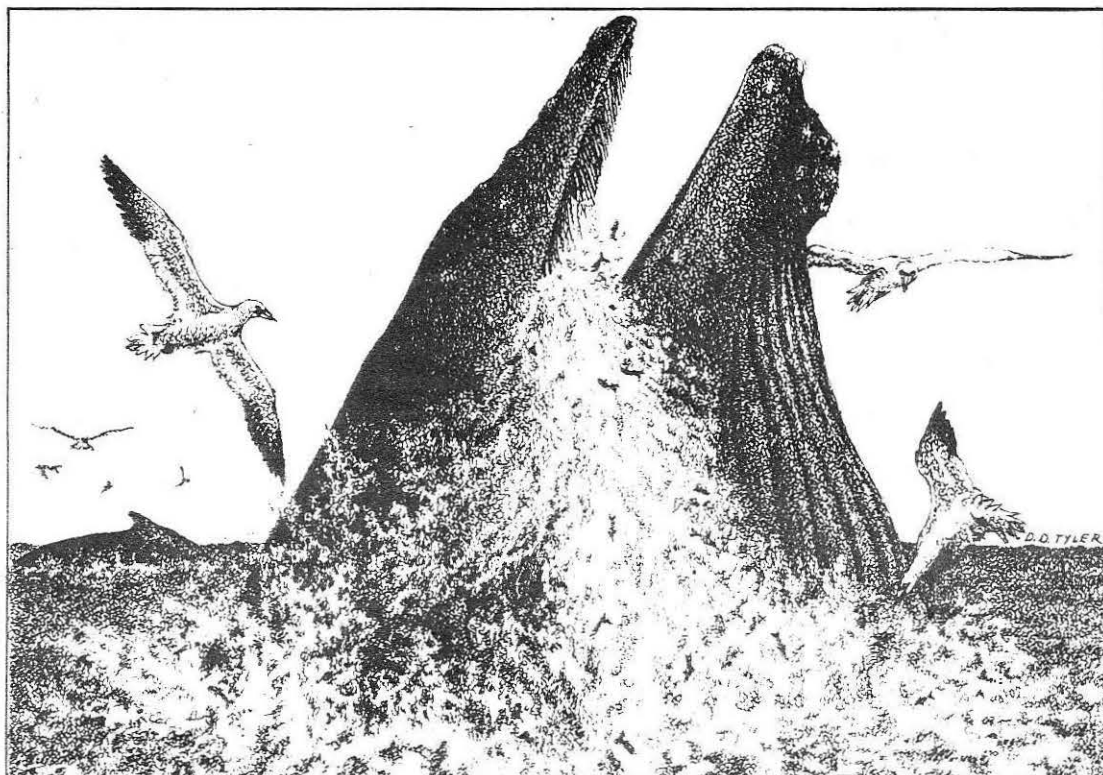
She stood spellbound by the flames as I came up, gazing into the fire as though ready to make a leap. With all my might I screamed at her. She turned like a robot and looked at me, finally staggering over and falling into my arms. Together we kept a vigil over his body until people came. I don't know how long it was; they led us away . . .

These photographs are all that remain to remind me of the progress of our fall. We should nurse the days of joy and not look ahead . . . After a long postponement they were married. She lives in dull contentment; to those who don't know her story she must seem a typical housewife engaged in all sorts of humanitarian projects. When asked to sing in the church choir, she politely refused. A small step at a time, though, she toughens herself against her memories . . .

Jane stays in a home now; she rarely speaks, sitting all day and looking out over the land. I visit her every so often, but when I'm there I simply join her as a silent watcher in the dark. Once in a great while John brings his family up from New Haven—or at least he used to. I guess he loves us and suffers inwardly with us, yet I know it's hell for him to come here. It's a matter of the truth about the twins, I suppose, of his understanding in those days.

I wonder if we'd been better off had we never known such happiness in the years of their youth—or, instead, are our recollections of those beautiful moments meant to be our only salvation? . . .

Stewart Goodwin
Farmington
teaches at Mt. Blue H.S.



Humpback Whale and Gannets Feeding on Small Fishes. c. 1981 Diana Dee Tyler

Humpbacks At Jeffrey's Ledge

Summer in Kennebunkport, the time
for litter over Goose Rocks Beach, traffic
knotted through Dock Square, the time
to leave behind the tourist-crowded town.

Twenty-six miles off Maine, out
on the uninhibited waters
over Jeffrey's Ledge, that's where
I knew I was
where I should be. There,
among phalaropes, drifting,
our boat of eager ocean-goers happened upon

two huge smooth whales. Lulled
to sleep by tide,
white flippers motionless and brilliant
as treasure, they lay
letting the sea lap
their long, barnacled bodies.
Letting the sea bring me
close enough.

A breath!
A cool, wet krill-breath steaming
from a blow-hole
towards a cloud, and drizzling
down through the sticky air, moistening
my bare skin.

We had awakened them, or the sun
was too sweet for sleep: two large eyes
opened up for white light, or green sea
or me.

The breath again!
And a dive, their knobby snouts tipping
to darker fathoms.
Then a breach, both giants
twisting in mid-air, flippers
slapping the water like laughter.
Breach and dive, breach and dive, until
their flukes rose so high, then
slipped beneath the surface
down to where
I could not see.

I don't know
what made them rise again,
break the water
just below my outstretched arms
I don't know

what made them dive again—
a deep, deep dive—
as if there were
some perfect depth.

Allison Childs
Ithica, NY
graduated from UMA, UMF

Keillor comes on
with perfect fiddlin' and fun;
Winter's wild Wolf Eyes
teaching us our own howl.
Right here in town!

Two start for home
past lattice-laced backshore estates,
by Bucksport's bridged bay,
inland to our ledges,
our own moonmad den.

Patricia Smith Ranzoni
Bucksport
is an educational consultant

The Facts of Catching

My father ice fishing at night
after his father forbade it
comes up with a pickerel
of record length
and runs
only to fall through
where it's thin,
rushing glinting moonlight
ten feet away
till knees and elbows
pull him to shore.

His father, storming
to be wakened so late,
admires the long body
still breathing,
staining the cardboard
on which, by tradition,
the largest fish alone
are outlined,
sketched in, the facts
of their catching
noted underneath:
hour, bait, fisherman.

And I, son and grandson,
patient to the story's
telling and retelling,
should be listed
as witness, except
I've got it all wrong
I'm told years later:
grandfather was that boy
poorly dressed
for a midwinter's vigil
out on forbidden ice.

What's the difference?
I answer back,
to myself:
as long as it's understood
how magnificent fish
get caught, drawn,
handed down;
and how honor
may sometimes follow
a broken word
between son and father,

a shattered pond
freezing over in the background.

Carl Little
Somesville
is a freelance writer & editor

Night River

When the tide's out there's a lot of mud to get through to reach the water. Thick mud, black and cold. When the bluefish are running it's different. Sharp those blues, their fins, teeth. I remember one day that summer when I was twelve: we were out in the boat and nine-year-old Lizzy peed over the side. I needed to but didn't, so my stomach hurt for the last part of the trip. Out there with the men in the boat, he wasn't the same as on some nights, those nights, underwater.

The water was green. Smooth bottle green, like the song, "Nine Green Bottles Hanging on the Wall." My sister and I used to sing that song other summers driving in the rain, small country roads in England where picnics were always rained out; roses lay crumpled on the ground, sodden, and the smell was of lavender and smoke.

But that's not the river, smooth as milk; in the evening after supper when fireflies came out we'd go there. High with the idea of it, the older kids, Lizzy, Jake, Anne, and me. I was the oldest—besides him, and that was the best part knowing he'd be there too. My old babysitter, Jan, whose kids I now looked after, wouldn't come. She'd stay back with the little kids, hers and his, put them to bed or wash the dishes. Sometimes I wished she'd come with us too. To the river. It was hot those nights, none of the five of us wearing clothes and Annie just beginning to show hair under her arms and on her pubes. I already had some, remember it turning, beginning to change from light to dark, a whole froth of hair. They noticed too.

In the river, we slipped in so easily, night and the fireflies; I didn't like touching the mud on the bottom, kept my feet up; the tide was high then, we only swam when the tide was high. Like fish we'd butt up against each other, but fish don't squeal, giggle, shriek. When he picked me up under water, screaming and writhing like the rest, his legs moved funny places. Extra parts seemed to brush up on me, my body felt limp as a weed or a grass on the muddy banks. I didn't want to touch my feet to the squelchy mud bottom; somehow clutching on to him was better and worse.

Over on the other side away from the marshes birds slept. And the ocean. A roar. Plum Island. Once I picked beach plums there and made beach plum jelly and rose hip jam, but that was later. This was now and wet—hair, skin, lips, all of me submerged in green that was black and thick and slow. Everything was honey. It was being touched along one leg. Or sitting in the livingroom with the TV on and knowing somehow I was being watched. I would look out of the side of my eye too. We both liked blueberries and cream on our cereal. He was balding. I'd never seen two naked bodies before, grown up bodies that is, lying together, until I looked over the wall that separated the kids' room from theirs. Seeing the two naked bodies of the people I was entrusted to, stretched out and moaning, I wanted that too. To lie there and feel whatever it was that they felt.

Jan wasn't happy that summer. Sometimes we never had anything to eat. We'd make some kind of pudding with milk and a can of fruit and eat right out of the bowl, all of us kids. It was hot. And one chair reclined and vibrated if you pushed a button.

It wasn't my house and it wasn't theirs yet either, but we lived there. We washed in the rainbarrel. Scooped up soft water and the soap and the rain; once he washed our backs; all of us out in the world with nothing but bare skin. Or that time we nestled in inner tubes, round black rubber rings, the current took us downstream in water so cold.

On the beach I lay in the sand face down and let the sun heat me, pull myself down into the crystals and bury me. My new young breasts burying into the sand like birds. We ate blueberries and ran across a scrubby field, my legs scratched from the bushes, a frisbee sailed over my head. I began to eat—ten, twenty pancakes with strawberry jam—I couldn't be full enough. I couldn't be filled. Something brushed up against my leg in the water. That water. Those nights. Eels, I thought. And I liked it? Wasn't it enough to be loved. To be part of a family at last. But I didn't get a sweater. Not a white wool heavy fisherman knit sweater like the others; though Jan promised me one it never happened, so I wasn't really family, I had to go home. And in the night sleeping beside her, Lizzy, my favorite, the tough one, in the other bed; it wasn't her he came to kiss goodnight, to touch under the covers so that I had to pretend to be asleep and finally rolled over so he would just go away. Later I wondered if he did touch her. Because she was his favorite, and she wasn't his daughter either really.

The world whirls above our heads sometimes so fast it can't stop. I remember the smell there of the marshes—like warm ginger ale at night. The



Photo by Clara Schroder

bike was too big for me, his bike, but I rode it anyway. Once I slipped and the crossbar hurt, the way I landed on it, in the crotch, dug into me. Sometimes I rode the littlest one and once when she fell and got hurt I rode her home quickly to her mother. The marsh road was long. A straight narrow stretch I could walk down. We rode or walked down it to go to the store to buy penny candy. Red licorice. Gummy fish. Wax lips. Banana-flavored peanuts. Malted milk balls. Pixie sticks. The marsh green and unending, greenflies that bite hard but don't leave a mark. Where was my mother. Not there in the marshes. Sometimes I had a letter. Who was taking care of whom I want to ask myself looking back. The grass—the games of hide-and-seek, kick-the-can; I hid in a patch of poison ivy and didn't get it.

One day we played kick-the-can in the graveyard. Lizzy and I hid together. But he caught me. The best thing was to get caught by him. He grabbed hard. I don't want to tell you his name. If I do I might fall underwater. The water's so green. Green and smooth. As milk. It's dark the sky, and the fireflies flicker; the little children sing in their beds. One is just learning to read. Their soft hair, the way they'd lean up against you or get mad. I wanted to make them happy. The cereal bowls in the sink I rinsed out and put on the edge to dry. That bathing suit I didn't really like to wear, the string of green beads my sister made me that I wore around my neck always. A talisman until the snap broke.

Driftwood piled up on the beaches and in the winter when I went back there years later, there was ice. Blocks of it piling up on the river, in the marsh, everything frozen and breaking and frozen and churning and frozen and wet. Sometimes I was wet; it's not supposed to be like this, you're not supposed to like it. And what do you do then: walk out into the marsh, but the river got in the way. Green, bottle green the river. Black and the greenhead flies, my mother; I remember going back and I smiled scared and didn't tell her. Didn't know how and didn't want to hurt her.

Secrets: they idle around in our heads like waterbugs. Nasturtiums on the window sill. The color of roots and berries. The way my mind flickers back still to lying naked in the river. River sea of salt and the motion. The tide pulling in and out. Being alone. The way we wanted and didn't want. The need to touch. The way, when the moon was full, the river came up once to cover almost the whole road. Lapping. Insistent. There's something else here. The smell. That marsh ginger ale smell. The sensation at dusk that the whole world is washing away. Stone wall crumbling. Venetian blinds pulled down. Keeping in order, keeping out light, everything so carefully put away in boxes. The way we save everything for the next generation. Even our secrets, we carry them with us. And the tide rising and falling, going home.

But when I wake up and the sky is an open blue and I can take off my sweater why then there will be a day. Open. Arms open to the light, sun, the harbor, water swilling in, like pig slop, the bright, the sea, lichen gold and moss green. Trees that glitter white with dew. Tamarack and pine. Pine trees that stand like sisters in the woods. Cabins that cluster and stand apart and that one can call home. Home. Home is the coming to myself part. The home of my heart. The place I carry inside. The honey and butter on scones. And tea. And space to move around in. The field stretches down to the sea, I can let it.

**Pamela Powell
Camden**

*is instructor for Outward Bound
in Penobscot Bay*

Late Morning on the Kennebec

The river here drawn down so low
around the sandy flats, as if by
wounds far off and mortal
whose progress tempts these deer
to leave the murky grass and forest
of the eastern bank. Two does,
a clumsy fawn, and then so still
they look just like the air between them
until a gear of care will dip each tongue
in turn to lap the old tide's
long connections. Nature so didactic
frets with meanings for the moment
they have not heard something
in a willow's song, the quick last glance
that carves a ripple left to
disappear and the waxing sun
to drink the morning leaf by leaf.
What the sky does to the river lingers
for the eye that like a hand stretched out
has thought its touch explains.

David Adams
Mecklenberg, NY
taught in Maine for years

Sheepscot

from Repairs
(Part II of a Long Poem)

Thrush renews song
from the ravine, dusk,
here where
the Abenaki tongue lives
in river-names,
Sheepscot, ("Ssi'kkat"? "Stream deeps"?
or "cry of geese"?)

thrush tongue unfolds old tune-husk: arpeggio,
jagged,
strings,
distinct,
plucked;

"aboriginal language"
of these streams, swales,
Father Rasles jotted down
a word list,
a branch of the Algonquin tribe;
as clavichord
lightly thrummed, or Bream's lute
(nouns inflected, vowels sound
as in Tuscany,
local tribes, "Passamaquoddy, Penobscot,"
[as in Greek: two plurals,
and ai, au diphthongs]
"if . . . beauties of . . . their language . . . known
in Europe, seminaries . . . would . . . teach it")

David Gordon
Sheepscot

Leon

It rained and rained and rained. It came down in huge crystalline drops that plopped on the tops of automobiles, sidewalks and people. The torrent splattered mud on everything to within three feet above the ground in some places. The intensity of the rain was bad enough, winding along in sheets that moved and undulated like a liquid, earthbound northern lights. But it was the unusual size of the drops that held everybody in awe. Frank Simmons over on the East Lake road swore he saw one of his buckets fill up in less than an hour.

The rain had been coming down now for almost three weeks, not stopping for long even when it managed to. Virtually all the towns along the rivers were under water, and any road that wasn't paved was in danger of becoming a greasy quagmire. Tractors were mired in fields, trucks and wood skidders were hopelessly stuck in the woods, and many jobs and activities were coming to a standstill.

It was on the third Friday of this deluge that Leon screwed the cap down on his thermos bottle and stared at the rain through the window of his pick-up truck. "Three weeks of this," he said. "I don't believe it."

On the passenger side of the truck Jack rolled the window down an inch and blew cigarette smoke out into the rain. Leon hated cigarette smoke and thought he could feel a headache coming on. "Yup," Jack said, "we're not going to be working much longer if this keeps up."

The woods were shiny and wet. At this moment the pine boughs were swaying from the force of the downpour. As Leon stared through the windshield there came a lull in the rain, diminishing the pounding on the cab of the truck. He impatiently started to pour another cup of coffee from his thermos when Jack motioned towards the shanty that served as an office for the Sanderson mill. Emil Sanderson, his wet yellow slicker glistening, was holding the door open. Leaning out into the rain he motioned the two men inside.

"I think this is it," Jack said as he thrust open the door of the pick-up. Leon muttered, "Yeah, you're probably right," and bailed out of his side of the truck. They landed with a splash on the mucky forest floor. The footing was tricky as the two men sloshed their way through muddy wheel ruts towards the shelter. They walked past the large sawblade and carriage that the logs were sawn on. The mill, which was powered by a diesel engine, was covered by a roof only, the sides being open. The diesel engine was covered by a blue tarp. The office was at the far end.

As Leon entered through the door he looked directly at Emil. Normally he would have looked at the calendar on the far wall; a picture of an athletic, nearly nude woman standing in a green clearing with a chainsaw beside her on the ground, and she smiling as if all you needed was the chainsaw to make you the man she always wanted. CORLISS CHAINSAWS and MacPHERSON POWER PRODUCTS read the bold print on the calendar. Leon was a man of fantasy, but he ignored the calendar this time; he watched the foreman's face as the door was closed against the weather.

Emil was straight to the point. "I don't imagine it'll come as any surprise to you that things have come to a screeching halt around here." Leon looked around the room. Lonnie and Rafe were standing against the wall looking uncomfortable. Leon knew that Emil would keep them on hand since they had been with him from the beginning, but if the weather didn't dry up soon even they would have a vacation. "We have plenty of orders to fill," Emil continued, "but we've cut all of our own logs and until this shit stops coming down and the woods get workable again, there won't be a whole lot to do. Rafe and Lonnie can do what maintenance needs to be taken care of around here." He shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry. I'll let you know when things change. This can't last forever."

Leon dropped off Jack at the house he lived in with his mother and started for home. He watched the faded yellow line on the road, the wet pavement and the surrounding green of the woods. Along this road the trees seemed to close in, to be trying to overgrow the shoulder as if they wanted to reclaim the area taken over by civilization. That's why Leon liked this road. It gave him the feeling that nature was still in charge here; that he was here only by way of her permission. The whack-whack of the wiper blades had become so much a part of his being that he didn't hear them anymore. He muttered to himself as he drove. "Oh man . . . just when I was getting caught up . . . I should be used to it . . . I should be used to it." He turned up the country music on the radio.

The two gas pumps of the Pine Hill Grocery came into view and at the last minute he decided to stop in for a six pack of beer. He was halfway from the beer cooler to the cash register when he went back to pick up another one. Leon hadn't felt like this for a while and figured he was about due. "Can't do much else in the rain anyway," he thought. He didn't own a television.

Leon drove past the entrance to the side road he lived on, continued down the main road about a half mile and then turned right onto an ancient side road which disappeared tunnel-like into the trees. There were no houses on the road, it being hardly more than a widened path. It had been paved at sometime in the distant past and had a good bed of stone as well as broken chunks of thin asphalt. He slowly bumped his way along until he came to a huge, old maple tree on the right. He turned off the road and parked under the maple. Now he was facing the river.

It was close to a hundred feet wide here and was running very high. It was as high as Leon could remember it ever being. At other places along the river it had overrun its banks flooding fields and parking lots alike. The banks were high along here, but to Leon the brown foaming water roaring by with trees and other debris in its hold seemed to be waiting for the right time to spread out over these banks also. When the river was like this it seemed almost alive to Leon. He had no choice but to be awed by the power of tons of water rushing by with all its sound. But Leon was a little fearful also. He imagined it must be something like being on a big game safari on the African plains, when you come upon two large rhinoceros and don't know whether to run from the fear of it or stay for the fascination of it and watch the show.

Leon shut his engine off and listened to the rain slamming on the roof of his truck and the roaring of the river. Opening a can of beer, he decided to stay and watch the show.

It was later that afternoon when Leon burst through the door of his cabin. He had removed his shirt and shoes in the rain and was wearing nothing but his Levi's. He stepped into the first of two rooms that made up the small dwelling. Leon lived alone, in exactly the manner he preferred, and the cabin was frequently an undesirable place for all but Leon. It was a storage house for refuse, dirty dishes and old clothes. Leon wasn't exactly a hermit since he had to work with other people, but he would have liked to have been one. He just didn't have the drive to trap or farm or whatever it took to be completely self-sufficient. Sometimes his drinking got the better of him and almost prevented him from working at the mill, but he always managed to keep himself straight at work so they never had reason to be dissatisfied with him.

"Friggin' rain," he said as he swaggered drunkenly into his home. He kicked over what passed for a coffee table, scattering old newspapers, empty beer bottles and tuna fish cans onto the floor. Even from where he stood in his cabin he thought he could hear the river, could feel it. He looked at the woodstove in the middle of the room, his only source of heat in the winter. It was dormant at this time of year, used only occasionally to drive out the dampness. At this moment however, Leon only saw the stovepipe, with its center of black residue, the result of trying to get heat out of wood that was much too green. He saw his rifle in the corner and picked it up by the barrel. Swinging it like a club he sent the stovepipe flying across the room, flinging soot and chunks of creosote over the contents of the cabin.

The river in the distance seemed louder to Leon. It must be close to overflowing its banks now. "Friggin' friggin' rain," he said as he swung the rifle again and knocked over the ancient floor lamp that was his only source of light other than the two ceiling bulbs. He raved. He kicked the chair and the piles of newspapers and magazines.

Suddenly he stopped his raving and listened. He thought the river seemed louder now. It had broken its banks here too. Unexplainably he felt himself relax. He calmly looked around him as if he was here for the first time. Then he raised the rifle.

For a moment he just sighted down the barrel and swung the rifle around the room. His gaze came to rest on the sink. The sink was piled high with dirty dishes, tools and other clutter that had been there so long he didn't even know what they were or how they had gotten there. Leon sighted a cup on the top of the pile. He calmly and deliberately let the breath expel from his body, felt his muscles relax and pulled the trigger.

The sound inside the little building was incredible. Leon's ears were ringing as he dropped the rifle and put his hands over them. He yelled and fell to his knees, closing his eyes. The smell of gunpowder was overwhelming. After a minute or two he opened his eyes and stood up. The cup at the sink had been obliterated. There was a large hole in the wall where the bullet had passed through. Leon smiled and picked up the rifle. He aimed it at the plate that was now on top of the pile and pulled the trigger. The incredible sound, the smell of gunpowder and the explosion of plates, plastic and glass once

more surrounded him. This time Leon stayed on his feet but still closed his eyes. When he opened them he saw that half the pile of dishes was gone. He thought for a moment, then walked over to the pile of newspapers that until recently had been on his coffee table. Tearing off two strips of newspaper he stuffed them into his ears. He turned back towards the sink, held the rifle against his hip and pulled the trigger. He had been aiming at the remaining dishes. Instead he heard a loud clang and saw that the bullet had struck the sink pipe where it emerged from the floor. Leon raised the rifle a bit and fired again. There was another loud clang as the bullet dented the sink and mangled the faucet, and then went out the wall. Moving the barrel to the left this time he fired twice. A shower of plastic, glass and wood once more burst from the counter. Leon yelled in delight as he jumped up and down, waving the rifle in the air. Then he stopped and, still smiling, began to randomly blow everything apart in the little building. Firing from left to right and up and down, mostly from the hip, he fired into wood, fabric, glass, plastic and metal. He had to stop to reload twice. His ears didn't bother him anymore; after a point he was almost deaf anyway.

The smell, the sound, the violence seemed combined into an almost tangible entity that Leon could see and deal with. It was there and he controlled it. He could raise and lower the intensity as he wished; quell it to silence for a moment, and just as it seemed as if calmness might be restored, begin firing again, even more furiously and rapidly than before. Leon fired as quickly as he could, trying to follow round upon round in an attempt to create an almost continuous sound, a solid wall of chaos and intimidation. Frustration disintegrated before his eyes. He murdered it; he conquered it.

Leon finally stopped, exhausted. He looked around, at the place he lived in, then shook his head. He didn't want to see that yet. He had won, blown the living shit right out of it. Leon and his new friend had done it. Together they could stand up to it, would keep it away. They were the guys in white hats, on patrol.

The cabin was a shambles, a disaster. Leon wasn't fazed. He could repair the damage a little at a time. He was handy when he wanted to be. It was worth it.

First things first, however. Leon picked his way through the debris to a shelf by the door. From there he brought down a metal box and sat on a chopping block in the middle of the floor. That was probably the only piece of furniture left whole in the place, he thought with a chuckle. He opened the metal box, took out three steel rods and screwed them together to make one long length. Then, after inserting a cotton patch through the eye on one end of the rod, he began to methodically and lovingly clean his rifle.

Robert C. Lewis
North Edgecomb
is a musician & laborer

autumnal kayak

*our boats separate.
off, through the highest
marsh grass,
my son glides
to seek another passage.*

*his yellow blade windmills
in constant visual pattern,
above his head,
then at his side.*

His growing stroke is sure.

Ellen Bowman
Readfield
Is a child therapist

Mama Is Dying Very Well

It hurts to watch her labored breathing, so I focus on the fine hairs, still not completely gray at eighty, twirled into a pug at the nape of her neck.

"I am like a cat that wants to crawl under something and be left alone . . . you know what I mean?" she asks, leaning forward over her bed-table. She rests her head on bruised arms trailing plastic tubes.

"I do," I say, remembering kittens who, overnight, it seemed, turned stiff and bleary-eyed with age. Remembering the agony of deciding when they should die . . . their final exhalations when the shot took hold. I feel stifled and long to throw open the windows in this stale room.

"Let me brush your hair," I say.

She perches on the commode. I slide out hairpins and work gingerly on snarls, afraid of causing one more pain.

"That feels good," she says, closing her eyes. "You know, that's Damien's brush. He loved to be brushed."

Damien . . . a mammoth blue-eyed dog who had filled her tiny kitchen for thirteen years. I noted silently that she would never have bought herself a brush of such good quality. For animals nothing was spared. Up all night with the eye-dropper of milk or medicine. Weeping inconsolably when they died. Vowing never to have another pet but unable to resist the next inevitable, pregnant stray.

She even brushed Damien's teeth . . . which made him smile, she said.

Her hair hangs all around her face now, soft and smooth. "Here. Let me do it myself," she says, reaching for the brush. She closes her eyes and wears a sad smile.

Stepping back, I study her profile. No one has a mother as beautiful as mine, I think, amazed at how young I feel at this moment. I am a child not yet in school watching my young mother perform her personal rituals. I am a child looking at a future self.

"You're beautiful Mama," says the adoring child.

"Thank you very much baby," she says, and suddenly I am fifty-seven again.

Together, we make braids and pin them up away from her face. She struggles, exhausted, back to bed. I lift her legs for her and smooth out the sheets . . . keeping busy . . . keeping busy . . . not to think. After a moment she opens her eyes. Extraordinary eyes of deep hazel, but nearly blind. She fumbles with her grotesquely thick glasses and now peers through them at me.

"You know. Damien had the same thing I've got."

I nod. Not exactly the same, sweetheart, but cancer anyway. The vet had said he could buy a small amount of time with surgery. Damien had wagged his tail.

"But I said, no. It wasn't worth it to put him through all that. Better put him to sleep, I said." She waits.

"You made the right decision, Mama." I brace myself for what comes next. Mama talks like she plays chess.

"Yes, I did," she says, "and I wish someone would do that for me right now." Check.

I avert my eyes. This is my mother talking. I want to say, "You're right. Makes sense. Someone should do that for you." But who? Hey! Don't look at me. Let everybody who loves her gather around this bed. Spread out the guilt. Let's sing a lullaby while the lethal dose drips innocent as gravity . . . a sleek serpent seeking its target. Cleopatra and the asp. She's courageous . . . ready to go. I'm a coward . . . not ready to let her.

It will be a month before she gets her morphine drip. And through those days I become ready too. But her doctors and nurses do not. Our side wars with the whitecoats. They say her disease can respond well to procedures. They poke and prod. She simply continues to die. They say—

"Irene is not cooperating." (Mama is a bad girl.)

"We can give her up to six years." (Of what?)

"She must get up and walk." (Like Lazarus?)

She says, "If I try to walk I'll have a heart attack." They walk her anyway. She has a heart attack. Moment of truth for the whitecoats. They miss it and redouble their rescue efforts.

Bound and gagged in intensive care, one hand untied, she telegraphs from her bunker. My mother, the objective observer reports:

I HAD A HEART ATTACK. NOT BAD. LIKE NAUSEA. HOW LONG TO DIE? TYING HANDS OF ELDERLY COMMON PRACTICE. VERY OLD FASHIONED. NEED NO MORE PROCEDURES. NEED COMFORT.

Can you all understand that my mother is still in there? In a house of cards. Prop up one system and another collapses. Stabilize the heart and the kidneys fail. Can you hear what she is asking? Only to be comforted.

The whitecoats capitulate. A truce. She ascends from the purgatory of intensive care to the limbo of a ward for the terminally ill. She will be comforted. And so will we.

Husband, son and daughters . . . twelve strong, lovely grandchildren stand vigil. We bring our bewildered, weeping, curious selves to see how this thing is done. And she shows us with style. We know she will be a tough act to follow.

"Mama. You're like a beached mermaid," my sister tells her. Mama laughs and inches up to higher ground to wait. (Will I be whole enough to laugh on my deathbed?) Across the open water she calls to us in a new voice.

"I am in the valley of the shadow of death," she says. "This is it. This is really it. When you take it all in it is a heavy load to bear. It's my turn. It is my turn to die." We are quiet with her while this weight settles into us.

"We are mirrors of God's love. We reflect His love." And then, as though politely dismissing all of us she says, "Now I go the Teahouse of the August Moon to reflect. August is a lovely month to be born." Born? Why not? I see her contemplating, silhouetted . . . elegant in a softly draped robe in her teahouse at twilight against a Maxfield Parrish moon. I consider joining her for tea.

Then she says, "I love you all, all, all . . . ALL of you." To leave no doubt she adds emphatically, "We have discussed it thoroughly and we have decided that we love each and every one of you. Every single one!" (And will I have the grace to remember my loves as I die?)

My sister scribbles in her upside-down left-hand way, tears streaming down her face. We want every note of this mermaid's last song. Mama says to herself (though she has always hated the song), "Good night, Irene. I love you dear." (Will I speak as tenderly to myself?)

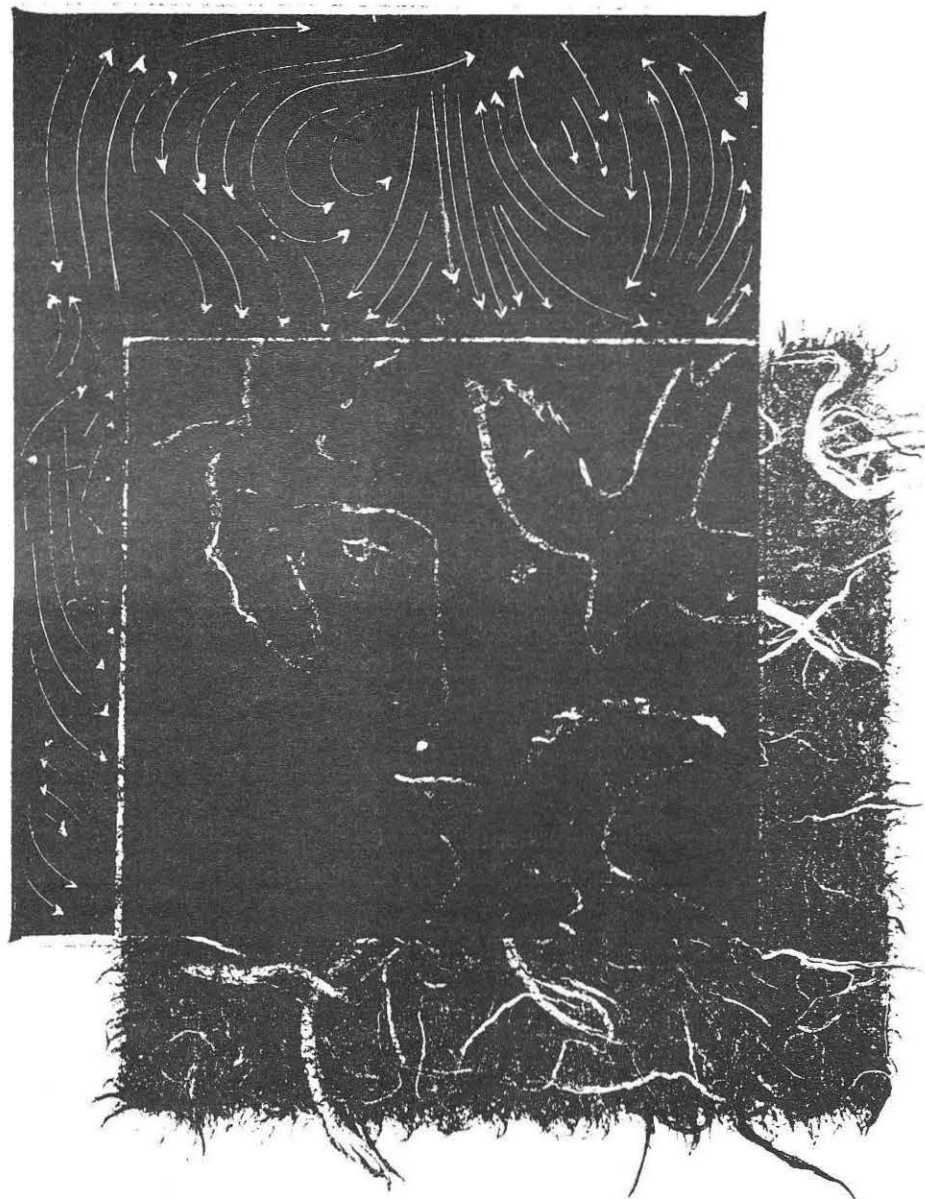
Then as the sea comes up to meet her, she writes her last review.

"Indeed. Mama is dying very well."

Indeed you did, Mama. (Will I?)

**Dorothy Sheldon
Spruce Head**

*is Director of Substance Abuse
Treatment at Thomaston State Prison*



Graphic by Karen Gilg

heroes, etcetera

It was a hot and muggy night when Louie Hill snuck outside to hear the whisper of automobiles travelling the interstate south of town. He looked into the dark for quite a while, and never called out or waved when his best friend, Blue Blue Martin, pedaled down the street, dipping through the shallow pockets of light of the street lamps. It was eleven-thirty by then, and although Blue Blue really was his best friend, Louie felt sick and scared and tired to see him coming, and for a moment he shut his eyes.

Blue Blue had spaghetti fingers and sausage thumbs, and blue eyes and black hair that grew wild over the last two years; and when he flipped it off his face Louie saw the ripe, bruised eye.

"I'll kick your ass," Blue Blue said, and shoved Louie twice in his chest. He never threatened friends, or fought them ever. "You're a chicken shit fucker."

He never swore at them.

Louie stood still. Telephone cables sagged over his head. The only call being made tonight was one house down from the Hill's. Their neighbor, Mr. Jonathon Kleig, dialed 911 because of a pain exploding inside his chest. It was only heartburn, and bad dreams and bad nerves, but he was panicking. He fumbled the phone, dialed 811, then 611. He whimpered into the line.

"Let's go for a ride," Blue Blue said, looking down at Mr. Kleig's house.

"It's too late. We'll get in trouble." Louie felt stupid saying it, after the chances they'd taken over the last year, the things he himself had done to Blue Blue's father.

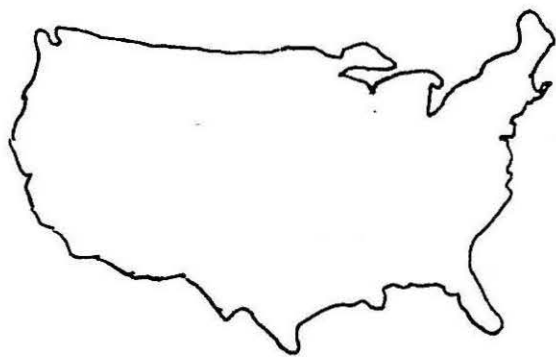
"Now," Blue Blue ordered.

"It's late," Louie said, staring at a yellow Chevy that heaved by on a rusted frame.

"You go to hell." Blue Blue's lips peeled back on sharp teeth.

Louie saw the light flick on in Mr. Kleig's kitchen, then he looked back at his own house. It was dark, and his parents were asleep. He thought about when he was younger, how Hermann Martin drove Blue Blue to school, and picked him up at the end of the day. Hermann's Harley Davidson was new then, and had a side car that Mr. Kleig put on at his garage downtown; a shiny black capsule that Blue Blue slipped into when his mother rode along. Everyone wanted to be Blue Blue those days. "No," Louie said, turning around and facing Blue Blue again. "You go to hell."

Then Blue Blue stepped forward and rammed a fist into Louie's mouth, and started to choke him to death.



Blue Blue's father disappeared two years ago on the fourth of July, the summer before Louie and Blue Blue graduated into Miss Bretch's sixth grade class. The wind droned the night he left, and for weeks after Louie dreamed about Hermann Martin, grinning as he rolled the Harley away from his home, a cigarette dangled between his fingers, the tip burning in the wind that swept from far away to far away.

And after he'd gone the neighborhood whispered their stories. No man left for a month job in the middle of the night, his family asleep. The gossipers gossiped, but they couldn't figure it out for a long time.

The bike was fire-engine red, with the front seat slung low, and the rear jacked up so a passenger's thighs wrapped around Hermann's ears. Chrome pipes shone; the front forks stretched out into the front tire. Its handlebars rose straight up, the hand grips so high that Hermann drove with his arms straight over his head, like he was being robbed. They were called ape-hangers and were illegal, he told them, because there was no control.

