



Photo by Elliott Healy

KENNEBEC:

A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING

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Shoplifting Poetry

We're in the bookstore stealing poems,
 lifting the best lines—
 You cop one from Williams,
 I stick my hand into Pound.
 No one's looking. . .
 I throw you a line from *The Cantos*—
 It disappears in your ear like spaghetti.
 We stuff ourselves with Crane,
 Cummings, Lowell, Voznesensky—
 Neruda, Rilke, Yeats!
 The goods dissolve in our brain.
 Now we move from the shelves with caution.
 The cashier's watching. Can she tell?
 Fat! We've overeaten.
 You giggle. End-rhymes leak at your lips like bubbles.
 I clap a hand on your mouth.
 You are holding my ears
 as we fall out the door.

Martin Steingesser
 Portland

Poem for a Volunteer in a Nursing Home

*Sometimes,
 young woman,
 you unnerve us
 with your manners,
 blunt words and dress.
 So forgive us our laughter,
 for we still hope for a glimpse
 of your braless breasts
 at the top of your paisley blouse
 and do not wish to lose your smile,
 or your fingers on our hands.
 Our laughter is applause
 for your moments spent
 with old men.*

Douglas Scribner
 Augusta



Photo by Charles Lamson
Circa 1870

Work in Progress . . .

The first pages of a novel

It was exactly six-thirty in the morning when April Devoe got out of her car, grabbed onto her basket, and walked stiffly down the long furrow of potatoes to her section of field. The sun was not yet over the hill. Cold rays of light wove silver through the trees. A web of frost still glittered on the ground and clumps of soil bearded and brittle with frost smashed to powder under her feet. The tractor was already halfway down the first long row, the digger dragged behind it rattling, wheezing, clanking — churning out the nerve-jangling metallic tune that would creep up on her and fade again like a radio jingle a dozen or more times in the course of the day. Where the digger had already gone lay two filament rows of potatoes on the dirt's surface. Here and there were huge coiled masses of plant tops that had caught up in the digger and then been yanked out. Poisoned, withered tops clung hard to life and fiber, never dying enough to dry up and blow away or lie flat and be crushed. More tops than potatoes, everyone grumbled this year. Every year.

Jean was already bent over and picking up. When April came near she stood straight, said hello, and dumped a full basket into her barrel. The potatoes bounced in with a rush of hollow thumps. Before she had reached the end of Jean's section, April heard jealously the familiar, muffled sound of half-fullness as the contents of a second basket tumbled in. At the next section, the one before her own, Freddy and Bea were just getting started; no hellos came from them. Their section seemed too short to April. Already she was feeling the fury of this day's greed and suspicion. Her own section looked too long, the far marker just barely visible. Freddy had probably moved her stake again, always giving her more section when he and Bea were feeling lazy or else shortening it up, sneaking that stake around behind her back, when they were greedy for more barrels and the picking was good.

April pulled on the gloves that were still damp and crusty with mud from the day before, yawned, and let her eyes stretch for the last time this morning out to the distant end of field, so far and blended into high grass and scrub trees she could not tell if there were pickers there yet or not. And then she decided she'd finally better face it: the bend. The first bend of the day. She dragged a barrel over to the start of her section and tipped it on its side, then bent from the waist. It was done. She stifled a groan. Bullets of pain shot from her waist up and down the length of her body. Breakfast crouched in a cold heavy wad in her stomach. For an instant she was no longer blood and breath and bone and flesh but only pain, pure pain. Then, since there was never any question of giving in to this agony, she forced herself into the rhythm of the day's work: first, her body arched as gracefully as a cat's over the tipped barrel, she flung potatoes into it with two hands at once. Swiveling the barrel around as far as she could and flinging with wrist-flicks that astounded even the oldest and hardest of pickers, she got that barrel half-filled from four rows across before she even tipped it upright. Then, faster than the devil, they all said, with those wrists of hers on magic hinges, she threw potatoes into her basket like some crazy juggler, basket

braced between her ankles, spuds flying into it from earth like rockets launched into space. Her basket full in seconds, she straightened up, ran to the barrel, and dumped in the potatoes. The second basket, filled even faster, finished off the barrel. She ticketed it with her number from a pile of tickets in her pocket and dragged over the next barrel. And then the next. One right after another so that even on the worst days with the smallest potatoes or rain muck or machinery breakdowns, she was barrels ahead of everyone else, ahead even of Charlie who at the age of sixty-eight could not bend his back because the emphysema made him choke but could pick on his knees better than almost everyone else could nick on their feet. April knew if she let her knees touch ground even once she'd be finished. They would draw frost like two wicks, then ache sharply, stiffen, and grow numb. With all the time she would need to unkink them, she'd lose twenty barrels a day for sure.

She moved down her first set of rows like fire through dry brush. The sight of her line of barrels set off within her a small warmth of consolation that helped her maintain the frenzied momentum into the next row. She took a grudging pride in her work. Doing it well, doing it best, was what made it bearable. "Quite a worker, that April, quite a worker," people had always said, and always said twice as if unable to underscore the fact in any other way, even when she was a kid. Quite a worker and quite a looker, is what some were more likely to say now. Her features were large and lush and well-proportioned. Her long thick hair, red as fall maples, was pinned into a knot and tucked under a bandana when she worked. Her skin shone gold with freckles. She was tall, lean and solid with muscle. Carrying three children had not wrecked her shape.

The morning began to warm. The frost vanished, earth dried pale. The trucks hummed and groaned behind her. One of them crept along the finished rows, picking up the filled barrels. From the back of the truck, Ernie the year-round hired man took the huge metal ring that was attached to the winch and threw it with a clunk over the rim of a barrel. "Aaa-yup!" George's baritone floated out smooth as ice as the barrel was hoisted up off the ground with a screech of metal. When it reached the level of the flatbed, Ernie disconnected the rim and removed the picker's ticket, while George swiveled the barrel into place with massive arms. Slowly the truck made its way down the row. Then, full, it turned back to the potato house to dump its load, passing the second truck as it went down the field with empty barrels. Two men on this truck threw off the empties, spacing them evenly along the length of the field so that the echoing thud-plunk of each barrel hitting ground became a new line of the field's rhythm and melody. Thud-plunk, thud-plunk, thud-plunk, they were timed, like pulse-beats, with the truck's one uncanny skill, to fall regularly, precisely, one here, one there, thud-plunk, thud-plunk, until there were no more left, no matter what the difference was between the pickers' speeds and needs. April's neighbor on the far side, Edna, excruciatingly slow of body and mind, could barely manage a strip of field twenty feet long, yet each time the truck went by she got a few barrels,

until the whole depth and breadth of her section, by the middle of day, would be covered with empty barrels lying on their sides, while April or Jean and just about anyone else would be a dozen rows ahead and crying for barrels; would be pacing back and forth with nothing to do, waiting, losing money; would be screaming at the fellows on the truck, "Give us more, you jerks! Can't you see?" And the fellows, as if deaf and blind or somehow convinced they were serving the interest of a higher, purer cause, would give them each two or three barrels, just like Edna, for an eight-barrel section.

"Edna, could I have one of your barrels here?" April asked after lunch, smiling and trying to be friendly.

"Uh-uh," Edna answered, her face stony and grim. "Nope. Not from me. I need it."

"Edna, you won't possibly be needing all those barrels before the truck comes back again."

"I will, too."

"Edna," April said more sternly, with no smile left, "I've got to have more barrels. You've got more than any of the rest of us."

Edna wrinkled up her nose and held onto April with a long, hostile stare. Finally she said, "Take one from back there," and pointed far behind her to the very first row. "But just one."

"Oh for Christ sake," April yelled, stomping away. "I'm taking two."

Each day there was at least one battle. She was growing to hate Edna. She could no longer feel sorry for the woman as she once had. With her children April was very strict and forbade them to mock or belittle the kids in school who were retarded and slow. She was ashamed of her venomous feelings toward Edna. But as she dragged up the hard-won barrels from so far away, losing more precious minutes, she grimaced derisively at the back of the dumpy, lethargic figure picking gingerly at each potato, one by one. Edna's very looks made April angry.

Anger it was that kept her going. Except for the moments now and then when the rhythm of her work maintained itself automatically, when there were no long waits or jumbles of tops to interfere and her motions simply followed one another without a thought, it was rage, not skill or even doggedness that propelled her. Anger at Edna. Anger at the voice of Edna's sister Annabel, a shrill whine that snagged on phlegm and snot as it drifted from the section beyond Edna's, wrangling with a husband's grunts. She was angry at this irrevocable order of pickers down the field, created on the very first morning by the sequence in which they arrived; they were stuck with each other all season so that Nelson the farmer could pace out and mark off their sections ahead of them as he started to dig each new field.