Alice Martin said her husband left on a construction job for just five weeks. She didn't know where. "Out west. He's moving around," she told Blue Blue twelve times in two days. "He didn't want to wake you, so just shut up about it."

But they couldn't. They needed to be with him out in the cities, the country. Blue Blue, Louie, and Kevin Grady met at the railroad tracks south of town to

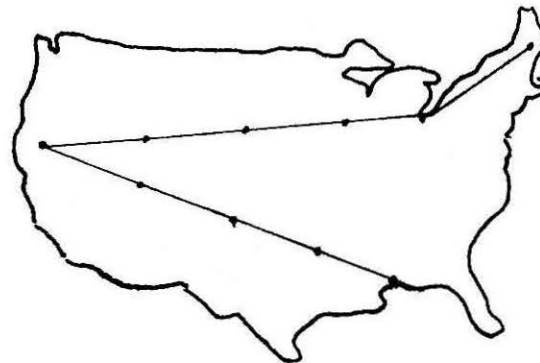
place Hermann in the world. On the hottest days Blue Blue always guessed California:

"On the beach."

"The mountains," Kevin Grady said. He was fat, with greasy hair and zits, and he wanted to explore all the highest places in the world, where grace and strength and beauty were real and guaranteed. "There's mountains in every bit of California," he said.

"Malibu," Blue Blue laughed, thinking of his father in the sand.

"He's in the mountains," Kevin said. "Doesn't he fish, doesn't he hunt?"



"He never kills anything," Blue Blue said, running a hand over his neat hair. "He's a vegetarian. He's in perfect health."

Kevin thought about that, scooping out a whitehead with his pinky. "Exactly," he said. "He's in the mountains."

They got a United States map and a calendar, plus a photograph of Hermann Martin tacked in a treehouse that Blue Blue and Louie found at the start of summer, the planks dishwater gray and shrunk like old bones. Kevin Grady was too heavy for the rotted wood, so he sat against the trunk of the dying pine while they held meetings in the afternoons, yelling down to get his swing vote and announce every decision.

Blue Blue was the only one allowed to stick colored pins into the map, although they took turns crossing out the calendar days that led up to five weeks, and looping kite string between the pins. After California Blue Blue swung the trail southeast, plotting his father, Louie suspected, to the Gulf of Mexico.

Louie thought more and more about Hermann Martin, but as the days passed he started to fade away in pieces. Louie remembered his short hair and mustache, but did he have a beard? He was thin, but skinny? Were his eyes blue or gray or green?

Louie and Blue Blue rode bicycles to the interstate, sat under the pea-green bridge that arched over the railroad tracks and listened to the ragged wind trickle through the steel girders and dissolve, and to the trucks rattling over their heads. They laughed and made dirty jokes about Miss Bretch's fat ass, while Louie imagined Hermann Martin and the Harley, its chrome glinting on a stretch of road without hills or corners, the heat drifting off the pavement in waves, his thin arms straight over his head, hanging from the handlebars that grew up over him, melting into them. No length to his hair, no weight to his body, no color to his eyes.

And even when a bike crossed the bridge, its engine throbbing low as the Harley's, Louie never believed it was Hermann coming back. He was always out there, beyond the town, riding further away. Louie prayed for that; he had his own maps at home, of the United States and the world and the galaxy, all plastered with colored pins and dangled kite string.

Blue Blue's hair grew longer. Three weeks after Hermann left he hacksawed the front forks of his bicycle in half and welded in steel rods, stretching the forks twice as long, like a chopper's. He wrapped green tape around the rods so they glowed at night, and cracked a bottle of cola over the handlebars, blessing it the Green Lantern.

In August they watched Evel Knievel jump a world record on the Wild World of Sports, then flew their own bikes over pits filled with stones and bricks and jagged cement. Louie took eleven stitches after one bad jump, and Kevin got fourteen in his chest before their parents put a stop to that madness, cursing and threatening them; then length of the jumps doubled then tripled, with nails and broken glass stirred into the pits. They walked through graveyards at midnight making fun of the dead, and shot rats in the town dump, leaving the bodies in mailboxes like packages of fat and slaughtered mail.

Ten-and-a-half weeks after Hermann left, summer ended with an icy wind that knocked all the yellow leaves to the ground and drove them over the cold dirt. Both the calendar and photograph disappeared from the treehouse that day, setting Kevin on the lookout for spies and thieves. In October Blue Blue stopped sticking pins into the map, so it seemed like Hermann just stayed in Santa Fe. Kevin bugged Louie for days about that. He called at night, trying to figure why

anyone would spend so much time in Santa Fe.

Alice Martin sold her car and borrowed cash from Jonathen Kleig (the only man in town she trusted), to make late house payments; she hitchhiked to work at Howard Johnsons, and bummed rides home late at night. On the eighth of October a trucker from Philadelphia offered a lift, and in the dark of his rig he held her hand. Alice was sleepy and a little drunk when she touched three gnawed warts on the pads of his fingers, and felt their roots twisting through his arm and down into the chambers of his heart, and she believed he was a good man, and squeezed his fingers tight. They tried to sneak into the house, but the man crashed in a heap onto the kitchen floor. He tripped over Blue Blue, who sat and moaned on the bare linoleum, and who vomited whisky on the man's hands. The trucker jumped up and kicked Blue Blue in the guts, then wiped his hands on Blue Blue's face and hair, and left.

The next Tuesday Blue Blue showed Louie how to play Russian Roulette, and they played every Tuesday. He took his six shooter cap gun and they went to the treehouse and slid one bullet inside the chamber, then passed it back and forth, adding bullets all afternoon. The first time Blue Blue aimed the gun between his eyes and jerked the trigger, it clicked.

"Here," he said and held it out to Louie, who sat cross-legged on the warped floor.

"What?"

Blue Blue set the gun in Louie's hand, and guided it up so it pointed between his eyes. "Shoot," Blue Blue told him, and the cap popped in the dull afternoon. "You're dead," Blue Blue whispered.

"Sure," Louie laughed. "Sure I am."

"You're dead," Blue Blue said.

Then Hermann came home. It was Halloween, and Louie stood alone, leaning against the school gym. He felt the drone of music through the cement wall, and believed that tonight he'd ask Chrissie Cousin to dance. He'd hold her hand in the dark, tell her she was the sweetest old girl in the world. Chrissie was a perfect witch, with green hair and black teeth and glitter on her fingernails, and Louie only had a white sheet hung over his head. He felt dumb, so he leaned against the gym as other kids growled and fanged and limped inside, building his courage, losing it, when Hermann and Blue Blue rode up on the Harley, the headlight sick and yellow. The bike had faded to pink, with the chrome pipes dented on one side and beat off the other.

"How's it hanging, Louie?" Hermann Martin asked, while the wind gusted and Louie shivered, and the Harley's engine knocked like a combustion heart.

"Pretty good, sir."

Hermann nodded and swung off the bike so Blue Blue had room to climb down from the back seat. He was skinny. His hair strung half-way down his neck, the mustache curled around the corners of his mouth. He looked like an outlaw: tired, happy and miserable all at once. Louie wanted to touch him. "I saw Evel Knievel," Hermann said.

Louie stepped in closer, where the bike gurgled, and the engine sucked and burped heat. "Yeah?" Louie whispered.

Hermann settled back onto the bike. He had holes in the seat of his pants, and no underwear. "Here." He drew a picture from his wallet and held it out. "In Boise." Louie clutched the photo in two hands. "Idaho," Hermann said. "He bought me a beer. He has a Sky Cycle, to jump the Snake River."

In the picture, Hermann leaned against the wooden rail of a bar with a mug of beer in his hand. Beside him, Evel looked heavier, and maybe older, and he had sandy blond hair and a cockeyed smile, with a brown leather jacket in one hand, and a can of beer in the other. Behind them a bartender grabbed some bills from an unattached hand. Evel looked happy, confident, brave.

"You keep it," Hermann said and roared the Harley away from the school.

"Asshole," Blue Blue said, standing in his biker costume, watching his father gun the bike down the driveway. Wind twisted around the building and lifted Louie's sheet, then Blue Blue walked inside and Louie followed, wondering exactly what Blue Blue meant, if Hermann lied about Evel, if he gave Blue Blue a picture, or should Louie just hand his over, but he didn't.

* * * *

The ambulance's siren rose in the sticky night, and Blue Blue let go of Louie, who had blood running down his lips, dribbling over his teeth and chin. The sound dropped low, then climbed higher than before. It cut across the neighborhood streets, came closer. In a minute they saw the red and white swirl of its lights, and then the machine tore onto Landow, and came at them.

When the ambulance shut off its siren it pulled into Mr. Jonathen Kleig's driveway. Two figures ran into Mr. Kleig's house, while the red and white strobes pulsed like a heart. Louie stared at the light, and then the ambulance itself,

hulking in Mr. Kleig's driveway. They snuck across the lawns separating them, and spied through the kitchen window. Mr. Kleig slumped in a chair, and a thin man stood behind him with his hands on Mr. Kleig's shoulders, while a woman sunk a stethoscope into his bare chest. Mr. Kleig had his eyes closed, and he bit his left hand as the thin man patted his shoulders, and the woman felt his fatty chest.

Blue Blue tripped Louie down from behind, then kicked him in the legs. Blue Blue looked sick in the throbbing light; with drops of blood beading under his black and purple eye.

"What happened?" Louie asked and scrambled up when Blue Blue turned and walked away. "What happened?"

* * * *

After a gray Halloween, after a drizzling Thanksgiving and a soaking spring Hermann Martin disappeared again, on the seventh of July. It had rained that day, thin drops spitting on the tin roofs of trailer homes, falling in the streets, down into alleys and streaking across the greasy windows of Johathen Kleig's Foreign Auto Repair shop downtown, where Kevin Grady's father worked on Volvos and Volkswagon buses every day except Sunday, and sometimes Sunday. The rain was silent.

This time Alice Martin didn't pretend to know where her husband disappeared, and no one asked, except for Blue Blue. He called Louie two days after Hermann ran out again. He'd left a note that guaranteed he was coming back.

"What'll you do then?" Louie asked. And when Blue Blue answered, Louie knew it wasn't him. He spoke slow and clear, but it wasn't him. "What?" Louie asked again.

"Exile him," Blue Blue said.

That second summer of Hermann's absence they decided ways to drive Hermann away, keeping the best ideas, making lists.

Rumors:

- He beat Blue Blue and Alice
- He took drugs, and sold them
- He was a communist
- He hated God (and everyone else in the Bible)

Personal:

- Send anonymous hate-letters; make hate-calls
- Plant dead rats around the lawn before he mows; slice them up into the Harley's saddlebags
- Shove dogshit into the toes of his sneakers and shoes

At Home:

- Smash the coffee maker
- Never speak to him, but if you do, mumble, interrupt, lie and run off before he finishes
- Steal his money

They dreamed up hundreds of plans, and that was fun and it bothered Louie sometimes, since it was all Blue Blue cared about. Once he planned on feeding Hermann rat poison and shooting him in the back of the head, in his sleep, in his rotten dreams. Still, it felt better than the summer before, blowing their brains out every Tuesday afternoon.

Louie wrote down reasons why Hermann ran away. He thought if he found out why then he could start his own plan, to help Blue Blue stop him. Maybe Hermann had an old mother to see, or he was helping the law, or was sick and had to find the remedy. But Louie worried about something he'd scribbled onto the list early one morning, listening to rain beat against the tar streets, and drool through the trees; **there is no reason**, he wrote, and lay back in bed.

Like the summer before, they sat under the interstate and listened to the cars and trucks, to the drops smacking the steel bridge when it rained, only Louie and Blue Blue didn't talk anymore; they didn't joke. When a train flew under the bridge they launched rocks and hunks of cement and bottles at it, watching the debris ricochet off the green and green boxcars, the bottles exploding without sound. Blue Blue screamed at the traffic that slammed overhead, while Louie listened close to the sound of motorcycles running in the rain, praying Hermann was on every one.

Then he came back. It was September eighth. That day Nolan Ryan threw a ninth inning fastball to Bee Bee Richard that was clocked at 100.8 mph; President Ford pardoned Richard Nixon; and Evel Knievel finally jumped the Snake River Canyon in his Sky Cycle. Louie saw it on television. The Sky Cycle was really a rocket, and Evel still didn't make it across. The chute opened at blastoff, and he drifted over the mouth of the canyon, helpless. Louie watched the red, white and blue rocket sink into the Snake River. Evel landed on an

island, barely saved from drowning.

"Jesus Christ," Louie's mother said. "Another idiot."

When Blue Blue worked on the plan, Louie helped, but he was scared, especially when he shoved a rag in his mouth and made an anonymous call:

"Mr. Martin?"

"Yes."

"We'll shred your balls."

They never had recess on the playground that fall. Curtains of cold rain washed the days away, and they stayed in the gym, while the teachers walked outside under plastic umbrellas to have their smokes. Louie spread the rumors around, but not enough made it out of the gym to keep Blue Blue satisfied. Louie finally quit on the eighteenth of January, after Blue Blue made him sneak over and spill a bucket of water on their walkway. Hermann fell so badly on ice that formed by the morning that Alice drove him to the emergency room. Doctors shaved the side of his head and sewed thirteen stitches. Blue Blue said no one stopped the bleeding; two days later it still oozed between the stitches and crusted thick on his head at night.

July was coming, so Blue Blue dug in. He stole thirty dollars, scratched three Cat Stevens albums, and ruined the second coffee maker since Christmas. In the spring he trailed neighborhood dogs to get the freshest shit possible, and put it everywhere his father might be. He set it on top of the morning paper outside their door, mounds of it hot and steaming, soaking through the pages Hermann wanted so badly. Blue Blue poked holes in Hermann's rain coat with pick-up-sticks, and worked harder. He threw rocks through the two front windows of their house, and increased the hate-mail; subscribed his father to *Playboy*, *Swank*, and *Playgirl*, and let his parents fight it out.

But he got reckless, and was caught destroying the third coffee maker, and tearing out the last twenty pages from *Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance*. His mother, already tired and desperate, grounded him forever, and then saw him tear the cord out of the fourth coffee maker. She drove him against the kitchen wall.

"What are you doing?" she asked him, then pulled him back from the wall, and slammed him again. "Don't," she said, her lips brushing his, her eyes dark and ugly. "Don't."

Hermann himself begged off the long punishment. He took Blue Blue and Louie to see *The Sting*. Blue Blue sprinkled garlic on his popcorn.

Nothing worked. Hermann stayed and stayed, and June was nearly over. It was a rotten spring.

* * * *

Greg Palmer
Hampden
graduated Iowa Writer's Workshop
& teaches at UMO

Old Wool

My brother's old robe lies heavy on me like something precious but it's purple and plaid and scratchy, like a coarse army blanket. The belt falls to the floor, a purple snake heading out the bathroom. I feel like a fur trader in this old wool, living by what I skin off *other* animals, off the trap line, living very close to an undefined edge: something elemental, blood (still) on the flesh, scent hanging, unweighted, in the air. Like old wool.

Deborah Stiles
Orono
teaches at UMO

"He's gone," Blue Blue said, and stretched his arms over his head, then flicked his wrists. "Vroom vroom."

Louie stared across the lawns, at the beat of the ambulance's light. The rest of the street was dark; it was quiet. "When?" he asked.

"Tonight." Blue Blue wrung his hands and laughed. "I caught him. I said I never believed him."

"About what?"

"I told him he'd die this time." Blue Blue peeled his tank-top. His skin was creamy, like Louie could take a scoop out of it with a spoon. "He said he'd come back no matter what." There was automatic rhythm to his words, as if he had them all memorized. Blue Blue wiped sweat and blood from his bruised eye.

"Did he do that?"

Blue Blue shook his head. "Mom," he whispered. "I woke her up and said he was gone for good this time. I finally drove him off."

Louie wanted something to stop this now, something with pus and oil and mud and shit leaking out of its eyes and running off its fangs to crawl down the street, or just a cop to drive along and haul Blue Blue home. Something. "Did we?" he asked.

"I hope so," Blue Blue said.

A train whistled from the tracks across town. It was hooked up and would pull out soon.

"What are you going to do?"

Blue Blue wiped his face and eyes again. He tied his tank-top to the handlebars of his bike, with those long front forks out in front like a lost dog sniffing its way home. "Celebrate," he said, then jumped onto the Green Lantern and pushed off onto the empty street. It was the quietest damn night.

When they pedaled past Mr. Jonathon Kleig's house, the man and woman were helping him into the ambulance. Mr. Kleig looked at Louie and Blue Blue, and he laughed and waved, and Blue Blue waved back.

Fireflies flickered in empty lots across town, lighting bits of the sticky night, while further away trucks shook along the interstate. In twenty minutes they parked their bikes over the bank. They sat under the pea-green bridge, on chipped cement and broken glass and bags of trash flung there summers ago.

Blue Blue curled his legs to his chest, and a line of trucks rattled the beams and girders, and a beer bottle flew out of the dark and smashed below their feet. Blue Blue scrambled to grab a shard, then slashed one cheek and his lips, and drove the sliver into his mouth and tried to swallow while blood pumped down his face and spit out of his mouth. And Louie tackled him. And they rolled in the trash on the ground as another semi and two motorcycles came and rode off the bridge, their engines perfectly steady, until they droned away.

Looking Over the Application

- Have you ever cut fish?
Once I showed my son how to clean a small mouth bass.
- Do you have experience as a fry cook?
We cooked over an open fire in an old black skillet.
- Did you ever work as a dishwasher?
After supper we washed the skillet with sand and water.
- List next of kin in case of emergency.
I haven't heard from him in eight years.
I don't even know where he's living now.
- Would you be willing to work part-time?
Took three work days off so we could go fishing together.

Looking over the application,
I came here to answer all your questions yes—except,
I haven't heard from him for eight years.
I think he's in Florida working construction.

Pat Murphy
Portland
runs Out-of-Print Books

Cowboy Tough

If asked to sing only
of alabaster skin
and graceful features
there would be
no song for me.

My love
is hard determined lines
on a face unyielding.
Rough edges of will—
cowboy tough
and hard to hold.

This is my true song.
I can love no other way
but flat out
in the face of adversity.
A ragged reaching
through space and time.
It is not
lovely to look at
but it belongs to me.
Cowboy tough
and hard to hold.

Laura Bass
Bangor

*is a transplanted Texan
& UMO grad student*

Coloring Reality

A slap on the face
from me
knicked your nose,
perfect blood dripped external,
landed in my bellybutton,
marking a contoured pool
crimson,
as you sat on my legs barebottomed.

You sneered
in incomplete guilt,
an aspect I shared
for lying naked with you,
and then reasoning
I still had the right
to say No,
to sex, after all.

Now you feel justified
in minimizing the act,
saying you loved me
too much,
for self control,
without seeing my spirit
crushed,
because of you,
the man
it was so easy to trust.
I sometimes dream
of flawless blood
raging red
from my navel,
forcing its way back into your nose.

Gretchen L. Patrick
Randolph
is a student at UMA



Drawing by MaJo Kelesian

Inheritance

He turns on her computer
and finds in its memory lines
she wrote before she died.
He hadn't known, how could he,
how much he missed of her
that another memory held.

Wendy Kindred
Ft. Kent
teaches at UMFK

In the Free World

You think I look
like a million bucks.

What commerce
is this?

You're in the market
for a new wife.

What an eye
for acquisition.

Who first attempted
to negotiate
a wilderness?

Survey—
divide,
and auction off.

To name
the ungovernable
Property,
to buy and sell
what cannot be owned.

Nancy Devine
Waldoboro
teaches creative writing

Independence

Martha Varney's independence is going to be the end of her. It always has been one of her greatest assets. But these days at age 71 as a widow, living alone in the family farmhouse on 50 acres of land just inside the boundaries of the central Maine town of Universe, her feisty, scrappy, do-it-yourself nature ultimately is working against the very independence that she holds so dear. Her few remaining friends fear that if she doesn't agree soon to compromise that independence by such actions as opening a checking account, moving into a smaller place with less upkeep or even learning to drive a car, she gradually will place herself in the position of becoming totally dependent on them, and they are no spring chickens either.

"I hate to see her come to this, Hattie," says Grace Beecher one day after she and Hattie Brooks have driven Martha to the bank up in Pittsfield and the grocery store over in Bangor.

"I know, I know, Grace, but it'll probably happen to us someday too."

"Oh, no, it won't," contends Grace, gripping the steering wheel tightly and squinting her eyes to block the setting sun as she guns her old Buick over Universe's rolling, autumn-gold hills and turns onto the dirt of Red Bog Road where Hattie and her husband Stanley have lived for 40 years.

"And why won't it?" Hattie demands, drawing back her head of stiff, gray curls to look at her determined friend.

"Because, I won't let it," she replies testily as if Hattie must be crazy to believe anything else.

"I don't understand you, Grace Beecher, or maybe I do too well, but are you telling me that this is all Martha's fault?"

Grace is concentrating on avoiding a dead porcupine in the road and does not answer for a few seconds, then reaching the long gravel driveway that leads to Hattie's house which perches on a rise of land looking down on the local pond; she carefully edges her way toward the once barn, now garage, in the fast fading light, brings the Buick to a stop, turns to Hattie dead serious and says, "That's right dear, that is, I mean most of it is her fault. She *can* do something about it, but she won't because she's so damn stubborn. You can be independent and you can be stubborn, look at mules. When's the last time you ever heard of anyone wanting to have anything to do with a mule? A mule is stubborn, not independent, besides you have to depend on someone, have to trust them, a little anyway."

Hattie regards her old friend and begins to chuckle. As she does, Grace nervously pulls her short, dyed, red hair that badly needs a rinse, takes a deep breath, begins to laugh too and advises, "Look, you know what I mean. If she has to have everything the way it's always been, she'll never survive."

"Well, that's the way Sidney was. Used to go all the way into Waterville to pay his electric bill because he didn't trust banks and wouldn't have a checking account and wouldn't pay it up at the drugstore in Deerfield since he was afraid Jack would know his business and tell everyone in the county."

"I know, can you imagine anyone caring about Sid Varney's electric bill?"

"He thought everyone in town wanted to know everything he did."

"Martha's not like that, really, you know, it's just so much of Sid rubbed off on her."

"You think she's better off without him?" asks Hattie, almost holding her breath and afraid of her own words.

"Sure do, I'm better off since Charles died."

"Grace!" Hattie feigns shock, knowing all along, as does everyone else in Universe, that it's true.

"Look, Hattie, Charles and I had some good times and a nice life, but he was miserable and in pain, and money was being spent on a losing cause."

The two women sit in silence for a few seconds, each considering her own mortality. Then Hattie says, "I'd better get in before Stanley comes out to get me. But what are we going to do about Martha?"

Grace stares absently out the car windshield toward Hattie's Cape Cod-styled, red-shingled house as a light goes on in its living room. Then she turns quickly to her friend, "I'm supposed to take her over to Bangor to shop next week."

"All the way over there again? Can't convince her it's cheaper in Waterville?"

"No, she's sure Bangor's better and cheaper, don't confuse her with the facts."

"Want some more company then?"

"Well, I just might not take her, Hattie."

"Oh, you can't do that, Grace. I mean she does get cranky, we all do, she's just set in her ways."

But Grace hasn't heard a word and is sitting behind the wheel of her car grinning and pleased with herself, yanking on her hair and laughing.

"Grace, what in the world is wrong with you, are you okay? I'm going in now."

"No, wait," and she grabs Hattie by the wrist, "wait, dear, wait, let me tell you my plan about Martha."

"What plan?"

"This. And you don't have to do it if you don't want. But . . ."

"Well, what?"

"Martha's going to get her driver's license."

"What?"

"And we are going to teach her how to drive and tell her if she won't do it, we may not be able to take her all those places she's been wanting to go."

"She won't do it."

"It's worth a try, listen she always has said she wished Sid had taught her."

"Sid was such an old stick, he was afraid Martha would leave him behind if she could drive a car."

"Look, she's always talking about doing for herself; this is perfect."

"But she gave her car to her cousin after Sid died."

"I know, and she can get it back, after all, she's leaving him her house and land."

"I don't know, Grace."

"Will you help me, Hattie?" Grace pushes, ignoring her friend's misgivings, "she'll probably end up being the terror of the roads."

"Oh, all right, Grace, all right," and with that, Hattie gets out of the car and walks slowly across her leaf-strewn lawn toward the house where her husband peers from the window as he waits for her. And Grace, delighted with her own cleverness, screeches out of the driveway and rumbles back down the dirt road anxious to get home and pursue her plan more carefully.

Meanwhile Martha Varney realizes that she has forgotten about the oilman's delivery the next day. This discovery means that she did not draw enough money from the bank to pay the oil bill and will probably be short by the week's end. So she will either have to return to the bank or make sure she doesn't need any money until the next Monday. If she goes back to the bank then she'll have to ask Grace Beecher to take her, or Hattie or her cousin or one of the Stowes from down the road, and then she'll feel like she's been begging. She can only ask for so much help and right now she's figuring on how to make sure Brad Stowe's boy will rake the leaves left by the weekend's northeaster, give her lawn a final mow before cold weather sets in and trim down the peonies. He's back in school, and she's certain he's tired of taking care of her yard; she's hoping Brad will think to remind him soon. She knows deep down that she should open a checking account; it is the most practical thing to do, but she has been so adamantly against such an action for so long that she is embarrassed to change her mind, fearing such a reversal would indicate weakness and dependence. Yet, at the same time, she is intelligent enough to realize that by condemning checking accounts, she may be consigning herself to a virtual dependence on others. Nevertheless, Martha is afraid of writing checks, scared of putting them in the mail, even though she can get money orders from the bank and lately has been sending them through the mail. And she insists on obtaining the money orders from the bank and not, more conveniently, from the Universe post office because she doesn't want the postmaster to know her business.

Martha's family goes back about five generations in the Universe area, an expanse of rolling hills, both wooded and cleared for growing, dotted with ponds and bogs, that form a ridge between the Kennebec and Penobscot River Valleys. In fact, the town's name originated when the region's early settlers, who had migrated from Massachusetts, took a look at the undulating terrain from a point atop the ridge where the White Mountains over in New Hampshire could be seen and immediately decided that, indeed, this country must be the "backbone of the universe." Martha's parents lost most everything during the depression, and she'd seen a very adequate sawmill and dairy business sold in order to, at least, keep the farmhouse and some of the acreage. She and Sid, who had no children, left for Massachusetts where he'd found work, but returned after World War II when her father died and left them the farm. She always swore that she'd never leave it, never go to an old people's home. And just think, Grace and Hattie, her two best friends, are hinting that she do that right now. Hard to believe what must be wrong with their heads. She wonders, though, if there could be something wrong with her head, but she doubts it.

A short, plumpish woman with a round, heavily jowled face, a pug nose and fierce black eyes, Martha usually surprises people when she smiles and shows off a pair of deep-set dimples. She limps a little from arthritis in her left leg and refuses to do no more to her dull, gray hair than to wear it in tightly rolled curls all over her head. Still, she knows how to laugh and after a while, realizes when she's wrong. It's just that she's usually afraid to admit the latter. All part of a typical Maine independence that comes with a hard life on hard land. She doesn't understand the word quit even when it's advantageous to do so, or at least make a compromise.

Continued next page

Anyway, when the oilman comes the next day, she finds that due to the warmer than usual fall, her oil is not down as much as she'd thought, and she can pay the bill easily. Then on Thursday her cousin, who lives near Waterville, is in the area and stops by to see if she'd like to ride with him to Pittsfield and have lunch. As they drive over, she mentions if it would be convenient to stop by her bank. Even though the oil bill was not as much as she'd thought, she's still low enough on cash to feel insecure. It is an easy request, and she doesn't have to bother Grace or Hattie. Something always works out, she tells herself later at home that evening, trying not to imagine when luck may not play her way.

As for driving an automobile, Martha really has not given it much thought for years. Not since Sid had refused to let her learn, advising that it didn't matter as he intended to do all the driving they needed. So on the following Monday, when Grace and Hattie take her to Bangor and Grace suddenly asks her if she would like to learn to drive with herself and Hattie as teachers, Martha, for once in her life, cannot think of what to say.

"Well?" Grace finally asks. "Never thought I'd see the day you were lost for words."

"I'm not lost for words," Martha shoots back, now clearly irritated at what she believes to be offered charity from a friend who should know better, "I'm just trying to figure out who hit you in the head with a club; since Charles is not around anymore, it's hard to know who's been beating you senseless."

"Oh, Martha," the gentler Hattie glides into the conversation, "don't be mean to Grace. I think she's got a good idea. Just look how convenient it would be for you."

"And what am I going to drive, the lawnmower?"

Grace has pulled the car into Shaw's parking lot, cuts off the engine, turns toward Martha, who is sitting in the front seat, glares at her for about 30 seconds and says, "We're trying to help you Martha. You're our friend, and we love you and we know how much your independence means to you. I will carry you around in this car until the earth blows up if you want, but the more I do it, the unhappier and snappier you're going to be. Make things easy for yourself, Martha. There's nothing wrong with letting friends help. If you let us drive you around, why not let us teach you how to drive yourself? What's the difference?"

"You still haven't told me what I'm supposed to drive."

"Oh, Martha," and now Hattie is exasperated, "you know Carl will give you the car back; he doesn't need it, and if you threaten not to leave him the land, he'll do anything you want."

"I'm too old to learn. I'd feel foolish."

"Wendell Coffin's mother learned when she was 65," counters Grace.

"That's different."

"How?" demands Grace.

"Well, she's younger, I'm 71, and she does those kind of things better."

"Well, Martha," taunts Grace, "I never thought I'd see the day you'd let Mildred Coffin do one better than you."

"That's not what I meant."

"Oh, come on, Martha," pleads Grace now.

"Do you really think I could learn?" Martha asks cautiously.

"If I can," laughs Hattie, "there's no reason you can't."

"Well," and Martha gathers herself up to open the car door and juts out her chin a little, "let me think about it."

"Okay, dear, you think good," soothes Hattie, who winks at Grace and hopes that the more outspoken woman will tone down, "now let's get inside before everyone in the parking lot thinks those three old women in the beat-up Buick have gone crazy yelling at each other."

That evening Martha wrestles with the proposition of learning how to drive. There had been a time, about 25 years ago, when she almost had taught herself all the fundamentals of operating a car, mainly by driving the tractor. She'd obtained information from the state, all the rules about traffic, what she'd needed to know for the tests, both written and driving, and had even practiced in the car of her old friend Ethel Mills, who'd been dead now for 20 years. But Sid simply had not allowed it, had said he wouldn't have his wife driving a car and making a fool of herself. As for what she might do when he wasn't around to do the driving anymore; well, he'd never said anything, like he was going to live forever. But he had humiliated her, and she'd never mentioned it again—to anyone.

And now Martha's main concern is another humiliation, failure to pass the test. She knows that what Grace and Hattie want is for her not to have to ask, not to have to beg. In the long run, it will be a reaffirmation of her cherished independence; it will make life easier. She knows all that. She even knows that her cousin Carl will give the car back, although taking it back will be embarrassing. Still, if she is able to drive herself around, maybe there will be less talk of her need to enter a senior citizen's home. Martha is just not sure. One minute she leans one way, the next minute another. And finally she realizes, if she can go either



way so easily, there is probably no harm in trying something different and her mind is not as set as she once had thought. Lordy, she tells herself, as she picks up the phone to call Grace and tell her that she's game to try, I don't even know what I want anymore.

But Grace doesn't answer the phone. Her daughter, Sally, who lives in nearby Deerfield, does.

"That you, Sal, where's Grace," bursts out Martha, eager now to surprise her friend about her decision.

"Who is this? Oh, Martha, is it you, Martha? I was going to call you in the morning. Oh, Martha, Mom isn't here, she's had a stroke. She's in the hospital over in Waterville. It's not a real bad one; she called the ambulance herself. We've just come back from over there; I've got to pack some things for her."

"Sally, I was with her today, she was fine; in fact, she was downright pig-headed. Me and Hattie were with her all afternoon. What happened?"

"I guess she was really lucky, Martha. It was around supper time, her right arm and then the back of her neck started going numb on her, couldn't move her arm. Same kind of thing that first happened to Dad, so she knew."

"Well, I won't keep you dear, can I see her, maybe tomorrow?"

"I think not for a day or two, Martha. I'll call you. The doctors have to make tests and want her to get some rest."

"Of course, well you tell her that I'm thinking of her and I love her and I'm going to be waiting for her to be giving me those driving lessons; she can't get out of it now."

"Oh, okay, Martha, I'll tell her. You take care now."

"I will dear, you do the same and let me know if I can help. Bye, bye."

Now wouldn't you know, Martha thinks, as she sits quietly in her kitchen by the phone watching her hands shake and doing nothing about the tears that are streaming down her face. Wouldn't you know. That's that. So much time spent worrying about something that wasn't meant to happen in the first place. That's what I get for being so taken with myself, thinking I'm going to cruise around these roads in my own car. But I guess I really wanted to, else why am I so upset; it's not all for Grace; she sounds like she'll be all right and maybe she'll still be able to . . . no, no she won't, that's too much to ask.

Just then, the phone rings and it is Hattie. They discuss Grace for a few minutes and find comfort in each other's voices, feeling their own mortality immensely and wondering to themselves, but afraid to speak out loud, of Grace, perhaps, being the first to go.

Finally Martha says, "Let's see if we can see her tomorrow. Sally isn't sure, but she's always been overly protective anyway."

"Okay, dear, I'll pick you up around eleven, and then you can drive the rest of the way and show me if it is really like running a tractor."

"Stop being silly, Hattie."

"I'm not being silly, it's just that Grace made me promise when she got the driving idea that if something happened to her, I had to teach you myself."

"Hattie, did she know? How? I mean did she, I mean, I don't . . ."

"Well, you know her great-great grandfather, the one from Roumania, he was a fortune teller."

"Hattie!"

"Well, he was!"

**C. Walker Mattson
Troy**
is a free-lance writer

Translations:

Five from Maine Try Baudelaire

Editor's Note: Robert Frost once said "Poetry is what is lost in translation." He meant quirks of idiom, slang, sandtraps of syntax: in short, *tone*. On the other hand, poetry is sometimes *found* in translation too; hear Robert Lowell, who sought "alive English" and tried to get what Baudelaire would do "if he were writing poems now and in America." An earlier academy of alchemists, passport forgers, loved the literal—prosaic renderings, strict prosody, "the facts, Ma'm, just the facts." Lowell called them "taxidermists, not poets." But they did make possible for later mediums the flights of fancy, the reader's sense that, as Jackson Mathews says, "poetry is being translated into poetry." Not all translators are for all poets and not all of a poet's poems are suited to his translator, says Mathews: "sensibilities vibrate together only within limits." On this page, KENNEBEC tries to show a range of linguistic reaction. We found two translations of "The Enemy," the standard by Edna St. Vincent Millay, and another by Lowell, "begun as exercises in couplets and quatrains" at a time when "I was unable to do anything of my own." Like Baudelaire himself, he wanted it to "ring right for

me," and apparently it did—free, the clapper unhinged, knocking around loosely in the bell. We also asked three living Maine poets to have a go at the poem. The five contrast starkly, telling of the tough trek from idiomatic (even formal) French to idiolectic English. Some have tried the rhymes, some not. One changed the title. Many struggled with meter. Only one abandoned the sonnet's 4—4—3—3 stanzaic pattern. Two "took only a few liberties with the literal." And what would Baudelaire himself say? Although he was a superb writer, he was snobbish, insecure about being read, and a puerile theorist (witness the *three* ranting prefaces to *The Flowers of Evil*). He feared publishing, feared "facing the sun of stupidity." He may as well relax: no stupidity here. As he wrote in the second Preface, "French poetry possesses a mysterious and unrecognized prosody, like the Latin and English languages." Our five Maine translators recognize it, and render it.

T.P.

L'ennemi

(from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857)

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage,
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils;
Le tonnerre et la pluie ont fait un tel ravage
Qu'il reste en mon jardin bien peu de fruits vermeils.

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,
Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur?

—O douleur! ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie,
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le cœur.
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie!

Charles Baudelaire

1821-1867

I think of my gone youth as of a stormy sky
Infrequently transpierced by a benignant sun;
Tempest and hail have done their work; and what have I?—
How many fruits in my torn garden?—scarcely one.

And now that I approach the autumn of my mind,
And must reclaim once more the inundated earth—
Washed into stony trenches deep as graves—I find
I wield the rake and hoe, asking, "What is it worth?"

Who can assure me, these new flowers for which I toil
Will find in the disturbed and reconstructed soil
That mystic aliment on which alone they thrive?

Oh, anguish, anguish! Time eats up all things alive;
And that unseen, dark Enemy, upon the spilled
Bright blood we could not spare, battens, and is fulfilled

(1936)

Edna St. Vincent Millay
Rockland
(1892 - 1950)

My childhood was only a menacing shower,
cut now and then by hours of brilliant heat.
All the top soil was killed by rain and sleet,
my garden hardly bore a standing flower.

From now on, my mind's autumn! I must take
the field and dress my beds with spade and rake
and restore order to my flooded grounds.
There the rain raised mountains like burial mounds

I throw fresh seeds out. Who knows what survives?
What elements will give us life and food?
This soil is irrigated by the tides.

Time and nature sluice away our lives.
A virus eats the heart out of our sides,
digs in and multiplies on our lost blood.

Robert Lowell
Damariscotta Mills, Castine
(1917 - 1978)

titled "The Ruined Garden" from *Imitations*, Noonday/Farrar Straus, 1961



Baudelaire, Self-portrait, 1860

My youth? A more than neverending storm
 Warmed once or twice by some soon passing sun;
 The rains washed everything away, and gone
 Is all the purple bloom I counted on.
 Now at the brink of autumn here I stand
 With rake and shovel, bent at last to save
 That almost given over, flooded land,
 To make again a garden of a grave.
 Who knows? Perhaps those long lost flowers of fire
 Will take root in this miserable soil
 As simple plants feed on their dead to thrive.
 Strange, that as life is eaten up in toil
 Time gnaws upon the veins of my desire,
 And draws my blood to keep my death alive.

Thomas Carper
Cornish
teaches at USM

My youth was but a gloomy thunderstorm
 Crossed here and there by brilliant suns;
 The thunder and the rain wreaked havoc so
 Remains in my garden few ruby fruits.

There I've touched the autumn of ideas,
 And must employ the shovel and the rakes
 To assemble anew the flooded lands,
 Where the water seeps from holes big as tombs.

And who knows if the new flowers I dream
 Will find in this ground washed like a beach
 The mystical fruit which makes their vigour?

—Oh sorrow! oh sorrow! Time eats up life,
 And the dim Enemy who gnaws our heart
 Of the blood we lose looms and fortifies!

Duff Plunkett
Washington, D.C.
ex-French major, UMO

My youth was simply a dark storm,
 Pierced here and there by bright suns;
 The thunder and the rain did such damage
 That few ripe fruits survived in my garden.

So now, my ideas have reached their autumn
 And I have to wield a shovel and rakes
 To reclaim the flooded fields
 Where the rain has eroded holes as great as graves.

And who knows if these new sorts of flowers
 I have dreamed up
 Will find in this beach-like, infertile soil
 The mystical nutrients to make them flourish.

Oh, sorrow! sorrow! The seasons consume our lives
 And the dark enemy who eats at our hearts
 For the blood we are losing grows and becomes strong.

Denis Ledoux
Lisbon Falls
is a market gardener

The Team that Loved Softball

Mel Peevey stood there on the mound, stooped forward, brown sweat stains spreading out from the armpits of his T-shirt. He was a big man, a behemoth, downright obese. But oh could he pitch a softball. It was fluid. That's what it was. Fluid.

"Okay, gents" (that's what he always called his teammates), "I'm gonna put this one in nice and low, so get ready to scoop it." And he wound up like a flywheel, firmed his jaw, groaned, and sent that ball in on a straight line, watching it close in on home plate as he balanced on one toe of his ridiculously tiny feet, his other leg hooked up in the air.

Thump! The batter connected, and it was a grounder, just as Mel had promised. It banged along to Harry Phelps ("Digger"), who scooped it at first before stomping that bag with authority.

The fifty or so fans in the bleachers jumped to their feet and cheered. With that win the old guys would move on to the championship.

After the game, Mel and the rest of the team went over to Dave the second baseman's house. They pulled out a few beers and sat out in the lawn chairs to talk about the team. These guys were all in their thirties and forties, but such good players that they had been allowed to join the college intramural league with all those kids in their teens and twenties. University of Maine. These old timers were a little thick around the middle, sure, and yeah, they liked their brews. But they had decent jobs—maybe took a sick day here and there to dip a fishing line in the Penobscot. Most of them were married and were pretty fair husbands and fathers (except for Scott Weston, who drank more than a little and admitted he was a generally rotten family man). But when it came to softball—they loved that game. **To a man—they loved that game.** And none of them could get out of their minds what Eduardo Tranilla, their Filipino catcher, had said one day. He said, "God, I love softball more than being in the sack."

The college kids always laughed at them when they came out on the field. But hey, the team loved it. They even had their own special sky-blue T-shirts with their team name on the front—the "Sons of Beaches"—because they all wore sunglasses and looked as if they'd just come in off the beach. But then they'd settle down to business and play their hearts out. Because, once again, they loved that game.

Mel Peevey had pitching down to a science. "Pitchology," he called it. Dave Hodgkin was born to second base, an incurable Bobby Richardson fan since childhood. Scott Weston was shortstop. He said that was the only position that could keep his mind off his problems. Otis Burr, who had only one lung but still smoked like a chimney, played third, with Lester Annis in left field and his brother Buzz in right. Center field was Flit Titcombe. They called him "Flit" because he was real fast, and quiet, too. Dropped only one ball in his life. Last but not least there was Digger Phelps, the lawyer, with little Eduardo behind the plate.

The team in general was feeling great about their semifinal win. Their opponents in the championship game was a team of English majors who called themselves the "Oxymorons." "Great name," said Dave. "Because they don't seem all that bright."

During that week of preparations for the big game a lot of other things were happening in the Beaches' lives as well. Scott Weston's wife had locked him out of the house for betting on another game, and he was living with Lester and Buzz Annis in their trailer for the duration. Eduardo's wife had given birth to their first kid, but Eduardo still said he loved softball more than being in the sack. Digger Phelps had launched his bid for state senator, but put his campaign on hold so he could play out the season. And Otis—poor Otis; they were talking about taking out his other lung, or so he said. So he finally gave up cigarettes and was chewing nicotine gum now. The Annis brothers were rolling merrily along all right, but they almost got fired from Bangor Hydro-Electric when they stopped off at softball practice on their way to an emergency call. Flit Titcombe was in top shape, although he had discovered a varicose vein behind his left knee and decided to wear an elastic brace to hide it. Mel was getting heavier, but he was still fluid. And Dave, well, Dave thought it would go on forever, and on the day of the big game he showed up an hour early and just went out to second base, put his glove behind his head, and lay down in the grass, listening to his heart beat and looking up at the blue sky. Next thing he knew, all the guys were standing in a circle, looking down at him and laughing, because he had fallen asleep.

Mel put his big arms out and gathered all the Beaches together into a huddle for a pep talk. He said they were going to have a perfect game—no errors, no nothing. He knew exactly what to say and the guys got real excited and started hooting and clapping—everyone except Eduardo, who wasn't a hooter. He just smiled, but you could tell he was into it.

While the Beaches were in their huddle they hadn't noticed that people were

showing up by the carload. A rented bus even pulled up, and people with banners got out and streamed into the bleachers. Mel looked out at them bug-eyed. "Must be five hundred people here," he said, slack-jawed.

Some of those fans made no bones about heading out across the playing field and coming right up to the Beaches to cheer them on and offer words of support and encouragement. The team was particularly touched by this, every man realizing that nothing felt so good as to have someone come up to you, slap you on the back, and say, "You son of a beach!"

They were in heaven.

Even as they headed for their bench, people were jumping up with signs and pom-poms, calling out their names. Scott Weston took advantage of this surge in his popularity. He plucked a cheering woman right out of the bleachers and over the fence, with her legs kicking. He couldn't have done that if he hadn't been a Son of a Beach. But Mel made him put her back.

It was just about six P.M. The evening was really warm and muggy, and the black flies were out for blood. The Beaches looked across home plate at the other bench, at the Oxymorons, who were wearing red T-shirts with a picture of an ox and the word "MORON" printed under it. They were huge—real weight-lifting types. Lester Annis turned to his brother Buzz and said, "You sure these guys are English majors?" Scott Weston, for his part, noticed that the Oxymorons did a lot of whispering to one another. "I don't like it," he said.

Mel was sizing them up as well. "I don't see much speed there," he said soberly. "But those muscles look like they could rip the ball into the trees."

The fans were all over the place by now, sitting impatiently in the bleachers and on blankets and in lawn chairs in the grass, squirting the fly dope on because of the black flies. Then a familiar figure bandy-legged it over to the Beaches. They brightened when they recognized Meyer Trumbull, a retired chemistry professor who, at eighty-two, was their oldest and most persistent supporter. Meyer stood before them, presiding over their bench like a schoolmaster. "Boys," he said, "I would dearly love to be your manager for this one night."

The Beaches clapped and cheered Meyer on. The old man continued with a pep talk. "Remember," he said, "it's not that you're getting older *per se*; it's that the **glue** starts to go. So take it easy out there."

The boys responded somewhat less enthusiastically to this encouragement and Meyer took his place on the bench.

Mel and the opposing team captain strode over to home plate for the coin toss, and the crowd went wild. The maintenance guys from the university had gotten a kazoo band together and there were even cheerleaders from the high school. They were cheering for the Beaches. "GIMME AN 'S'!!"

The captain of the Oxymorons was a perplexed-looking hulk of a guy named Rocco, who grunted, "Call it!" And Mel said, "Heads." Rocco flipped a quarter and let it fall into the grass, where it got lost, so both teams ran over and took to their knees. They screwed around in the grass while the kazoo band played "Yankee Doodle." Eventually, Mel and Rocco came head-to-head over the quarter, so both of them could see that it was heads, and the Beaches took the field as the crowd stormed its approval.

Mel stood there on the mound, kicking and scraping like a bull, raising a cloud of orange dust around his bare, skinny legs, which looked like toothpicks. But above his waist he was huge. He looked behind himself, deep into his outfield, until all his boys were in place. Then he adjusted his cap and began to get that ball good and sweated up in his fleshy hand while Eduardo pounded leather behind the plate.

The opposing team captain himself was the first one up. Rocco stood there at the plate, rock solid, rarin' to go, running his hand over his blonde crewcut and rippling his biceps for effect. The crowd sent up a cheer and Mel went into his windup, propelled by their support. And he let one fly—right towards the strike zone.

A split second later there was a gut-wrenching thud and that ball went rocketing skyward. For a second it was right up there with the rising moon and you couldn't tell one from the other. As Rocco rounded first like a locomotive, all you could hear were his feet pounding the field, because the crowd was spellbound. Then a couple of intrepid individuals released their breaths and sent up a cautious cheer. A few more joined them as Flit Titcombe leaped across the field like a gazelle, screaming for everyone to get out of his way. But that ball was all his, and when it descended from orbit it plopped neatly into his glove before Rocco had stomped second base.

It was madness in the stands.

Mel was happy for Flit's catch, but he was otherwise concerned. Flit was their only real runner, and if these weight-lifters were going to keep having that kind of batting practice, the Beaches, veteran infield strategists, might not have much of a chance. Mel looked over at Meyer, who was reassuring him with steady nods and hand signals.

The second batter looked like Rocco's twin brother, only his crewcut was black. "C'mon," he shouted to Mel as he shifted his weight from foot to foot and chopped at the heavy air with the bat. "C'mon!"

Mel knew that this batter's anxiousness for the pitch was the best reason to deny it to him. So Mel slipped off his glove and pretended to examine his index finger. The crowd cheered and laughed, but the Ozymorons were closing ranks and screaming for the pitch. The batter turned and started to lead them in chorus. So Mel, without so much as a windup, and without replacing his glove, suddenly flung that ball home.

"STRIKE!" called the umpire, and the crowd rose to its feet in affectionate support for their beloved Beaches.

The batter was red-face with hysteria by now, which told Mel that he had him right where he wanted him. "I wasn't ready!" screamed the batter.

"Then get out of the box," growled Mel, and the Beaches howled their support, echoed by the crowd.

The second pitch was high on the outside, but the batter wanted it so badly that he stretched for it, tipped it, and watched heartbroken as it dribbled a few feet out from home plate. Before he even decided to run, Eduardo had snatched it and lobbed it to Digger Phelps at first, who played the throw as if his life depended on it.

"TWO!" announced Mel as he jabbed the sky with a victory sign.

The crowd echoed him passionately as the kazoo band struck up "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the cheerleaders jackknifed and called for a "B."

While all this was going on, no one had really noticed that dark clouds had pretty much filled the sky. But the black flies had retired and the band still had "Dixie" in its repertoire, while the cheerleaders were jumping pretty competently on the fringe of the playing field. "LET'S - GO - BEACHES!" Clap! Clap!—Clap! Clap! Clap!

The Ozymorons were livid now. Their third man was not all that bulky, but he looked like he could muster some speed. Mel decided to play this one cautiously, so he lobbed one tight on the inside. The Ozymoron took it, knocking a grounder out with the bat handle.

Now, Mel had nothing against grounders, as long as they were headed towards one of his infielders. But when they came for him, well, he hated them. They meant that he had to bend down, despite his bad sacroiliac. And this one was banging along straight for him. Mel tried to get it, but by the time he was low enough it had already bounced under his legs. "Damn," he said through gritted teeth. But as he looked between his legs he was consoled somewhat when he saw Dave Hodgkin lining up for the ball.

The Ozymoron who had hit it turned out to be a speed demon, and he rounded first with impunity, not even watching the ball. Halfway to second, his legs pumping and his arms flailing, he looked suddenly sick when he saw Dave coming for him. He did a sloppy about-face and high-tailed it back towards first, where Digger was all but on his knees, begging for the ball, which Dave continued

to hold as he tried to chase the frantic Ozymoron down. Scott Weston was standing over towards third with his arms crossed, shaking his head sadly. "Digger gonna split a gut if Dave don't throw him that ball," he said. But Dave had no intention of giving Digger the ball. He had never really trusted Digger, or lawyers in general. And besides, he had seen Bobby Richardson successfully chase a runner down in 1963.

Digger finally realized he wasn't going to be touching a softball anytime soon. But as an attorney he knew some tricks of his own. Without another moment's delay he jumped up, pounded his glove, and nabbed the Ozymoron as he ran past him. "Gotcha!" he said, and the Ozymoron did a profane little dance before Dave Hodgkin arrived from behind and tagged him for real. "Just like in '63!" he said proudly, and the crowd nearly doubled over at the sight of it. Even Digger was smiling, although he realized he would have to hate Dave once this was all over.

When the Beaches retired their side the storm clouds were really boiling overhead. As Eduardo, Dave and Mel approached the bench, Meyer Trumbull took them aside. "Now look," he said. "It's going to rain but good. So let an old chemist help you boys out before the game is called." And having said this, that venerable old man, standing straight as a rail despite his years, took another softball out of an old beatup haversack and passed it to Eduardo. "Tell your first batter to let the first pitch go. Then throw this ball back to the pitcher. This is the ball you want to hit. And you've got to do it before it rains."

There was no time for questions. Eduardo conveyed Meyer's information to Otis Burr, who was the first one up. Otis nodded gravely and picked up a bat. "Got my runner?" he asked Eduardo between two hacking coughs.

Dave Hodgkin took his place beside Otis. He crouched low, pointed down the first base line. The pitcher for the Ozymorons went into his windup. Dave looked sidelong at Otis and said, "Remember to let the first one go!"

Otis nodded without taking his intent gaze from the pitcher, who was winding up with a vengeance. And then, suddenly, just when it looked like he was going to rocket the ball home, he slipped into slow motion and released a high, slowly tumbling pitch. "Damn!" said Dave. "A folly floater! Let it go, Otis! Let it go!"

Otis was bug-eyed. "He's—tempting—me," he said.

"No, Otis!" said Dave, getting ready to run just in case. "Meyer said not to swing."

The ball was describing a smooth, high arc. It was moving so slowly that you could count every stitch in it. Halfway to home plate, at the top of its arc, it seemed frozen in space and time. It was the pitch of Otis's dreams, and before he knew it, he was committed. Fortunately, Eduardo sensed this, too. In the meantime, the first raindrops were beginning to fall. Eduardo perched on his toes, leaned forward a bit, and just before the ball was in hitting range, cried, "SWING!"

And Otis, always eager for any advice which would improve his game, complied.

Continued next page



Photo: Susan Wadlington

"STRIKE!" roared the umpire. And the crowd sighed, brokenhearted.

The Oxymorons passed their hands over their faces while Eduardo secreted Meyer's special ball from under his shirt. He tossed it out to the pitcher. Dave looked back at Otis. "This is the one, Otis," he said. "Cream it."

Otis nodded and took a few practice swings. The pitcher went into his windup and let go with a perfect low arc, headed straight for the strike zone. "Hit it, hit it, hit it . . ." said Dave, like a refrain.

Otis hauled off and put all his weight into his swing. He connected solidly—and then let out a scream of alarm when the ball burst into flames and rocketed out high over the field, trailing a fiery tail that made it look like Halley's Comet.

The crowd was cheering hysterically, but Otis just stood there dumbfounded, still with the bat in his hands, staring at the smoky trail of the fireball he had hit. The Oxymorons weren't even going after it. In fact, they were scattering to get out of its way. That made Otis feel good. Accomplished. Strong. In the meantime, Dave was rounding the bases at leisure, waving his ballcap at the cheering fans.

Then it started to rain, really rain. And thunder started to roll. The Oxymorons began to break up, pulling their shirts over their heads. The Sons of Beaches called out to them to keep playing; but Rocco was the first one off the field, high-tailing it home with the others. The crowd was dispersing as well, followed by the kazoo band and the cheerleaders. Pretty soon it was just the Beaches in that soggy field, looking at each other, although Otis was still staring reverently at the sky. Judy, Dave's wife, was standing under the bleachers with a windbreaker over her head, along with some of the other wives. They were all waving their husbands over, but none of the Beaches moved. "C'mon, Eduardo!" called his wife, Inez; but Eduardo just shook his head. Dave said, "Eduardo, why are you shaking your head?" But you already know what he said. So Dave said, "Why not? We got equipment."

The wives spent a few more minutes screaming at their husbands and then went home disgusted, while the Beaches lined up for batting practice, ten swings per man. It was raining so hard that you could barely see the ball. And then Mel started to laugh, and one-by-one all the Sons of Beaches joined in, until they could hardly stand up. But they played right through, until every man had his ten swings. Then they realized that what they had that night was a genuine forfeit. And that was oh so sweet. That was also the last time they were all together.

Robert Klose
Bangor
teaches biology at University College

A Republican Repast

Remember honey
last
Time we were hungry
trying to eat ballads
Though
The poetry ran out the holes
our forks
made in the paper
Better to smoke
than swallow
Tissue of lies no food
for thought
Starves the souls
Laid back to back
Prisoners like Bobby Sands
Cordwood pulp
Cold stack

David Snow
Portland
emigrated from Detroit

Cider Pressing

Think of smooth brown seed
split into green underground. Parentage
can not be assured, bees
being what they are. Remember
blossoms, white, pink, rusting
with age as apple flesh
browns in air. Remember
branches bent, baskets of fruit
windfallen, ground bruised, transfixed
with stubble and twig. Wrap them
in filtering shrouds. Feel
the great screw come down,
relentless rack in reverse.
See blood of seed flow, pale, sweet.

Robert Chute
Poland Spring
teaches biology at Bates

Instant Replay: 16 October, 1912

"Snodgrass muff in 10th sparks Boston rally.
Visitors win in eight games,
second game having been called because of darkness."

The factory behind the fence is shifting
to the early step of the night watchman.
Smoke rarifies into green and gold atoms
that strand across light sliding down the Watergap.
The ball squoshes from the ash and wobbles
outward, catching shadow on the laces
that try to keep its lower belly stitched.
Christy raises his face to the east,
where the tiny gray and ragged object
pauses in the light, breathing its hold
along the gold levelling in from Jersey.
Snodgrass fleets across the sod,
graceful on darkened spires of turf,
his sinews signalling any rut or alteration
in the placement of his spikes.
The slightest shrug of dirt will angle glove
and ball from the intention of legs and eyes
and the inspiration of silence in the stands,
throat suspended, like the tiny white cap
curling in the sun and spinning to the destiny
of a final out. This is the design of the game,
the perfection of a diamond picking up final facets
of the day. Smoky Joe and the Boston Nine fade
into the loom rising over the East River.
Matty holds on to win in ten.
Indian Summer reddens into blackness
across the Shenandoah, exploring the continent
west of the Polo Grounds. The farmer looks up
in Ohio, and turns his team to the crunch and creak
of the barn. His wife raises wicks on lanterns
and peers again into the savory burn of the stove.
The sun sends silver shivers across the wide Missouri.
In California, the ocean crumples unnoticed
and emerald in its stretch along unpeopled sands.
The shaggy ball thwacks into the thin leather
above the palm. Snodgrass smiles and holds it up.
Klem raises his arm. Closest to the clubhouse,
Snodgrass turns and trots to the steps,
giving a final glance to the oval now spilling
with people. A last nimbus of smoke or cloud
burns against a withdrawn fingertip of light.
He thinks of the dining car he can afford now,
on the long train ride back to Thanksgiving in Ventura.

H.R. Coursen
Brunswick
teaches at Bowdoin



House by ocean, drawing by Nick Snow

Hunger for a Stillness to Call Home

What is there to enter anymore?
Oblivion stopped working. I want to crawl
inside his one blind eye, make it right,
give him peripheral vision,
center vision, strength to see.
It was just another day, fishing
in New Hampshire, just an easy day
floating on a pond, his fishline deep
in the water, deep into a tree trunk,
deep into the eye, piercing the retina.
If it'd hit his temple he'd be dead,
they speculated. I'd rather it'd hit a magpie
flying by. Instead, my brother's now half-blind.

In Islington, a blind voice teacher
taught me how to roar. We pretended to be picking
at the earth, our bodies rising and falling.
In this act of toil, she had us release
our voices; odd chants fell between floorboards.

Years ago, I let go of the act of eating
two dozen chocolate chip cookies to satisfy
an impossible hunger. Now, my hunger is for the fox's
stance, his camouflage and waiting. From a train window,
I see a fox stop suddenly, stare only at me.
I watch him run down the empty road,
realizing it's one I'll never press my foot against.
I envy his fur that changes color, his power
of observation, his decisiveness. I want his skin
over mine, the landscape entering me as beast.

Renee Gregorio
Taos, NM
is a UMO graduate

At 18, I wanted to kill myself on the library steps,
in the rain, over my first lover. I'd hurt him.
I couldn't see how to go on. A god of righteousness
ruled over me. I'd never go to heaven. I'd go to purgatory.
Or maybe even hell. I ran from the bad girl in me,
the one who slapped stickers on a perfect white house on Halloween.

But the bad girl wanted attention. She caught up with me
in the corridors of the English department. She flirted
with married professors. She wanted several lives at once,
foreign cities, many lovers. She wanted to catch the end
of the red silk scarf she saw rounding distant corners,
to own the body whose perfume spilled into strangers' compartments

Her appetites were severe. She said good-bye often,
never believing forever. When silence at last consumed her,
all she wanted was to be informed when each of her ex-lovers died.
Line after line, I resurrect you, she would write.
Then ask herself, But from what death? Then one day
she said, I will save nothing from its own destruction,
and she became clear again. The bad girl retreated.
The old, remembered scenes became static as photographs in frames.

The stopped train is only waiting for the proper signal
to begin again its familiar journey. Passengers only get
a peripheral view of the train's meandering.
You've got to walk to get it straight on. Or be the driver.
Peripheral vision is like basil in tomato sauce. It fills the gaps.
I'm after what's head-on, the single light burning
at the top of the stairs, inviting you to claim what's home.

Just Yesterday

My Casio watch
bought the farm

had its
ticket punched
cheque cashed
bell rung
pencil snapped
sub sunk
core melted
apple cored
bark mulched
head shaved
song sung
chain rusted
spring sprung
drain plugged
chicken fried
toast burned
prune pitted
portrait painted
peaches canned
pool drained
curtain called
embers cooled
door slammed
nail hammered
button pushed
driveway shoveled
log rolled
table set
trail blazed
lobster clawed
pipes pumped
captain crunched
slam dunked
condo converted
acid rained
and clock cleaned

Dan Rothermel
York
teaches at Frisbee
Middle School in Kittery

Earthquake

"Listen, Dave," I said. "I'm *not* kidding. You heard the dishes rattle. You felt the chair shake." Belching is never a subject I discuss easily. And it's not one people hear easily either. They always think you're joking. Dave was no exception. A little smile played in his eyes even though his mouth remained perfectly serious.

Dave folded his arms across his chest, barricading himself from believing what he had just witnessed with his own two eyes, had *experienced* right down to the very roots of his crewcut. He chewed his lower lip, a sure sign he was thinking. Dave did a lot of thinking about life, in general, and how it worked. The gears were really turning. He mulled. He considered. He sorted and sifted facts like a Jackson Lab scientist trying to determine which mouse gene-pool was most likely to prove the hypothesis.

I let loose a very large, exasperated sigh, and waited. I'm not a patient woman. But I'd known Dave long enough to know that he never let himself be led to a conclusion until he was ready to arrive at one.

"Nope," he said in the stubborn way I recognized from other debates, "had to have been a truck going by up on the Main Road. Must have something to do with the thaw, the ground just the right firmness to resonate the rumble and shake hard enough to rattle the dishes and rock the table. That's one theory. Or it could have been a plane flying lower than normal. The wind's in a funny direction, too. That can make things sound real odd."

I hate to have the evidence of my five senses reduced to the straight lines of logic, so I replied with more than a little ill humor.

"You and your damn logic, Dave. You *saw* what happened. You saw me open my mouth, you *heard* me. I *burped*, Dave, and the whole house shook."

I raked my fingers through a wedge of graying hair falling into my eyes. I always fussed with my hair when I got agitated. Mad enough to tear her hair out, my mother always used to say.

All Dave really knew about my family was what I'd told him over the years. I don't know as I'd actually avoided commenting on their foibles. Certainly, that was possible. It wasn't always easy for me to admit to myself that in my family, for every regular person born, two certifiable eccentrics were also born. Most of the time, I liked to think of myself as one of the normal ones. I knew I wasn't, though, because my mother never lost a chance to point out that I was THE most irregular member of the family. She based this opinion, I feel certain, on the regrettable fact that I had once been a devoted follower of the Roshni Hadarashna's zen of written communication as a means to purge the mind and body of psychological toxins. But that had been years ago. Now, I lived a very quiet, uneventful life on a back street in Winterport, Maine. Dave lived in Hampden, just a few miles up the road. We'd met years ago when mutual friends had introduced us.

Our friendship was both casual and close in the sense that we lived separate lives, but relied on one another if the furnace died in the middle of the winter and for company at suppertime whenever we got too tired of eating alone. Both of us had been married and divorced. We weren't interested in surrendering our autonomy again. So what we told one another about our families and their habits tended to be somewhat selective. We had never met one another's families and we didn't really spend too much time talking about them.

Dave shifted in his chair and crossed his legs. He drummed his fingers on the table. He scratched his fork around on the barren surface of his supper plate. Light from the overhead fixture lit up the silver in his hair.

"Just wait a minute, Dee, before you get too bent out of shape," he said. "Maine, especially this part of the Penobscot River Valley, sits right on top of a geological fault that runs all the way from the middle of New Brunswick to Mt. Desert Island. It's a scientific fact that every so often the plates along the fault shift. Causes earthquakes. Mostly little ones. We have them more often than you or anyone else realizes. We don't feel them because the shock is so mild. What happened when you opened your mouth and burped was a one-in-a-zillion coincidence. Burping does not cause tables to shake and dishes to rattle." He replaced the fork beside the plate with deft, precise motions. Dave taught science at Hampden Academy. He'd had a lot of experience living according to the natural laws of the universe and teen-age hyperbole.

Dave's faith in the infallibility of scientific principles seldom yielded to the intuitive and unexplained. But logic and reason always confused me more than it helped make anything clear.

"It was no coincidence, Dave," I said. "Listen, I know you've been trained to think that everything in the universe is explainable. I respect the fact that

you wouldn't give Shirley MacLaine the time of day, but believe me, Dave, things happen. The laws of physics, given the right conditions, can be defied. Even the Doppler Effect can be cancelled out, I bet."

Dave looked skeptical, but he didn't contradict me.

Now that I had his attention, I made myself a little more comfortable. I put my feet up in an empty chair and poured myself a little more coffee. I pulled the coffee mug close to my heart, a defensive stance in case he laughed in my face. It was never easy to find just the right words to explain what Herrick Stomach Syndrome was and how it worked.

"A fair percentage of my family are big burpers," I said, "so big that the potential for external repercussions is very great. When we burp, nothing is unaffected."

"Everyone in my family, including me," I told him, "are Big Burpers. We burp so big we sometimes cause serious repercussions—like earth tremors. We don't know why. But we *do* know that the force of our burps is directly proportional to what and how much we eat. Lettuce, for example, produces a series of burps roughly equivalent to the sound and force of a rock dropped off a shed roof. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich with marshmallow fluff dredges up burps comparable to a freight train rolling across bedrock. My Uncle Paul, he's the inventor in the family, figured out that a relationship exists between the magnitude of our burps and the *combination* of the foods we eat. A salad with radishes and blue cheese dressing, a plate of baked beans, two red hot dogs—we're talking burps like twin jet engines revving for a take-off."

"Sure, Dee, Sure," Dave laughed.

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," I said, not surprised.

The only person I'd ever told about my family's digestive peculiarity was the Roshni Hadarashna. He'd said something that always comforted me when I remembered it. He'd said, "Strong wind blowing out of the body makes room for the spirit to expand." I said as much. Dave almost rolled on the floor, laughing.

"Come on, admit it, you're exaggerating," Dave said.

"No, I'm not!" I said hotly. I could feel anger forcing me out on a limb. Sometimes my temper got the best of me just when I least expected it to. "And you know what, Dave," I went on, "I'm going to prove it to you."

I telephoned six of my relatives who lived in and around Winterport. They all agreed to cooperate providing I kept everything under control. I promised I would.

After talking to my aunts and uncles and cousins, I ate a peanut butter sandwich. Then I fixed myself a lettuce salad with cucumber dressing. I drank a bottle of beer and nibbled on a handful of peanuts. I ate a dish of baked beans. I finished up with a giant mustard pickle.

Dave watched me eat with what I can only describe as scientific detachment. He scribbled things on a little spiral-bound notepad. I don't know what. Elapsed time, maybe; a list of what I'd eaten, the quantities. I didn't pay too much attention to him. I was watching the clock, calculating to the last second how long it would take me to prove to him that Herrick Stomach Syndrome was as real as thermodynamics.

"You'd better brace yourself," I said. Pressure was building in my stomach; that same force was being duplicated in six other sets of innards.

At precisely seven twenty-two, a belch of monstrous proportions, a long, low r-r-r-a-a-a-l-l-l-ph rolled out of my stomach. Microseconds later, six more r-r-r-a-a-a-l-l-l-phs of equal intensity engulfed Winterport in a great roar of belches, bounced off the Bucksport Hills across Penobscot Bay, hit the round sides of the Monroe Mountains to the west, and set terra firma a tremble.

The table shook so hard it moved an inch toward Frankfort. Dishes in the cupboard clashed and clattered like the gear of a routed army.

The rumble faded. Perfect calm and a wondrous silence, louder than the rumble, settled like a welcome mantle into the room as if the world had paused in its rotation for one awful, immeasurable second. It scared me half to death. Always did. I just couldn't get used to having that kind of power.

"I don't *believe* this," Dave mumbled. "I don't *believe* this!" He got up, staggered slightly, reached for the back of the chair to steady himself.

"Well, now you know," I said. I felt like a perfect fool for having given in to such a childish impulse.

Dave just stared at me like he'd never seen me before.

"Look, Dee, I gotta go home. To think. I need to think. There's an explanation, a theory, mathematics . . . something. I'll be in touch, o.k.?"

I closed the door behind him and watched him drive away. I think he was talking to himself.

Continued next page

Before I went to bed, I swallowed a triple dose of Mylanta II as an antidote for aftershocks.

The next morning the front page headline of the *Bangor Daily News* said: EARTHQUAKE RATTLES WINTERPORT. And in smaller typeface: Measures 3.2 on Richter Scale. Scientists Puzzle over Eerie Noise Preceding Quake.

Dave called a few days later.

"Can I come over?" he asked. "I've been working on this whole thing. You won't believe what I've figured out—the action of peptides on hydrochloric acid. I'm calling it the Theory of Bio-enzymal Dynamics . . ."

Ardeana Hamlin
Hampden
is at work on a second novel



Excerpt from *Mars Poetica*,
or History Becomes A Kind of Antidote for Shopping-Mall Disease

The inspired youth writes to the award-winning poet:

Your Royal Hindness:

I attended your poetry reading last Friday night & was impressed with your lifelike imitation of what it's like to be dead. Poetry is indeed a matter of life & death, as I always suspected, & I was particularly moved by the cadences subtle & incomprehensible to the human ear that revealed your greatest monotony in life is to see into the death of things & to reflect through your words the emptiness of the entire universe. The vast desert places between stars is nowhere near as vast as the emptiness between our own ears. Your courage in repeatedly speaking of your personal religion without ever mentioning "God" opens up whole wastelands of possibility for me, as I now see how to peer into the depths & pits of my subterranean homesick mind. My mind, after all, is merely an extension of the real world, which as you point out science points out, is full of empty facts. Your poem about the death of your family cat was a watershed in my career. I wish I could convey to you the sense of how boredom & lethargy can be legitimate topics for poems. The world, I feel sure, is made of lead. I think now that I will surely sign up for poetry workstops at graduate school and run for class poet.

Sincerely yours,
Anona Mouse

The award-winning poet writes back:

Dear Ms. Mouse:

Thank u very much for yr encouraging letter. I can only say that u must enter into yr own cerebral vortex to plumb the depths of yr own glaciality & express the immediate intertextuality of global words upon yr semiotic-consciousness, this is what I have done, as u so rightly point out. The freeplay of language sublimates the drive for intersubjectivity in the same way that homosexuality concerns not only the poet but the frump, & we must all put our minds in a sling & give ourselves up to the structurality of the natural world, which has no significance for the signifier—no more than the gum of an erasure. My hands are sticky with my newest poem—I shall quote a few lines

My cat, Alsace-Lorraine,
became to me a
flower
rolled round & round
in earth's infernal
course

Of course, my cat's death is a healing metaphor for the tragedy of the world war, as is plane from these lines. Please don't write to me any more unless I write to u.

Sincerely,
Colella Wigmore Fatua, D. Poi.

Aphorisms on Poetry, by way of explaining what is going on

1. Williams: "If you change the poetic line you change civilization."
2. When told that 600 poets had been hired in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Robert Frost replied, "600 poets? There haven't been 600 poets in all of recorded history."
3. When asked to comment upon the terrible, spirit-breaking toil of being a writer, Jorge Luis Borges said, "If I didn't like to write I wouldn't."
4. Stevens: "It is necessary to any originality to have the courage to be an amateur."
5. The best stone-wall makers build about ten feet a day.
6. EP: "Stupidity carried beyond a certain point becomes a public menace."
7. Great poetry could exist in America, if only it was possible to use your culture's energy without becoming a human metaphor for Love Canal.
8. The winner of any postmodern war is the one who dismantles his bureaucracy first.
9. It will generally be believed, hundreds of years from now, that the one great error of the rational age was that we did not take care of our dead.
10. Great audiences make great poetry. Lazy audiences make lazy poetry. Preoccupied audiences make preoccupied poetry.
11. The poetry of an age is the sound of its own voice. The postmodern age is inhabited by minds which do not hear their own voices.
12. The problem with loving money is that money doesn't love you back.
13. The supreme note toward the supreme fiction: "It must give pleasure" (Stevens again).
14. The true literature of alienation is literary criticism.
15. Oscar: "There are two ways to dislike art: one is to dislike it; the other is to like it rationally."
16. When the response to poetry is silence, it is because, in Nietzsche's words, there is much to be silent about.

Dana Wilde
Unity
teaches at Unity College

from **Rivertown** poems

Jennifer Shea
East Chestnut Street

1973: Windows Like Eyes

Thirteen, pretty I thought but
never kissed
a boy. Once, dancing, almost,
but looked too
long in his eyes and saw
messy bed,
clothes, dropped shoes. Shy,
my eyes fell.

Late at night, our church youth
group returned
from New York. Bus dark and
chaperons
sitting in front. Kids
pair off. Matt
Levey moves close to me. I
am staring

at road-side homes, lighted
windows like
eyes, families flashing
by: a child,
men, a laughing woman. I
keep to myself.

1975: Goodbye

The night before Matt left
I cut an inch off Mom's
old A-line. Then Matt at the bus:
kiss parents, hug sister,
bye Grandpops—all the while
staring at my legs like
a road he'd never seen.

1985: Matt At My Window

Then, I had skinny legs and good
buns. I raced basketballs, softballs.
Boys came to my games.

Then, I slept in the last room
of this long house.
Cars could not call to me.

Then, I was sixteen and books
were my lovers. I fell asleep
grabbing their thin bodies.

Then, two AM one June, Matt
Levey was at my window. He joked
on a ladder: "Cops! Hide me!"

Then, Matt was 18, Rivertown's
poet. Famous because he had left
school to be a customs guard.

Then, that night, Matt knew I was
alone. To see his curly hair
and grin stiffened my breasts.

Then, wordless, I locked the window.
I ran to the front guest room,
like a mother for her child.

Now. Now, 26, divorced, I still
live at home. Men stare, I slow.
I give and get a better view.

Now, I sleep always in the
guest room. My little John
and Anna sleep across the hall

Now, when not too tired, I date.
I have taken one lover. But I
read too many books, too young.

Now, this January, I wake
frightened. A ladder is banging.
Matthew: coatless, drunk, singing.

Now, Matthew is a lawyer alone
in one room on Water Street,
with poor clients and friends' divorces.

Now, I hear my Anna cry
and Moma hastening to check her.
She worries my job is too hard.

Now, I quickly lock my door
and run to open the double window.
I pull Matt into my room.

Now, I guide him toward my bed,
pulling off his shirt, wrapping
my arms around his thin breasts.

Now, I kiss him again and again,
like a pretty girl in a parked car
on a dark, lonely road.

Jim McKenna
Augusta
is an Asst. Attorney General





Drawing by MaJo Keleshian

Love Poem

There was a time
When you and I couldn't have a love poem.
There were no words
For that
Limitless fusion
Which catapulted us out to the ozone.
We had to suffice with pedestrian definitions of ecstasy
That kept falling off.

Now
We have our own history, reference points, baseline;
Our own means of judging deviations.
If we could just remember to use them
We wouldn't have to keep rolling over
To protect each other from the sun.

Anna-leila Williams
Augusta
is a PA.

Three Couples

1959

Along the esplanade at Brooklyn Heights,
it's summer, evening. The neighbors sit
on benches, watching the liners float out
to sea and in to harbor. No lights

burn across the water, on the island.
The night comes slowly, a faint shadow,
a remembrance to the two bright lovers
who stroll the cobbles, softly, hand in hand,

and who flicker oddly at the mad
woman in rags and dirty hair who stops
them with her words: "You're in love, you shits.
Don't worry. Before you know it, you'll be sad."

1974

Off Davis Square, in Somerville, Sunday's
washing day at the laundromat. The heat's
a drag in early May, but the air inside beats
it, and friends greet friends in the 'sixties way,

with genderless hugs. The cool ease their warmth
conveys over-rides the junky clatter
the driers make, as does the soft patter
of that young pair, who murmur as if for form,

no words for folding sheets required, just gestures,
rhythm, and maybe the admiring eyes
of that old German woman, who says,
"Nice work. Been married long? This hanky yours?"