She got angry at the potatoes when they were so small and sparse she had to drag her basket halfway down the section just to fill it once, or when they were so diseased and rotten that her thumbs burst through them and the black, oozing gunk would penetrate her gloves. She fumed at the truck crews when they were so stingy and perverse with barrels, as if they delighted in perpetuating a nagging fear of scarcity and deprivation across the field. She seethed silently at Nelson when he slowed the tractor to talk or to tinker with the digger, and they all had to stand by idly, waiting for him to dig the next row. They were paid by the barrel, yet it seemed rigged so she could never get ahead. And she was angry at the pay that had gone up only once in the six years she had picked.

She grew enraged when by late on a morning like this one had been, the sun became so fierce that sweat poured from her in rivers. She had taken off her sweatshirt by eight, cold as the ground still was, then her sweater by nine, and the flannel shirt by ten. Now she was in her T shirt. The men on the trucks liked to watch her strip and that made her livid, too. She got angry when the wind kicked up hard and the dry grit that was supposed to be soil got blown into her face. This afternoon the wind did not die down. Her eyes stung and blurred and she couldn't keep her speed. Nelson kept digging new rows and she got angrier. How did he expect them to pick? The grit coated her throat and rasped in her lungs. Finally, the tractor stopped near the road. Pausing, relieved, April squinted to watch as Nelson got off the tractor and walked across the next field toward the potato house. He went in. She bent to finish off her row, figuring it was the last. Five minutes later she saw Nelson come out of the potato house, walk back across the field, mount the tractor, put the goggles on over his eyes, start up the machinery, and begin digging the next row.

"Son of a bitch," April said to Freddy as they picked up the potatoes on each side of the stake. "It's nice that his eyes won't get dirt in them."

"Well what do you expect?" Freddy chuckled.

"What's he want you and me to do about it?"

"Big deal, a little dirt," said Bea. "It won't kill you."

She got angry at Bea and Freddy. All the time she was angry at everybody and that was what kept her going so crazy-fast. Not just that she was young and strong and desperate for money; what made her not only good but the very best on the field was the rage, the constant fury.

Lucy Honig
Bar Harbor

Twice in Millinocket

*All day we have been steeped in heavy clouds
like a room full of vapor
where someone has just boiled water for tea.
We are here for disparate reasons.
On the way home I look behind
and for the first time see Katahdin
rising over my shoulder.
Whatever becomes of us, your body
will remind me of that mountain—abrupt,
huge in its implications. Months later
I pass the Great Northern paper mill alone:
white, opaque, thick massive smoke
and the viscous flow of workers
emerging with empty faces off their shift.
I had been waiting years
for you to enter my life, to labor
in each other's arms and the factory windows
high and frosted keeping us apart.
I put my hand between your thighs, quiet,
deliberate, remembering patches of snow.
Now that trail rises in my mind
where we walk through elevations
that imply new birds, new music
sung with a voice I recover from a dream.
The landscape is pure invention
plucked and fingered like the strings
of an ancient instrument. We're walking
in a world without memory.
There are no slashed trees for guides.
Descended, we make up a story for the opera
on the radio, the soprano a woman
who walks in her sleep.
The plot comes clear. The tenor suffers
all his life for old songs,
and their bodies so alike
have different voices.
There is no landscape, no libretto
that will tell us we are not alone
in the universe, even in sleep.
The details outside ourselves, this factory
huddling under Katahdin
and spewing out people like smoke,
unfamiliar, remote; the trail
cuts across the mountain like an artery
and assumes our names.*

Kathleen Lignell
Stockton Springs

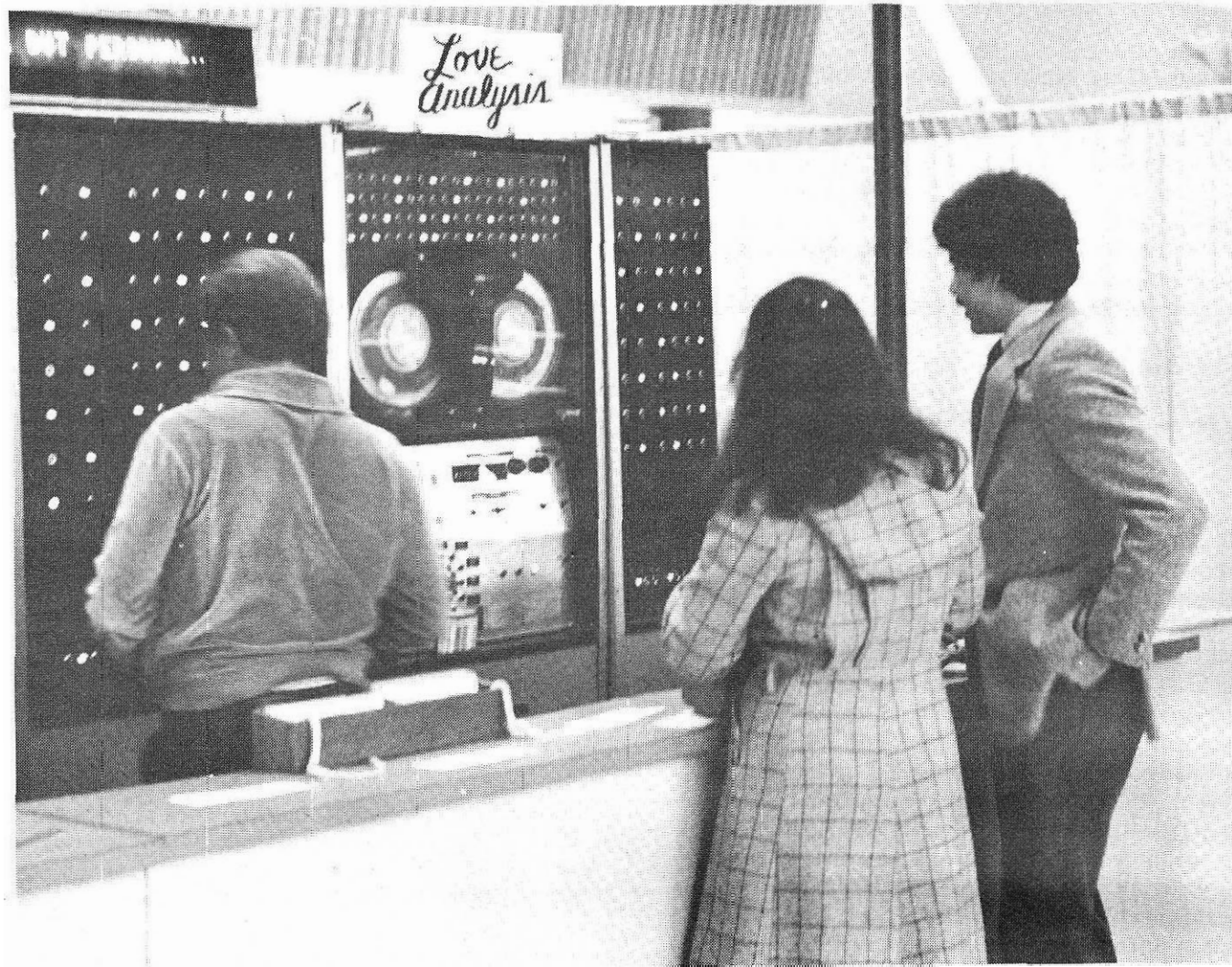


Photo by Elliott Healy

On my lover having left me one month before my thirtieth birthday

All through the summer the seduction sustained me. I plotted, he succumbed, or perhaps it was the other way round. I remember the night on the sofa, hot and sweaty from riding the horses, I was. We talked as always, and then like punctuation to our conversation his hand rubbed my foot. I knew it was done.

We managed long nights of love. He drove home in the cool mists of midnight and dawn. We worried what our neighbors would say, and our children. "You are amazing, dear friend, dear lover," he said. I felt proud, laughed and gasped for more.

But now that the wind has come to howl and the stoves are fired to chase the descended cold, he's gone. Not forever, you understand. An old friend, a neighbor, we'll be thrown together, often innocent as roses, by our families or other friends. There will be picnics, workdays, dinners, business, but no long-tongued kisses at the door of morning.

Now my mouth is not filled with sweetness, but is dry and bitter as a mouthful of crumbled leaves. I should have known when he gave me my birthday gift too soon. Like trying to fit one more week of summer before the fall, he dug my new garden before he said good-bye. All that Indian summer day he worked, bare-backed while I, from the safety of the hammock, imagined trysts. He was silent.

No amount of grace would silence me when he did not come. I had to ask, to know. I brushed my hair and wore my red hat to make myself look happy and brave; I trudged up to his studio. "Where've you been? What's happened? Is it that bad?"

He answered gently, fondly, perhaps wisely. "It's pretty bad. I can't come anymore." Smiling, but not looking at me all the same. The little fold of skin beneath his eye twitched madly. I shrugged and walked as coolly as I could out his door, down his steps.

The bathroom mirror and I are having a dialogue. I'm witty, cutting; by turns tender, pleading, fierce. Then I notice all my words accented by three lines across my forehead. I end the conversation abruptly. Yet each time I pass the flat silvery surface of my familiar, I'm caught for an instant by my own eyes unable to resist the reflection. I see myself walking, in flight, patting back a loose hair, straightening my shoulders, and sometimes looking frightened as a child.

I listen to the prattle of my son. No sympathy there for my sadness. We take long walks in the wind and golden light. He pulls and tugs and dances. He teases the dog. I snap. He cries. It is the only time I feel ashamed.

I sit knitting, intent as a cat. I listen to mournful records I have not played since I was twenty-one. Songs of young women, betrayed, abandoned, disappointed; all afraid for their beauty, for their lives. After so many laments I try to block out the words, and see only the soft brown wool taking shape beneath the steel pins in my hands. If anyone saw me now I'd look just as they would have us women be. Doing handiwork by the fire.

Sometimes I feel as ignorant as my son of the truth of future time. How long a time can "alone" be? A month from now? A year? A hundred years of solitude or joy?

I find myself alone, not so young, living in the country, unemployed. I recognize the possibilities of fresh, romantic love are but few. So, I find myself comparing. I hold up my everyday talk to what I might say to him at midnight. I measure feeling simply happy against feeling a strong hand feel the notches of my spine. Peace next to fever, affections against obsession. I am overwhelmed. A tight fire burns when I try to settle myself to be content with the memories of this love.

J. Brown
Portland

The Drums of Heaven

Mrs. Reed stood at her kitchen window and looked out over the back fields to where the stone wall held back the dark forest. The gently sloping terrain glowed in the morning sunlight. She smiled as she surveyed her good land.

"God is good to me," she said to herself.

She studied the fields as though she were memorizing them; itemizing each section as to contents. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she again glimpsed the black shape. But when she directed her eyes to where it was, it was gone. The smile suddenly flickered from her face, but reappeared when she saw nothing concrete.

It was a glorious morning. Her daughter, Ruth, had given birth a few days before. The thought of this miracle of life brought her smile back in full force and she began to hum as she wiped down the kitchen table. The sun poured into the window and set her cafe curtains aglow with golden light. But like small, black butterflies, her eyes kept darting to the stone wall and the dark forest beyond. Somewhere in her brain, a tiny warning voice told her that there was something odd going on. But she refused to allow this thought much room. She had just finished cleaning the table when the phone rang.

"Morning, Mama," said Ruth. "How are you?"

"Morning, Ruthie," answered Mrs. Reed. "I'm fine. What a glorious morning. How are you and my grandchild doing?"

"We're just fine, Mama."

Mrs. Reed thought Ruthie had a cold or something. She didn't sound quite right.

"Mama, I'll get straight to the point," said Ruth. "Will and I have decided not to have the baby baptized; at least not yet. Now before you start in, Mama, you got to remember that this baby is Will's too. Now we both know how you feel about this, but you got to let us do as we feel is right."

Mrs. Reed stood quietly. Her mind returned to the dark shape over the stone wall, but only for an instant.

"Mama? Can you hear me OK? Mama, are you there?"

"Yes, Ruthie, yes," said Mrs. Reed, "I hear you. What? No, no, you do what you think is best. Don't worry about what I think. Good-bye, Ruthie."

Mrs. Reed hung up the phone slowly. She sat in a large maroon chair in the living room; the dishrag was still in her hand. She stared blindly at the carpet. "No baptism? Good God!"

"We will just see about this, young lady," threatened Mrs. Reed. She waved the rag in the air defiantly. As she passed the kitchen sink on her way to the back door, she savagely flung the limp rag into the standing water.

On the back steps, the sun blanketed Mrs. Reed with warmth. She squinted up into the sun and smiled. The day was golden and Mrs. Reed felt less tense. She walked over to the oak rain barrel that stood by the clothesline, lifted the cover, and stuck her head inside and breathed the coolness, smelled the sweetness. She brought her head out of the half filled barrel and thought: Here! *Right here was God's baptism of the world. Rain. Soothing and pure, God's rain cleansed the world, gave it life. How could Ruthie even think of not baptizing that poor baby?*

She dipped in a tin cup and drank the cool water. Sweet and clean! Just like Jesus, she thought. She hung over the edge of the barrel and dipped the cup again, listening to the lapping water and watching the rocks on the bottom of the barrel quiver and contort in the rippling water. She straightened and leaned against the barrel. The morning was quiet. Water from the tin cup dripped onto the ground making a small pool of dark mud. She again looked out across the fields.

The horizon was darkening. Way off, across the fields, over the stone wall that held back the tangled forest, black storm clouds approached stealthily, relentlessly. Low rumbling sounds rolled across the fields and engulfed Mrs. Reed. Storm clouds suddenly swallowed the sun and the golden morning turned into a gray limbo, hanging between heaven and hell.

Invention; and it could be by the Aegean

*Since I am older than I was the canaries sang much longer,
the fingering of light upon the joy of our two bodies
by the window
near the sea was wild enough (more than before ?) for me
and her, the wetness of the waves
and she in summer undulation (more than before ?) was exercise
to keep the curious and learning
gods in satisfaction, it was Greek, another millionth time
for us, unique, ecstatic,
the mythic landlord and his wife, in care of this hotel, hearing
all that noise (like 5 thousand canaries)
must have known their special guests were with body language
writing the encyclopedia again,*

John Tagliabue
Lewiston

Small gusts raced across the fields and tugged at Mrs. Reed's dress. Wisps of her hair blew about as she remained leaning against the barrel. Soon the forest beyond the stone wall was one with the black skies. A shiver ran through Mrs. Reed. She replaced the tin cup on its hook and settled the cover against the wooden barrel. Might even fill the drum by the looks of this storm, thought Mrs. Reed. Another rumble of thunder echoed over the earth.

Mrs. Reed wrapped her arms around her waist and was just at the back door when the voice stopped her in her tracks. She spun around to see the small man. He was dressed in black and held a large valise, also black. She stood staring at the man for what seemed to be eternity. The tiny voice kept trying to tell her about the black shape beyond the wall, but Mrs. Reed refused to acknowledge it. A sudden, explosive crash of thunder startled her back to reality. All the sky was black now.

"Excuse me lady, but have you got a place where I can get out of this storm?" The man removed his black hat and placed it over his heart.

"How did you get here? Where'd you come from?"

"Sorry if I startled you. I'm a traveling salesman. Name is Alvah Worth."

Mrs. Reed glared down at the little man. She did not like strangers. She held a lock of gray hair out of her eyes with one hand and thought.

"Where'd you come from?" she repeated.

"I been traveling these parts for near a week. I sell books."

"What kind of books," said Mrs. Reed as another drumroll of thunder reverberated.

The man replaced his hat and dropped his valise. He looked up at the woman and a slight smile came to his face. The wind swirled around him.

"Why, in this here bag, I got all kinds of books. Dictionaries, novels, almanacs, Bibles. . . ."

"Bible?" shot Mrs. Reed. "You got a Bible in there?"

"Yes ma'am. It's the best selling book I got."

Mrs. Reed still hesitated. A Bible would be just the thing to give to Ruthie and Will. Yes, it would back her up about this baptism.

"What about it, lady, you got a place where I can stay 'til this storm blows?" The man was anxious. He fidgeted with the valise handle.

She glanced up at the black skies. Small drops started to pummel the ground. She squinted into the wind.

"OK, come on in. I might want to buy a Bible from you, she said.

The man smiled.

"Let me get some water for coffee." She went into the kitchen and returned with a coffee pot. "I like to use rain water for coffee." She hurried out past the man to the barrel. "God's good water," she said.

Again Mrs. Reed hung over the barrel's brim and smelled the water's sweet aroma. Now the rumble of thunder seemed to come from another world. She didn't hear the drummer approach.

He moved quickly across the yard and came at Mrs. Reed from behind. With one quick, deliberate movement, he lifted Mrs. Reed from the ground and head first into the barrel. He watched her legs thrash for a little while, then grabbed his empty valise and entered the house.

Deep in God's good water, the last thing Mrs. Reed saw was the black slime on the bottom of the barrel.

E.N.S. Lorusso
Bangor

This is no time

for sleep.

Tonight, through years, your mother comes.

She moves beneath the axe-hewn beams of this white room

as you had hoped she would.

Light and silence fuse in her.

She moves beyond all pain, all needs.

Offer her the shawls you wove

and folded on the shelf for her to see.

Her fingers run the burdock green and trace

the yellow tones

you bled from onion skins

for this first shearing of the lambs.

Of ways to remember her, tonight

*it is the hands, their touch upon your chosen things,
their bones.*

Susan Hand Shetterly
Gouldsboro

A Righteous Man

Fred Cooper considered himself a righteous man whose moral standards were severe, open to no compromise. Young men new to his real estate agency were immediately advised by old Mrs. Lloyd, Cooper's secretary:

"Don't ever forget what Mr. Cooper tells you. To him a bargain is a bargain, right is right. Understand? He knows right from wrong, believe me. He's a *good* man, and a righteous man!"

Though Fred Cooper never saw himself as courageous or given to displays of righteousness, he did set rigid limits for himself and felt it his duty to correct and guide those around him whose behavior or appearance suggested moral depravity. He knew inwardly that he was not brave or demonstrative. He usually avoided raising the banner of truth or wading into combat against the brash and the ugly.