1985

In Gardiner, Maine, we park the Subaru
outside the cleaners, settle our two loads
in the soap and suds, move to the waiting
room and listen to TV, read poetry

I, and a novel, you. Now and then you
check the clothes, and when the time's arrived,
we empty the driers, fold up the pants
and shirts, the other things. Our work's in concert,

tuned. No one notices. I recall myself
as someone else, and bless us for our love
that requires no one else's words to be.

Eric Horsting
Yellow Springs, OH
summers in Machiasport & teaches at Ar

Visiting Hours

An electronic voice bleats from the hall: **Visiting hours are over.** Clara looks at her husband, who is slumped in the green plastic chair beside her hospital bed. His eyes are closed.

She is going to die soon. She is quite certain of it. All the heart monitors and medications and busy nurses won't keep her alive. The doctors are talking about open heart surgery, but she won't live long enough to reach the operating table.

"Neil?" She reaches toward her husband through a wedge of sunlight, stops, stares at her hand. Blue veins ride the freckled skin; tiny lines are scattered all across the back of her hand like irrigation ditches gone wild. For a moment she wants to hold the hand between her breasts, rock it there like a baby. She remembers rocking her own babies, feeling their thin, fluid flesh under her fingers. There is a sinking sensation under her shoulder blades; she lets her hand drop back onto the bed.

"Neil."

He starts awake, straightens, looks at her, blinking. His eyes are light blue, paler than they used to be. She wonders, do eyes bleach with age?

"What?" he says. "What is it?"

"You have to go now."

He frowns, shuffles his feet on the gray tile floor. "I must have been asleep." He stands up. His long shoulders droop under his sweater; his hair stands out over his ears in thin white wires. "You okay? Any more pains?"

She shakes her head. "You go home. Get a good night's sleep."

He bends over her, brushes her lips with his mouth. "Don't you worry about me. You just get better, so I can take you home."

She tries to smile, but sighs instead, a long, slow breath; the air in the room is too warm and dry, the same as the air in her mouth. "Won't you call Lydia tonight, let her fix you a decent meal?"

He shakes his head, a hard thrust of his round chin. "She still smokes, doesn't she? She's still living with that Kemp guy. I'm not going to go crawling to her now just because you're in the hospital for a few days."

"It's more than a few days, Neil." She watches his eyes shift away from her. Does he really believe she's going to come home? "And Lydia's not an enemy. She's our **daughter**."

"Not mine. Not any more."

Clara turns away from him. The door to the hall is open; little groups of visitors go past, their heels clicking on the floor. They laugh quietly and talk to each other; some of them peer into her room. She knows they are families, grown children visiting their parents. She wants Neil to talk to Lydia; she wants to know he'll be looked after when she dies.

"Have you called Joseph?" She knows what the answer will be. He hasn't called, he won't call, won't let her call. Joseph doesn't know about her chest pains, that she's been in the hospital for a week, that she's going to die. Twenty years ago Neil threw him out of the house for smoking marijuana. It had been one problem after another since Joseph turned twelve.

Neil snorts. She doesn't want to look at him, but she does, reads the disgust in the gray lines around his mouth, the loathing in the hard slant of his head.

"What do you expect he'd do if I did? Come all the way out here from California? Joseph?"

"No." He's right, of course. Joseph wouldn't come. The wall between them is too high and thick now. It's been so long since she's seen him that she probably wouldn't recognize him. She still thinks of him as young, a child really, running out in the afternoon to play basketball at the playground, watching "Bonanza" reruns on TV.

She remembers the shock she had, receiving a letter from him last spring. She tore it open in the kitchen with thick, clumsy fingers, her head cocked so that she could monitor Neil's grunting snores from the living room. The letter was short, perfunctory. He had a new position in the company; he was a vice-president now. Laura was going back to school. The children were well. How was she? Would she consider coming to Los Angeles sometime for a visit? There was no mention of Neil. The letter contained a color photograph of his children. Clara looked at it for a long time, holding it carefully in her palms. The children were half-grown, a boy and two girls. They stood self-consciously in front of a brown split-level house, their heads tilted toward each other. Their faces were long and she could see the lines of the bones under the skin. She had never had the silken feel of their baby skin under her hands; she never would. It was gone. Her eyes filled slowly with tears, so that the picture blurred and swam. When Neil came into the kitchen, she didn't even hear him. He leaned over her shoulder.

"What's that?" He snatched it from her.

"Give it back!" She reached for it, but he turned his back, hunched over the picture, studying it.

"Whose kids are these?"

"They're your grandchildren," she said. "You ought to know that. The boy looks just like Joseph."

He dropped the picture onto the table, went out onto the porch, but not before she saw the flushed spot on each cheekbone.

The photograph is in her *Bible*, marking the place where Jesus blesses the children. She takes it with her everywhere; it is in the drawer beside her bed right now. Every night she finds a moment to open the *Bible* and stare at the picture of her grandchildren.

Neil pats her shoulder. "We don't need a couple of rude, ungrateful kids weighing us down. I can take care of you, Clara. I always have."

She gives him a little smile, lets her hand slide over his arm. It is no use arguing with Neil. He will never change.

"You got to leave, mister. I have to clean this room." The voice comes from the doorway. Clara turns and stares at the heavy, thick-waisted woman who is leaning against the doorframe, holding a mop; the thick white strings hang down over her hand. Clara has never seen her before. The cleaning ladies usually come in the morning, after breakfast.

"This is my wife," says Neil. He presses Clara's shoulder. "I'm paying for the room."

The woman looks straight at him. "Visiting hours are over. Time to go home. Didn't you hear the announcement?" She wears a shapeless, blue dress and a sweater the color of mustard. Her upper arms bulge and strain against the sweater. Her round face is pitted with acne scars.

Clara glances at Neil. His neck is red. She touches his arm. "Go ahead," she murmurs. "They have to clean the rooms. Keep the germs down."

She watches him tighten his shoulders, frown. He takes a step toward the woman.

"Yeah. Germs." The woman grins at Clara, revealing a black gap between her front teeth. "It only takes a couple minutes."

"Who's stopping you?" says Neil. He stands at the end of the bed, his arms crossed over his chest.

But the woman doesn't answer, doesn't even look at him. Instead, she pushes her hand down into her skirt pocket, pulls out a package of cigarettes. She taps one out, holds it up to her mouth. Her rust-colored lips curl around it so carefully that they quiver.

"You're not allowed to smoke in the rooms!" Neil's voice is a bark. Clara feels her back go cold, the way it always does when he's angry.

The woman smiles again; her mouth curves toward two deep dimples in the thick cheeks. "Don't worry, I'm not lighting up. I gave up smoking years ago. I just like the feel of something in my mouth." She looks at Clara. "Know what I mean?"

Clara blinks, startled. Amazingly, she does know what the woman means, knows exactly how satisfying it would feel to have the cigarette clamped between her lips, though Clara has never smoked before, has never even wanted to. She looks at Neil. His whole face is red now.

"Neil, please go." Her voice is pitiful, a lost child's voice; it is the only tone he will respond to.

He looks at her, lets his arms drop to his sides. "You sure?"

She smiles, nods. "Thanks for coming, dear." She watches him go. His left leg is stiff; he limps slightly as he walks, his right shoe scuffing the floor every few steps. He passes the cleaning woman without looking at her, his head jutting forward on his taut neck.

The woman steps into the room, pushing a metal pail mounted on four little black wheels. She shakes her head. "Men are all alike, ain't they? Always showing off." She gives a short, raw little laugh, glances at Clara. "Bet he's a teddy bear underneath, though. Right?"

Clara blinks. She's never thought of Neil as a teddy bear, not in forty years of marriage.

The woman rests her mop against the wall, pushes the door shut with one hand. She goes to the wall-mounted television, reaches up and flicks it on. "Mind if I watch the game while I'm working?"

"I guess not." Clara stares at the back of her head, at the long, gray hair in its drooping pony tail. She doesn't like television, has no interest in sports. She hopes the woman will work quickly; she is suddenly exhausted. She sighs, sags deeper into the bed.

"You a Celtics fan?" The woman picks up her mop, dips it into the pail. Above her head, the television flickers and blurs; there is a faint picture of an enormous mug of foaming beer.

"No," says Clara weakly. "I don't watch basketball." She blinks; something jumps into her brain. She used to watch it all the time when Joseph was home, when he played center on the high school team.

The woman pulls the mop out of the pail, wrings it out with her thick right hand, slaps it down onto the floor. She glances at Clara; when she speaks, the cigarette bobs up and down on her lower lip.

"You seen the babies yet?"

"Babies?"

She leans on her mop, tucks it under her arm like a crutch. "Brand new. Twins. Somebody left 'em on the hospital steps this morning. Cute as buttons."

"I hadn't heard." Clara laces her fingers together in her lap.

"Nobody knows who they belong to. Guess they're wards of the state now."

"Will they live?"

"Oh sure." The woman grins, shrugs. "They're up on the maternity ward with the other babies. You ought to go up and see 'em."

Clara shakes her head. "I can't. I'm very ill. My doctor's ordered complete bed rest."

The woman cocks an eyebrow, goes back to her mopping. A few minutes later, her head comes up. "Dr. Seton?"

Clara rolls her head toward the woman. Her fingers are knotted together very tightly. "Yes. How did you know?"

The woman shrugs, goes on mopping. "He's always ordering bed rest. Takes all the fun out of life, that man. A real tyrant." She looks at Clara again. "You really feel that bad you can't go up to the sixth floor?"

The woman takes three more swipes at the floor, stuffs the mop in the pail, comes over and drops heavily into the chair beside the bed. She takes the cigarette out of her mouth, leans toward Clara.

"How about if I grab a wheelchair, take you up there?" Her eyes are bright blue, very clear, like a child's. Clara is startled that she didn't notice them earlier.

"No." She thinks about seeing the babies, what it would be like. They would be on the other side of a wall of glass. She wouldn't be able to touch them. "No, I can't. The strain on my heart . . ."

"Sure you can." The woman clamps her hand down on Clara's arm. Clara feels the scratch of calluses against her skin; she wants to pull away. "I'll take care of everything. It'd do you good to see those babies."

Clara's heart thumps twice, hard, and, for an instant, she thinks she's going to feel another white pain in her chest. She sucks at the air.

"Maternity's the happiest floor in the hospital. Everybody should go up there, get a daily dose." The woman grins at her. "You got kids?"

Clara starts to shake her head. It is an automatic gesture, a way she's trained herself to respond so that she won't have to answer questions, won't have to explain that she doesn't know them, has never seen her grandchildren. Something makes her hesitate. She nods weakly. "Two."

"I got seven." The woman pushes at the sleeves of her sweater, jamming them toward her round elbows. "Never know what they're up to, so don't ask. Too many to keep track of, I guess. That's what Eileen says. She's my sister."

Clara's lips are dry, almost sore. She wants to run the tip of her tongue over them, but her mouth seems glued shut.

"I like 'em when they're little, myself. When you can put 'em down and they'll stay put. Can't get lost yet. Know what I mean?"

Clara stares at her. "Yes," she says suddenly. "I do know. Exactly."

"That's why I always take a peek at the babies before I go home at night. Brings back a lot of happy feelings. Sort of like a lullaby to myself."

Clara raises her head off the pillow, presses her hands against her stomach. She remembers singing lullabies to her children, rocking them in the dark, long after Neil was in bed. The tunes lie on the back of her tongue even now, as if she'd just finished singing them; she can almost taste them there, syrupy, warm. She looks into the woman's clear eyes.

"I think I want to go," she says. "I'd like to see the babies."

The cleaning woman stands up, slides her cigarette back into the pack in her pocket. She grins down at Clara. "Just give me a couple minutes to get rid of the nurses. I'll be right back."

She grabs the pail, wheels it out the door. Clara watches her go. Something swells and bounces in her chest like a bright yellow balloon.

When the woman comes back with the wheel chair, Clara feels quite strong. Her heartbeat is firm and regular. She sits up and swings her legs over the side of the bed, drops to her feet and slides into her thin, pink slippers. The woman reaches to give her a hand, but Clara waves her away and maneuvers into the chair herself. She touches her hair, smooths her gown, places her hands carefully together in her lap.

The nurse's station is empty; the woman pushes Clara up to the bank of elevators, presses the Up button. The doors roll open. Clara is wheeled into the elevator; the doors close quietly; the elevator hums. The doors open.

The woman pats Clara's shoulder. "Here we are."

Clara's arms feel as if they are strung with wires, like a harp. Her hands tremble.

The woman rolls her down the hall, parks her in front of the viewing window. Clara looks into the round faces of two sleeping babies. They lie side by side in transparent, plastic baskets. Their torsos are wrapped tightly in lime green blankets, but their hands are free, curled into tiny fists beside their cheeks.

"Aren't they the sweetest little things?" the woman coos. "Don't you just want to rock 'em like your own?"

"Yes," Clara whispers, "yes." And her fingers tingle with desire. She leans forward in her chair, touches the window. She wants to stroke the soft cheeks, cradle the tiny bodies against her old breasts. Her heart beats hard, slaps against the inside of her chest, urgent and swelling, pushing its way out.

Then, somehow, she is standing. Her body is pressed against the thick glass, so that her mouth, her breasts, her hips are flattened, compressed. She is making a soft, moaning sound deep in her throat.

"Hey!" The cleaning woman grabs her arm, but Clara lurches out of her grasp, reaches toward the window, with thin, wiry arms.

"Please!" she wails. "I want my babies! Why are you keeping them from me?" She slaps the glass, beats at it with her fists. Tears roll down her cheeks. "They're mine! I want them back!"

"Take it easy, lady." The woman clamps her big hands around Clara's waist, pushes her roughly back into the chair. "You're going to get me in trouble." She spins the chair quickly away from the glass wall. Cigarettes tumble from her pocket onto the floor; one falls into Clara's lap. Clara wraps her fingers around it. Her face is wet; she can feel tears dropping off her chin.

Continued next page



Drawing by Phil Paratore

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to freak out? I wouldn't have taken you up in the first place." The woman rolls Clara quickly down the hall and into the elevator; her voice is shaking.

Clara closes her eyes. She doesn't see the hall, the bright fluorescent lights, the startled face of a tall orderly. She lolls her head against the back of the chair; she thinks about flying out to Los Angeles in a big, silver plane.

When the morning nurse comes in at six, Clara is so weak she can't lift her head off the pillow. But she knows what she is going to do, and when she asks to have a telephone installed, her voice is firm and steady. The nurse, a sweet-faced woman with chubby arms, smiles; her black eyes shine.

"Anything to keep you in bed, Clara. I heard you had quite a little adventure yesterday. You're lucky you didn't have another attack. You had the whole staff scared."

"I'm sorry." Clara gives her a stiff little smile. She wants to tell her that her heart will be all right now, that she is finally going to do something about it. Her palms are sweating under the sheets. "The telephone?"

"I'll order it right away."

As soon as the phone is installed, Clara dials the long distance operator. The receiver is shaking so badly that she has to use both hands to steady it.

The phone rings for a long time before it is picked up. She hears a heavy, masculine voice say hello. She imagines a tall man with thinning brown hair, wide shoulders, pointed elbows.

"Joseph?" she says.

She hears Neil's shuffle coming down the hall long before he appears in the doorway. She folds her mouth into a straight line, tries to make it stop smiling. She has combed her hair and elevated the bed into a sitting position. She is feeling quite strong, better than she has in months, maybe even years. She slides open the drawer of the bedside table, lifts out her Bible, sees the crumpled cigarette in the bottom of the drawer, picks that up, too.

When Neil comes into the room, she has the Bible open on her lap and the picture of her grandchildren in her hands. The cigarette is tucked into the corner of her mouth.

He stops in the middle of the room. "Clara?"

She smiles. "Sit down, Neil. I have wonderful news."

But he doesn't sit down. He comes up to the bed, frowning.

"What's that in your mouth?"

She smiles. "A little whimsy of mine." She tips the cigarette into her hand before he can grab it. She cups it, slides it under the sheets. It lies next to her thigh, the thin, white paper against her skin. She straightens her neck, looks up at her husband, takes a deep breath.

"I called Joseph this morning." She very carefully licks her lips with the tip of her tongue. "He's flying out to see me."

"Joseph?" His face is blank; he hasn't registered yet what she's told him.

She watches him, wondering if he will turn and walk out of the room, wondering if he will yell at her. Instead, his face softens, folding in on itself in a strange, confused way. She has never seen him look this way; he reminds her of a little boy.

He sits in the chair, looks down at the floor. "You called him yourself?"

"Yes, I should have called him years ago."

"You deliberately opposed me." He shakes his head. "You've turned against me, too."

She doesn't say anything.

"You made a fool of me." He raises his head, looks at her. His voice is weak, old.

"A fool of you?" She frowns. "How did I make a fool of you?"

He doesn't answer and it dawns on her gradually that he doesn't have an answer, that he doesn't know himself what he means. She watches his shoulders sag against the back of the chair.

"All this time," she whispers. "All these wasted years. So I wouldn't make a fool of you."

He closes his eyes. There is a long silence. Clara thinks of all the times she and Neil have sat together without speaking. All the hours of silence between them. Has it been a kind of protection, a way of not hurting each other, a way of holding hands in the darkness? Or was it a failure of courage? She doesn't know.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I didn't want to hurt you. I just wanted my children back."

He doesn't open his eyes, but his back curls lower in the chair. After a while, he sighs.

"When's he coming?"

She opens her mouth to answer, feels something catch in her throat. She realizes, suddenly, why he is not angry, why he has not exploded or stalked out of the room. He is relieved. She has delivered him from his obstinacy, from the stubborn inflexibility that he wears like a suit of armor. Has he been hoping, all these years, that she would oppose him? Has he been yearning for this moment of release? The base of her spine tingles. She sits up straighter in the bed. Cool, sweet air slides into her mouth. She smiles. "He said he'll be here tomorrow for visiting hours."

Neil opens his eyes, glances at her quickly, looks away, studies the ceiling molding. "Think he'll mind if I'm here?"

She reaches across the space between them, covers his hand with hers, feels the tiny muscles in his fingers shiver under the dry, veined skin.

Amy Belding Brown

Freeport

is a writer, quilter and mother of four

The Emissary of God

WELL, I really don't know where to begin. You'd have to know everything to understand about the unmarked car and why it's here. You know, one of those state police ones that have a regular license plate and the blue lights behind the grill where you can't see them until they're turned on.

First, I suppose it's partly Angie's fault. She was I.J.'s pet lamb when he was eight. Well, he's nearly twenty-four now so Angie was really getting on for a sheep.

Haggis and Charlie have some of the responsibility and of course there's the coyote, too! For the past two weeks Haggis and Charles have been finding ugly bits down in the pasture. And Haggis being a retriever and all, well you know, he'd arrive in the dooryard with a workable leg minus the edibles. Mother is sick of this so she yells at Dad, "Haggis has brought up one of Angie's legs. I wish you'd bury the poor thing."

And then there's the Emissary of God or the E.G. as we call them. They always come around on Saturday, "... attempting to work their way into God's good graces by drawing someone into the fold," according to Gram. Dad always said to get rid of them was like trying to shake off a burdock. That's why they're always shunted off to us kids. We usually match them pretty good, question for question, so it isn't long before they'll give us a pamphlet and head for greener pastures.

Well, it all started this morning when they stuck me with the E.G. Ben was waiting for me, or at least I hoped he was, to play ball and here I was, the sacrificial lamb, you might say, being interrogated by the E.G. Apparently it's census Saturday or something and the Emissaries are totalling potentials versus conversions. Anyway, I was getting the third degree as to immediate family members and all. That's when I did it. I really did it for Mum because I knew she wouldn't approve of me giving out a lot of family business to anybody, let alone the E.G.'s. So I just led her off the track. I says, "You'd better not count my little sister, Angie, 'cause she's not with us anymore." Always alert to the opportunities of family bereavement, the E.G. picked right up on that, asking all kinds of questions. I got kind of scared by the depth of interest I'd created so I didn't dare come clean. And not wanting to get in any deeper, I clammed up. The E.G. viewed this with suspicion so I retreated behind feeling so bad I didn't want to talk about it. As a matter of fact I felt so bad about then, that I wanted to be alone or at least somewhere else!

Well, you've guessed what happened next. Haggis appeared at the pasture bars in triumph, his prize still joined at the knee! From then on things kind of followed the domino theory. Mum screamed at Dad, "That dog has one of Angie's legs! Would you please bury the poor thing once and for all!" Dad replied that they'd just dig her up again, anyway, but I don't think the E.G. got that part as she was almost to the mailbox by then without so much as leaving me a paper!

It wasn't long after that, that the unmarked car I was telling you about, appeared in the dooryard. The two detectives have been talking to Dad for quite awhile. Uh oh, I think I can hear him calling me. I guess I'd better look for Ben. It might be some time before I get to play ball again!

Ian B. Orman

Leeds

teaches at Edward Little H.S



Penelope, drawing by Diane Potenzo

Waiting for Ulysses

The faithful Penelope
 ever weaving
 ever waiting
 Did she never tire of loyalty?
 Did she never wish to substitute
 One dish for another husband?

Did she never regret
 that more than flesh
 Had been wasted?
 Did she never wonder
 if he thought of Calypso's charms
 While holding her?

Had she called him back
 to Ithaca
 Or had the stronger ties
 Been Telemachus and Home?

What's left of love
 After an Epic separation?

Estelle Watson Sanders
Windham
 teaches at Windham H.S.

Laughing Lady Buddha

I remember you, sad friend, back in Boston,
 standing on a sidewalk in Chinatown.
 Winter wind blows through your hair.
 By a bakery window you stand
 and eat a glazed Buddha-cookie.
 The red gumdrop has fallen from its navel
 and is a dot next to your foot.
 You eat his head slowly, this Laughing Buddha.
 Your reflection glows on the window.
 You nibble the ears, and say,
 "I want only his head. You want the rest?"
 I say I want his head too.
 Your hair lifts, and your eyes grow large.
 "Then you must get your own Buddha."
 You are laughing.

Terry Plunkett
Hallowell
 teaches at UMA

Villanelle: Before Two Letters

I have two letters that I have to write,
 One to my sister, one to a close friend.
 They'll hate me for bringing my love to light.

Sister, you're on the verge of a long night
 And passion wins again over reason.
 I have two letters that I have to write.

Friend, I can no longer watch you delight
 In your own destruction. I understand
 You'll hate me for bringing my love to light.

Hate me then as I hate you for your plight
 Which pains me with visions of your ruin.
 I have two letters that I have to write.

Sister, we both know that I have no right
 To decide your fate, but please, please listen
 And hate me for bringing my love to light.

Young, unschooled, jobless, pregnant, money tight.
 Old, abusing drugs, risking everything.
 I have two letters that I have to write.
 They'll hate me for bringing my love to light.

Douglas Woodsum
Cape Elizabeth
 works at Bread Loaf

Weihnachten DDR

In Berlin, Kurt and Petra scramble westward
 over the stubble of the wall.
 In an hour, they return to their gray flat
 with a small evergreen tree
 a string of tiny multi-colored lights
 and a bag of oranges.
 Kurt squeezes orange juice and adds vodka.
 "A toast!" they say.
 Outside in the solstice night Germans
 dash about like ants, singing,
 waving torches, frantically searching for
 some vital thing lost long ago when
 the great trees were cut up and burned.
 "A toast!" they say, and dream
 of Christmas in a land
 that finally will not be bought by he
 with the most guns, or the most money.
 Still . . . in the west, millions of plastic toys
 poise to fly at them. Appliance dealers
 in Frankfurt, toss in their sleep,
 dreaming of gray fruit in the east
 that when picked, turns to an oily gold . . .
 In the flat, colored lights dance
 on darkened walls.
 Petra and Kurt
 toast the new Yule till dawn,
 their fingers crossed.

Lyle Dennett
Rockport
 builds houses

The Women in Vincent's Life

(Van Gogh died at thirty-seven. 1990 marks the hundredth anniversary of his death.)



Johanna van Gogh-Bonger with her baby Vincent Willem in 1890

That hot Sunday evening a hundred years ago, when Van Gogh shot himself in the stomach with a revolver, did not bring immediate peace. From the Auvers farmyard where the act took place, he was able to stagger to his 70-cent a day attic above the Café Ravoux and collapse into a narrow bed. For another thirty hours, on his cross of colors, he kept a severe vigil, conversing rationally with those close to him and smoking his customary pipe. It was July in France; his single window must have been open to the sky he loved so well.

He had plenty of time, then, to think thoughts of the past, all the good and sad: his lonesome boarding school days in Holland, his understanding brother Theo, his frustrating work as an art-gallery functionary, his evangelical mission to the mining district at Borinage, drinking hard through the night with Toulouse-Lautrec, the sun, the sun, the birdcalls he'd studied, the olive and cypress trees, his enemy-friend Paul Gauguin, the berserk mistral wind in Arles, the candles he put in his hatband as he worked on his canvases outside through the night, how like a snake eating its tail he had once before tried suicide by swallowing his paint at the Saint-Rémy asylum.

In an earlier crisis, his brother once wrote of him: "Poor fighter and poor, poor sufferer. For the time being nobody can do anything to alleviate his suffering, though he himself feels it deeply and strongly. If he had been able to find somebody to whom he could have opened his heart, maybe it would have never come to all this."

During his thirty-hour deathwatch, smoking his pipe by the window, Vincent's



Van Gogh drawing, 1882, Sorrow (Sien), Clasina Maria Hoornick

thoughts must also have turned toward certain women, some of whom might have saved him, to the extent that anyone can ever truly be saved by others, though he would not have considered them in that light.

There was Ursula Loyer, back when he was twenty and making hesitant drawings along the Thames embankment in London. She was his landlady's daughter, and his affection for her was unrequited. For six years he sought consolation in religion: Bible studies, tutoring children at private schools, preparation for the ministry. His broken heart coincided with his search for self. After austere months in a Belgian coal-mining district, he wrote: "The clergy call us sinners, conceived and born in sin, bah! what damned nonsense I think it is. Is it a sin to love, to stand in need of love, to be unable to exist without love? I think that life without love is a sinful and immoral condition. If I am repentant about anything, it is that at one time, through mystical and theological abstruseness, I committed the error of retreating too much into my shell." Vincent had finally surfaced from his heartache for Ursula.

At the age of 27 he went back to Etten, Holland, to live with his parents. He was now firmly dedicated to his drawing. A fascinating new arrival in the Van Gogh household was Vincent's cousin, Kee Vos. The daughter of an Amsterdam preacher, she was young and recently widowed, with a four-year-old son. Vincent took both into his heart, over long walks in the countryside and pleasant discussions of flowers and birds. He expressed his affection. She was shocked and outraged; she told him she could never marry again. To his brother he wrote that



Vincent at age 18

he would win her somehow someday: "For love is something so positive, so strong, so real that it is as impossible for one who loves to take back that feeling as it is to take his own life." Kee thought he was crazy, and she fled to her parents in Amsterdam. He followed. Kee heard his knock, and departed by the back door. Vincent confronted her father, the preacher Jan Stricker, in the family room. The young artist, wild-eyed and desperately in love, put his hand into the open flame of an oil lamp. He explained that he wanted to speak with Kee for only as long as he could endure the pain. But she was gone forever, and Vincent soon fainted in his agony.

Within hours, bandaged and defeated, he took sustenance with the streetwalker Sien. He eventually confessed this development in a letter to Theo, adding: "I need a woman, I cannot, I will not, live without love. I am a man and a man with passions. I must go to a woman, otherwise I shall freeze or turn to stone." Sien was her street name. Sometimes he called her Sorrow. She was born Clasina Maria Hoornik; she was 30 years old, vulgar, brazen, consumed by gonorrhea, a prostitute for nearly half her life already. She had an 11-year-old daughter, and was pregnant when they met. She was a hard-drinking, cigar-smoking woman with a smallpox-pitted face, and for the next year and a half she provided him with the closest thing he would ever know of domesticity in his adult life. When their relationship finally came to an end, he gave her a parting gift of painter's canvas, so she could make clothing for her child.

In the summer of 1887, Vincent began a doomed romance with La Segatori, in Paris. He was 34, thin and toothless, on an early decline caused by lifestyle and malnutrition; she was a fading beauty, named Agostina Segatori, who owned an

Italian restaurant in Paris called Le Tambourin. One evening, Vincent found himself in a fight with a patron of hers—the argument may have been of a jealous nature—the result was that their friendship ended abruptly. He had had many paintings on display at Le Tambourin, pictures he was never able to retrieve and which were eventually sold as waste canvas for a penny apiece.

Rachel. Rachel. His days were running out, but not without long wild scratches at the sky. Vincent's dreams of domesticity had been radically altered by the time he moved to Arles; he no longer felt wife and children a possibility. "The more ugly, old, vicious, ill, poor I get, the more I want to take my revenge by producing a brilliant color, well-arranged, resplendent." He sought a commune of artists, but this was made impossible by his eccentric disposition, mystical and so nervous. Just before Christmas 1888, after an outburst of utter sorrow, Vincent amputated his left ear lobe. He had attended bullfights in southern France, and knew the tradition of good kill, the matador's presentation of the severed ear in a handkerchief to the sweetheart. Both animal and assassin, Vincent put on an oversized beret, wrapped his flesh in newspaper and walked to the nearby brothel. He asked for Rachel. "Here is a remembrance of me," he said, giving over his sad package.

Rachel took him in, nursed him as best as she could while arranging for his care at the local hospital. He had severed an artery, and there was considerable loss of blood, long-staining the wooden floors at both her place and his. Upon his release from the hospital, Vincent was full of doubt. His house was pelted with stones by children, who taunted him through his windows as he tried to paint once more. On the street, adults and children cursed him as a freak; eighty citizens signed a petition requesting that he be jailed. He feared for his sanity; he thought the condition which caused his mutilation might be chronic, and he went back to Rachel.

She was young and her vision was imprecise. She told him that his bad experience was not out of the ordinary in that part of the country. It's the wind, she said. It's the sun, she was sure. She told him he wasn't crazy. She allowed him to continue.

In his last year and a half, Vincent made 300 paintings and several hundred drawings. He wrote his brother Theo: "I am now trying to recover like a man who meant to commit suicide and, finding the water too cold, tries to regain the bank."

Shortly before his death, Vincent Van Gogh's first sale was made, for \$80 to an unknown Belgian artist named Anna Bock. She must have loved his yellow and emerald green ways. But she was too late for anything more. They never met. The current got swift.

Frank Johnson
Tenants Harbor
writes on a tidal cove



Clasina (Sien) and daughter



Woman Sitting in the Café du Tambourin, Paris, Febr./March 1887 oil/canvas, 55.5 x 46.5 cm

La Segatori, in Café du Tambourin, Paris, Van Gogh oil, 1887.

The Watercolor

It hangs there,
Imprisoned by glass and wood,
Doubly matted, expensive,
Ready for the ages,
As I am not.

Does it feel what I feel?
That we should get together
one more time.
For one last stroke or gouge
To make it more right.

It could be arranged.
I could make it happen.
But then,
It would hang there again,
Imprisoned once more.

Might it feel what I might feel?
That we should get together
one last time.

It could be done.
But then?

Charles Danforth
Augusta
*is a painter, musician
& administrator at UMA*

The New Age Comes To Grangely

(From collection, RFD 1, Grangely)

It was the Fourth of July, and the Danforth family was gathered for a picnic at Ezra and Noreen's. The women were talking about soap operas. Beulah plunked the last of her chocolate cake into her mouth and licked the bits of frosting from her plump little fingers.

"They say that soap opera ain't true to life," she said, "but it is. I don't know how many times I've had the same things happen to me that happened to Aurora on 'The Gathering Gloom.' Just a month or so ago, after Derek spent all of Aurora's money and left her, Aurora got real sick. She had this disease that's called Anorexia. She couldn't eat nothing, and she kept losing weight. Well, the same thing happened to me after Broderick left me to join the French Foreign Legion."

Her lower lip trembled a bit when she mentioned Broderick's name. She and Broderick's mother were the only people in Grangely who called him by that name. Everyone else called him Brickhead.

"It was real bad," she continued, "especially right after Broderick left. I lost three pounds in just two weeks. Even my mother noticed it. 'Beulah,' she said to me, 'you've got to eat to keep up your strength. You're coming down with that anorexia just like Aurora.'"

It would be hard to imagine Beulah as an anorexic. She must have weighed 250 pounds. She looked at the last wedge of chocolate cake in the center of the table, hesitated for a moment, and then reached out and lifted the cake from the plate. She brought it to her mouth and took a dainty bite. For such a big girl, she had a dainty way of doing everything.

"Godfrey, Beulah, how did you get over it?" Noreen asked.

"Well, I went to this meeting in Bangor. It was put on by this lady named Heather Laurel, and there's this voice that speaks through her. Heather said we had all lived another life somewhere. The voice told me that I had been an artist's model back in the days of Reubens. The voice said I got my artistic sensitivity during that lifetime."

"I asked the voice about Broderick. It said I would not see Broderick again in this life." Her lip trembled when she said that. "But we'll be reunited in another life, the voice said, because we're soul mates."

"The voice told me to get a crystal because that could harness the rays of the sun, and that's what I needed to cure me. And it really worked. I got my appetite back, and I ain't got anorexia no more."

The young woman reached out and cut a slab of blueberry pie for herself.

The women were clearly impressed with what Beulah had said.

"Godfrey, what will they think of next," said Flora.

The men, on the other hand, thought it was pretty ridiculous.

Junior Larrabee said, "I wonder if the voice could tell me where my pocket watch is. I ain't been able to find it for nearly two weeks."

"Maybe I can use one of them crystals on the arthritis in my elbow," Ezra said, and the men all laughed at that.

Eben said, "Maybe the voice can tell me if I'll ever be reunited with Bathsheba." The cow had eaten some fermented silage the day before, and Eben hadn't been able to find her in the woods around the pasture.

"If you men want proof," Beulah said to them, "you can come and see for yourself. Heather Laurel is coming to Grangely in two weeks. It only costs ten dollars a person."

Ezra said, "I'd sooner take a ten dollar bill and burn it because if I burned the bill, I'd only be wasting money. I wouldn't be wasting my time on top of it."

Eben decided to go. Maybe it was because Flora hinted that she would bake a blueberry pie if Eben took her to see Heather Laurel. Eben had a great weakness for blueberry pies.

Two weeks later Eben and Flora were at the Grange Hall in Grangely where Heather Laurel was going to speak. Noreen and Beulah were there, and so were Junior and Elvira. In the entryway a table had been set up with books and healing crystals and herb teas for sale. In the hall itself the shades had been drawn, and colored lights had been set up. A cassette was playing some strange music, the likes of which Eben had never heard before.

When everything was ready, Heather Laurel made her appearance. Heather was in her forties perhaps, a tall woman whose light brown hair was just beginning to go gray. She was wearing a turquoise sweater with purple pants and bright green sneakers. The music continued to play softly in the background as she talked.

"I know that some of you are hearing me for the first time. Some of you no doubt are merely curious or even skeptical. I was skeptical myself until I was in a serious accident. I nearly died. I think for a short time I did pass over into the other world, and there I met the spirit of Axorth who led me back into this world and healed me and who speaks through me. This is not superstition. It is a new perception, a new awareness of the spiritual aura each of us has."

"People want to get back in touch with their soul. Physical problems are manifestations of spiritual problems. If you can get in touch with yourself, you can recognize your spiritual needs and use the healing power of the natural world to cure yourself of your ills."

Eben leaned toward Flora and whispered, "That must be true. Whenever Ezra wakes up with a hangover, the physical pain is caused by too much spirits."

"Now you hush, Eben, and pay attention to what the lady is saying."

The music on the tape picked up a little with a light drum beat.

"I am going to summon the spirit of Axorth now. Everyone must be very quiet and help me concentrate."

She pulled a stool forward and sat on it. "Axorth, come forth to speak to the people of this troubled century. Use your wisdom to heal them and soothe them. Axorth, come forth and speak through me."

Suddenly her head fell forward, and her hands fell to her sides. Then the voice of Axorth came forth. It was a low, guttural voice.

"Pain is a perception. Pain is not a reality. You need to get in touch with your spirit so you can heal the pain in your body. Is anyone here in pain? Does anyone want to ask me a question?"

Eben stood up and said, "I've got this pain in my left knee that troubles me sometimes."

"Are you in touch with your spirit?"

"Well, I don't rightly know."

"Let me ask you something. Have you suffered a loss recently?"

"Well," Eben said, "I lost Bathsheba a couple of weeks ago. She ate too much fermented silage and wandered off."

Evidently they didn't have silage in ancient Egypt, or maybe Axorth had been a city fellow when he was alive. He didn't seem to know what silage was, and he seemed to assume that Bathsheba was a woman.

"You will be reunited with Bathsheba in another life," the voice of Axorth said. "It might be in another life form. It might even be on another planet or another solar system. I can tell because you have an aura that I can read. You and Bathsheba are soul mates."

Most of the people there knew that Bathsheba was Eben's cow, and although she had been lost a couple of weeks before, she had come home the next day to be milked. Eben expected to be reunited with her, not in another lifetime or on another planet, but in the barn at milking time. There was a little bit of snickering going on, but not too much because Flora and Noreen and some of the others said, "Now you stop that. You just be quiet and listen to what the lady has to say."

About that time a middle aged couple came into the hall. They were talking quietly, but people could hear what they were saying.

The woman said, "We must be late. It looks like the service has already begun."

"We wouldn't be late if you had got the directions right."

"Well, it's been years since I've been to Hannaford, and a lot of the roads and things have changed."

"I've never heard of a funeral being held in a Grange Hall anyway," the husband said.

"Cousin Henry was so active in the Grange that they wanted to honor him."

All this time Heather Laurel's voice was going on about how modern life was unsatisfying. "Material possessions, technological advances do not bring satisfaction. The ancients understood this in a way that modern people don't."

The woman who thought she was at her cousin Henry's funeral turned to her husband and said, "This is the strangest funeral I have ever seen."

Her husband whispered back, "Maybe that is all just part of the Grange ceremony, but where's the body?"

Junior Larrabee turned to the couple and whispered to them, "You must of come to the wrong place. This here is in Grangely. You want to be in Hannaford. That's ten miles down the road."

The voice of Axorth continued, "You have to get in touch with your spirit; you have to let your intuition work for you; you have to trust the unseen world."