Tall, thin and pale, when regarding himself in a mirror he saw a figure much too gawky and angular — a modern-day Ichabod Crane. He often envisioned the earth overrun with ravenous beasts to be shunned at all costs. The one regret of his quiet existence lay in his certainty that he lacked a fitness for the struggle of life. The world was a cruel place for the righteous.

But there came a time when he realized that a righteous man must sometimes act. His wife of ten years, a bosomy, domineering woman of many words, was as alien to the joys of genuine love as her husband. She viewed him as an instrument for measuring status and thrived on his fine moral esteem in the community. He, in turn, was always pleased for her to trumpet his righteousness to whomever would listen.

They had just snapped off the television set and lingered at the kitchen table before heading for their separate bedrooms. Suddenly she leaned toward him in the red bloom of indignation. "Fred," she said, "I'm sure those people down the street, the Prestons who moved in last year, beat that little boy of theirs unmercifully. Have you noticed the welts on that child's face?"

After several days of balancing his obligations against the possible weakening of his comfort and security, Fred contacted the proper social agency and the Preston boy was rescued.

"I'm so proud of you, Fred!" his wife exclaimed. "You saw the correct thing to do and by God you went right out and did it!" She bent across the kitchen table and patted his hands. "You did a good thing," she said, "and you should be proud. Wait until our friends hear how you saved that boy! They'll think you're *so* brave!"

Later, encircled by a cluster of admiring neighbors, Fred held up his glass of milk and addressed the throng: "Hated to do it," he said. "Hated to get messed up in something really not my concern, you know. But there are limits . . . there are some things a man just can't put up with in this world. . . ." He paused a moment and a frown came over his face. "Just one thing bothers me," he went on. "The parents of that boy should be put in jail and they oughtta throw away the key. But you wait and see . . . they'll get nothing but a warning, a slap on the wrist. It just isn't right! Crude, ignorant people should be punished to make the world safe for the rest of us!" The neighbors cheered and Fred moved away with a tingling, electric glow of self-worth, happy just to be known as a righteous fellow who loved the simple life.

One warm Saturday he gathered his fishing gear and went off by himself to an isolated pond near Ellsworth. He had promised his wife teasingly, for they both knew he was an impatient fisherman, that he would return with a catch to take her breath away.

He enjoyed the silent splendor of the day, but he started for home with an empty basket. Undaunted . . . after all, the fresh air and chance for calm reflection were what had mattered, he drove into McDonald's for a snack. Taking his drink to the car, he turned awkwardly into the heavy traffic with one hand on the wheel, the drink wedged between his legs.

Suddenly a horn blared from his right and blared again, jarring him from his lethargy. In the rearview mirror he saw a gaudy red giant bearing down on him; in the front seat of the car two animated figures gestured wildly, mouths obviously spewing savage oaths.

He had cut them short in his snaillike entrance onto the highway, forcing them to brake, and he saw they were fiercely upset. Oh well, he thought, it was poor judgment, but everyone makes careless mistakes now and then. Too bad, and he mentally checked off his error.

Something peripheral made him glance to the left. The red car had pulled even on the inside lane and was edging slowly toward him. He saw two women, each blonde, each dowdy and scantily dressed, and it came to him that the car was littered with beer cans and other sorts of trash. The driver leaned across her companion, bending low to catch his eye, and extended her right hand toward him, middle finger erect and wagging.

"My God," he gasped aloud, "she gave me the finger!"

The coarse gesture, though he knew it to be a disgustingly common one, rattled him. While struggling with his perplexed reaction to the woman's affront he only smiled at her with Christ-like humility, hoping to show his superior moral stance in the face of such ill breeding.

Through the town the large red automobile stayed directly before him, not letting him by, switching lanes to block his progress. He noticed the driver's left arm propped on the window frame and the way she flicked ashes from her

cigarette as though each snap of her finger were a slap at his face.

"So," he thought, "that's the way she wants to play, is it? The cheap whore." He pictured her as sluttish, luridly painted, probably half drunk. Likely she was cruising around for some action, and he imagined her foul talk and catty gossip as she swigged beer and twitched her cigarette.

He kept behind her willingly. She occasionally glanced into her mirror to gauge his position. With a faulty muffler, her roaring machine led him out of town and toward Bangor.

It puzzled him how this creature, this ignorant wench who lacked the refinement to forgive a human error, could be so persistent in her wrath. For miles she did not allow him to pass. He would make little feints, quickly speeding up either to her left or right, and she would alertly, evidently determined to punish him, slide in front to impede him.

In time he became as obsessed with the situation as she seemed to be. It offended him, more and more intensely as minutes passed, that he should be the toy of a person he judged so common. And to think she had given him the finger! To him that obscene and tasteless gesture, particularly when rendered by a woman, seemed an ultimate display of the worst in mankind. That she did not know any better did not excuse her. He could perhaps forgive the initial impetuous anger on her part, for he *had* used poor driving judgment, but for her to make such an issue of it was not acceptable.

When she wheeled about in her seat and looked him squarely in the eye, once more holding aloft the middle finger, he vowed that come what may he would teach her a lesson.

They seemed a tough pair, lowborn and base, and he feared they might have a gun in the car. He would be wary if they urged him to pass; he pictured her aiming a pistol at his head when he came alongside. In his mind, any bitch of a woman who made obscene gestures and rode around the country drinking beer and looking for a pickup would not be above such an absurd thing.

Once a police car came toward them and he saw her wave familiarly to the officer. What was that all about? Did she know the man, or was she in her stupid way trying to win points in case of need at another time? See what a good girl I am! she seemed to suggest. Then it dawned on him: of course, she was one of the frowzy kind who lurk in bars and often find themselves hauled to the police station for one sordid reason or another. But as often as she was brought in, he concluded glumly, she was released to foul the earth again. Her type ought never to see the light of day. There was no justice, no protection for the law-abiding, unless . . .

He smiled when he thought of the possibilities. His wife would be astounded if she knew what he was thinking, and he visualized her pride in him if he went ahead and . . . He had a chance to prove his moral courage once and for all by punishing the hag in front of him in a way that would *really* make people take notice. A plan had crept into his mind.

Along a remote stretch of road between two small villages the red car squealed abruptly onto the sandy shoulder. Approaching, he saw the driver jump out and wave her right hand at him in a defiant challenge. He could speed on by, ending the matter, or he could stop and carry out his plan. Vaguely, he knew his decision would set the course of his future. He pulled up behind her, allowing his bumper to knock against hers as a subtle insult.

Before opening the door, he sat and sized her up a moment. As he had supposed — outsized breasts scarcely concealed, flesh pinched into folds around polka-dot shorts, unkempt and abundant hair of a light, artificial coloring, lavish gobs of scarlet makeup . . .

He got out with a sigh and stood beside his car.

"You goddamned kook!" she began. "If you can't drive, why the hell don't you stay off the road? Damned near killed us back there! Jesus Christ, Charley! What a fuckin' asshole. . . ." Beside herself, each word fueled her hateful passion. Hands fluttering, she reached into the car for a cigarette, bobbing it nervously until finally managing to find the eager, quivering lips. Her eyes rested a moment on her friend, a subdued, frightened-looking woman who was leaning on the window frame, and they shook their heads to indicate their mutual indignation.

Fred drew himself tall and addressed her with the poised omniscience of a priest. "It's true I made a misjudgment," he said, "but there is no call for such profane rudeness. If you'd been paying attention, you had plenty of time to slow down."

"Slow down?" she cried. "Why should I have to slow down for an asshole like you?"

He frowned, seeming forlorn that she was so childishly intractable. He sauntered around to the other side of her car and looked into the front seat. He was relieved to see nothing that could be used as a weapon. Moving past the front of the car toward her, he said, "Now I made a mistake in my driving. I admit it. Does that give you reason to carry on so?"

"Listen, creep," she said, stepping right up to his face, untidy hair straying down over her eyes, "I've got your license number, and I'm going to call the cops."

"Go ahead," he countered, "and I'll tell them how you nearly ran me off the road. It would be your word against mine, and I'm a respected businessman."

"Get a load a this!" she said to her friend. "Assholes's gonna use his position against us! Don't he know everybody's equal in this country?" She turned to him scornfully. "Fuck you, Charley," she said simply. She perched herself on the fender of his car and took a long drag from her cigarette, regarding him as though he were a visitor from another planet.

"Come on, Marji," said her friend, "forget it. Let's get goin'."

"No. Not 'til Charley here apologizes."

He walked to his car, reached into the back seat, and opened his fishing basket.

"People like you make me ill," he said, his back to her. "You're so ignorant and hostile. You think the world owes you something. I bet you're just riding around half tight, the two of you, looking for pickups. Right?"

"Listen, you son of a bitch!" Marji yelled. She could take no more of his preaching and she lunged at him. Bringing her right arm down hard, she gasped when he seized her wrist and held it with a strength that surprised her.