Beulah had not been aware of much of what had been going on in the room. She had stayed up late the night before reading *Tessie's Terrible Temptation*, and it was warm in the Grange hall. About the time that Heather Laurel had slumped forward, Beulah had also slumped forward. From time to time dainty little snoring noises had issued forth from her open mouth. But she awoke with a start when the out-of-towner asked, "Where's the body?"

Beulah looked around the room, startled, uncomprehending. Then as the out-of-town couple left, a burly young man burst into the room calling Beulah's name:

Beulah looked at the young man and called to him, "Broderick!"

He came to where she was and put his arms around her.

"Oh, Broderick," she said, "at last we've been reunited!"

"Yeah, I never did join the French Foreign Legion. I found out they don't have it no more," Broderick said.

"I didn't realize I had died. This must be my funeral, but where's my body?"

"Godfrey, Beulah," Junior said to her, "you ought to be able to find your body. It's the biggest thing in the place."

"Instead of joining the French Foreign Legion," Broderick said, "I joined the circus. I been travelling around the country with them. Then when they got to Manchester, New Hampshire, I decided I had to see you. I missed you a whole lot, Beulah."

"Well of course you missed her a whole lot," Junior said. "There's a whole lot of her to miss."

By that time everyone was busy listening to Beulah and Broderick and laughing at Junior's comments. They weren't paying any attention to the voice of Axorth.

Heather Laurel abruptly came out of her trance. "If you're going to be silly, if you can't take these things seriously, I might as well leave," she said, and she stomped out of the room.

It took nearly an hour to convince Beulah that she had just fallen asleep and had not died and come back in another life.

The next day Ezra went over to see his brother. Eben was sitting in the back yard holding a piece of field quartz against his knee.

"Quite a to-do over to the Grange Hall yesterday, I hear," Ezra said.

"Ayuh."

"Cost you twenty dollars for you and Flora."

"Ayuh, but I saved money in the long run. After yesterday Flora ain't likely to go back to no more them New Age things. Besides it was worth twenty dollars anyway. I ain't had so much fun since that time the bull chased Tommy White up a tree."

"Ayuh. What's that you're holding on your knee?"

"Piece of field quartz. Supposed to capture the sun rays and help the arthritis in my knee."

"Do any good?"

"Well, it can't do no harm. Nothing Doc Burns ever gave me for the arthritis never done no good." He paused then and seemed to be thinking something over. "You know," he said, "I believe it is beginning to feel a little better."

"Ayuh. Let me try it for a spell, why don't you. Maybe it will help the arthritis in my elbow."

Carl R. Perrin
Portland
teaches at Casco Bay College

January 1st, Rangeley

*The quiet of a single chainsaw,
a silent skidder,
a slick snow road,
paved over swamp—*

*an aching silence;
until the crunch of my feet
echoes hollow
in the frozen clumps of snow.*

*The smell of cut spruce and fir
pungent in the frozen
hairs of my nose;*

*and above me the grey gorbies,
canadian jays—souls of lumberjacks—
follow the trail
of sawdust and breadcrumbs.*

Suzanne E. Hunger
Eureka, IL
*grew up in Maine mountains
& teaches at Eureka College*

Town Planning Board

*Stiffening, she looked askance,
tight-lipped and furtive.
Under her breath, she said,
"Are they giving me a hard time?"*

*When she left
he gustoed a lip-splitting gasp.
Breathless, he sat back in his chair
clasping his hands behind his head,
having justly administered
a power pole permit.*

*She appeared before the board
for her husband,
that he might build
a new home
for their son and daughter-in-law.*

*Being at each other's disposal,
structures form above antics,
working a place
protecting expansion.*

George V. Van Deventer
Washington
is a dairy farmer

The Bet—May One

*The bets are in
And centered on May One.
An island of old ice
Like a worn lace table cloth
With edging torn and trailing
Stretches in mid-lake
And cannot reach the shore.*

*Today long rents appear
On our south side. It is
A pretty day. The daffodils
Are blowing on the lawns.
If that North wind dies
It will be warm.*

*They're launching a big
Speed Boat at the Slip.
The owner loads his Collie,
Leaps aboard.
He revs the motor;
the Collie wags applause.*

*He's off—full speed and noisy.
He cuts three circles
Between the beach and ice
And then is gone. His wake
Is there. He zipped around the point
To stir the other side.*

*The rents have gone to gashes.
The wake has slopped the tablecloth.*

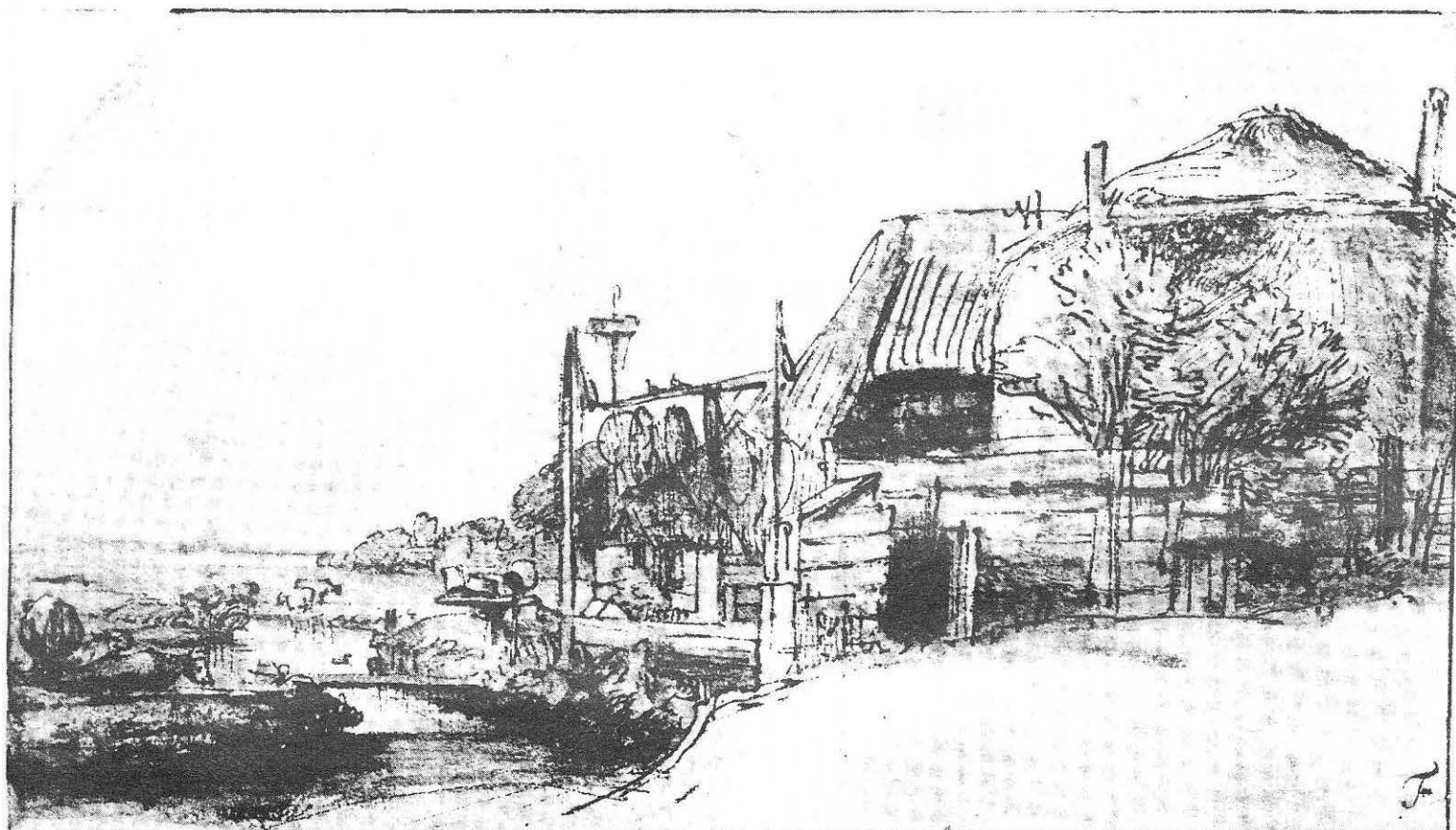
*The afternoon grows warmer
In Spring sun. Blue holes
Reflect the sky. An hour later
And the ice is down.*

*If you put your money on May One
Of course you won.*

Eulalie Marshall
Wilton
is an "interested observer"

On Poetic Forms: Five Poems with Commentary

Editor's Note: Most poetry being written in Maine is in a verse that is "free," to a greater or lesser extent (usually greater). To strike a balance, and to stir a revival of "older" forms, perhaps, KENNEBEC asked a real master for five of his poems in different forms. THOMAS CARPER of Cornish, and Professor of English at USM, cheerfully obliged, and added a brief commentary on each. T.P.



Rembrandt drawing, c. 1652, reed pen, bistre, wash

A Farmstead with a Hayrick and Weirs Beside a Stream

When he was about forty-six, Rembrandt made several drawings of the same farm.

Perhaps it was the texture of the calm
That brought him back—the straight stakes of the weirs
Combing the stream; light blurring a tree's crown
Above a thick board wall; nets in the air's
Warm ruffle; and the hayrick, yellow and high,
Dense as the dwelling's thatch. Perhaps it was
The sense of an entire prosperity
Not got by owning, but bestowed—because
Here the clear eye could have, the pen could keep,
The terrace with its rail, the browsing cows,
The watery, reedy tufts beside the steep
Banks, the ducks, the whole of farm and house
And all beyond, even beyond the brink
Of space beginning at the edge of ink.

(First published by the Phi Beta Kappa Society in the
Summer 1987 issue of *The American Scholar*)

The Rembrandt drawing suggested this sonnet. For a long time poems about works of art have been attractive to writers (as with Keats's "Grecian Urn"). Why, I'm not sure, except that such works often have about them a sense of permanence and repose so different from what our daily lives tend to give us, and they have those depths and distances that lead the imagination out in significant ways. The longest sequence of poems I've ever done is about Camille Corot and his work—a dozen sonnets that become a kind of portrait and biography, with relations, naturally, to my own anxieties and interests. Since some readers might have a problem with poems that talk about unfamiliar paintings, I try to make sure that adequate information can be found either within the poem or in a headnote. And where headnotes are used, they make a little bridge between our world of prose and the poem's other world.

Casting the Nets

It must be in the evening, for our boat
Rides fragily on the water; if a wave
Should lap over a gunnel, the remote
Reaches of river would become a grave.

Yet in the calm after the winds of day,
We move out, confident, and do not break
The almost-silence as we row away
From shore, tipping the arrow of our wake.

A hand thrust through the surface feels the force
Of currents that oppose; a dragonfly
Inquires of us, then takes a different course
And disappears into the yellow sky.

When we arrive, the land is lost in mist.
We balance carefully as we prepare
The nets whose spidery strands seem to resist
Their being flung extravagantly in air.

But, brought to standing height and artfully
Swirled out into the sunset, they begin
To wing and fan as though infinity
Could be encompassed, caught, and gathered in.

This poem was suggested by a photograph of fishermen on an Asian river (possibly the Mekong) at evening, ballooning out their nets from long, flat boats. One summer morning when I was looking around for something to write about, I found the picture on the cover of a novel by Marguerite Duras which my wife was reading. Having written sonnets for several days, I decided to write with quatrains to have a more leisurely poem. Where couplets tend to be terse, the alternately-rhymed lines seem to pace slowly. Quatrains also open up a page, and with them the writer can develop a thought or image at some length, then move gradually to the next thought or image. I've found that different forms help one pace material differently.

"The forms must be observed"

(Barry Fitzgerald to Maureen O'Hara
in John Ford's film, *The Quiet Man*)

Couplets in a Seventeenth-Century Manner

You would be in your seventh year
Had you arrived to sojourn here,
And now, beneath this flowering tree,
Might, as I write, look up at me
To wonder why I take my time
On sunny days to sit at rhyme.
And, were you here, I might delay
The task determined for today
To play another sort of play,
Making a son-shined holiday.

And yet, before you first drew breath
You learned what I will learn of death,
Departing prematurely hence
In knowledgeable ignorance,
Never having thought to thrive
Here at a time when I'm alive.
Was it a wisdom learned before
You halted at the mortal door
That sent you on your way, to be
A child of God—or memory?

Still, were you here, in spite of doubt
Expressed in cries at coming out,
You would look up and I look down
Each greeting his own flesh, but grown
By day and day two things apart,
One novel heart, one troubled heart.
Yours would beat a different beat
As you stood on your own two feet
Like any other, meeting me:
A man, and yet a mystery.

Underneath this sheltering shade
I sense all mysteries are made
To challenge any who might be
Too certain of felicity.
So now in this your seventh year
Of growth forgone in love and fear
Even imperfectly shared and known,
I'll watch an evening sky alone,
Acknowledging that day is done
By losing yet another sun.

"Couplets" began as an imitation of a model, Henry King's "The Exequy," a memorial for his wife. I was attracted to the typical-for-the-period metaphors, where "setting sun," for example, stands for "death":

Thou hast benighted me, thy set
This eve of blackness did beget,
Who wast my day, though overcast
Before thou hadst thy noontide passed . . .

This way of speaking worked as a distancing device—something to make writing on a painful subject possible. And then, the insistent tetrameter lines suggested finality and inevitability which seemed to suit the content. A pentameter line, such as the line of "Casting the Nets," would have been too leisurely and calmly meditative. Not that four-beat couplets are rigid; as with King's, the lines run over, carrying meaning across the rhyme words. And why capital letters to begin each line? Well, it's hard to see why a line of verse can't begin with a big letter that says, "This is a line of verse." One might claim that couplets aren't modern, but then, why not? A poem is a poem, and even the freest free verse is entirely artificial.

A Short Course in Sonnets

For J.H.

Dear Judy, if a sonnet will evolve,
The writer first must listen for the beat.
The ear, and not a syllable count, will solve
All problems, and create the dancing feet
Whose turns and twirlings of a hundred kinds
Move music far beyond the metronome
Into those swift-slow patterns where the mind's
A motion—venturing, then returning home.
Oh yes, the subject. Look into your heart,
As Sidney says. Don't search for the profound,
But watch for modest entries into art—
Small things perceived when others aren't around.
Then work. Keep going. With the fourteenth line
You're done. Relax. Take Howard out to dine.

One day a friend at USM asked me about books which could help a newcomer learn to write sonnets. I recommended Derek Attridge's truly insightful *Rhythms of English Poetry* for a general discussion of metrics, and then said that, of course, the best way to learn about sonnets is to imitate those one likes—in the English style, with three quatrains and a couplet, or in the Italian style, with the more-difficult "a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a" rhymes (Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a good model). Imitation and persistent practice will help a writer develop ease, naturalness, and a habit of thinking pleasurably within forms. Then I put together the suggestions above: write by ear, not eye, and follow Sir Philip Sidney's famous advice to do what you want: "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write."

Flypaper

Because it looked unpleasant, and its idea
Unsettled us, we took it from the kitchen.
But, ever economical, we hung it
Out of sight, in a corner of the bedroom.
Days later, on a sultry afternoon
During a short siesta, I heard buzzing
Of more than usual loudness that began
And kept on at a pitch I found disturbing.
A large fly had set foot on the flypaper
And now made efforts to unstick itself
With one after another burst of wingbeats.
I suddenly felt my shoulder muscles ache;
I thought I ought to save him; then I thought
That this was why flypaper was invented;
And then, that, even rescued, all the viscous
Goo would keep him ever from recovering.
Of course by then his wings had touched the surface
And had been thoroughly seized. So, naturally,
After a little while he died in silence.

"Flypaper" is a nineteen-line poem in blank verse. The form is useful, being longer than a sonnet and, without rhyme, more casual and talky than a poem in quatrains or couplets. Still, it has the regularity that I enjoy—although readers who haven't settled in to the poem's five-beat norm may hear certain lines as four- or six-beat ones. Of course, any line taken out of a metrical context may be read in many ways, with many rhythms. But hopefully readers will move along confidently with the five beats I hear. Many writers, particularly these days, have difficulty with meter; for me, though, using meter is not even second nature, but first nature, made part of me, I believe, by the thousands of hymn-sings I attended from earliest childhood. Also, while I was growing up the lyrics of popular songs were filled with meter and rhyme. So I learned in church, like Emily Dickinson, and now feel, like Robert Frost, that I'd as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down. There is a lot of wonderful free verse in the world, but I could do nothing in that way. When using forms—couplets, and quatrains, and sonnets, and blank-verse nineteen-line poems—I have a sense that I can order the material in ways that suit me. And particularly with sonnets and nineteen-line poems I have, as Winnie the Pooh might say, "useful pots to put things in."

Thomas Carper

Poets

Poets were normal in our house. That is, it was normal to have them. They drank with my parents and ate dinner with us and sometimes they liked children and sometimes they didn't. Usually they were more interested in my mother, unless they were women, in which case they were more interested in my father. Once or twice it was the wrong way round—men poets made passes at my father, or he made them at lady poets—and then there was an uncomfortable feeling around the house after they left. We did our best to forget the names of those poets.

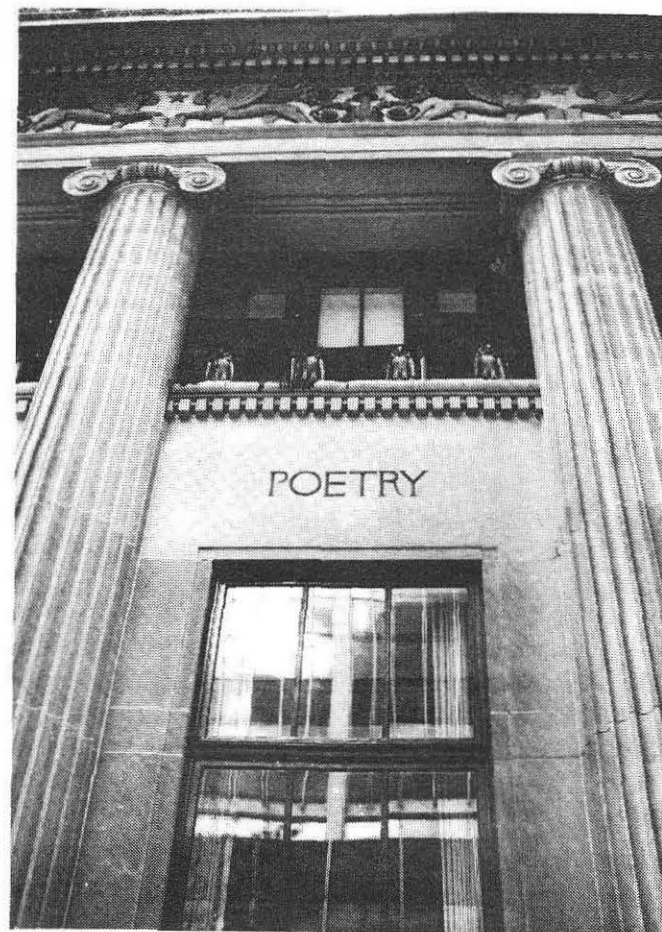
But the others we stored up, adding them to the lists of famous poets who had visited our home. My sister is reported to have sat on Robert Frost's lap and recited "Stopping By Woods," but I have never been sure whether Robert Frost could be on my list or whether I was born yet. I used to pretend that I had sat on the lap, but lately I have preferred to think that I must have been a mere babe. No doubt within a few years I shall have been unborn.

Who is the earliest poet I remember? Well, Daddy was a poet, but of course he lived with us. I never thought of him as a poet until it became interesting to tell people he was one. I don't know if he acted like a poet or not. He drank too much in the early times, but then so did my mother and so did their friends in the chemistry and history and economics departments. If they had any friends in the economics department. He sang "A Walk in the Garden" in a high tenor voice, and on Sunday mornings he led us marching around the dining room singing "A Duck May Be Somebody's Mother" at the tops of all our voices, and he ate Thin Mints and Non-Pareils in bed, non-stop and non-sharing, while he read. I did not think these were particularly poetic activities, but they may have been; I have never known any other poets who did them, but then I never knew anyone else's father who did them either.

I do remember the poet who was the handsomest man in the world—even at my tender age, which couldn't have been more than seven or eight, I knew he was the handsomest man in the world. I'll call him Alexander West. What I remember is my mother, in chenille robe and curlers, suddenly leaping up from the green wing chair and crying, "Oh, my God!" at which a burning cigarette flew from her mouth and landed on the green woven rug. Had I not been alert and stomped on it with my sneaker-shod foot it would have burned a larger hole than it did. I can see it now, the red foot with the white rubber toe twisting and twisting on the carpet, and me looking up in amazement as my mother rushed past me and up the stairs. Satisfied that the cigarette was out and my shoe hadn't melted, I went to the window. All I saw was a man—the handsomest man, yes, but that meant nothing to me then—walking past the house, his hands in his pockets. He was wearing a blue zipper jacket and walking rather fast. "He's not coming here," I called upstairs. I went up; my mother, astonishingly fully dressed, had stopped yanking curlers from her hair and gone to the window. Her shoulders dropped a little; I went and stood beside her. Together we watched the handsomest man in the world turn the corner and disappear up Chestnut Street. "He must have forgotten which house it was," my mother murmured. "I told him to come over for breakfast. I never thought he'd come!"

There was one poet I did not like at all. I shall call him Silas Fick. He came home with my father after sitting in on his afternoon class, and when he walked in the door he reeked of alcohol. In those days most of my parents' friends smelled of alcohol, or left faint, pretty trails of its odor as they passed, but this person walked in a cloud of it. I was older then—older than ten, but younger than, say fourteen, when the memories I can distinguish from dreams begin—and this man, large and odiferous and red-faced, didn't see me at all as he came into our house. My mother and I were introduced, and after my father took the visiting poet into the living room, my mother suggested I might want to eat dinner upstairs, in front of the television. I had a chicken pot pie and watched whatever I wanted to, while downstairs my parents and the poet and invited faculty members seemed to shout over their roast beef. They went away to listen to Silas Fick read poems; but after I was in bed they came back, and big band music shouted up the stairs, and Silas Fick's southern accent shouted even louder. Did I hear the crack of a chair's back during the evening? Maybe not; but I can hear it now, for that became one of the stories: the night that Silas Fick, drunk as a lord, leaned back in one of my mother's ladderback chairs and broke it right in half. "The slob," my mother would say. "Thank God he didn't break his neck," Daddy always added.

Lady poets came. One was the Dark-Haired Lady, who said she had a little boy my age. I must have been quite small. She talked with me for a long time,



while my mother was in the kitchen, and my father sat in the yellow chair watching us with a strange expression on his face; now I think I would recognize it as boredom. I don't remember what we discussed; what I remember is how closely she listened to what I said, how her dark eyes were fastened on my face and how she slowly nodded, in understanding or agreement. When they came back after her reading, I sat at the top of the stairs and watched people dancing, and drinking, and talking with great animation. The Dark-Haired Lady, who was thin and wore her hair pulled back in what my mother later said was a bun, listened to them, too, but it seemed to me that she was not as interested in them as she'd been in me. Later one of my father's friends played strange music on the piano—it was jazz—while the lady poet read poems out loud.

A feminist poet came too: Dinah Malek. She was not too interested in little girls. She had extremely short grey hair, and she wore long pants—the grownup women I knew then *always* wore skirts—and she followed my mother into the kitchen when she went to get dinner. Afterwards my mother said she liked her very much. She was "no-nonsense," my mother said firmly. "None of this 'artiste' stuff about her." I think Dinah Malek was a surprise to everyone. This was a long time ago, in a small midwestern town, at a conservative men's college. The things she wrote about, and what she said to my father's class of boys and to my mother in the kitchen are things I like to imagine we take as gospel and given now; but that girls should be admitted to that school, or that my mother's work in the kitchen was as interesting and important as my father's job in the high-ceilinged hall across the wooded campus, or that a woman might choose not to engage in motherhood—these things made my father and his colleagues nervous and uncomfortable, and passed right over the heads of the college boys as so much Greek. But they made my mother, for a few days after Dinah left, bold. To this day my mother thinks of her with pleasure. "Ah, yes, Dinah," she'll say, and nod, as if they shared a secret wisdom.

The poets changed as the times changed, or as I grew up—or did I grow up with the times? We had the famous homosexual poet, Billy Ray, and his friend Jimmy, despite my mother's pronouncement that she wouldn't have them in the house. They came, but my mother stayed upstairs with me. Downstairs there was the usual loud talking, laughter, music; but not the music of earlier times, but sitar, and Jefferson Airplane. I suspected I should have wanted to be downstairs; but—truth be told—I was relieved to be watching TV with my mother. Late in the evening there was chanting, and the soft fumes of incense, or another smoke, wafted up the stairs. My mother and I looked at each other. After that evening the house was uncomfortable for a long time.

Poets came thick and fast during those years. There were black men wearing dashikis and medallions, shouting and flashing bright teeth; young women in leather, glaring at me through silver-rimmed spectacles with

challenging disinterest; emaciated, bearded men who spoke so slowly I squirmed with terror that they'd forget what they'd meant to say. When now and then a respectable person came—a woman with well-groomed hair, wearing a wool cardigan; a middle-aged man in a jacket and tie—I stared at them in some surprise, unsure whether these were poets; or, if they were, were they any good?

A final poet came; not the final one for my parents, who entertained poets until Daddy retired, and still invite them to their home—but a final one for me, before I left for college. He was a flamboyant poet (I'll call him Rasmussen Cole) who swooped into our living room wearing a bedspread. He was enthusiasm incarnate, fascinated with anything that was said, enthralled with the house and life in a small midwestern town, charmed by my mother (he seemed not to notice that she drew back from his enthusiasm, and from his bedspread, in some distaste). In the course of the evening he played the banjo, jumped from his chair to demonstrate interpretive dances, and sang Native American songs. After his reading, my boyfriend and I were to drive him the forty miles to the airport. "Show him your poems," Daddy had urged me. "I've told him you write."

We drove through the blackness of the midwestern night, staring at the bright tunnels lit by the headlights, listening to Rasmussen Cole talk and sing. Finally, as we passed the entrance to the airport, he asked me, "Did you bring any of your poems?" Shyly I handed them over into the front seat. Rasmussen Cole read through them—a sheaf of maybe twenty little poems—by the light from the ceiling. "Wow," he said. "Amazing," he added. "Incredible," he said, looking back at me. "You wrote these?" I nodded. My boyfriend's shoulders, in the driver's seat, seemed to stiffen. "Can we just get a cup of coffee or something?" Rasmussen Cole said when we reached the terminal. "Do we have time?" he asked my boyfriend.

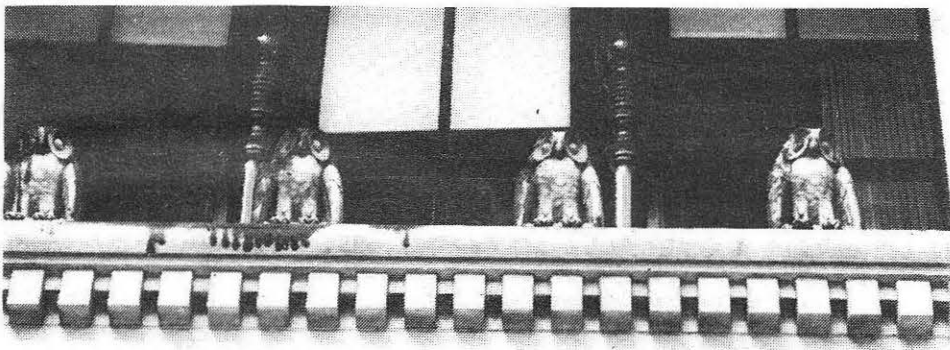


Photo: Bonnie Enes

POETRY

We sat in a fluorescently-lit booth and Rasmussen Cole went over my poems, one by one, praising them, reading them aloud, all the while peering at me with frighteningly bright eyes, while I sat in terrified pleasure and my boyfriend's face grew glummer. Finally Rasmussen Cole ran for his plane. "Send me more!" he called over his shoulder. "Send me some for my magazine!" We drove home almost in silence, the headlights illuminating a bright world in which I would learn to dance, sing in public, and wear flashy clothes. I broke up with the boyfriend when I went to college, and I did send Rasmussen Cole some poems, but he never wrote back.

Now that I am grown up I see that poets are no more normal, and no less, than anyone else. I no longer know very many. My husband, an economist, and I live very quietly; we almost never entertain. Still, poets come in handy. They make good cocktail party talk, they are useful when I need credentials. "Ah, yes," I might say, "I remember when he almost broke his neck in our living room." People look at me in awe; he's won a Pulitzer. "She's a friend of my father's," I'll say. "But a better friend of my mother's." And I'll smile discreetly.

Once I heard that a woman I knew—actually, a woman who won a poetry prize I'd been confident of winning myself—was having an affair with the handsomest man in the world. "Oh, Alexander West," I said, with some scorn. "Is he still at it? He's been doing that sort of thing forever."

Alison Baker
Salt Lake City, UT
writes in Seal Cove

For Emily Dickinson The Centennial of her Death

To make a cake
according to her recipe
you have to break
a fresh coconut.
First, though,
you have to
drive a spike
through its eyes.
It isn't easy.
It has the face
of a baby fur seal
and when the spike
pierces the eyes
it weeps,
leaving wet trails
across the dry brown fur.
You must not slip
or lose your nerve—
you need a cupful
of this liquid
for the cake.
To steady your hand,
think of the many times
she must have
filled the cup with tears,
and turned away to bake.

May 15, 1986.

Sylvester Pollet
E. Holden
teaches & edits at UMO

Fox Watch

They never match, the tracks
in wildlife guidebooks,
and the genuine article,
frozen motion in the snow.
The vixen shunned the normal route
to den and back, helixing here and there,
sensing I was on her trail
and misconstruing my intent.
She grew in my imagination to coyote.
(We have too many howling in the night,
making sheep shudder in their hay-baled pens.)
As if to make her last, I painted her red
and bestowed a waving plume
with sweep of sable brush,
but tracks and watercolors paled today.
A little after dawn the sun's rays redden
the Dixmont hills, purple backdrop
to the chimney ropes of smoke.
And there's the vixen, circling the oak,
nose alerted, tail out straight,
coat afire with dawn.

Carolyn Page
Dixmont
*is an artist & editor
of Potato Eyes magazine*

Oriental Gardens

I am doomed to an old age in those horrible adult diapers. They can give them all the fancy names they want, but they will always be diapers to me. I know this fate because of my current bladder problems. Every time my husband and I go out to eat with a bunch of friends . . . I wish I could call the individuals we go out with "friends," but unfortunately I must modify that to "humans." I run to the bathroom upon finishing my drink, and between every course. After the appetizers, the water closet calls to me. Trying to wait is a ridiculous mistake because, in my agony, my left leg starts to twitch uncontrollably and someone asks if I need a cigarette or something. In hopes of avoiding the call too frequently, I gulp down as much of my beer as I can under the false hope that the more I get into my bladder before I empty it, the less return trips I'll be forced to make. Of course, you and I both know these are the fabrications of a hopeful but helpless fool. I can only liken it to the hopes of a school girl who thinks she can avoid the ultimate bed wetting, an experience I am all too familiar with, by voiding her bladder after she has downed a quart of Kool-aid prior to bedtime.

Anyway, the water flows, more than a normal bladder should be allowed to hold, and I happily return to the main course. Again, however, after a few bites of "Moo goo gai pan", the urge is back. The same routine is followed, down as much beer as possible, head for the little girls' room. This approach seems only to get me dead-ass drunk.

"Small bladder, huh, Kate?" the ditsy blond sitting across from me wisecracks. Couldn't she think of something a little more discrete? And her husband taking in every word. What should I wisecrack in return? "My, aren't we observant?"

But why waste my time and my breath on this woman? All she seems to be able to think about, and the only two topics she has broached this evening, pertain to sex or my bladder. "My, don't these funny little mushrooms in the Oriental Beef remind you of teeny, weeny penises? Am I glad that Dicky's isn't that small! Aren't you Dicky?" Appropriately named, Dick ole' boy.

Back to the diapers. They are even being advertised on television now, and the ads are using once-famous actresses to tell us of their benefits. It makes me wonder if these once-famous actresses have a "bladder control problem." Not that it would make me like them any less. I can't say that I liked them much in the first place, but it certainly would not affect my opinion of them. I am doomed to their fate.

I can envision it now. I will walk into the drugstore and hang around the counter until it is devoid of customers. I then rush up and slam down my box of adult diapers with that urgent look in my eyes which says, "Put the goddamn things in a bag please before someone notices them!" And of course, I have selected the only box with no price on it. The little girl with the spiked hair operating the cash register holds the box high, bangs the bell on her counter and screams so that everyone in the store hears, "Mr. Demers, *what is the price on these things? I think they are diapers for adults. It's size medium.*" A crowd gathers and stares at me, wondering if they can see it in my eyes, or will they find a puddle on the floor. Mothers hold back their children and point saying, "She has a bladder control problem." "What's that Mommy?" "She wets her pants!" "Yuck!"

I will make up a story instead. "These are for my husband. He has been bed-bound for the last ten years . . . years that have seen me transformed from an attractive young woman to a haggard, devoted caregiver. A prisoner in my own home, let out only long enough to buy his medicine. And of course, his adult diapers. But I still love him and will for the rest of my life, what there is left of it." That should earn a sympathetic smirk.

Such stories seemed to work when I bought prophylactics in my college days. You could never trust a man to have them on hand, and I certainly was not going to risk my health taking the pill. Not for an easy lay every couple of weeks. "These are for my roommate." Oh sure, the elderly man at the counter would say with his eyes. Like a judge and jury rolled up in one. But it did not stop me then and when I have to buy adult diapers, a little lie is worth my self-esteem. I do, however, wonder whether branding your husband a bed-wetter is worse than branding your roommate promiscuous.

The evening is finally over. I have taken nine trips to the bathroom, but it seemed that no one noticed as the evening wore on. In fact, it seemed that they relished those moments without me, because whenever I was trapped in the bathroom, hovering over the grimy toilet like a seagull over a dump, gales of laughter floated in on the smoke-filled air.

The ditsy blond's hair, held back at the start of the evening, was now hanging down over her left eye in a seductive manner. At least I thought she looked seductive, although I know that men sometimes have different views of what seductive is than I do. What turns men on anyway? I certainly have tried before,

to turn men on that is, but ditsy blonds always seem to have it all over me. On the other hand, I don't care if I turn men on, liberated woman that I am. In truth, I would love to be considered seductive, but because I am not and don't seem to have it in me, I turn boldly to the liberated women's movement. It is not necessary to be sexy if you want respect and don't want to be treated like a sex object or a piece of meat. Right. I do believe!

About the liberation movement. I consider myself a liberated woman. I work. I don't do all the housework (my husband washes the toilets). I talk about my period in front of men and I buy rubbers . . . prophylactics . . . for my husband. Isn't that liberated? But I don't think you have to look ugly. Gloria Steinheim doesn't look ugly, although thank the Lord she stopped wearing her hair underneath her glasses' bows. So what am I supposed to do about this latent desire to look seductive? Don't lesbians want to be attractive to other lesbians? We try to look seductive for one purpose only . . . sex! That is what we all want, isn't it? Sex. Why would the ditsy blond have become the center of attention if that isn't what we all want in the end anyway? "Well, I don't mean in the end, I'll take mine in the middle. Ha-ha!" Oh, Jesus, she actually said that over her Jamaican coffee. And all the male fantasies took off thinking about her middle. And her end. Including Paul's.

To compound the problem of my husband's interest was the very noticeable fact that ditsy was impressed with Paul as well. Furthermore, she appeared to be in pursuit. Every disgusting comment was aimed at him, every wink of her eye. And he was showing interest, more and more with each Manhattan. I just stare at her, awed by her nerve.

Paul and I had moved into town only two months previously, and this was the first time we had gone out with this collection of locals. They all seemed to know each other quite well, and I mean that in the Biblical sense, but we only knew one couple. The day we moved in to our new home, the Peaveys came with a tuna casserole (how tacky) and a bottle of wine, with a screw-top no less (tackier still). A nice gesture. We hadn't heard from them since that day, until the other night when the woman, Rhoda, called and asked if we wanted to eat out with a bunch of their friends. Thank goodness Paul answered the phone. I am ever so bad on the phone . . . long pauses, unintelligible mumblings, stupid responses to normal inquiries. "How are you?" "It depends on what you mean by 'how.'"

Paul is smooth on the phone. "Sure, we would love to go, that restaurant is one of our favorites. Sure, we'll be ready at 7:00, if you're sure you don't mind picking us up. Casual dress did you say? Great, see you then."

"What would we love to go to?"

"The Peavey's. They asked us to go out to The Oriental Gardens with them and a couple of friends. On Saturday night. I figured it would be a good way to meet some more of the people in town. Okay?"

"Who else is going?" My mind is active. I knew so few people and every one of them I met did not like me. I always made a fool of myself when I saw them at the post office or the town office or the store. I just can't think of any small talk. "Read any good books lately?" Now really, why would I ask that of a woman I stood beside while we paid our respective taxes? She just looked at me as if I was mad. Should I have mentioned I failed Interpersonal Communications my sophomore year?

Why would the Peavey's even ask us out? She was not taken with me. She spent the entire time they were here talking to Paul. But I was used to that. Everyone spent all the time talking to Paul, and avoiding me. It certainly was more palatable than the conversation I would create, I'm sure. People catch on fast. I think they see it in my eyes even before I confirm it when I open my mouth. "Wow! Check out those eyes! She is definitely neurotic. And a bad conversationalist!"

Paul said, "Kate. I don't know who else is going, she didn't say and I didn't ask. We don't know anyone anyway, so what good would it have done? Just relax. This will be great, an opportunity to meet some people. It's nice of them to think of us, don't you think?"

Sure. So everyone will learn that you're a nice guy and I'm a jerk. Can't you just hear them now on their little phones spreading the news. "He's a real nice guy. She's a little weird, but I like him a lot. All she does is go to the bathroom. They don't seem to go together."

"What should I wear?"

"She said casual. We've been there before, it's not too dressy. You decide."

"Thanks a hell of a lot. You could at least help me. Can't you see I'm nervous about this? Can't you help me?"

"Come on, Kate. It's not for a week. Don't get all nerved up already. Just relax. It's just dinner. Don't drink too much and you'll be fine. Go get something to wear if you don't have anything. You always look nice anyway, so just don't worry. Okay?"

There he goes, telling me how to act. I drink because I can't think of anything to say, and when I have a few drinks, I calm down a little.

"You know I can't think of anything to say to people I don't know. A few beers

just helps me."

"Jesus, Kate, I know you get nervous, but you're just going to have to get over it. It doesn't do any good to worry about it before the fact. You always get this way. Then when you get home, you swear that everyone hated you. But it's not so. You sometimes have a few too many, and you tell some raunchy jokes which don't help, that's all, let's not make a big thing out of it."

There he goes, bringing up my raunchy jokes. I knew he held it against me at the last company party. He said it was okay then, and now he brings it up.

"You know I can't think of anything to say. Come on, Paul, you know I don't drink too much unless I'm in those situations. Why would you suggest that I drink too much? I suppose you think I'm an alcoholic!"

"There you go. It's black or white with you. If I criticize your drinking and dirty jokes, you accuse me of calling you an alcoholic. I just don't think it's a good idea for you in a situation where you don't know anyone to drink too much and start telling your Polish women jokes. You always wake up the next morning and moan and groan that you offended someone and no one likes you."

Why is he so goddamn normal? Always in control? Why doesn't he care about meeting people, why doesn't he get nervous? Why can he always think of the right thing to say? Couldn't he be neurotic about something? "You should be deciding whether you like them, not worrying whether they like you." He's said that so often he doesn't even bother to say it anymore. And I wish I could do that, could think so logically about it.

Funny how well he knows me. Goddamn him if he's right tonight. My new-found "friends" are now paying their bills. Am I weaving? I don't think I drank that much. As much as I went to the bathroom you'd think there would be no alcohol left in my body. Everyone else has consumed enough alcohol so they won't notice any weaving I might be doing.

Ah, we're outside. I can now bid farewell to the blond and her charming husband. Good bye to those two couples who sat at the other end of the table, whom I hardly spoke to and whose names I could not recall. Good bye to the ditsy blond. Good bye, good bye.

"No, Katie, honey, I'm riding home with you. Rhoda has asked us if we want to continue our little party at your house, and I just jumped at the chance. I want to see your big, beautiful, new house that sits up there on your big, beautiful hill. It is so pretty from the outside. How many bedrooms did you say it has? I bet you and Paul have made it in every one of them by now, haven't you honey? You don't mind a little more partying, now do you?" God, give me strength. It's wonderful to have been consulted on such details. Thank you, Paul.

We all bumble our way to the car. Oh boy, the Peaveys sit in the front with Dicky, bless his soul, and the ditsy blond gets to sit in the back with Paul and me.

"Let's put Paul in the middle so that we can both enjoy him, huh, Katie? You don't mind sharing him with me, do you honey?" Do I hate it when people say my name every time they speak to me. It sounds so fake. Who gave her permission to call me Kate anyway? My name is Mrs. Falton to you, bitch. You sound like those newscasters, trying to sound so familiar with each other. "Bryant." "Thank you, Jane." "Jane." "Thanks, Bryant." They probably hate each other's guts. There probably exists a market study which proves everyday yuppies riding their exercise bicycles like this type of fake familiarity, to a positive or negative 3 points. "Look what good friends they are, they call each other their first name and everything." Please.

The ride home is dominated by dirty jokes and lewd innuendos. And Paul is laughing. Her joke about the man giving it to his wife in the supermarket is just as disgusting as my Polish women jokes. Therefore, I begin my repertoire. Paul quickly puts his hand over my open mouth. Why the hell can't I tell them? Maybe I fear Gloria would not approve. The glare he gives me is of total loathing. He hates me for trying to get into the conversation, for trying to be funny, for trying to be accepted by these people, for taking time away from his precious blond. I should bite his hand, a good hard bite that would evoke a shout of pain. But how embarrassing that would be. "She is not only weird, with strange, neurotic eyes, and a bad conversationalist, but she bit his hand in the car on the way home. And he's such a nice guy."

I do nothing, sit back, close my eyes. I listen to the tires on the pavement and try to imagine where we are. Five minutes from home? Ten? How am I going to handle these people? How am I going to be a good hostess, take their coats, get them drinks, make small talk? It's more than should be asked.

An accident! Pray for an accident so this car never makes it home. What a perfect ending to such a glorious evening. It would get me off the hook completely, with a bit of the dramatic. I pray to God: *Lord Almighty in the Highest, please grant me this wish. I know I haven't been in contact with you since Girl Scout camp when I asked you to please let me pass my Intermediate Swimming test. You granted my wish then, so please, find it in your heart to grant this tiny, little wish. I know I haven't been the most faithful of your flock in the past ten or so years. I take back*

everything I said in Philosophy I class about the fact that you did not exist, okay? And please forget my embracing Voodoo as my religion of choice. It was all a big mistake. Therefore, that said, please make us have an accident . . . a mere slipping off the side of the road would be sufficient. I don't require anything as impressive as a parting of the blacktop.

"Here we are at last, Katie. Are you asleep, honey?"

Shit, you bastard, ignore me for the last time. And you call yourself omnipotent. You can't even cause an accident!

"No, I'm still awake. Just resting."

"Well, you can't rest anymore, Katie. I want you to show me all around your big, beautiful home. I've heard so much about it from Rhoda."

Everyone tumbles out of the car and into the house. I take coats and throw them into the closet. They all seem to be enjoying the house. The blond wants to know where the master bedroom is, and Paul is taking over as host. He is saying, "I'll get some beer from the basement. Meanwhile, help yourself to whatever you can find. The liquor is in that cabinet over in the corner, and the mixers are in the refrigerator. Kate, get some ice," Paul commands as he opens the basement door.

Get the beer, get the liquor, Kate, get the ice. Yes, Master Host, just as you say! Anything else I can do for you, Master Host? Should I mix their drinks? Light their cigarettes? Wipe their bums?

"Kate, where is the bathroom?" This is Dicky. How appropriate.

I point at the door. Then, I stick my head in the freezer. No ice. Shit. Downstairs in the freezer,

As I descend the stairs, I hear Paul say, "I hope this stuff doesn't taste like skunk piss, we've had it hanging around for the longest time."

"I doubt if they would notice," I offer.

Paul turns and looks at me. "Oh, it's you. I thought you were..."

"Blond?"

"No, I mean, I just thought you were someone else."

"Right, I know. You thought I was the blond bimbo who has been squishing her tits all over you. What's her name anyway, Boo-boo?"

"No, it's not Boo-boo, it's Dee-dee, and she hasn't been squishing her tits on me. Jesus, what the hell is wrong with you?"

"I don't like her fascination with you. She obviously hates me, too."

"Goddamn it, Kate, there you go. She couldn't hate you, in fact I don't know how she could even have an opinion of you, you've hardly spoken to her. The only thing you've said to her was the start of your stupid joke, and thank God I stopped you."

"You didn't have to slap me."

"I didn't slap you, I just put my hand over your mouth before you got yourself into it. Will you stop this? We do have guests upstairs."

"I'd call them animals. They are so wild, and they drink so much."

"And when did you get so pure?"

"I don't know, Paul, I just don't know what to talk about. And you aren't helping, you running off with Miss Blondie. Can't you stay with me and help?"

"That does it. I didn't 'run off' with Dee-dee, I am just being friendly. Maybe if you were a little more friendly, you'd have more fun. Just lay off me!" He slams the door to the refrigerator, picks up the sixpack and heads for the stairs.

"Hey," I yell after him.

"What? You don't have to yell." He stops and glares. Is that a look of love anymore?

"I'm sorry," I venture. "I just . . ."

"Just lay off!" he returns over his shoulder as he climbs the stairs. "Beer, everyone. It's so old it will surely taste like skunk piss. Sorry about that."

I stand there in the middle of the musty basement with my hands pressed together in front of my chest. Should I cry? Scream? Should I go back and pretend nothing has happened? Or make a scene?

Laughter spills down the stairs, muffled and lurid as it floats over to my ears. I can almost see it assault me. Loudest of all is the laugh of Dee-dee. Can you imagine naming your child such a thing? I hear her say Paul's name over and over. I do not want to go up there. But I have got to. Those diapers would sure come in handy right now. I'll talk to Paul about putting a bathroom in the basement.

Well, here goes. I figure, slowly, noiselessly up the stairs, open the door without a sound, run around the corner to my left into the hall, and up the hall stairs to the bathroom on the second floor. Then, just go to bed. The party can go on all night as far as I'm concerned because I won't have to see any of them.

As I emerge from the basement, Dicky, Rhoda Peavey, Dee-dee and Paul all turn and stare. "Here she is," says old blondie. "Where you been, Katie, honey?"

"Oh, getting some ice."

"Great," says Dicky. "I need some."

I forgot to bring it upstairs.

Continued next page

"Uh," I mumble, "I, uh, had to go to the bathroom so bad I forgot. I'll just go and then I'll go back and get it, okay?"

I walk as fast as I can to the bathroom door and grab the handle. Locked. I'm going to piss my pants in front of all these people.

"Adam's in there," Dicky says.

Without thinking I say, "Adam who?"

"You know, Adam Peavey, Rhoda's husband." The blank expression on my face compelled him to continue. "You better have another bathroom because I think he passed out on the john. He always does about this time of night."

Great. I really don't think I can make it. This is just great. Without acknowledging this man's comment, I head through the living room. Dee-dee looks up from her deep and I'm sure intellectual conversation with Paul and says, "Katie, your husband is just TOO nice." No shit.

I glare at Paul. At least at the back of his head. He doesn't even bother to turn around, but continues his conversation with Dee-dee, whose breasts are now being firmly rubbed all over Paul's right arm. At least she gave his left arm a break. He doesn't move it, so he must be enjoying it.

Paul won't care where the hell I go. The rest seem to be taking care of themselves, as long as there is booze around. My priorities are bathroom, bed and an empty house in the morning. Screw the ice.

The stairs are weaving. Or is it me? I have surely had too much to drink. That means I'll have to go in the middle of the night. I hope I won't wet my bed again. I always do when I've had too much to drink.

Bathroom being done, I climb into my beautiful, warm bed with plans of sleeping away my insecurities and despair. Paul will just flirt with Tits until they all decide to go home, then he'll come up, go to sleep, and all will be forgotten in the morning. One thing about Paul, he doesn't hash things over, and certainly does not hold a grudge. If I can keep my mouth shut, all will go smoothly. And I will, I am determined. I am turning over a new leaf. These people won't remember me anyway. Hell, I doubt if they'll remember where my house is.

Great, I can't close my eyes. The room is spinning around and around. Like a carousel, around and around. Actually, more like when I was a kid and would spin myself around until I couldn't stand any longer and felt sick to my stomach. Well, I guess I'll just lay here and wait till the spinning stops. My only other option is returning to the partying, which I cannot face.

This little group seems extremely cozy with each other. The Peaveys and Dickey and Dee-dee! The names alone sound lewd. Straight out of a B movie. "Dee-dee Does Dicky" I can just imagine their all-night parties. Perhaps they are trying to get us into their little group. Can't you see it? Little old Rhoda, upon meeting dear Paul, calls Ditsy Dee-dee and says, "Have I got one for you! Adam and I met our neighbors yesterday, you know the ones that built that big colonial in the next lot over from us. Well, you should get a look at him. He's tall, dark and indeed handsome. And so nice. I can hardly wait to get my hands ahold of those beautiful buttocks. But she's a little weird. I don't know if either Dick or Adam will want her, but who gives a shit about them, huh?"

I focus on the door and see the outline of a tall male figure. "Hey, girly, what the hell are you doing tryin' to sneak away from the party like that?" It's not Paul, I know that's not his voice, nor his way of addressing me. In fact, I don't believe I have ever heard him utter the word "girly."

The figure lunges toward the bed. "Come on there girly, what are you doing up here all by yourself? Don't you want to party no more?"

It's Dicky, Dee-dee's darling. What the hell does he want?

"No, I'm kind of tired," I offer across the room. I pull the bedclothes up around my chin, concealing my naked body. At least my upper torso is naked, while I do still have my undies on. Something that dates to my upbringing. As my mom used to say, "I don't care what you wear to bed, but keep your undies on. There isn't anything worse than a stark-naked woman in bed."

My wandering mind is jolted back to the present as Dicky dear plops his hulking body onto the bed. Jesus, what does he want? And why the hell can't he just go away and leave me alone? But no, he has to chat a while, me in my scanties, him drunk as a skunk.

"I can't imagine why a sweet little thing like you would want to leave this wonderful party. What are you, shy?" He presses his torso up onto my chest.

"I just have had enough, you know? I guess I'm not the all-night partier you guys are. I'm tired."

"So you really are up here cause you want to go to sleep? Come on, Katie darling, who are you trying to kid?"

"What do you mean? Of course, I'm . . ."

"You know what I mean honey. You ain't up here cause you want to go to bed. I mean you don't want to sleep." As he says this, Dicky the dink grabs the edges of the sheet and blanket, and pulls them down. I cover myself with my hands, but sit calmly, as though this man is going to engage me in pleasant conversation.

"You get undressed every night for bed, right honey? Sure. Just like I jerk off every night into my wife. But you know it ain't so, so let's not fool each other."

"Dick, really, I sleep this way, and I AM tired and I really did come up here to go to sleep." My arms are still crossed. My entire body is shaking. Dicky stands and proceeds to unbuckle his belt.

"Now, I know what you want and I want it too, I'll tell you. I don't blame you for wanting it when your husband is downstairs getting heated up over my wife. Hell, I couldn't ask for a better set-up. Dee-dee happy with your man and you and me happy up here." By now, he has completely disrobed, except for his socks, and his member is certainly agreeing with his statements.

Think, Kate, think for Christ's sake! What did they tell us to do in that lecture on rape in college? "Don't fight." That's all I can remember. Because the rapist might kill you. Little old Dicky isn't the typical rapist they were warning us about. I think he wants to get laid because he's drunk and he's jealous. Or maybe he actually believes that I want him. Oh, my God, could he actually be thinking that? Somehow, though, I don't think that he's going to pull a knife. Where would he keep it?

Maybe I should scream and fight him. The logical thing to do. This brawny, hairy man. Look at the hair on him! In my book, hair is not a sexy thing on a man, although a lot of women seem to crave it. Personally, I could never stand Tom Selleck. That's another reason women think I'm odd.

If I do scream, what would happen? Perhaps it would frighten him. He would just put his clothes back on, go downstairs, and no one would be the wiser. But what if someone heard me and came rushing up the stairs to find the two of us in bed? What a scene that would be. I can just see Paul's face. What disappointment. I know he likes to flirt, but he would never go to bed with another woman, I'm sure of it. What would he think of me? He would be so upset, I would have let him down. I would have embarrassed him. He would move out, divorce me, and I would be alone.

And think of our guests' reactions. They don't like me already. Can you imagine my reputation? The phone wires would be blazing. I have seduced poor little Dicky. It's always the woman's fault, after all is said and done. "She lured him upstairs and seduced him. With Dee-dee right downstairs all the time. Can you imagine the nerve of her? I heard she was strange, neurotic they said, and a bad conversationalist, but to think an adulteress and a slut, too. I just don't know what kind of people are moving into town these days. And I heard that her husband was such a nice guy. Well, he'll be better off without her, that's what I say."

While my mind processes all the potential outcomes of a scream, Dicky proceeds to place his knees on either side of my waist, rather clumsily I might add, and flops himself onto me. What a hulk! God, how can Dee-dee stand the weight? I wouldn't think she would have any breasts left after too many nights of this.

"So, welcome to town, little lady. It's a pleasure." And with that, Dicky attempts to create a oneness of our bodies, if you know what I mean.

Oh my Jesus H. Christ! (Does anyone know what the "H" stands for?) My bladder! That little organ that so many bathrooms all over the state have come to know and love. It lets go. I failed to mention that I also ALWAYS have to go when I am nervous.

"Jesus H. Christ!" Dicky offers. Would it be inappropriate to ask him what the H. stands for? "Jesus H. Christ," he repeats, "you pissed on me, you bitch."

So I did. I didn't mean to. Honestly I didn't. It's just that when I get nervous, or when I drink too much, or when I have to ride in a car, or when I think about it, I have to go. Or when I'm getting raped by some hairy man who weighs too much.

"I'm sorry." Am I actually saying this? "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to. It's just that I have this bladder control . . ."

"You are some weird lady, you know that?" Dicky quickly pulls his pants on.

There you go, calling me weird. I hope you won't spread it around. Come to think of it, that would be hard to explain to people, the circumstances and all. I guess my secret is safe.

Dicky leaves and descends the stairs without saying goodbye. I get up, change the sheets, put on clean undies and go to sleep. My secret is safe.

**Virginia N. Plummer
Turner**
writes children's books

The DNA Caper

(sci-fi in the manner of Dashiell Hammett)

I was doing my nails at my desk when the dinosaur walked in. Of course I didn't know that about him yet. All I knew was, when I looked up from my right hand there was the ugliest thing I had ever seen.

"My name is Frank," he said. "Is Mr. L'Arancia in?"

He was standing in a funny way, as if his knees were double-jointed. He had bad-looking greenish skin and a bad-looking greenish suit. And his face—well, have you ever seen a Gila monster?

"Frank what?" I asked.

He looked at me with eyes that didn't make sense. "Just Frank."

"Right," I said, and jabbed the intercom button.

L'Arancia was eating a burger—it was Friday night and we were going out later—so I gave him a minute to put it away. But there were still soda bottles around when we went in. There always are.

"Sit," said L'Arancia. I had already gone to my chair in the corner and opened my notebook. Frank dropped into the client's chair, where the sun hit his bald head and made it shine like his suit.

"Mr. L'arancia," he said, "I am on the run."

"Oh?" L'Arancia began to crack his knuckles. That means he can hardly wait for what comes next. "Start talking."

"My name is Frank," and he leaned forward. "I came to you because I heard on the street that you were the smartest man around." That would be Sadie-on-the-corner—not much of a compliment, most of the men she knows boil their brains in steam-music, if not Sterno. "The police are after me," Frank went on. "I have robbed a bank."

We had heard about the robbery that morning in downtown White Plains; the guy had shoved a gun through the drive-up window with a note. L'Arancia laced his fingers together. "You need a lawyer, not a detective," he said. "I am a detective."

"Mr. L'Arancia," said Frank, "I know that. But—There is more that I cannot tell in the presence of this dumb broad."

I learned ages ago not to react to clients. Besides, I was still trying to figure out what was wrong with his eyes. L'Arancia did not react either, just said, "Madge stays."

"In your movies, it is dangerous," Frank said. "However—I will be frank with you. No, I said that to the police, that caused trouble. I will tell you the truth. I robbed that bank because I needed money. I am a government agent, and they forgot to give me any."

"Keep talking," said L'Arancia. I smoothed out my face—nobody can not react all the time—glad that Frank couldn't see me though I had a perfect view of him. L'Arancia and I spent hours placing those chairs.

"Not from your government," Frank said. "From—" He grinned, showing gumless teeth, and pointed down. "We are descendants of the Great Ones," he said, "the Fire-Breathers. You call them Tyrannosaurus Rex. We moved below when it got crowded topside. The climate was deteriorating anyway, and we had lost our protective scales—in our own language we are the Skinless Ones. Now I have been sent to make the semi-centenary report, but if you don't help me your police won't let me finish it."

He was done. I bit the end of my pencil, hard.

L'Arancia rocked back in his chair. "Have a soda," he said.

"A wha—Yes. I will try one." L'Arancia got a couple of bottles from the crate behind him—raunchy orange stuff his mother sends him from Italy, it's where he gets his nickname—opened them, and shoved one at Frank. He doesn't offer them to me any more, he knows I only drink Pure Land.

"Where did you learn your English?" he asked.

Frank grinned again. "You got it from us," he said. "We sent you all our best computer languages when you were slow figuring out how to talk, and we've been updating them ever since."

"Oh," said L'Arancia. "I see. Funny, though, to me you look like just another alien. Where are you from this time, Jupiter, Mars?"

Frank threw his bottle into the trash can. "Mars?!" Was that him or the soda fizzing? "Isn't Venus bad enough? This whole day I have been on the surface I have heard of nothing but those low-life aliens that degrade Earth by their presence! I am ready to tell the Lords that leaving you the surface was a mistake!"

We stared at him. There was a noise from the outer office, but I didn't pay attention.

"The door, Madge," said L'Arancia at last, out of the corner of his mouth. I hate it when he does that. But I went. Behind me he was saying, "Listen, Mr. Skinless Frank—"

It was the police; two of them. One hung back to look at the spider and web that's painted on the glass door, but the other, a big burly guy, bustled right in. "We have a warrant for the arrest of one Frank, surname unknown," he began, "bald, in a—Move it, Dave, there he is!" And then they were in the back office and Frank was against the wall. They began to read him his rights. Frank's eyes widened—that was it, they opened sideways—and skittered around the room from the door to the window and back. Then he ran.

I didn't see where he went, I just felt L'Arancia grab my wrist and we were running too. One flight down we crouched behind the balcony railing where we could watch the stairs and the old openwork elevator. It's an atrium-style office building from the thirties, with balconies all around an open centre; we rent there because it would be so good for a chase. But of course we never had one. Til now.

"Where'd he go?" I whispered.

"Bathroom," L'Arancia said, out of the corner of his mouth again. "Ladies." He pointed up, to the fourth floor where we'd come from.

"Then he'll wait for us," I said. "The lock's broken, it sticks shut. And the fan's stuck on, he'll—" I looked at L'Arancia.

"We'll let him cool off a bit," he said, "and then we'll see if he's crying crocodile tears or not."

There was a shot. One of the railings shivered. A door opened in the corridor across from us, then shut. Anne Hutchinson, the lawyer, working late. Everyone else would have gone long ago.

"He got away!" L'Arancia shouted. "Down the back stairs!"

"Stop shooting and I'll show you!" I added.

Silence. Then, "All right. Just the girl," and the policemen peeked out around a corner.

I ran over to them, all breathless. Frank probably didn't even know what a dumb broad was, but I did. "What on **earth** made you think we were helping him?" I panted. "He just came **bursting** into the office—" I was close to tears.

"Well, you must admit your boss isn't always—" began the smaller policeman, but the big one said, "Shut up, Dave. Lady, are you going to show us where he went or not?"

Polka-dotted silk is good for flouncing in. I flounced, then turned and led them along the hall and down the back way. I left them arguing about which direction to try and raced back upstairs.

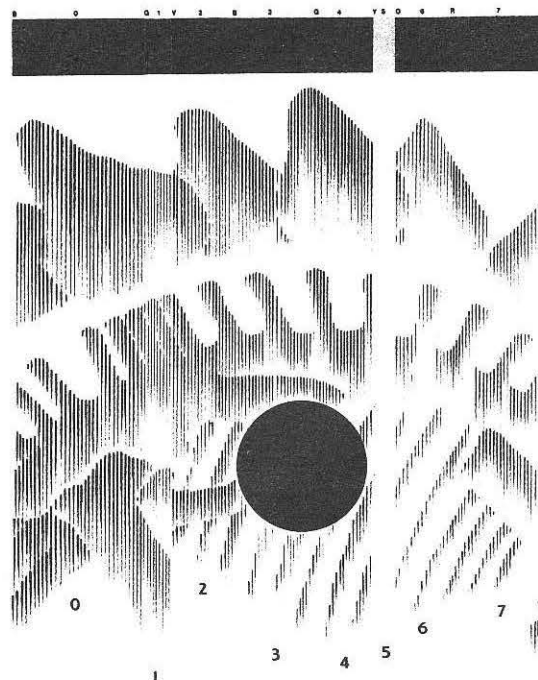
L'Arancia was gone. I went up the last flight to the fourth floor and found him outside the ladies' room, sorting through his lock-breaking gear. Angry noises were coming from inside.

"We'll give him another minute," he said. When the noises calmed down he got to work, and by the time he had the door open Frank was lying flat on the cold tiles. L'Arancia knelt beside him.

"So much for the hot-blooded dinosaur theory," he said. "He's cold as a snake."

I sat down too, shivering. The fan was turning the place into a refrigerator. "So now we know," I said. "He is a reptile. A dinosaur. So why are we helping him? If it's really between him and Venusian steam-music ballet—"

"That's it!" L'Arancia exclaimed. "Steam-music ballet!" *Continued next page*



It took me a second, but I figured out what he was getting at. "It starts at seven," I said. "We've got to get him warm—" Before I finished I was on my way to the office where we had a space heater in the closet.

When I turned the heater on Frank he sat up, rubbed his face, and said sleepily, "You have no climate control yet?"

"Get moving," said L'Arancia. "No time for room service!" He was cracking his knuckles again.

We got Frank on his feet and walked him around a few times. Then he got so close to the heater I thought he'd burn himself, and stood there for a bit. He didn't burn himself. The idea might work.

He was still a little dazed when we left, otherwise he might have argued. But it was warm out and we gave him a coat as well; and when we got to the auditorium he woke up all the way. They may not have climate control there, but it sure is hot. It's supposed to make you feel like you're on Venus—though it's much hotter there, they say, eight hundred degrees or so even in winter.

When we got to our seats he wouldn't sit, just stood glaring at the audience. We had brought him around the back so he wouldn't see the signs, but we couldn't avoid them all. "What is this place?" he hissed. "Why have you brought me here? It stinks of aliens!"

"You want our help, don't you?" L'Arancia hissed back, and I added, "This will give you something to report!" Then the lights went out, and at last he sat down.

The stage for steam-music, in case you haven't been to one yet, is a huge fish tank that they keep at **really** Venusian temperatures, filled with a real Venusian atmosphere. The stuff stinks, one of the stage hands tells me. But it sure looks pretty when the show gets going.

They used to think nothing could live on Venus, anything alive would burn up. Well, the Venusians don't have bodies to burn. They use the gas of the atmosphere instead—I don't know what they do to have children, but when they're hungry or whatever they just pull in more gas, and that's steam-music ballet. That same stage hand Pete, who thinks he knows everything and who told me all this, says the name is wrong because it's not really steam, and as for the music—

The music was starting. That's the part that gets people stoned, it's something to do with the atomic vibrations inside the tank hitting your brain cells, but only some people feel it. The rest is enough for me, the lights in the tank and everything. I wish Pete hadn't told me it's only them breathing and digesting and so on.

By the time the lights started Frank was hissing and clicking, and I hoped he would make it to the end. But maybe the music got to him, he did calm down in a minute and let us watch the show. The colours were really amazing this time, some new ones I'd never seen. But the end was the same as always: all the curls and swirls of gas turn into fire, starting with just a line of flame in one part and building up. They keep their shape through this part, so it's like flame made into sculpture. Frank went very quiet, and I forgot to check up on him. And when the house lights came on he was gone.

"Backstage," L'Arancia said. "I let him go."

So we went to the stage door and found Frank making unpleasant noises at Pete. Pete was so glad to see us that he let us in without arguing the way he usually thinks he has to, and we sat down to wait for the Venusians.

They were quick. Frank was just saying, "They are not aliens at all, why did you lie to me—" when in trundled two of the small transparent tanks that they use for Earth suits.

"Visitors," said one, whose gas stayed a little yellower through all its colour changes. Their voices are like steam-music making words. Not very clear words, but you can figure them out.

"Devotees," Frank corrected. He began to pace frantically, waving his arms around. "I was brought here against my will, I confess it. I did not believe in you, I thought you a foul intrusion on our pure planet. But you have the divine power of my ancestors, to breathe fire—no, you transform yourselves into the breath of fire itself. I see that these foolish skin-dwellers did not understand, you are truly the gods from the heart of the earth that we have been seeking so long, and they told me you were aliens!" Was that noise a laugh? "But now I know, my business with them is unimportant. Far more important to find you, to invite you as my guests to the warm lands below, where the rulers of my people will offer you—"

The aliens were looking at each other. They may not have faces, but they know how to look annoyed. The second, greener, one looked very annoyed. "I told you to stop giving me first drafts," it said. "The humans are ok, if not great, but this lizard character—"

"Dinosaur," said Yellow. "I told you, Tyrannosaurus Rex."

"I don't care what you call it, it doesn't work," said Green. "It's a waste of

genetic tape. If you wanted to do art you could have stayed home where there's tape to throw away, but here—I want it all erased, I want you to start that detective story you promised me, and I want it on my desk Monday morning. And no skinless reptiles. Clear?"

"Please listen—" began Yellow, but Green had already turned and was trundling out on its bulldozer tracks. Yellow followed, jabbering, and the heavy door slammed. Then I heard it lock.

"Erased," said Frank. "Have we really fallen so low, are we so far from the gods, that they—"

"Quiet," said L'Arancia. "Madge, did you hear that about genetic tape?"

"Yeah," I said. "You know about that stuff, what did it mean?"

"DNA," he said.

"What?" said Frank.

"DNA," said L'Arancia. I sometimes tell him he should have stuck with biochemistry, which is what he was studying when we met, when I was department secretary at NYU. "Deoxyribonucleic acid. Stuff that sits inside your cells and tells them to turn into dinosaur. Humans have it, dinosaurs have it, but Venusians don't. So they've been playing around with ours."

"Of course, they are gods," Frank said. "Of course they made us, whether you call it DNA or not. But there must be a way of atoning—"

"Now wait a minute," I cut in. "We brought you here because we knew you'd like their fire trick, but this god stuff—Do you really think they invented us?"

"Sounds like it," L'Arancia said. "Sounds like they use DNA as an alphabet and write themselves detective stories. So we have to find Yellow's manuscript and save it, before Green recycles us." He took out a lockpick and went to the door. Then stopped. There were voices outside.

I knew those voices. "Get in the closet," I hissed at Frank, "It's the police!" He didn't move. "Go on, if you want to learn to breathe fire!" Then he moved.

The voices came closer. Pete was denying he'd seen us—bless him: though I knew by tomorrow there'd be a whole new story going around, with him as the hero. Then another voice, was it Green or Yellow? I couldn't get what it was saying, it's hard enough without a door between you.

The doorknob moved.

Before it opened L'Arancia and I were in the closet too. I put my eye to the keyhole but I still couldn't tell which Venusian it was. The differences aren't that much, you have to see them together. The little policeman, Dave, was saying, "Ugly guy, looked like a steam-freak to me," but the big one cut him off.

"Watch your mouth," the big guy said, and hustled him out of there as if he was afraid of an interplanetary incident. Pete followed them, talking fast. They hadn't had time to see that there was a closet.

The alien stayed. It trundled around for a minute, then stopped at the closet door. "Come out quickly," it said. Now that the walking-around noises had stopped I could hear it better.

I felt L'Arancia move next to me, getting hold of Frank just in case. I held the latch shut. Venusians move things by telekinesis, but I didn't know how strong they were. "It is your author," and the alien said its name, but I didn't get it so I'll still say Yellow. "I have come to free you, and I need your help," it went on. "I am going to steal back my tape." But why would it need us once it had its tape? L'Arancia didn't trust it either. He let go of Frank just long enough to duck and look through the keyhole.

"Green," he whispered.

"If my editor gets hold of you," the alien went on, "you will be destroyed, and my tape will never be the same, even if I do get it to another publisher. Green doesn't understand that characters make themselves." L'Arancia ducked again, shrugged, and said, "Yellow."

It was getting stuffy in there, and besides L'Arancia had a gun. I opened the door.

Frank fell on his knees at once. "Master!"

"No time for that," said the alien. "We have to find a freezer."

L'Arancia and I looked at each other. "There's one in our office," I said.

"Of course, I forgot. We'll hide the tape in it," said the alien. "Come on!"

"Wait," said L'Arancia. "Why do you have to steal your own tape?"

"It's not mine," said Yellow. "This publishing house is a tax shelter—we do thrillers and science fiction, all at a loss—and part of it is being here on Earth where you can't get tapes. Yes, I know DNA-creatures are all around," impatiently, as L'Arancia and I started to interrupt, "but that's just the images. All you humans and so on are just the pictures that stories make in the minds of people reading them. The tapes, the books and paper you'd say, are made on Venus, in the caves where it's cold. We only have a few here to write our manuscripts on, and they belong to the publishers. Now Green is waiting for me, come on!"

We followed it down the hall and down several ramps—Venusians don't like

stairs—to a sub-basement. It was a lot cooler here, and Frank began to slow down. We didn't see anybody; everybody would have gone home by now. At the lowest level we came to a huge door, like a bank safe door. Yellow opened it by looking at it.

Inside it still looked like a bank, like where they keep the safe deposit boxes, and it was cold. We stayed back while Yellow went in and looked at one of the small drawers, which pulled out and landed on the flat top of its tank. "Here," it said, coming back, "hide this under Frank's coat, and take it back to your freezer. I wish the computer weren't so well guarded, we'll have to wait for a ship to send it to Venus."

"Mashter," said Frank. His voice was getting thick, and his weird eyes looked stuck half open. "Mashter, I can get you a computer link."

"We have a PC in the office, you can use that," I began.

"It wouldn't be big enough," said the alien, and Frank snorted. "If you call thozhe toyzh computerzh," he said. Then he reeled around and fell to the floor.

"Now what!" cried the alien. "I'm late already—Green will be looking for me —"

"Do you have a heater?" asked L'Arancia.

"He's still my best character, I don't care," said Yellow.

"We can load him onto you and carry him to where it's warm," I said. So we did, and then we were out of there hardly stopping to lock the door. "Maybe I will teach him to breathe fire," Yellow said as we got to street level. "It would make a good sequel."

We did not answer. We had just passed the door to the staff room and someone was in there. Then a shout, "Freeze!"

We froze. Well, Frank already had.

"What are you doing here?" Pete came out of the room looking very disappointed. Then he saw Frank and his face lit up. "Isn't that—?"

"Never mind who it is," said L'Arancia.

"He overdid it," I said. "We're taking him home."

"I must go," said Yellow. "Noon tomorrow, in your office?"

"Do you know where—?"

"Of course I do," and it dumped Frank and left.

"What's going on?" Pete demanded.

"You were supposed to be gone long ago," I said. "But since you're here, help us get him to the car, we're in a hurry!" And just then Frank turned his head to one side and grunted. If he woke up now, if Pete found out—

"I'll get some cold water. It'll wake him right up if it's steam-music," and Pete zipped into the staff room.

A dash of that in the face put Frank out nicely. Then of course Pete started with more questions. But we were too busy to answer, trying to lift Frank up without uncovering the DNA drawer. Pete came to help, and the drawer fell to the floor.

"Don't touch," said L'Arancia. "Evidence."

"It's a safe deposit box," said Pete. "He is that bank—"

"Just help carry him," I said, and finally he did. Then he wanted to come with us. We barely got away from him before Frank woke up enough to blink.

In the office with the heater on him he finished waking up, and sat up saying, "I'll get you the best computer—"

"You've got until noon tomorrow," said L'Arancia. "Have a soda."

And he did it. I never knew how, or where his private cave entrance was, but at noon the next day there were three more like him in our office, all blinking their nonsense eyes, hissing politely at each other and devoutly at Yellow. Yellow gave a pretty good steam dance all alone. And that tiny computer would make a Cray look sick.

Well, that was the first dinosaur. Now, of course, since the Venusians deal with them too, they're all over. I gather Green went home in a snit, to try another tax shelter, and Yellow is editor now. Of course nobody but us knows about that part of it. I said to L'Arancia when it was all over, "Tony"—that's his real name—"if people knew what they're really doing here do you think they'd worship them like the dinosaurs do?"

"No, they'd try to figure out what they use for genes," he said. "Where did you put my NYU lab permit?"

**Elizabeth Rike
Hallowell**

A Distant Tutorial

*The real unsaid is not simply
the unspoken, it is rather that which is
left behind as the "other" of speech.*

Thomas J.J. Altizer

*In the dream
a baseball team is playing
between counters in a department store.*

*Players, at perfume display
or mannequins, their collars turned up, subtle
sepia or fuchsia blend, an unblinking pitch*

*tossed back when batters miss their chance.
I drop two throws from my catchers mitt,
the season ends my misplayed game.*

*Things drop away these days. Resolve or dissolution?
I don't know. Except that the dream ends with the noise
of pre-dawn garbage collection, skunk inspected,*

*passed over, thrown aboard. The wind wakes the chime,
dog stirs, water flushes.
If I could pray it would be a solitary prayer—*

*an unimposing backyard, firewood drying, a neighbor's
footsteps leaving his house, a packet of poems
from State Prison students—our distant tutorial.*

*Intimacy becomes self-division for each of us, touch
and go, more memory than presence, a mute mindfulness
The way a runner, off the bag, not being held,*

*senses the first baseman behind him, just out of sight;
stranded between pitch and reception, starting toward second,
caught longing for the sound of bat supporting his move,*

*fearing the noiseless throw, the straddling end
of any change. They write about their lives,
strands of mowed and unraked grass*

*covering over and over the ground fall,
cut at seasons end, remaining there, forced to wait
for a new call, or a new dream beginning*

*another image—perhaps the metaphor of department store
where a baseball player practices in the clutter
between counters and silent unmoving eyes*

*the end of something unsaid, leaving out
return address,
the solitary and unimposing prayer that is everyday.*

**W.F. Halpin
Old Orchard Beach**
is a consultant in care & learning

Robert J. Vs. Henny Youngman

*So what did Mozart say
to Salieri
during a passage
of one of
his most difficult bowel movements?
"Whatsa sonata for you?"*

**Michael Uhl
Walpole**
is a freelance writer

Heart

I placed my ear to my wife's chest and heard her heart beating, her warm soft skin throbbing against my cheek and ear. Her heart beat so regularly and strongly against my ear. And I loved her so.

Sometimes the beating speeded up a bit, marking three beats in the time normally meant for two; sometimes it skipped a beat, slowing either the muscle expansion or contraction, I couldn't really tell, to cover the time meant for two beats with one and a terrifying silence in between. No sound coming from her chest, no deep sound at least. Just shallow breathing, scratchiness in her windpipe, but no heart beat; nothing.

And I fell into the vacuum of that silence as if falling through space asleep. When her heart again beat I would crash out of the terror and reach up to touch her face.

It is said that if you have that falling-through-space dream and don't wake up with a violent thud like hitting the bottom of the damn Grand Canyon after falling for that whole mile or however deep it is, if you kept falling, never striking anything at all, or if you hit and never wake up, you were dead.