Before she knew what was happening, he slammed her hand against the metal above the open window. With his left hand he grasped her middle finger, the obscene finger, and pressed it against the upper frame of the door so that her remaining fingers were jammed beneath the bar, tucked into the window space. He brought his right arm swiftly around in a short arc and with his well-honed fish knife sliced her finger cleanly from her hand just above the second knuckle.

Her eyes widened in horror. For a moment she seemed to feel nothing. He stood grinning, holding the finger like a trophy. He let the image of his triumphant leer stamp itself into her mind before she lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

Unhurriedly, heedless of the frantic screams of the other woman, he placed the finger delicately into his basket, strolled to the driver's side of his car, got in and drove off.

On the way home he felt ten feet tall. There were times when a man of moral principles must act, when he could not turn the other cheek, and he threw his shoulders back exultantly and sang two verses of *Rock of Ages*. He imagined with a wide smile the pride his wife would feel in him when he displayed the day's catch. As a truly righteous man, he had struck a solid blow for justice and morality.

Stewart Goodwin

Reb Nachman (for Chaim)

Rabbi Nachman of Braslov
who had no successor
knew the purity of his soul
was beyond measure
and was sometimes even blinded
by his own light.
When he died
the stars attended him.

He asked to be buried in Uman
among the martyrs
of a thousand pogroms
so he could tell them stories
when they turned to him.

Slowly, in the course of years,
from splinters and pegs
they hid beneath their clothes,
his followers smuggled his chair
from Russia and set it like a throne
in Jerusalem where it is cordoned off
by twists of velvet strings.

All the other graves in Uman
are gone now
except the concrete slab
that bears his name
set between the squash and succotash
in a garden of great renown
where a peasant's laundry flies
like angels' wings
and the wind is a long whine.

The faithful come from far and wide
to pass in single file
beneath the windows
where the children
who are fed on soup and stew
stare out at them
with luminous eyes.

Roberta Chester
Bangor

You Don't Know Me

Great Grandmother

Old humpback pew never did fit my old slat bottom.
Mama had a cushion. Same old dust swimming up that sunbeam.
Comes through that yellow pane, same one Johnny broke when he was ten.
Once I dodged it feeling shy but now my sins have faded
Like this carpet. Why do all churches have red carpets?

Grandmother

Look at all the white-haired widows
Just like me and ma.
Twenty years since John escaped me into clouds of gold
But while he lived I was a queen
And after, I was well provided for.

Mother

Four of us together for once
Dressed powdered perfumed smiling at our only man
Passing the communion wine.
He only speaks to us in public but he pays the bills.
This time-bomb I've planted beside me will never wait, never listen,
never smile,
Wear housedresses paint her face punch a time clock
And she knows I did it all. For her.
Her happiness will be my own.

Daughter

Peaceful, safe, just this bright hour my heart is calm.
Sunbeam still strikes this time of year — I caught it once.
Their little rituals, their children's tales —
Dare I tell them He is risen — run down the aisle — He lives in me.
I saw Him in the jail, He sat beside me in Bellevue.
Poor ma, I'm glad we have this day.
Tomorrow I must tell you how this time
The pills spilled over the bed there weren't enough
I only slept three days.
I never told you how that first time
They told me LSD would show me God.
Then Peggy left, Jack overdosed
And Bob exploded over Vietnam.
The man I found him in the South End he was black
I wanted him to kill me but they took me to the shore
Took away my pills and called on God to cure me. He was awful.
I needed Him so much. I called on God but Satan answered,
Black gulls called my name.
I will tell you how last night the demons came again
I took a sleeping pill and wept alone. You'll take me
Crying to the ward where swaying zombies line the halls.
Oh, ma, please come to me along the urine sticky corridors
Bend down to touch one weary head, smile at the child-crone
Tugging at your hem and hold my hand
While I sleep sweating near the nurses' station.

Virginia Liscomb
Gray

2 July, 1981: Road Back

This lowering day sweats down at noon. The
metronome across the windshield lulls
me. An anniversary of some sort
coming up again. 4 July, 19—

19, Dempsey, hands rock-hard with plaster
of paris, and padding kneaded to the knuckles
by crafty Jack Kearns, destroys Jess Willard,
who timber-tumbles to the heated ring

of Toledo. Pale hose breeze across
a baked Chicago infield, glide through
parching grasses of their yard, win to lose
to the Reds, to blacken October's gold.

Home now, empty under sacks of food, I
labor through the mist. The night may clear, but
I will not see Venus curling into
the space held open by the crescent moon.

Herb Coursen
Brunswick



Photo by Elliott Healy

To Cuba

(Fidel Castro)

*I remember
when you came down from your southern mountains
into the heart of America
and we welcomed you to our shores
and cheered you in our streets.
What you had achieved made up recall
our own beginnings,
the people rising, joining,
touched again by the old dream
of becoming themselves.*

*It is sad we turned against you, amigos,
frightened by the strident voices
that drove us apart.
Close and distant neighbor,
I think I understand your bitterness,
the arrogance, the disdain,
yet still believe
the common geography of our hearts
will allow a final bridging
of our narrow straits.*

Gordon B. Clark
Bristol

The Pope and The Slum of Vidigal

(found in the Sunday Globe, July 26, 1981)

*When Pope John Paul II
visited the slum of Vidigal in Brazil,
moved by the poverty of the people,
he took off his golden ring
and donated it to the local church.*

*The clerics in nearby
Rio de Janeiro
have held it in safe-keeping*

*while the Brazilian Catholic hierarchy
discussed
what to do
with the Pope's golden gift
to Vidigal.*

*Last Week
Eugenio Cardinal Salles
announced
the ring
will be placed on display
at the National Museum of Sacred Art
in Rio.*

*A replica
will be kept
in a chapel at Vidigal
as a memento
of the Pope's visit.*

*It is my understanding
that the Cardinal
does not see the replica
as a call to revolution.*

Ruth Webber Evans
Portland

Depression Glass

Try, "depression poetry is like depression glass." I am bruised feeling frozen in a purple glass plate; greened purple glossed in acid, metalled shine. "If I were you I wouldn't bother with me..." and more in the same vein. Remember the thirties? Thursday night at the movies? Nevermind what was playing... thirty cents and free glass dishes... Remember?

Bruise purple bordered in bright-eyed comedy (if not travesty) of grapes — tight bursts of sour grapes — hard as bullets zinging (still the white-hats win). In dream sequence, I see flickering rainbow discs, runaway, rolling down canted uncarpeted aisles — spitting strobe-like flashes of hearty Kitsch, brittle greened purple. Now — let's run those bruised words by again?

Margaret Wickes
Oakland

Barker

Tying the awnings
of my lids
I roll back my bed,
lock the trailer,

fight the knotgrass
on the fairgrounds,
shake the spiders from the blinds,
set the milk bottles,

the marked and weighted ones
on the bottom
just like where the losers come from,
and in good voice

I click the microphone
hear a stronger me say
that no empty hands go away,
you can do it,

try a free shot,
don't fire, just lob,
a baby can do it from his crib
and he should know milk bottles,

even wooden ones, right?
and everybody wins
at this counter, fat, thin,
boy, girl, whatever

you want to be,
if you can throw
try it once then go,
just like marriage, honey,

ain't that right, sugar,
knock 'em all over
and you can be my lover
if nothing else

before I die I beer up,
and no bed leaves empty.
Nothing to it.
Just watch me.

William Duble
Peabody, Mass.

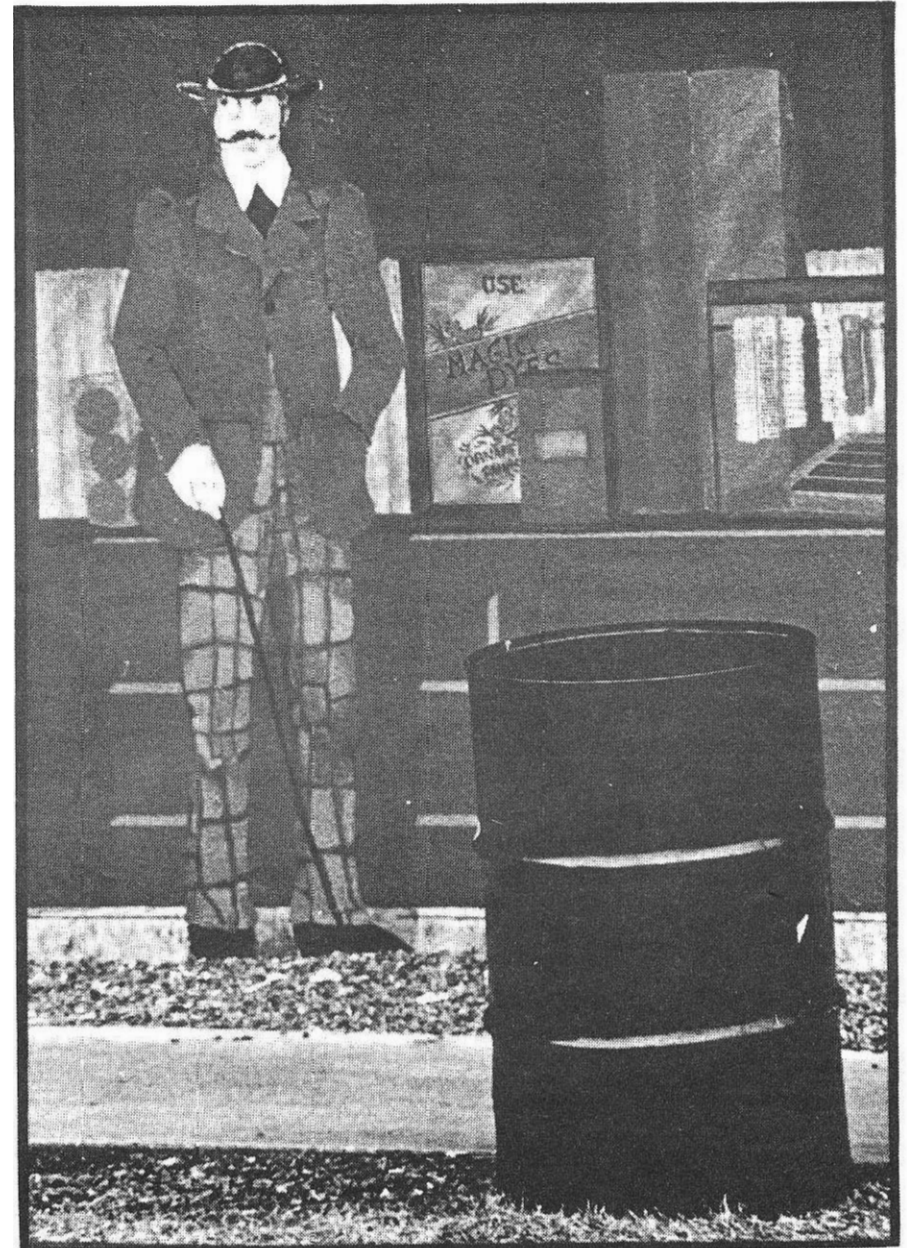


Photo by Elliott Healy

Laundromat

Almost ten years ago a friend wrote me a poem about a laundromat we both frequented. The clattering cycles of worn machines, the garish lights on the yellow washers soured the richness of that Ohio summer. The useless scoldings of mothers from the trailer park, children like unbalanced loads screeching for colas. I don't remember any of the fetchings scrawled on the dusty cards pinned over the "Articles for Sale." But having forgot those messages, I know it was possible even then to be saved locally, in that long summer while the cicadas chorused in the darkness, while the corn ripened head high. As if a war and its madness were not enough, as if life did have to go on; the knowledge that it could not seemed the single truth.

I don't remember her poem, either, only being asked once, "What are you doing here?" I took the emphasis for a compliment. Little did either of us know.

A decade later I'm still in them. I wonder what she would ask me now, here in the Highlander Laundromat in Waterville, Maine. Saturday night. Summer. Surrounded by archetypally obese women in shorts, whose hearts seem to freight the air as cross and soggy as their endless baskets of clothes. Oh Lord. Kids tipping the barrels for bottles, checking the washers for loose change. The doors still push open easily in a way that still robs my balance. I still waste time here. I still watch the clothes tumble round and round in the dryer. I could say I better understand.

I think she might just ask me if I were in love.

David Adams
North Jay

SCHOLION: A Contemporary Epic

"What's that, dear? . . . No, do tell me . . . Yes, someday, perhaps, you'll have to tell me."

My eyes are shaded from the sun, / my weight sprawled idly upon / crossed fabric slats and hollow metal tubes / (a half-bent couch left us by a dead relation, / having the capacity in rain / to lie flat-folded and compact— / a real space-saver that! / they say). The plump clouds, I am told, pose little threat; / they hide mere vacant portions of the sky / and are, so I am told, but wet / wind-lofted gatherings of air. / Here, they call the state "conditionally fair." / Presently, / their shadows drift down over me, / warped by aging flesh that I / am now resigned to own to. / These ruffled hands are idle and / no longer answer insult with a fist / nor wave to answer compliments / like those of Albert Rugh / (my neighbor Albert), / wave to answer Constance, / Mandy's secret and / my own.

Quite recently I noticed, or experienced / a certain impetus, like weakness; quite recently / let us say, I experienced / a will towards an impossible consistency, / consistency in working, let us say. / Not facts, their Truths! (which I am told mean nothing). / No, not that, but only that they work, / that all combine and interlock somehow / (and I cannot now tell you how) to form / the unique space in which I live— / unique or just intelligible. / Some demon or disease (both work) has entered me, / nourished on old plans and memories, / depositing this will toward a dull pliant unity / imagined as a vague reflection of my years / or as a vague allusion to those years.

But I am given to distraction. / I am lost in dead abstraction. / And I have told you nothing.

Several days ago . . . I believe several days, / for the incident seems clear to me; / not near, you understand — nearly all / I find myself still able to recall / seems near — but clarity to me / suggests a temporal proximity / and therefore I believe (or I insist) / that it has not been several weeks / but only several days. / And, let us say, / less than a week. / And let us say I was engaged in action, / let us say, / following the wheeled insistence of my mower— / the grass shooting feebly from sterile ground / to face blades meticulously sharpened— (why, / that cost me several days of leisure!). / And let us say my neighbor, Albert Rugh, / let us say he strode directly to me . . .

Yet there. There. / Impossible. Impossible. / "One moment, Albert. . ." / Rubbing of the eyes, contrived imagined sighs, / several hard and wistful drags upon a cigarette / as the fumes and mower's noise diminish. / There are coughs and match-lightings. / I watch the match-fire die; / its twisting grey-thin threads / tease false tears from me. / Yet Albert is impatient. He would not wait. / He never would have said those words, / as most assuredly he did say them.

Then something far less taxing, let us say, / some setting that is silent — a careful / per-view of my life, considered stretched along / the dictates of a metal chair. My feet / uplifted. My eyes / gazing idly toward the street / silent as dead memories. / Yes. / That will do. That seems adequate. / Or, more precisely, it will work.

I know. I know. This all is nothing. / Mere distraction. / To you what matters is the process. Yes, / as long as the enacted process seems a clear event; / as long as the appearance of the process seems / a unity, without undue embellishment; / as long as the sole witness to the process / (in this case, Albert Rugh) seems a man of sense; / and all appears experienced, perhaps, / in this case, by myself.

"What's that? Yes, dear. No I believe that was yesterday. . . . Day before? . . . Tomorrow then. Yes, that's fine. An excellent idea. . . . Yes, dear. . . . No, I have no idea."

No idea at all, in fact. / You witness a rare moment when / I have not idly schemed abstraction. / Bah! / I am an abstraction! / I am the cast off thoughts of a diseased God. / I am a concept feigning substance. / I am unworthy to proceed!

But that is more distraction, and not Constance, / Constance whom I trust, and Constance whom I love / at times, when I am able. / No, Constance differs from all that. / She plans. Always, still, she plans. . . . / "Yes, no. . . . That's fine. . . ." / Like trips broken into fragments, / moments of stops and viewings, / the clicking of the camera she carries / to fix the past as ground for reenactment. / "Yes, Constance," I would say. / "Yes, beautiful and something I'd forgotten." / And cryptic notes she writes / in outline form learned years ago when educated, / reminders and commands, a future also fixed. / I nod, raise my glasses once / and sense the presence of those words. / I have read two notes this morning, studied them / with scrutiny my years permit, with eyes / moving slowly left to right: "Do not forget. . . . Do not forget. . . ." / But when I saw those penned initials, / the arched addendum on the page, I saw / mere markings of a pen (which did not work), / whims of fingertips traced on white paper, / cut trails and paths, like paths / of fatal radiation. / And no, that would not do for me. / For me, that would not work.

"Yes, dear. No, you look fine. Fine."

Poor Constance is afraid to die, / as frightened as I am bemused. / Tender is the cared-for skin / stretched taut on cheekbones, soft once / to my touch, / and quick the pace, darting into / unsuspecting rooms, quick / like day's fragility.

"Yes, dear. . . . Yes, yes, that's fine. Yes, I'll change directly."

So much had changed now, / ever since she overheard my child, my Mandy, / impress of an old forgotten love, / ever since she heard the girlish whisper / quite audible through the mere three walls and two open doorways / that stood between them, / neither caring that those baffles proved / completely ineffectual, / ever since she heard her secret, Mandy's, mine, her own.

"What's that? . . . Yes, I did see her. . . . No, she didn't say. . . . No, nothing. You know how girls are."