I listened to my wife's heart beat still with my ear on her chest. I listened.

I had fallen asleep once she told me with my head in a position like this one and woke to find her smiling at me and stroking my hair like a mother and a child.

I listened.

When I read that story in the newspaper about the two Australians being sentenced to be hanged in Malaysia a shock I don't fully understand except that it is the shock of facing sudden death ran through me.

They had to stand there and listen to some judge say that they would be hanged until dead. They would be taken to some remote, cold room and with great ceremony of finality, have a thick coil of rope draped over their heads and tightened against their throbbing windpipes, then some dark, odd smelling cloth hood wrapped over their faces, a hood that muted all sounds even the fleeing footsteps of the executioner until they were left standing in a swelling silence interrupted only by the slightest crack as the floor beneath them opened and they fell for what seemed forever and then jerked to a stop as the rope tightened, their necks snapped and all sense vanished and they were dead.

Their bodies hit bottom, their bodies falling the mile or whatever it is to the bottom of the damn Grand Canyon, but they did not waken. Their souls flew on into the early morning, never stopping, ever sailing.

It is better it seems to die in an instant than to live halfway in between, to know the wall is coming and there is no way to avoid the flash of pain, then nothing, than it is to miss the wall and sail over the cliff into an unending fall-like dream that has you just missing the wall, just missing the wall, and then screaming when you know what happened. Just missing the wall and screaming.

I listened to my wife's heart still.

The police said there was little chance the rock would have missed the car. The speed of the truck, the speed of the car, the angle . . .

There was no chance it would have bounced at an angle. It was a large rock, and round, no edges to deflect it. It bounced like a basketball; it was that size.

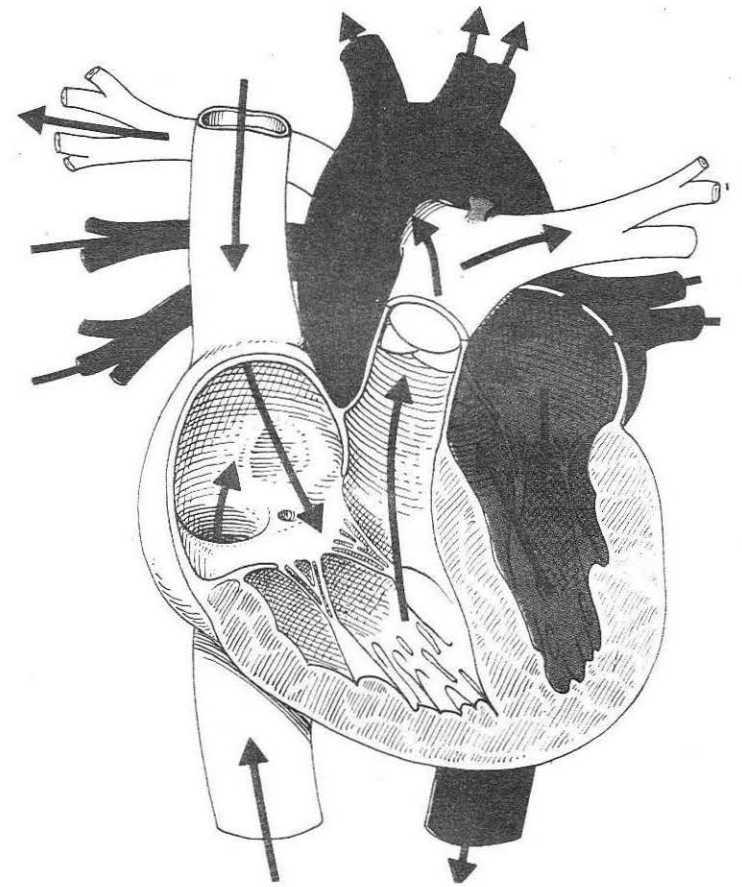
There was no chance it would have bounced extremely high that last time and passed over the car, or angled away and hit the side, or maybe landed on the roof and not crashed through the windshield where the driver had no chance to duck or swerve or slow the car down, or speed up.

The police said it was a freak accident. A one-in-a-million chance.

But still the large rock loosened by the vibration of the rattling old truck and directed by the speed and angle of the corner and the slight shifting of the sandy load causing a slow slide down the pile in the back of the dump truck, and maybe the truck slowed down, or a tire ran through a pothole or the driver oversteered as he took the sharp corner maybe too fast . . . whatever . . . it was. The rock hurtled over the side of the truck and like a meteor crashing through the atmosphere to bury itself in the desert, broke through the windshield of the approaching car. The rock rolled down the side of the sand pile as the truck rolled on, bounced on the hard surface of the road and smashed through the windshield of the approaching car, striking the driver in the head, before passing through the rear window of the car and on the road a couple of times before stopping.

The driver was killed instantly.

Or at least the doctor said so. Still, they tried. They used needles filled with chemicals and pounded on the bloody chest, leaning heavily over the heart with both hands and leaned with their full weight.



I listened. The driver was killed instantly.

And I in the opposite seat wished I had been driving.

But it was her new car and she wanted to get used to it. In reality, she alone wanted to drive it. She was so proud. It was her brand new car. All those terrible years of having nothing vanished when she sat behind the wheel. Hers. No one else's. Hers.

I saw the rock falling from the truck as she did, too, I'm sure.

"What the . . ." was all she had time to say. I grabbed for the wheel and flung myself across the seat all in one motion. I think the car had begun to turn. I thought that if I could change the angle only slightly the rock would miss the car, or hit something harmless, or me. There was a scream and then a crash. Or a crash and a scream. I'm not sure.

Then the car began to spin.

When I woke up the light had changed and was alternately red or slashed with blue. There were voices shouting things I could not understand.

They came running, two or three, and yanked on the door and pulled at me, but my arms were around her and I heard her heart beating.

They came running and shouting and pulling. But the driver had died instantly.

They came too late and tried but the canyon fall had not ended. I had listened to my wife's heart beating inside her small chest.

They pulled me away. I listened to my wife's heart still.

I walked to the end of the road. I listened to my wife's heart. Still.

**Michael Daigle
Albion**

is a newspaper editor in Waterville

The War on Teenage Pregnancy

I read where there is a new war on teenage pregnancy. This is something I am an authority about. I want to make my contribution to the war effort now, before they start confusing you with facts. Any war they are trying to run on %'s they are going to lose. Most everything I have seen in the paper begins with an awful list of %'s, and I know there never was a teenager impregnated by a %, nor do they use % as birth control. They will try most anything, but only afterwards, if you know what I mean.

If you want to know how I manage to qualify as an expert in this war, I have got to run through the family history a bit. I don't have as bad a case of that as my husband Alvah. He is purely incapable of discussing anything without knocking it back to his great grandfather. I am not about to go weewee on someone's grave, however. It's all underground now, no point digging people up just to have someone to chuck rocks at. What I done is nobody's fault but mine.

It's also nobody's business but mine, least I have always kept it so. Why we ought to go trot these things out for visiting hours I am not sure. But it seems to be a matter of public debate, and I would rather we discussed something over and done, and which turned out all right, I suppose. Now when we get to the here-and-now of it, which is my daughter Tammy and her welfare check, I think we might just leave that to the family to sort out. We aren't done discussing that yet, even if she thinks so.

As near as Alvah and I could figure out, there haven't been too many people on either side, Bagleys or Harrises, that managed to get married when they were old enough to know better. Young marriages was the rule, and quite a few of them set up housekeeping with the old folks, at least for a few months. Then the fur would begin to fly, the young ones would move out, that premature baby would arrive—we have an awful string of premature first babies. Everything from five to three months ahead of schedule, but the next one always took nine months. Funny. When the baby came, the old folks would shift a bit, and a house would be found and dragged onto the lot near home, and Gram and Gramps were in for it.

And I say, this goes back a way. I have given some thought to how did we find out about this pattern of our elders and betters, and did it influence us to do the same thing when we was teenagers. Alvah knows about his brother being born when his father was away in World War II, but he says he never had any doubt but that whatever had happened had been a mistake, and that both of his parents wished it hadn't. He says he supposes he got the idea not to trust women about marriage and babies, but then he had Unk, who was an old bachelor and honestly couldn't see there was any women around anymore that was a patch to Alvah's grandmother. So why get married, he says. Alvah does seem to have heeded that. He really didn't plan to.

Now in my family getting married was pretty much what there was to do, and my mother was quite practical about it. She thought you needed to, and the sooner the better. She just wasn't one to make a fuss, and that's probably why she and Daddy always got on. She didn't look for ways to improve on him, and he liked that. It's probably why Alvah and I are still speaking. He knows there is a deal to improve on, like that we can't live on what he makes and haven't been able to for some time, but he'd just as soon not talk about it. You can listen to him talk for days and not catch on that I have a job checking stuff at the K-Mart. It used to be that that was extra, like making wreaths for Christmas money, but it isn't anymore. That is hard on men.

When Alvah and I were young (he's five years older than me, so we weren't really teenagers at the same time), you could still start married life with one job and a baby and probably survive. Money wasn't what stopped us from getting married when it became obvious that that would have been the thing to do, meaning Tammy was on the way. Alvah had this idea that he couldn't be held responsible for what was probably a plot against his freedom or something. It could have caused real hard feelings, in fact my older brother had started to make noises about setting up target practice in the sandpit behind where Alvah was staying. But I just stated every time the subject was brought up that it was my business and I didn't require assistance. I had been working all along and I proposed to keep right at it. Alvah cleared some point of land he had in his sights, and marched up one day ready to get married. Men move in mysterious ways their wonders to perform.

Now when it comes to advising the present generation, that is another thing. I don't know why it should be, but it is. We might have been a little more forthcoming than our parents were, but not too much. You don't really need to go into detail with kids now, they got it all in Technicolor right there

on the tube. As to whether it's a real good idea to get pregnant when you're sixteen and don't have any skills or anything, hell, I KNOW we've been over that ground with all of the kids. Mostly about other people, I will say, pointing out how it made it so hard for them. But I don't know what you can say to a kid like Tammy. She hasn't any idea about shifting for herself. All she wants is spending money and "independence," meaning nobody making her pick up her stuff. She really doesn't believe that there's anything in common between me at sixteen and her at the same age.

So that's how you can be a grandmother at thirty-three, which I know a lot of people don't believe. From what I've read and seen on TV, there's a lot who really think this kind of thing only happens to hillbillies and black welfare mothers in New York. But it doesn't, and I have my own theory on why it does happen. What it is is laziness and too much TV. There is this notion about playing your cards right so you won't ever have to work, and that that's the way real life is supposed to be. I think they get it from television. I don't really know what the cure would be generally, but I know what it would be for Tammy, is if she doesn't get that welfare check after all. I'm considering going to the welfare people and telling them that. I know it's not their fault she's pregnant, but she's heard about how much you get to live on, and to her that seems like bags of money. When she worked up to the Dairy Joy, she never could save anything so it always seemed to her like she didn't have any money of her own. I made her buy her school clothes, see, and the paychecks just evaporated. There was no running-around money left over. She resented it, and me, and our not being even halfway to rich.

Sounds like I was a pretty rotten mother, which maybe I was. I feel badly about it now. I couldn't give her what she wanted or needed or something, and Alvah was no help either. He made fun of her, appeared to believe she didn't have much for smarts, wouldn't do anything to build her up. He is the same to me, of course, but he respects me, and I know it. Tammy doesn't know that about anybody, what it is to feel in charge of yourself and not care too much for other people's opinions. If there was any one thing about her and her upbringing I'd like to fix, that would be it.

All water over the dam now. She's putting on a good show for the moment, but I see the end of that at hand. She has been strutting around all fall with her big bosooms stuck out, but now something else is stuck out there too, and it ain't near so attractive. Sad to say, she's built like me—no ifs, and's or maybe's, and plenty of butt. When I was carrying, we quickly got to the stage where you look to be smuggling basketballs, and then the only thing I could wear was those moomoos, which I guess have gone out of style. Tammy can't do up her jeans, and the other kids she was running with have gone back to school or work anyway, and that leaves her home with Ma. I'm at work from 7 on, but I know by the air that she spends a good part of the day being sick. I was the same.

God, I really do feel sorry for her. I can't seem to do her the slightest bit of good, though. I get mad at her about nothing and before you know it we're having it all out again, which is no earthly use and I know it. What gets me is I know some of the things you do grow out of or away from, but some you got to lay right down and sleep with them all your life. I don't regret too much of mine, but with her I get the feeling this could sink her. I wish I could protect her, but it ain't that simple anymore. We are talking from opposite sides, like there was a war on. That's what I think of, when I hear about the war on teenage pregnancy. I'd like to lob a bomb in there sometimes, but all it is is Tammy, whose jeans don't fit, hiding in the bathroom puking.

Catharine S. Baker
Spruce Head
is a free-lance writer

*Like snow falling, I wish the words
would come—effortlessly to the eyes,
relentlessly to the mind, and with that aura
of grace hinting at what purity might be
if we knew how to let it.*

P.F. Newcomb
Norfolk, VA
is a misplaced native

Interview: Elisabeth Ogilvie

Elisabeth Ogilvie has written over fifty books, and considers herself a regionalist, yet has found little recognition here. Born in Boston (1917), she graduated from North Quincy High. This ended her formal education. However, she did enroll in an evening extension course at Harvard called "Writing for Publication." There, Donald MacCampbell, who was to become her agent for 19 years, taught her that cutting a sentence in editing was not quite like "lopping off a finger." She grew disenchanted when he became more interested in business than literature. "He had people writing romances . . . He'd put them under contract and they would write one a month . . . This is just not literature."

Ogilvie came here in 1939 to settle permanently, after long summer residencies in childhood. Her longing for Maine is evident in her autobiographical work, *My World is an Island*. "I had to get it down on paper and out of my system . . .," an apparently hopeless task. At 27, she began her Bennett's Island (Criehaven) saga with *High Tide at Noon*. Soon more followed. As her life went, her novels followed. Even the Jennie stories, though they start elsewhere, return to Maine.

She captures island voices amazingly well. When asked how she got her ear, she laughs, and Dot (her companion) answers, "When Elisabeth came to Maine, I knew she had led a sheltered life . . . Yet, I recognized that she was a writer who had a novel brewing. So, I told her, 'If you want to hear some fishermen talk when no one is around, go upstairs over the kitchen . . . [where a heating duct would allow her to eavesdrop].'" From then on, she had no difficulty writing lively dialogue.

Ogilvie feels strongly about the power of place: "My people act and react in response to their environment. They are its creatures, whether they want to be or not. Someone said that Maine is a state of mind . . . for me, Criehaven is an island in the spiritual sense. I can carry it with me wherever I go, an integral part of my existence. It will never go away from me."

In 1944, Ogilvie and her friends, Guy and Dorothy Simpson, relocated to Gay's Island in the mouth of Saint George River. Eventually, they moved into a ranch house on the Cushing peninsula for the winter. From Elisabeth and Dot's winter home they can see their summer haven and all the old longing, found in *My World is an Island*, is felt again.

Ogilvie supports herself as a writer, a *rara avis*. She works only in the morning, "after my coffee and toast. I just get that first line written . . . it is like jumping into a cold shower." She keeps track on a 4X4 calendar: "Every once in a while I go through to see if I have used the stuff . . ." If not, she stores loose thoughts in sorted envelopes. Approaching 73, she has no notion of retiring. She admits, however, that it gets harder to discipline herself on a nice spring day. "I want to enjoy . . . I don't like to waste good weather . . . I like to relax, take a walk, meet a friend and celebrate Criehaven." But as usual, work calls. "I have a couple of things I want to write after I finish this [the third Jennie] book: a murder, and an 1800s history of Bennett's Island. I have all the material on it. I should use it."

**Estelle Watson Sanders
Windham**

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Elisabeth Ogilvie on Criehaven, 1941

Photo courtesy of Dorothy Simpson

Excerpt from *When the Music Stopped* by Elisabeth Ogilvie

I awoke to the cries of the gulls and the sound of oarlocks as the men rowed out to the moorings in the topaz light. There was an orchestra of other noises; pickup doors slamming in the parking lot, engines starting—I knew whose, I knew them all. That quarterdeck shout echoing from mooring to mooring, that bray of laughter. The expert whistler. Someone's radio went on, and I got every word of the Coast Guard weather report. I knew each boat without seeing her as she went out the harbor mouth. I heard the voice of Little Emily and wished I were with Glen. Yachts followed the lobster boats, going out by engine power because there was no wind yet to fill the sails.

I made coffee, toasted an English muffin, and got to work at my table beside the big window. On the wharf below, Uncle Early hosed down the floor of the bait shed, Gramp went into the store to work on the books, Chad stood on the car and barked at any sea pigeon who had the temerity to paddle with its little red feet to within ten yards of him. The Barrys' outboard motor coughed and choked all the way across the harbor as they headed their dory toward a day's clamming on the Davids.

A red sunrise burned briefly behind Fort Point and dulled to a harmony of greys. Yesterday's perfection and this hush meant a weather-breeder; the land was looming, and the seabirds were washing themselves.

I did three hours of work with the dictionary and the thesaurus, a yellow legal pad and my favorite pen. Then the Temple boys came to mow the lawn, and I decided to drive to Maddox to have lunch with my parents.

There were at least two hours between now and lunch, and Gram gave me a shrewd look when I asked if she wanted any errands done in town.

"Nope. Visiting the scene of the crime, are you?"

"Ay-uh," I said. "Now that you mention it. This Rigby-Esmond business is a living novel, and even if I haven't read it yet, I want to get all the settings straight in my head. Whenever I read a book, I draw a map for myself. It helps the imagination."

"Save your imagination for making your living," she advised me.

The day was cloudy and still, predominantly green and silver, with the yellows leaping out like flares from a sun in hiding; on either side of the black road the golden rod was gaudy against the woods.

I slowed down when I came to the Fox Point mailbox. There was nobody else in sight, so I stopped, staring up the driveway. All right, so I was behaving like that teenager Glen had warned me about. But who was to know but me? How I longed for the nerve to drive up there right now. I imagined them having mid-morning coffee; they would ask me to have a cup, and I would thank them for yesterday and try to say what the music meant to me. They'd ask me to sign their copies of my books. It would all be so comfortable, and Marianne would repeat Miss Emma's invitation to come often. A wondrous new dimension was about to be added to my life.

Review

When the Music Stopped/ Elisabeth Ogilvie

McGraw-Hill, 1989 326 pages, \$16.95

Some writers are like faithful friends. Year after year they generously share their stories with us. And year after year we rely on them to entertain us, to inspire us, to reassure us. They are consistent, reliable, familiar . . . and Elisabeth Ogilvie is one of these writers.

With over fifty novels and juvenile books to her credit, Ogilvie adds one more intriguing tale to her list with her most recent publication, *When the Music Stopped*. Readers familiar with Ogilvie's suspenseful narratives will not be disappointed with this mystery.

As the story begins, novelist Eden Winter has just finished her latest book when she becomes aware that residents of her normally sleepy coastal town of Job's Harbor are all gossiping about the return of the Esmond sisters. Little did she know "just how ugly the consecutive surprises were to be." As the story unfolds, both Eden as well as Ogilvie's readers become enmeshed in a mysterious series of events that will change this serene community dramatically.

World-renowned pianist Marianne Esmond and her sister Miss Emma, an accomplished violinist, were coming home after nearly sixty years away—and rumors and speculation about the reasons for their return preoccupy the curious Eden. When her grandmother, a childhood friend of the Esmonds, is reluctant to divulge the details of the Rigby-Esmond scandal that took place over half a century ago, Eden becomes "hooked" on piecing together the details about the notorious sisters on her own.

Not even Glen Heriot, Eden's boyfriend, or his twin sister Fiona, Eden's childhood friend, are immune from the curiosity that heralds the celebrities' arrival in the quiet town. And to complicate matters further, Nick Raintree, a handsome stranger who works at the local boat yard, makes everyone, especially the observant Eden, wonder about his unexplained interest in the notorious sisters.

The weekly musical gatherings that the Esmonds host at their elegant family estate provide the encounters necessary to fuel the fires of intrigue further: "It's the ambience up there that gets me. The music, them, and what they know, what they've lived through. Marianne's the great romantic heroine and the famous musician, but I'll bet Miss Emma has her own stories locked behind those twinkly eyes . . . She has had her own grand tragedy."

However, all these seemingly congenial afternoons become blurred with one hideous and violent event that plunges Eden into a "frenzy of horror and grief." She becomes immersed in a terrifying plot that ends in an explosive conclusion, far more chilling than any she might have concocted in her novels.

Readers acquainted with any of Ogilvie's previous novels will recognize familiar patterns here. Into one tight braid she intertwines three related strands: the story of the past, Eden's own story, and the town. Her characters are believable because they fit so comfortably in their setting, in this case the neighborhood of this coastal village. For Ogilvie the background is always an inescapable and alive part of the story. Without it the other elements have no existence. The harbor, the Point, the island, the loft where Eden lives, even the beaver dam, are as necessary to the story as are the events that the characters trigger.

And perhaps it is this strong sense of place—the weather, the seasons, the tides—that explains much of her popularity. Public libraries throughout the state have shelves full of her fiction, and titles previously out of print are being reprinted. Why? Because Maine readers understand the attitude that has guided Ogilvie's writing for over fifty years: "When all the loves are gone and the wars won or lost, it is the place that remains."

Carol Kontos
Windham
teaches at UMA



Photo: Carol Kontos

Also by Elisabeth Ogilvie

The World of Jennie G.
Jennie About to Be
The Road to Nowhere
The Silent Ones
The Devil in Tartan
A Dancer in Yellow
The Dreaming Swimmer
Where the Lost Aprils Are
Image of a Lover
Weep and Know Why

A Theme for Reason
The Face of Innocence
Bellwood
Waters on a Starry Night
There May Be Heaven
Call Home the Heart
The Witch Door
Rowan Head
My World Is an Island
No Evil Angel

The Bennett Island series

High Tide at Noon
Storm Tide
The Ebbing Tide
The Dawning of the Day

The Seasons Hereafter
Strawberries in the Sea
An Answer in the Tide
The Summer of the Osprey

In Memoriam

Ruth Moore (1908-1989)



"Cold as a Dog and the Wind Northeast"

When I first met Ruth Moore I was ten years old. That was in the summer of 1921, when an aunt of mine took me and my sisters (rusticators all) to Great Gotts Island, about a mile southwest of Mount Desert Island. For a month we boarded at the home of Ruth's parents there, a hilltop house with a wide view of Blue Hill Bay, of the silhouetted Camden Hills, and of the sunsets. It was where she, her brother, and her sisters had been born and brought up, her family sustaining themselves well with lobster fishing, with a garden, with cows, pigs, chickens, and a woodlot.

Ruth, as later also her sisters did, waited on the summer people's table then, and it was easy for her and me to become friends. She had just finished high school in Ellsworth that year, and went off to college in Albany, N.Y. that fall.

My relatives, by then hooked on the Maine coast, as I was myself, returned to the Island summer after summer for more than a decade, at first living at the Moore's home, and later, having bought a house, being summertime neighbors and, some years, boarders for the evening meal.

Ruth always claimed it was she who taught me to swim. I still don't believe it, though we never quarrelled over the matter. It's true I was slow to learn that art, but I know the first assuring strokes I experienced came at a goddamned Scout Camp my parents ordered me into in New Jersey, when I knew from the depths of my being I should be on Gotts Island with Ruth Moore, Esther Moore, Louise Moore, their parents and their neighbors. True, summers, year after year, Ruth, Esther, Louise, I, and neighbors did swim a lot on Gotts Island's "Inner Pool," a placid, sheltered tidal inlet, pure then, contaminated now.

After college, Ruth tried teaching, disliked it and quit. She moved to NYC, struggled with secretarial jobs, and in 1931 even came to the University of Maine to work toward a Master's Degree in English. One of my sisters, my college roommate, and I, breezed into Orono that fall and corralled Ruth to go down to the coast and out to Gotts Island for a three-day weekend. By that time, the island village had disappeared, all of the fourteen island families having moved ashore about 1926, but we few all felt good about being there for a day or two in a non-vacation season; even my roommate had been contaminated by the Gotts Island

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Mary McCarthy (1912-1989)



photo James West, late 1980s

A Reflection: The Duchess of Castine

Mary McCarthy, critic, novelist, journalist, and memoirist, died of cancer on October 25, 1989 in an intensive care unit of New York Hospital. She was 77, one of the most colorful and quixotic figures to walk across the American literary stage.

Since 1962 she lived on the Rue de Rennes in Paris, and in 1967 she and her fourth husband James West, a native of Old Town, Maine and graduate of Bowdoin College, bought a house in Castine where they spent the summers. "Dark Age luminary and Irish hothead," Robert Lowell called his Castine neighbor in a 1969 poem which describes her residence near the mouth of the Penobscot:

*Your eight-inch, star-blue, softwood floorboard, your house sawn for some
deadport Revolutionary squire . . .*

She had "the weathered yeoman loveliness of a duchess," Lowell wrote, which was how McCarthy, born in Seattle of Irish-Catholic, Jewish, and Yankee stock, often appeared, standing on the dappled lawn behind her large yellow house, a basket of fresh-cut sweet peas over her arm; or framed in the front door on Main Street, in the openwork lace stockings and black-buckled shoes she favored in later years, looking not unlike a Revolutionary squire herself.

Lowell, who occupied his elderly cousin Harriet Winslow's house in the 1960s, and lobbied hard for Mary and Jim West to join him and his wife Elizabeth Hardwick in Castine when the house on Main Street came up for sale, was a great admirer of McCarthy's prose. He liked its rhythms and cadences, its exacting diction, but also its stunning concreteness in the realm of idea and emotion. Of Jim Barnett in "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man" (1942), McCarthy writes, "The ideas he put forward, familiar enough when clothed in their usual phraseology, emerged in his writing in a state of undress that made them look exciting and almost new." And the same might be said of her own writing—which is peculiarly attuned to psychic drama.

"Surrounded by friends, she rode like a solitary passenger on her train of thought," McCarthy wrote of her close friend, the political philosopher Hannah

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Ruth Moore died at 86. During her career, the Gott's Island native wrote 14 novels and two volumes of verse about life along the Maine coast. Her works were translated into five languages.

virus a few months before.

Three months later, Ruth left academia (in 1947, UM awarded her an Honorary Master's Degree) and returned to NYC. There was a gap in seeing her at all when she went off to California to be manuscript typist and companion for Alice Tisdale Hobart, author of *Oil for the Lamps of China*, but for some years of the 1930s and into the 1940s she was in NYC in a small but comfortable apartment on Minetta Lane, Greenwich Village. In the years of the Depression, years when I was around New York job hunting or working briefly here, there, and everywhere, Greenwich Village was a delightful place, especially Ruth Moore's residence where the modest but congenial parties, New Year's Eve or any other eve, were great fun. Also there were good times to talk about books, and about writing. Once Ruth suggested she and I collaborate on a novel. I felt complimented, thought about it, and declined. I doubted that we could go at writing quite the same way, or in ways that would harmonize. Probably, I believe, I was right. At all events, Ruth did extremely well without me.

She was working for *The Reader's Digest* in 1943 when her novel, *The Weir*, was accepted for publication by William Morrow and Company. Some time later came *Spoonhandle* and the sale of its movie rights, which enabled Ruth to desert New York and return to Maine; for a while, now and then, to Gotts Island, but essentially to a woodsy portion of the Town of Tremont on Mount Desert Island where she had someone build the house she wanted to live in and write in. Gotts Island, by then overflowing with far too many out-of-state summer people, no longer appealed to her. Indeed, she felt alienated from it.

As the decades passed and I and my wife and children moved from one to another of seven communities in Maine, we now and then saw Ruth, at first, for a time, on Gotts Island where, through a few full years we lived, but more often at her home in Bass Harbor, part of the Town of Tremont. I remember especially the pleasure of reporting to Ruth that her book of poetry, *Cold As A Dog and the Wind Northeast*, had become an assigned reading in an American literature course at UM.

Then, in her last year—no, her last month, December 1989—I drove to Bar Harbor to see Ruth at the nursing home where she was, by then, for sound reasons, living. She was up and around, though moving slowly. We had a good talk about her writing, about her writing in progress, about our mutual failures of memory. Ruth said she liked that mountain-top home from which, on high, one could look out over Frenchman's Bay, not really so far from, nor so different from, the Blue Hill Bay beside which she had grown up. I believed she liked the place for other reasons too, for I noticed that the attendants kidded her in a friendly manner, and she kidded back. It was precisely what she would like, what she needed.

As I think back, I am strongly glad that she could see published, and some of them republished, the works she did, not just the ones mentioned here so far, but also *The Walk Down Main Street*, *Time's Web*, *Second Growth*, *The Fire Balloon*, and others. They are a valuable contribution, not just to Maine writing, but to literature.

Ted Holmes
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Arendt after the death of Arendt's husband in 1970. Of Arendt's own mind: "thought, for her, was a kind of husbandry, a humanizing of the wilderness of experience, . . ." In a 1947 story, "The Cicerone," a character's suspicions have a certain flickering quality: "the light in him went on and off, as he touched one theory or another, cruising in his shaft like an elevator." Lowell was entranced.

I slip from wonder into bluster; you align your lines more freely, ninety percent on target—we can only meet in the bare air.

(lines quoted from "For Mary McCarthy," Notebook, 1969.)

In Castine, McCarthy and Lowell met on the same corner outside Sylvia's Variety Store that everybody else did; though an evening's entertainment among the literati—which included the Wests' next door neighbor, the poet Philip Booth—regularly featured meetings of an impromptu *Cercle Français* and readings of Pascal and Montaigne.

During her first summer in Castine, McCarthy welcomed a stream of visitors as she would most summers; old friends from *Partisan Review* in the 1930s and 40s, Philip Rahv, Fred Dupee, Dwight Macdonald, and newer friends such as the poet James Merrill, William Jovanovich, McCarthy's publisher, and the writer Eleanor Perenyi. In recent years the guests kept coming, even when the Wests' long-time cook had gone, and arthritic condition of the spine made it increasingly painful for McCarthy to walk. Then she would get up early in the morning to prepare strawberry pancakes from scratch for a houseful of guests; and repair to the kitchen in the afternoon to string a bowl of sugar snaps picked from the garden. The meals were less elaborate, there were fewer courses, less sauces, one or two glasses at each setting for dinner instead of three. The basic ingredients, unadorned, stood out more sharply as in *nouvelle cuisine*, reminding the visitor nevertheless that for their hostess this stringing and chopping and blending of food by hand was more than a culinary preference or a case of unwonted perfectionism as some friends believed. It was both simpler and more complex than that; the presentation of a toothsome tomato or spicy apricot ranking amidst a throng of tastes ingested from childhood—childhood being an eternity for her—nearly as important as a well-told tale.

"I am staring down a channel with some very familiar landscape on either side," McCarthy wrote Hannah Arendt midway through her last novel, *Cannibals and Missionaries*. The chief figure, an Episcopal minister, kept sounding either like the girls in *The Group*, she said, or like Peter Levi, the hero of *Birds of America* (1971)—who sometimes sounds like McCarthy in a letter to Arendt, as a matter of fact. "It is sad to realize that one's fictions, i.e., one's 'creative' side cannot learn anything; I have learned," she continued, "but they, or it, haven't." She had her own theory about the reason for "these confining boundaries" which were set by a "life experience" lying in "vaguely upper-middle class territory, . . . between those girls and Peter. My mental experience is broader," she noted, which indeed it was, "but that doesn't seem to count for the imagination . . . It all leads to the awful recognition that one is one's life."

A punishing judgment which nonetheless squares with the truth. Or half the truth—for what about a rich landowner like Tolstoy? or a *bourgeois gentilhomme* like Flaubert who is quite capable of imagining men and women whose lives resemble his not at all? If in the end one tires a little of the parade of liberal, enlightened citizens and their illusions in McCarthy's novels, it may be because in some basic sense, fatal to true fiction, they are refugees from a "life experience," McCarthy's own. Their power of enchantment was too great to leave much room for the imagination. Dwight Macdonald put it another way when he said of her novels that she was always "reviewing other people's performances" (most notably her own).

But we will remember her for her ability to give her characters definition and worth by tracking their relation to politics and ideas, an ability few contemporary American writers possess. This fiction's lasting value is ensured because much of it remains a lively and reliable chronicle of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, as well as—in the case of *The Company She Keeps*—vintage literary entertainment.

In the end, nevertheless, Mary McCarthy remains her own most unforgettable character. And this not because she wrote prodigiously but lived wildly or miserably. She wrote well and lived well, turning a veritable sow's ear of a childhood—she was orphaned at six, and raised harshly for a time by ignorant guardians—into a silk purse, not only in memoir, but in life. One might even say that with her daring autobiographical fiction and memoirs she wrote herself into the public eye, not unlike her favorite Elizabethans, Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe; and then embraced the literary self—"a princess among the trolls," she calls the autobiographical heroine in *The Company She Keeps*—in life.

McCarthy is a tantalizing figure because in transforming the raw materials of

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a tumultuous personal history into literary gold—the Dickensian childhood, four husbands, many lovers, a penchant for public confrontation—she broke so many conventions we have come to expect in contemporary writers, especially women writers. She was not a feminist, for example. “I think feminism is bad for women,” she once told me; “it induces a very bad emotional state,” which is composed of “self-pity, covetousness, and greed”—three emotions with which she had to do special battle, as I came to learn. This animosity toward feminism—which didn’t keep her from supporting women’s rights in employment or the right to an abortion, neither of which had “anything to do with feminism,” she believed, but were simply a “question of freedom”—left her on the shelf in influential feminist circles.

A woman who was sometimes said to write a steely-edged prose ‘like a man,’ heady, tough, raunchy, but deep from a woman’s experience and with a romantic flourish which sometimes makes one blush, Mary McCarthy has always been hard to place. She wrote with what she called in 1980 (not referring to her own prose) a woman’s “gift of observation and analysis,” a gift which she thought “does come from their historic position of having to get their way without direct —” And here she had paused, skewered on the nasty implication of the thought, and I had pitched in: “Confrontation. We have to know what we’re up against.”

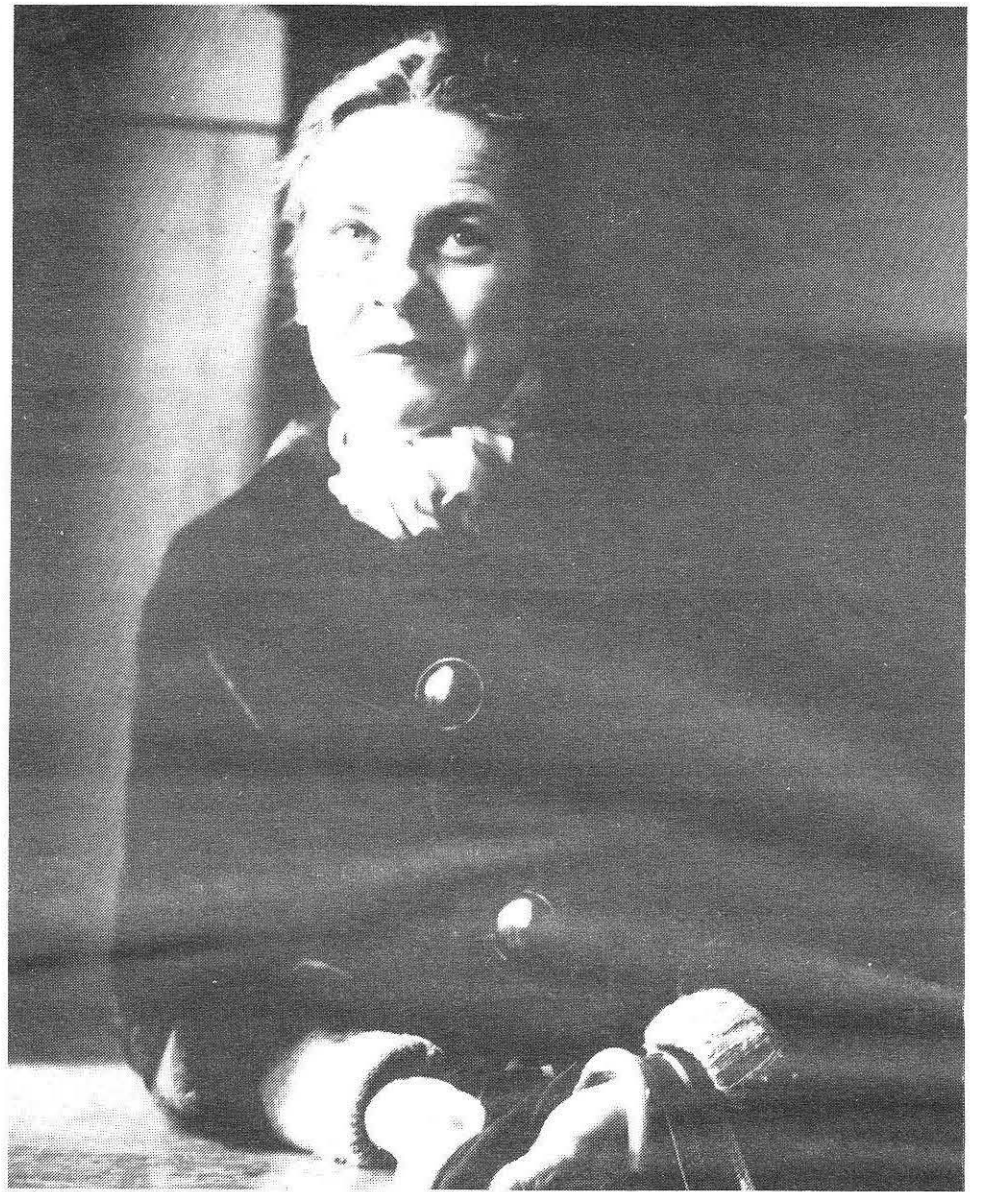
Certainly she has a woman’s eye for the drama of appearances, the myriad habits of consumption, whether it be of food, opinions, values, or appliances through which character is revealed. As for the sexual drama central to so many of her stories, including the tales McCarthy tells about herself, this drama, interestingly enough, is nearly always relayed from a prone position. When the heroine of “The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt” climbs into bed a second time with the man she has picked up on the train (or let herself be picked up by—one is never sure), she “stretched herself out on the berth like a slab of white lamb on an altar.” Waiting impatiently for him “to exhaust himself,” she thinks of herself “with a burning nostalgia . . . fully dressed . . . in her Pullman seat,” but then she is suddenly absolved of the whole tacky business by one of those sudden revelations peculiar to McCarthy’s moral universe. Having granted her seducer the tender illusion that he loves her, she knows now “with the firmest conviction, that for once she [is] really and truly good, not hard or heartless at all.” Her seduction is the ultimate sacrifice: “the mortification of the flesh achieved through the performance of the act of pleasure.”