Yet does she? / Does she know? or care? or care to know? / or merely carelessly impose. . . . / "Yes, no. I can't remember." / Like the way she has been seeking this event since Mandy's birth. / Just as she had read, seen, heard, and experienced it. Just so. / Yes, just so. / Each day, since that day twenty years ago / (and nine months prior) / she would consider this creation / of hers (and partially mine) / first with her hand, eyes closed, / straining to feel within her tiny heartbeats, / and then with her eyes, / slowly examining the object up and down, slowly / from head to toe, / as if by mere will or fantasy / to stretch it one more inch, a foot or so, / or maybe twenty years. / But I am cynical. And that / is hardly fair.

"What's that? . . . Yes, I have. I did take them. . . . I think so. Or maybe it was yesterday."

I have no need for vitamins, but likewise no / objection. They are, after all, merely small, / white and manufactured, and (so I am told) / exceed the body's needs a hundredfold. / No more exhausting, I suppose, / to eliminate an excess, than to overcome a small / deficiency. / So I accept them, admit that / aligned to her I am important, now / a symbol of her years / and noticed days. / No, Constance will not let me die. Constance has said nothing / in her notes about my death. . . . / But she forgets the pills that didn't work— / belatedly invented aids to passion! / No, Constance gave those up months ago, succumbing to / the morning, noon, the afternoon, / the night nausea, the five sudden pounds— / a price too high for mere illusion— / unsatiated gasps!— / in our case, mere delusion.

And listen, can you understand? / Can you read the epitaph? / Can you see the future years and lassitude, / the darkness and this chair folded in the sunlight? / Well, I was thinking several years ago / how someday this child's tactful variant / of this form, sprawled before me, / would flab into maturity and on that same day, / when filial devotion and obedience flourishes, / it might conceive the strange nature / of its parent's (singular, feminine) wishes. / I was thinking that and wondering why Mandy / (as my Constance claims) is far too young / for vitamins.

I still recall, as Mandy drew me secretly from Constance, / I still recall that grin I greedily mistook for guilt; / I still recall as she began to whisper / so near Constance, hidden by those rooms and walls / and open doors, I still recall the tainted joys / that grew as if the smirk I saw before me / might burst into a grin, into a shriek / of victory, in harmony with profane / Truths such as I myself imagined, so long ago, / so long past, and so long / before I met my Constance. / "And you're the first to know," she said.

And that is what I'm building to. / That is what I've hinted / all along. And that so shades this utterance, / so magnifies my feet, resting idly, fades / backgrounds into blurs, I have no wish for / idleness, / nor for days.

We have decided I was sitting, for convenience, / idly employed in contemplation. / And yes! Yes! Now I remember how I sat, / not for convenience but in fact. / And yes, that is precisely how it was; / that is exactly what I meant to say / some time ago when I began.

Albert and his epithet of neighbor walk / in sunlight warped over rooftops. / And Albert's steps are hesitant, as if / bold secrets hobble him. / "Walter," (with that whine that so amuses me!) / "Walter, you're. . ." Perhaps the earth's list / jarred his balance, staggered him as if her were / an ancient ruined pillar. / Or perhaps my lips' slight parting / round a horror / sound my fear. / For I knew what he would say. / I knew then, as surely as I lie here waiting. / Silly he was, standing there so timidly, / as if a fly, some dust might light on him, / disturb that balance, and raze him like old / marble, stained with sweat, sunlight, / the palms of the curious. / But then he stepped away, to view me as a man, / a living entity rather than / a thought-process churned beneath the glassy / shields of my eyes. / "Walter, you're all right," he said. / "A good man, and I've always thought so." / And with a smile that shattered ruins to a man, / he backed away. He was hurried, I recall. / He did not bid me well, nor farewell, / nor

did he mark the hell / I have assigned to this chair under me. / I have so little faith in Albert, / in his ability to reason or to understand / these brief upsets. / But I know. Yes. I know / what studied years have taught me. / No, I say, / it was no accident (you may have guessed) / that I did not request elaboration.

Joseph A. Dane
South Harpswell



Photo by Elliott Healy

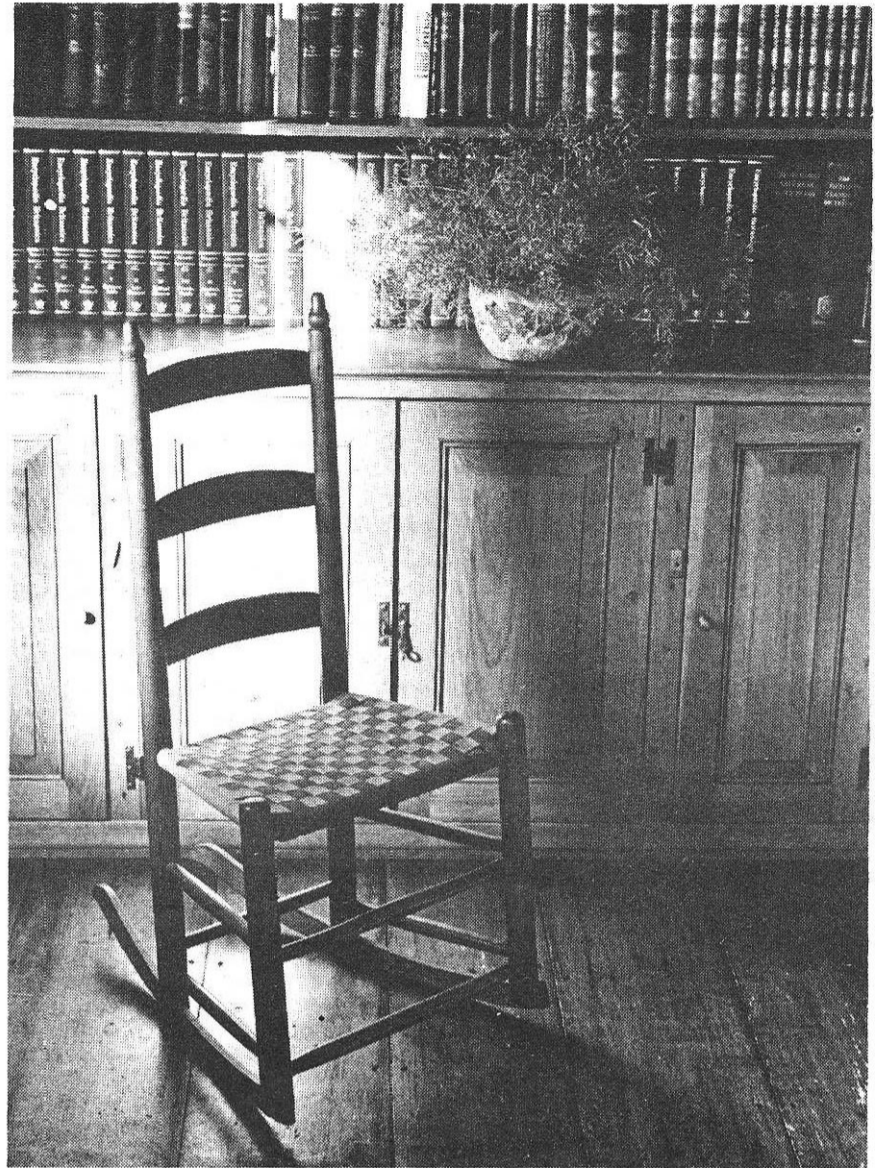


Photo by Elliott Healy

The Beast

*Last night when you pulled on your jeans
each leg ramming into its tunnel like a gun rod,
keys and change gnashing in your pockets
I knew it was for the last time.*

*You slammed the door so hard
the painting on the wall above our bed
slumped sideways, and I saw our lives
like jaws parting full of bitterness
yet with the expectation
of coming back together again and again.*

*Tonight, unable to sleep, I go outside
listen to crickets whisper
anthems to the dumb, dark hours
and in the mirror of the sky I see
a woman wishing over and over
for some animal's heart so small
such evenings wouldn't hurt.
She turns from the mirror
returns to her bed
feels ice-cold contours moving toward her
crawling down over her flat belly
into the space between her legs
this new lover named loneliness who,
waiting for the first empty moment to spring,
lowers himself down on top of her.*

Maggie Stewart
Augusta

One Hand Clapping

The sound is

*two hands clapping,
minus one hand*

*appreciation expressed by a man
with only one hand*

*half of what the applauded wishes for
interpreted by the other hand
as a non-violent act*

*noise silence makes when one hand
moves quickly through it*

not felt on the clapper's eardrum

*not heard by another
clapping with two hands*

not an issue for a deaf listener

not an issue for a deaf clapper

*a sign of hope for another
also clapping with one hand*

Terry Plunkett
Northport

Parkscape

*The fountains smell of urine.
Red cannas follow tulips
Under chestnut-drift like popcorn,
Food for gut-fat pigeons,
Pink feet splayed on pavement—
Starfish at the ocean.
On an elevated platform
Some blowzy, sudsy lady
Leans on a slippery scrub-board
In a fountain like a washtub.
The organ-grinder's monkey,
An agile pimp in scarlet,
A go-between for Music,
Extracts thin dimes and nickels
From somnambulistic children,
Pale faces under sailors
As vapid as balloons.
If I cut the string that ties them
To their grannies or their nannies,
They will float above the parkscape
With the pigeons that I scatter
When I run at them and scuffle
My patent leather shoes.*

Robert McGuire
Newcastle

The Prints and the Pauper

Bradbury was tired of being poor. Even old Henry up the road wasn't poor — not the way Bradbury was poor, subsisting as he did on cucumbers and the diminishing hope that one of these days he would snare some protein from the forest. Bradbury wasn't exactly envious of the old man — but dammit, for Henry, always grinning and puttering around, the whole business of survival seemed so, well, *incidental*. And dammit again, Bradbury had more going for him than the old man had ever had. In fact, the more Bradbury thought about it, the more it struck him that poverty was inexcusable. "No point a smart feller like you scratchin' around like an old banty-hen," Henry himself had said that very morning. Face it, the old man was right.