The Maine house and gardens were where she played, Paris was where she worked. Even after Jim West’s retirement as Information Officer for the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development in the late 1970s, and the two of them started spending more time in Castine, the book-lined study on the Rue de Rennes remained McCarthy’s center of operations. “The social life, there’s too much of it here,” she told me in the fall of 1980 when I first interviewed her in Castine. Especially in winter, there were too many cocktail parties, too many “inane conversations,” and they were hard to avoid, McCarthy said, “because you’re visible. All the leaves have fallen off the trees—socially as well as literally.” An attack of shingles had excused her from local society during the summer of 1980, and after the first referendum to shut down Maine Yankee failed in September she had hit upon “a successor idea”: “I could say that I refuse to see anybody socially who voted ‘no’ in the referendum,” a scheme which would have spared her the company of a good many of Castine’s retired navy and army officers.

In 1967, McCarthy was reaping the fame and small fortune accruing the author of eleven books, which already included her classics: *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, *The Company She Keeps*, and *On the Contrary*, memoir, fiction, and criticism, respectively, along with the best-selling *The Group*. Past owner of a succession of old Fords and Chevrolets, in 1963 she gave Jim West a white Mercedes convertible for his birthday, a car he still drives in Castine.

The next two summers were haunted by the apocalyptic events of 1968, a wave of student revolts that swept the U.S., Italy, Germany, England, and France—triggered by the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam. Wherever she went there was an “insurrectional atmosphere,” McCarthy wrote Hannah Arendt from Paris, “you begin to feel you are not safe near a bank, near the American Embassy, on the Faubourg St. Honore.” One night at a party given by *Time* Magazine on a *bateau mouche*, it occurred to her that the boat might be blown up by revolutionaries. “I should hate to give up the ghost with a lot of *Time* executives.”

During the summer presidential campaign in Maine she worked hard on Eugene McCarthy’s behalf—while Lowell had run off with Bobby Kennedy. She couldn’t imagine what would happen in the United States after the inauguration of Richard Nixon. Unlike Arendt, McCarthy didn’t sense the approach of right-wing repression in 1968. “What I sense is universal civil war and destruction of



1960s photo, James West

the technological fabric,” she declared, not without a certain excitement. “Mentally I sometimes say a sad farewell to Castine,” she added in the same letter, striking a dolorous note; “if Black Power or Tom Hayden doesn’t take it, the fascists will take me.”

McCarthy, of course, went to the battlefield in 1967-68 to find out what was going on in both North and South Vietnam while most of her political generation stayed on the sidelines, or actively lobbied for a partnership between intellectuals and the government, as did Diana Trilling, one of McCarthy’s adversaries in the 1960s—second only to Simone de Beauvoir and Lillian Hellman among other women writers she loved to hate. Her investigative essays on Vietnam, the trial of Captain Medina in 1971, and her Watergate portraits, originally written for *The New York Review of Books* and the *London Observer*, and collected in *The Seventeenth Degree*—surely the most underrated of all her books—remind one of Orwell’s *Burmese Days*. First-rate reporting is combined with astringent reflections on the political legacy of American intellectuals whose “socialism” was such that in the 1950s and 1960s only the CIA was interested.

McCarthy’s own political commitments were fundamentally anti-authoritarian rather than egalitarian. Thus her anti-Stalinism in the 1930s and 1940s never hardened into anti-Communism in the 1950s; but neither did it permit any prolonged commitment to reform movements, except in the case of Vietnam. After the Christmas 1972 saturation bombing of North Vietnam, McCarthy, then 60, wanted to organize a group of distinguished citizens to go with her to Hanoi and position themselves on the Red River dikes, whose threatened destruction might have caused mass flooding and starvation. There was more than a little dramaturgy in such schemes, though not necessarily self-promotion; in the religious sense, was the unconscious theme, as it is in a good deal of her fiction.

When she died she left a train of twenty books behind her, and was at work on the caboose, the second volume of her “intellectual autobiography,” the first being *How I Grew* (1987). She was a prolific writer of extraordinary range and quality. Her literary and dramatic criticism, well-known for its discernment and wit, was matched not only by her reporting during the Vietnam era, but by her writing on the art and architecture of the Italian Renaissance—*Venice Observed* (1956), and *The Stones of Florence* (1959), whose quirky narratives convey a wealth of historical detail without verging on the pedantic. Only her fiction, in

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my opinion, and perhaps in hers as well, suffers from a certain fixity of voice and character.

She was not a feminist surely, though perhaps a feminine misogynist, though I for one have never been comfortable with that formulation more common among McCarthy's male readers. What this passage reveals to me is a renegade Catholic of a certain sensibility, more like Jean Genet in *Our Lady of the Flowers* among former literary coreligionists than Graham Greene (a writer she disliked). In "Brooks Brothers Shirt," as in other stories, she indulges in a kinky sexuality, which calls forth a prose of contrition.

Actually, McCarthy's opinions on the Woman Question are worth noting—and almost never are. "Men are more available for feeling," she told an interviewer in 1963, but "women have quicker minds—perhaps not such powerful intellects; . . . But for sheer quick intelligence and reason women are better," she said. She wasn't being coy but speaking from a woman's perspective. Isn't that how most women regard other women and men? Or did, before the perception collided with neo-feminist canon to the contrary?

But McCarthy could speak like a man. "They want everything, that's the trouble," she fumed in 1963, "—they can't have everything, all the prerogatives of being a woman and the privileges of being a man . . ." And she railed against "those awful career girls . . ." Behind this archaic dualism lay a fierce attachment to feminine "prerogatives," to "the so-called domestic arts, cooking and gardening," and clothes, not to mention the feminine arts of seduction. "I've always liked being a woman," she declared stoutly in 1980. "And it seems to me that one of the problems of a lot of feminists is they don't like being women." An interesting remark, which points to the odd connection in Mary McCarthy's case between coquetry and intellect. But that is another story . . .

**Carol Brightman
Walpole**
teaches at UMA

Brightman's biography of Mary McCarthy, *American Heretic*, will be published by Clarkson N. Potter/Random House in 1991.

In 1984 Mary McCarthy was awarded both the MacDowell Medal for literature and The National Medal for Literature, and in 1989, a few months before her death, she won election to The Academy of Arts and Sciences. Since 1986 she held the Charles Stevenson Chair for Literature at Bard College, where she taught each fall. She held honorary degrees from several universities around the world, including Bowdoin, Colby, and the University of Maine, where she was writer-in-residence at the Orono campus in the fall of 1981.

Editor's Note: Mary McCarthy judged the 34 manuscripts submitted by Maine writers for the Arts Commission's 1987 Fiction Competition. Christopher Fahy of Thomaston won with his short story collection, *One Day in the Short Happy Life of Anna Banana*. McCarthy wrote a six page commentary on those writers, as an Afterword to Fahy's book. Excerpts follow:

The quality is astonishingly high . . . I'd expected that half or three-quarters could be eliminated without reading more than a page or so . . . [They] showed an exceptionally good ear for peculiarities of speech . . . Maine is less a state than a country, with its north and south and center, its dialects, its Christian names, its family names, its farms and its lumber camps, its French Canadians, and—interestingly—its Jews. There is a high ratio of Jews represented in these fictions . . . And finally, there are Maine's summer people, who are the other side of the endemic disease of poverty . . . Most of the entries deal with poor people . . . The middle and the upper middle class, central to so much fiction in other parts of the world, are here glimpsed as outsiders, folks "from away." . . . Most of these fictions turn on a conflict between outsiders and natives . . . almost the top native occupation is that of trainee in a real-estate office . . . The theme of the intruder is deep in the sour blood of local Maine . . . Maine seems to be felt as the center of a cruelly tightening drama of the impinging modern world, and the Maine vernacular—its dialects—is that drama's blank verse or heroic couplets . . . Here the untamed element of the animal world is represented by cats . . . not a wild animal—bear or moose—as would happen in the fiction of the South, in Faulkner, for instance . . . A peculiar Maine quality, something as native to the region as puckerbrush or what the people here call popple (poplar). That is a strange wild hilarity, almost like a shriek of mirth—not a hearty belly laugh but high, thin, elfish or goblin. It runs through the entries sometimes clear, sometimes barely audible . . . the Maine hilarity, emitting its unearthly cackle like a high-frequency station . . .

Woman Heavy With Cart

*She pilots the grocery cart -
a naked fetus preceding figure
still stranger to embryonic life,*

*gathering ingredients for half
a dozen meals, herself the product
of 25,000 trips to the plate*

*now parading in health beneath
basket-weave blouse and tan
chinos caressing lean cheeks.*

*I spot this movable feast
selecting frozen juices in the aisle
that spills its chill upon my loins.*

*Perhaps her lover ignores all
implications of her bowels as do I,
inventorying asparagus, rigatoni,*

*olive oil, pita bread and chicken
breast, destined to wend their way
through those dark, warm territories.*

*Our paths diverge in the delicatessen,
then cross once more with a raw hint
of recognition from limpid eyes*

*lifted from her list long enough
to note the vigor I've achieved
from her perceivable nourishment.*

*She clears the checkout, each
ounce proclaiming gifted artists
working with a palette of edibles.*

*This nutritional masterpiece exits
bearing the full-term fetus
of a few more days of life.*

**Glenn McKee
Waterville**
writes, travels, & contemplates

Chevroned V-Turns & Longcove Linguistics

Keen, cantankerous geese composing concrete poetry in space & pretending to be high-flying hawk missiles. How to decipher your frenzied patterns, your ambiguous imagery, your chevroned V-turns & Longcove linguistics. First you shift like high-speed swimmers touching cold blue stone, then you flaunt inverted jackknives & smooth plaited halftwists. Irrascible, erratic geese, sunbathing incognito with your Escher-like impersonations & your swashbuckling variations on a U.S. Air Force theme.

**E. Ward Herlands
Stamford, CT**
*is a poet-printmaker
who summered in Oxford, Maine*

Letter Home

After Hoboken, where the Empire
State building punctures the clouds
like a syringe, I give in to being carried
down steps, through turnstiles, gates,
revolving doors until the city is in my blood
while I rock from darkness
to darkness, my eyes glazed.
I keep track of the numbers
on the tile, my shallow breath,
the third rail where someone could
push me for the hell of it,
my head tumbling out of the roar
like a bowling ball balancing
on a scream of steel.

When I come out of it on 181st St.
into the dull November light,
the wind is shuffling papers, cups, scraps—
and refuse of life, liberty,
and the pursuit of happiness—
and piles of rags and blankets move
between the garbage bags and a couch
where a man and woman ate, slept,

and burnt the insides out.
The news is flying at my feet,
and puddles from yesterday's rain quiver
beneath a slick of grime that has turned
the colors of a rainbow. Above me,
on either side, the tenements rise—
empty rooms, broken glass, dangling wires,
and doors barricaded by boards nailed fast
below the words "THOU SHALT LOVE
THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF"
chiseled in the stone.

Still, given all this, I am not so far
gone I can't be amazed by roses growing
on a sill in Washington Heights. I stopped short,
loosened the grip on my bag, and felt
the petals of my heart unfold and shiver in their cage.
I thought, this must be revolution, and I should sit here
on the stoop and wait for them to come out from behind
the yellow curtains, the iron grate, the towels stuffed
against the draft. They know what else can flower
from sun and rain and dirt
and how to cultivate defiance.

Roberta Chester

Bar Harbor

is an educational consultant
for The Holocaust & Human Rights Center

Review

Once Upon a Time On the Banks/

Cathie Pelletier

Viking, 1989

Cathie Pelletier, in 1986, dazzled aficionados of the novel with the publication of her brilliantly comedic *The Funeral Makers*. The enthusiastic response all over the country quickly established her in the first rank of America's new generation of writers. Combining, as great novels do, a magical mix of humor and pathos, it creates a sense of place and character so real that one somehow assumes the McKinnons, the Giffords, and Mattagash always were there, latent in our unconscious minds, waiting for Pelletier to bring it all to life.

To eager readers of that first novel, this year's news is good. *Once Upon a Time On the Banks* is a handsome book that continues the saga of Giffords and McKinnons of Mattagash. Once more the remnants of the proud McKinnon clan close ranks to celebrate, not the funeral of spinster matriarch Marge, but the marriage of Amy Joy McKinnon to Jean Claude Cloutier from Watertown, thirty miles downriver.

In *The Funeral Makers* nothing seemed more overwhelmingly terrifying to Sicily (McKinnon) Lawler than the marriage of her pubescent daughter Amy Joy to Chester Lee Gifford. Chester Lee's death in the Packard stolen from Amy Joy's Uncle Marvin averts the trauma and, ten years later in *Once*, sets the stage for the wedding of Amy Joy to a Frenchman from Watertown.

Now Sicily takes to her bed with a vengeance and with all her internal organs in a state of near collapse. Once again Marvin and Pearl Ivy, their now grown children and grandchildren and trailed by Marvin, Jr.'s buxom mistress Monique, trek north for the nuptials. Once again the Giffords and the rest of Mattagash prepare for a spectacle that will echo down the years (nothing is ever forgotten in Mattagash).

Playing, as they did in the first novel, counterpoint to the McKinnon story are the wonderful, wacky, high jinks of the Giffords, this time Vinal and Pike, their wives Vera and Goldie, and their hordes of children.

Whether stealing hubcaps, high-jacking pizza, or cheating welfare authorities the drunken, malicious Gifford brothers, Vinal and Pike, in their shark-finned Plymouth, generate the tremendous comedic energy of the novel as they continue their thieving relationship with the McKinnons and anyone else that opportunity provides. The war of the Christmas tree lights is the Gifford event that parallels the impending wedding of Amy Joy and Jean Claude. The assault on the funeral cortege at the conclusion of the novel is a fitting convergence of the Gifford/McKinnon double plot.

In the end the wonderful texture of life lived in Mattagash is still compounded of wishes and dreams, fears and nightmares, leavened with joy and with tragedy

played out against forest and river in a setting as magical as the forest of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Again, as in *The Funeral Makers* the love affair between Amy Joy and her would-be husband (Jean Claude playing for Chester Lee) is at the comedic center of the novel. Again the hoped-for celebration of marriage, life, future becomes instead a dirge of regret and loss, with Amy Joy still unwed and pushing spinsterhood.

At the end of the novel Amy Joy goes to talk to her Aunt Pearl about the old settlers and the courage and endurance that brought them in the 1830's "to stake their claims in the piney undergrowth . . . 'But, by the God, they were tough, and so are we!' Aunt Pearl raised her cup of tea to Amy Joy's . . ." And so they are, tough enough to withstand the awful burden of collapsed dreams. Tough enough to keep on living, creating new dreams, and coming to terms with whatever happens in the life of the town on the banks of the Mattagash River.

Pelletier's second novel is wonderfully entertaining. It makes us happy and sad, wistful and momentarily wise. It is the tale of all of humanity that lives on the banks. You'll love it.

Roland Burns

Ft. Kent

teaches at UMFK

Excerpt:

Sicily heard it again, a swell of music and laughter rolling along the acoustical banks of the Mattagash, cascading, crescendoing, breaking like waves. She was not surprised to hear this. She knew that, years ago, old-timers could shout to each other from a separation of two miles and be heard. She knew that the old work-horses, trudging along in their belled harnesses, rang out like tambourines from among the gangly pines and cedars. There were all kinds of communications going on back then, before the telephone, before automobiles sprouted like weeds in everyone's dooryard, before televisions, transistor radios, and other such nonsense. Had it not been for an electric knife—yes, truly, Sicily was almost ashamed to admit it, but had it not been for a knife that plugged into the wall—Winnie Craft would still have the meaty part of her right index finger, the fleshy part that pushes against a pen or pencil to help execute writing. Winnie Craft had not sent out a single Christmas card since her son bought her that god-awful contraption up from Connecticut two years ago, but Amy Joy had remarked often enough that this injury did not stop Winnie from picking her nose.

Cathy Pelletier

Review

Voiceprints/David Walker

Coyote Love Press, 294 Spring St., Portland 04102, 1989, \$9.95

David Walker's new collection of poems, *Voiceprints*, is available at long last. Even the publisher, George Benington, of Coyote Love Books, Portland, alludes to the fact that it took awhile, in ending his colophon with the Latin motto *festina lente*, make haste slowly. But that's really the only way to get to such a beautiful place.

The look and feel of the book make such a powerful first impression that perhaps it's o.k. to speak of them first. The book is oversize, 7 x 11 inches, 48 pages, with a glossy, laminated, wraparound cover illustrated with an oscilloscope reading of the poet pronouncing the letters of the title. The feeling of that energy, sound made visible, continues throughout the volume. Just flipping through, one is struck by the feeling of spaciousness—large, elegant type, and plenty of white space, like the snowfields that appear in so many of the poems.

Then there are the etchings, five of them, all full-page portraits, by Thomas Cornell. The first, I guess, is Walker, though I'm not sure someone who didn't know him could use it to finger him in a police line-up. Maybe that's good. The others are of Chekhov, Kafka, Charles Ives, and a fox. Here I have to fault the book slightly, because although the press release gave biographical information on Thomas Cornell, the book itself does not contain it. He is "Dean of the Art Department of Bowdoin College, and is best known for his illustrations for the Gehenna Press edition of *The Defense of Gracchus Babeuf*."

A letterpress edition of *Voiceprints*, handprinted on English handmade paper, and containing original prints of the etchings, is also available. If I had my choice of etchings, I'd take the Kafka and the Charles Ives: the Kafka because it has, with his first fiancé Felice Bauer as Earth-mother in the background, ready to take all, and a tormented Kafka in the foreground, able to give nothing, all the suggestive richness of an image from a psychiatrist's Thematic Apperception Test. And the Ives for the subtle play of light, dappled as it passes through a grape arbor to fall on the composer's bald dome, white beard, and suitably whimsical smile.

The poems are divided into two sections of homages to various writers and artists—those alluded to in the etchings, and others as varied as Mandelstam, Emerson, and René Char, in the first section (plus painters, Bruegel and Ghirlandaio), and then working up through the more recent past with figures like Robert Lowell and James Wright, up to living, working contemporaries and friends, with even a glimpse at the future, in a poem "For my night class in writing."

As the list of names accumulates, I sense a murmur in the *vox populi* that sounds like "academic." Better answer it frankly: Yes, the book does have footnotes, the *sine qua non* of academe, to identify some of the figures and sources used—Kafka's *Letters*, or Ives' *Essays Before a Sonata*. Walker explains that the notes are meant as "instigations," and why not accept them as that, as guides to voices the writer has found rich and inspiring. "To discover what it is that makes every human voice unique" is the task set by the book's epigraph, and the poems incorporate actual phrases, as well as "imitations," to use Lowell's term, to affect that discovery. The results are anything but dry (here, for example, is the last stanza of the poem for René Char, a poet and a leader of the French Resistance, the Underground, in WW II):

I'm going to oil
my rifle before I feed myself, then eat
everything here. For if the Holy Ghost
is done to a turn, don't deny Him—He might
fly away with your luck. And if these thoughts
should dare turn beautiful, I can use them
for targets. Toilet paper. To light my pipe.

The range of pleasures in the book is great, as is the variety of forms, seeking appropriateness to subject, as in a freeish sonnet for Robert Lowell, or an open-form poem for Ives, in four sections which Walker's note says "follow roughly the movements and moods of Ives' monumental *Concord Sonata*." Here's a sample, to show the energy in the line-breaks, as well as in the tone:

got to get it
all right:
the 30 years ago band
cutting a jagged
brass scar across
a summer morning,
dust
in the road, watering
the petunias, moma
baking corn-bread
(You, Charles,
get some on the azaleas!)

Walker has definitely gotten some on the azaleas here (long may they bloom), and although I don't claim to love every poem, and I have some serious questions, like where are the women, the collection is a pleasure to read and reread, and I accept the words of the dedicatory poem, "a good piece of work is lucky to find."

Sylvester Pollet
E. Holden
teaches & edits at UMO

Short Skirts/Taffy Field

Dog Ear Press, 127 pp., \$9.95, 1989

Taffy Field's short story collection reminds us of the clothes we find in our closets—some things are perfectly smashing, others we put on and look at in the mirror and mutter, "Did I buy *this*?" The first, "Scam," (originally published in the pages of *Kennebec* a year ago) is a good example of Field's talent, and of how the reader should approach her work, illustrating in not-quite-two-pages how much can be deduced from how little, and offering a mini-lesson in literary analysis. It also serves as a warning: the reader must pay attention, or risk missing nuances that often are the whole point.

Some of the book's best: "In the Spirt," a Christmas story with a different approach; "Cyles"—funny, poignant, and with a nice twist at the end; the hysterical (and inspired!) "Sitzmarks"; "The Magic Kingdom," a commentary on the growing plasticity of our society; "Nobody Home" brilliantly illustrates the vapidity of lives that center around china, linens and highly polished furniture; "Flights" chronicles some of the more popular fantasies of office life; "Marketing,"—something everyone wants to do (and should do at least once); and the wonderful "Listen, Honey, Men Should Come With Directions"—life the way it really is. Although not a favorite piece, "Bosom Buddies" deserves notice because it says something important about the arbitrary nature of acceptance and the nature of prejudice.

Realism and redundancy are issues. People from afar suddenly pop up unexpectedly, sometimes after long periods of time, and although a perfectly legitimate literary device, its repetition becomes untenable. Field should work towards producing stories of real substance and resist the temptation to write the merely mundane. "Hang-ups," "Poco Tranquilo," "Bienvenue," "Hot Spots" and the unfortunate "Won't Anyone Say Phooey?" are examples. She should also resist the urge to be clever. "Sunday Morning" and "I Tried" have such affected structures that they irritate rather than challenge, and the inclusion of an index at the back of the book (yes, Virginia, an Index!) is artificial.

Field, a good writer, sells herself short by concentrating on quantity rather than quality. The advantage, to the author, is the ability to publish stories that likely would never be published on their own; unfortunately, the writer's advantage becomes the reader's frustration. Inferior stories don't sneak by: We Know. The stories are so short and the characters so sketchy that it is often difficult to make the transition from one to another; we never quite figure out who is who. Minimalism as a form has many strengths, but a collection of 31 pieces by the same author weakens rather than strengthens. Field's fiction would be best showcased in an anthology, where it would stand out from the work of other writers. As is, it is essentially the proverbial "mixed bag." No question that Field is talented. Sometimes too flip, on the whole, *Short Skirts* is pleasant and best read one piece at a time for maximum impact.

Janet C. Beaulieu
Bangor
reviews for BDN

Mountain Dance/Denis Ledoux

Winner, 1989 MSCAH Fiction Chapbook Competition
Available in August through MWPA

To be sure that ethnicity is alive and well is never the concern of many, but among those who are concerned, it is a quiet driving force that hears and speaks. Those who ask, "Where is Franco-America?" may be surprised to find it, metaphorically, in the spirit and work of remaining French Canadian descendents who were born in the States, taught in small pseudo-French communities built around the mills and riverbanks where their parents worked. Educated by nuns in parochial schools, often speaking one language at home while learning a new one for public use, those who lived the experience have a communal feeling. These remnant thirty-to-forty-somethings are people caught in the middle, between no place and some place.

Denis Ledoux returns with a new collection of stories. This compilation extends his first, *What Became of Them and Other Stories from Franco America* (Soliel Press, Lisbon Falls, 1988). Of the four stories, two focus again on David, in his youth in a story called "Big Brother," and as an adult in "The Evening Leandre Came."

Ledoux intermingles the heritage with landscape; the sense of loss of physical place causes malaise in the central characters of each story. In "Episode with Alice," Daniel is the live-in lover of a successful auction house assistant. While residing in a large city unfamiliar to him, he becomes disenchanted with trying to find a job, which is compounded by the power of Alice's achievements. He spends a night alone on the beach, with nature, to try to find himself. Daniel embodies the "rootless" Franco-American male, without land, without purpose. The common chord of displacement, oddly, binds the stories of this collection. In each narrative the male is dealt his lot: insecurity, trying to truly belong, weakness, being between two cultures, two lands, competing with the better-assimilated female, who may or may not be Franco-American. Manhood is questioned when it must stand for strength; womanhood is a force undaunted.

As suggested in the title, mountains are described in each story; in "Leandre" David is living in a run-down schoolhouse in the Quebec Appalachians where "firs, mountains encircle us." Ledoux's character adds, "I like these mountains, but sometimes I wonder if it's because I don't know any better." In the title story, Alfred takes his meddling wife on a terror ride down a steep mountain road. Tired of her nagging, Alfred must dominate through action instead of communication. Ledoux understands weakened males, but also searches the depths of emasculation brought on by the contrasting security—false or not—of others.

Is the Franco-American weakened by lack of nationalistic identity? Is he schizophrenic? Ledoux searches his soul, surrounded by his own culture and yet estranged from it. This collection is enthralling, especially the rueful tone in which success is described. *Mountain Dance* is bound to amuse with its comedy, and perplex with its poignancy. Its spirit runs in the ethnic veins of many small communities in America, and is heard in the inquietude of humanity.

Lenore M. Rheume
Lisbon Center
is a student at UMA



Excerpt: From "Big Brother," in MOUNTAIN DANCE

Jules was sleeping next to Bernard. From the livingroom, my parents' words wafted in soft and lovely, better than the music they listened to on the radio. I wanted to be comforted by their words and not hear the rumble of fear in my head.

New corduroy pants and a plaid shirt Maman had sewn lay at the foot of the bed. New shoes we had bought in Lewiston at Pepere's cousin's store were on the floor next to my pichous. But I did not feel good about the next day.

I sat up on my elbow. Slivers of light came into the dark room from the livingroom to which the door had been kept ajar. I looked toward Bernard but I could not see him.

I said, "You didn't know English when you went to school, did you, Bernard?"

At first he did not answer, but when I whispered insistently "Bernard!" he said, "They hit you if you speak French. You better learn quick or else not say anything!"

Clearly, in the dark shadows of the room, I could picture a nun, dressed in black, raising her hand to strike me. I shouted for my parents, and I cried until the door swung open and light flooded into the room bringing with it Maman who sat on my bed. I stopped crying as loudly as I had and I merely sobbed and she stroked my hair.

"Qu'est qu'il ya?" she asked.

I wanted her to hold me and rock me just as she had rocked Paulette and I sat up and put my head against her breasts.

The tears ran into my mouth and I licked them off my cheeks. Gasping, I told her about the teachers and how I was afraid of being slapped around.

She moaned, "Oh, non, the nuns are all French like we are. They'll speak French whenever you want them to."

"They will?" I said, wanting to believe her.

"Yes, and you will learn to speak with all kinds of children. You'll learn to understand your friend Peter. You'll like school, you'll see."

Denis Ledoux
Lisbon Falls

Review

Drinking from a Tin Cup/Katy Perry

Steele Publishing Co., Gardiner, ME 04345, 1989, \$9.95

(Foreword to book)

Katy Perry is not a typical grandmother from Hallowell. In recent years, she has run a local craft store, provided newspaper commentary on life in Kennebec County, run for the state legislature, even traveled to the Central American nation of Belize to work in the Peace Corp.

These diverse experiences have shaped a unique perspective on the world closest to her heart—country life in Maine.

Her collection of short essays is a wonderful tribute to the simple life. The stories capture the unique flavor of the people, the lifestyles, the towns, the land, and the culture of our state.

This book is filled with authentic images of growing up, growing older, family, community, and the pleasures of life outdoors and in the home. Everyday experiences become rituals filled with beauty and magic and the wonder of human relationships.

The warmth and nostalgia that flow through these recollections and descriptions reflect Katy's passion for her neighbors and her home state. It was a real pleasure to pick this book up and immerse myself in the special world that is rural Maine.

I know that readers—young and old alike—will find that these stories strike a special chord with their own lives. Clearly, the characters speak to our experiences as much as they do their own.

For years, Maine has prided itself on a rich heritage of quality writers. Katy Perry continues that fine tradition.

Senator William S. Cohen
Washington, D.C.

The Eloquent Edge: 15 Maine Women Writers

ed. Kathleen Lignell & Margery Wilson
Acadia Press, Bar Harbor, 1989, \$21.95

If you were a fly on the wall, and into a room came fifteen people who had three things in common—that they lived in Maine, were the same sex, and were writers—what would you expect to hear in the way of conversation? That's a problem with this anthology, and perhaps the only problem. This is a rich, varied and engaging collection—once the editors and writers work their way through the usual banalities about life in Maine, gender, and—most irritating—Being Writers. What good writers do best is, simply, "write"; what both good and bad writers usually do worst is talk *about* writing and Being Writers. This otherwise excellent volume has its fair share of pomposity, pretension, pious prose about the creative properties inherent in a certain kind of protoplasm, and Jungian blather about images rising out of the unconscious. There's some downright romantic silliness about "inspiration" too, the Muse, the White Goddess of Robert Graves and so on. The inviting and attractive format probably encouraged the excess: each writer is shown in photo, and described in a brief bio, each writes a short personal essay; and then gets down to the real business—some poems or a fiction.

Here is where the book sparkles. The poets' (8 of 15) verse crackles, as in Heather McHugh's "if you're/not dying, you are not alive," or Lee Sharkey's query, "What is the passage back?" or Deborah DeNicola's related musing about "the nomadic undertow/of a silver which lures me to stray." Or even the editors' own crisp clause: "we keep leaving home to . . . come home." Two of the remaining seven are essayists outright, one of whom, Alice Bloom, demonstrates once again that her excellent expository prose is among the best in America (never mind Maine). The other, Margery Wilson, has the humorous easy familiarity of her public radio persona. The five fictions are also fine, and especially so when considering some are excerpts from longer work and all must fit in the constraints of shared space of 170 pages. They are all told from the third-person point-of-view, which offers the reader some distance and a nice change from the intriguing but insistent "I" of the poets.

And there's more good news. The book has scope. If the reader lives anywhere on the modest earth south of the Kittery Bridge, it comes as a relief to find the settings scattered all over America, indeed the world, thus avoiding cloying parochialism that sometimes plagues gatherings of writers north of the same bridge as well as books with "Maine" in the title. True, one contributor has the nerve to write, and the editors the nerve to agree that "she speaks for all of us," that "The rest of the world can often go hang. So it is in Maine; so it is with art." This is parochial, what happens when otherwise admirable regionalism feeds too long on itself and sours; it is also anti-intellectual, see-no-evil snobbery, and to the rest of us actually living our lives somewhere in the rest of that world, offensive. The strength of this book is that, despite its title invoking the coastline and the cover photo depicting same, the selections point more often than not to other, more varied, landscapes, and the sensibilities behind the syntax to a kind of Mercator of minds. The editors admit that when they assembled their contributors, they had to scrap their original (and tiresome) native versus non-native format—all had been born elsewhere, "from away," in the condescending local phrase. The editors' surprise is the reader's blessing. Where else in the continental U.S., except perhaps Texas, would this be something to have to admit? There is decidedly not a book of bellicose chauvinism about either place or gender. This is a wonderful collection, and it deepens us. Once the writers settle down to writing, the "Edge" is more psychological than geographic, and the voices almost consistently "Eloquent."

Theresa Blanchet
San Francisco, CA
edits the feminist quarterly, *Island Voices*

Maine Speaks: An Anthology of Maine Literature

MWPA with Maine Council For English Language Arts, \$17.95, 1989

The beautiful cover catches every eye. The deep colors of Marsden Hartley's famous painting of Mount Katahdin serve as a glamorous opening. Next, the size and the low price, almost 500 pages for 20 dollars! And then, as a new reader glances through the paper-bound comes a surprise at the appealing page layout, good readable type and plenty of space. Imagine all this in a book designed by teachers to be used in class.

I was lucky to get an early order, hot off the press, for my summer course on Maine writers. To be safe, I had reordered the early paperback *Anthology of Maine Literature*, edited by Robert Lecker and Kathleen R. Brown, published by UMO in 1982. So I had a chance to get reader reactions to the two books. *Maine Speaks* looks like what it is—a book for the 1990s—and it makes the other textbook look like something from the 1890s. For example, the technology behind *Maine Speaks* results in a secure binding; the older text had loose pages by the time of the first exam.

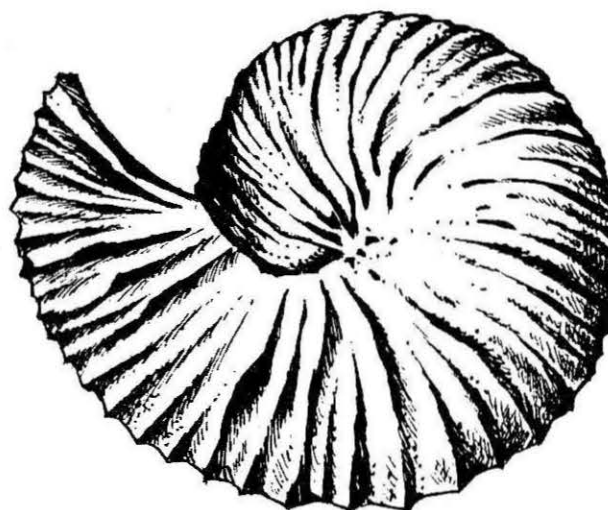
And the contents! The older book stopped with writings around 1970. *Maine Speaks* has Carolyn Chute and a little-known story by Stephen King, a good story by Sandy Phippen and samples of Leo Connellan's poems, also stories by and about Franco-American workers and a selection of Indian cultures.

Students enjoy the autobiographical comments by the authors (with a couple of omissions). A good index helps (again with a couple of omissions), and the Acknowledgements supply valuable information.

Personally, I was disappointed that *Maine Speaks* left out Kenneth Roberts; my students liked the selection from *Arundel* in the other anthology. And both collections have omitted Gladys Hasty Carroll and slighted Holman Day's poetry. *Maine Speaks* could follow up the beautiful cover with some illustrations beyond those that introduce each section, possibly pictures of the authors, but the price would probably rise dangerously. I was especially pleased that both anthologies included Ted Holmes, retired Orono professor who taught both Stephen King and Sandy Phippen.

In general, *Maine Speaks* avoided the academic formats—even leaving out the standard exercises and disheartening questions. The book looks like a great Christmas or birthday gift for any friend or relative. And imagine, Jeff Fischer did it with a committee, a committee of teachers and artists. Let's have more projects from Maine Writers and Publishers, maybe one on Maine history or on Maine geography or Maine art.

John Jaques
So. Portland
teaches at USM



Drawing by Phil Paratore

UMA's 25th Anniversary

Pumping Iron

(1)

At the body building gym
where the men go
to build up their muscles
there is even a machine
just for working out the heart.

And in this exercise,
the heart, inevitably,
will grow harder,
more inured to its surroundings,

the hollow pump of the body
beating the dark song
of the evening,
steady and obdurate,
thump-thump

(2)

How many nights will it take
those like us to learn
that the heart is an imperialist,
that we can hear our hearts
sending out messages
to the brain, telling us
what we've slowly learned:

that the heart knows everything,
and, like love, is hard,
because love is first of all
a dynamo whose motion generates
its own power,

that the great conduit
which runs from heart to pelvis
makes us shameless
bold
expansive
makes us touch one another,

shuddering in that little violence
of contractions
with the iron will
of love.

Kathleen Lignell

Bucksport

works for Marine Advisory Program
& teaches & edits at UMO

Every Day Another Truth

Every day, another truth
gotta keep up gotta keep up
another truth at least, every day
sometimes more
gotta keep up gotta keep up
adding the new truths to the old ones
gotta keep up
don't replace the old truths
don't erase the old truths
don't throw the old truths away
just keep nailing the new truths up
every day
I am shingling the house of my truth

Pam Smith

Bath

is a painter & writer

Evenings of Desire

When father quit cigarettes
he'd smoke one cigar
each evening after dinner.
He'd push back his chair,
cross his tired legs and light
a thick cigar with dark pleasure.

We never knew the source of his happiness.
We just knew he was happy,
as we were happy sometimes at play.

So we danced
and giggled in his swirling smoke
and ran our fingers along
the back of his chair,
chanting nonsense,
choked red with laughter,
while mother scoured the pots and told us
more than once
to leave the poor man alone.

Michael Brosnan

Lincolnton

is Assoc. Ed. of Down East Magazine

To Josh & David: Turning Thirteen

If we were
ancient shamans
now would be
the moment
we'd choose
to give you
shelter
from the coming
storm

But we are merely
survivors
of suburbs and cities
not forest nor mountain:
Modern men
offering
silence and words
to guide you
going out
on your own

Yet we have known
for years now
that the silence
of our fathers
will not do

And, yes, we have also known
that words alone
cannot become
the sacred knives
you need
to bleed you free
of raging doubts

So listen up
to what we
have learned
from the silence
found
between words:

Open your fists
Watch women move
Scorn uniforms
Don't march
Dance

Doug Rawlings

Mt. Vernon

teaches at UMF

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing, Vol. XIV

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Some of these writers are so good it is astonishing to realize that we all use the same language. Typically, about half of the 78 poets, fiction writers, reviewers and reviewed have not appeared in these pages before. Neither writers nor editors are compensated financially. 5,000 copies are distributed free throughout the state as a service to the community in an effort to bring Maine writers to the attention of a wide public. We are supported by the UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT AUGUSTA, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Deadline for submissions for next year: 9/1-12/1/90. Send SASE. Copyright held by writers.

Editors: **Carol Kontos**
Terry Plunkett

Layout assistance, Clara Schröder



Charles Danforth will retire this spring after a distinguished career as a professor and Academic Dean at UMA. The editors wish to thank him for his unfailing support of KENNEBEC over many years, and for his encouragement of Maine musicians, artists and writers. All are in his debt. Maine is a more civilized place because of Charlie's efforts.