Bradbury surveyed his options. Employment, of course, was out of the question. Bradbury had decided *that* years ago — which was why he was poor in the first place. Gang activities, bank-heisting included, were also out of the question. Ethical considerations aside, very much aside, Bradbury was not a group person. What he needed was a one-man operation, a low-risk, high-yield, solo enterprise. Counterfeiting, for example, was not out of the question. Bradbury lived in the country, in a log cabin built over an old cellar hole. The cellar hole was roomy and dry, perfect for clandestine operations. There was even a natural safe of sorts, a large cavity behind a squared-off, pink granite rock. He could keep his operation small, specialize in one denomination, twenty dollar bills, say, crisp new twenties by the armload. Of course, old Henry would wonder, think he was pushing dope — or, worse, inheriting money. By Henry's ethic, at least you had to work at pushing dope.

In the end, Bradbury rejected the counterfeiting scheme as too risky — and not just because of the Henry factor. Computerized supermarkets alone left him reeling: visions of the twentieth century crime lab were more than he could handle. Besides, triggered by the thought of Henry, another idea had come to him, something more within the range of conventional business ethics, not to mention his own skills and inclinations. He spent the rest of the evening recalling stories the old man had told him, tales of the old days, of wildlife that once roamed the forests, of cougars in particular, of a time or two when townspeople locked their doors and windows.

Bradbury pondered into the wee hours, mulling and scheming. By morning, he was ready for action. He fired off a letter to a friend in New Mexico and buried himself in the stacks of his town library. By the end of the day, he was something of an expert on the subject of turn-of-the-century, local wildlife — on the subject of cougars in particular. He returned home with a legal pad full of notes and a book called *Safari*. It included a chapter on chemical big-game repellents.

That all took place on a Monday. On Tuesday afternoon, Bradbury returned *Safari* to the library and mailed a carefully typed letter to Chemco Inc. in Cincinnati, Ohio. The rest of the week he spent organizing his wildlife notes, waiting, refining his strategy — except for afternoons, which he spent weeding his cucumbers and checking his rabbit snares. The rabbit snares were invariably empty; witch grass had invaded the cucumbers. Bradbury was *very* tired of being poor, exhausted by it, in fact.

The following Monday, there was a package for Bradbury at the Post Office. "Ray's Taxidermy / Albuquerque, New Mexico," read the label. Bradbury bought four toilet plungers at the hardware store and headed for home.

"Four cougar paws," read the note inside the package. "As requested. Numbered counter-clockwise from right front to right rear. What are you up to now, Bradbury-ol' buddy?" Bradbury squinted at the note in the dim candlelight of the old cellar hole, then folded it neatly into his pocket and held the paws, one by one, up to the light of the candle. Perfect: Ray was the best. Bradbury spent the rest of the day setting the paws like large, furry jewels in the cups of the toilet plungers. Then, counter-clockwise from right front to right rear, one through four, he notched the handles of the plungers: he would have to be able to tell in the dark.

Bradbury was whittling his last notch when three long blasts of a horn flushed him from his cellar hole. Blinking in the sunlight, he signed the release and helped the UPS driver unload the truck — carton after carton, forty-eight in all, from Chemco Inc. in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was well after sunset before Bradbury found himself, secure in his cellar hole again, perched on his inventory, scanning his Chemco contract. "Exclusive regional dealership. . ." He liked that. "Product: Bwana." Bradbury suspected that Bwana was nothing more than repackaged Mace, but no matter: it was the packaging that counted. He glanced at his plungers and nodded his head. He would begin at daybreak.

With Tuesday's dawning, Bradbury was up and stumbling through the puckerbrush, clutching by its handle a guitar case full of toilet plungers. By sunrise, he had found what he was looking for — a soft, oozing spot of ground, just firm enough to hold an impression. He selected his Number 2 plunger, a left forepaw, from the guitar case. Angling the plunger according to his wildlife

studies, he pressed a single print into the mud and returned the plunger to its case. He was home in time for breakfast, a long morning nap, and a leisurely

afternoon. As usual, his rabbit snares were empty; the cucumbers were succumbing to the witch grass.

With the coming of evening, Bradbury was back at his mudhole. An eager child was with him, one of Henry's innumerable grandurchins, his bicycle parked nearby. Bradbury pointed to the pawprint, traced its outline with his finger, told the child he should ask his grandfather about it. The child raced away on his bicycle. Bradbury wondered if the old man would take the bait.

For three days, Bradbury wondered and waited. By Friday afternoon, he knew he was in business. A picture appeared in the local Weekly: old Henry stood beside the mudhole, pointing at the pawprint. A uniformed game warden stood beside him, and the grandurchin hovered in the background. The picture was accompanied by a short article: old Henry hadn't seen a cougar in these parts for fifty years, it said. The game warden agreed, speculated a bit, emphasized the harmless, reclusive nature of the big cats.

Bradbury was off and running. Ten miles to the north, the Big City Daily picked up the story. The cat, so to speak, was out of the bag. It was time to thicken the plot.

Discreetly now, by the light of the night sky and the nine lives of Eveready, Bradbury began to roam the countryside. Plunger 1, Plunger 2, Plungers 3 and 4 — he used them all, not randomly or indiscriminately, but always with attention to angle, pressure, and appropriate setting.

Night after night, Bradbury plied his trade. In time, he grew accustomed to the newspaper accounts. "More tracks found . . . outskirts of town . . . circling . . . growing bolder . . ." By the end of the second week, Bradbury detected the first hints of hysteria in the accounts. He laid a final set of tracks at the Big City limits and temporarily retired his plungers. Shortly thereafter, he appeared at the editorial offices of the Big City Daily with a manila envelope under his arm.

Bradbury's article was a scholarly work, deeply rooted in his studies of turn-of-the-century wildlife, of cougars in particular, in the newspaper's circulation area. It detailed the history and habits of the big cats; it emphasized their harmless, reclusive nature; it scoffed at accounts of attacks on humans and family pets. The clinical, detailed descriptions of these accounts, rejected as they were, fit nicely with the scholarly tone of the article. The editors were impressed. They paid well, and Bradbury returned home whistling. He stashed his first profits behind the pink granite rock in the old cellar hole. Bradbury was pleased — but far from finished.

In the days — rather, the nights — that followed, Bradbury resumed his print-making efforts. With the waning of the moon, he grew bolder, crossing forbidden boundaries, penetrating town limits, city limits, plunging, as it were, into the unknown. Flower gardens, vegetable gardens, parks and pastures — nothing, at least no spot of ground soft enough to hold a print, was sacred. And then, without even waiting to gauge the reaction, Bradbury retired his plungers again and launched the second phase of his operation.

"Bwana," Bradbury told the buyer at the hardware store. "From Chemco Inc., specialists in big-game repellents."

"Bwana," he told the man at the drugstore. "Twelve dollars a can." He rented a van, carted his stock to the Big City, and sold Bwana by the boxload. By mid-afternoon, he was sold out. He placed a collect call to Chemco Inc., and spent the rest of the week taking orders. His business was growing by leaps and bounds. Bradbury was even getting a little tired from getting rich — but he loved every minute of it.

And so it went, week after week through the summer. Bradbury's cucumbers gave way to the witch grass; his rabbit snares went unchecked. But business was booming. By late summer, Bradbury's cellar wall safe was overflowing. He would have to do something about the safe, invest the money somewhere, buy into Chemco, maybe. Oddly, it was on the very evening that Bradbury first had trouble fitting the pink granite rock back in place that old Henry came by for a visit.

"Howdy, Brad."

"Been a long time, Henry."

"Business goin' pretty good?"

"Couldn't be better, Henry."

"You was pretty quick on your feet with that Bwana stuff there. Good thing, a man knows how t'grab a opportunity."

They sat on Bradbury's doorstep. "Yep," old Henry continued, "it's a real good thing. Funny thing, too. Old Witt Bowden — use t'live here, just like you — made hisself a pile of money off'n the cougar, too. Raised a cub. Use t'charge folks a quarter t'come see it. Kept the money b'hind a rock in the cellar — pink rock, granite, I b'lieve t'was."

Old Henry chuckled, but Bradbury was aware that he was eyeing him shrewdly. He refused to be taken in. "What came of it all?" he asked, but the old man ignored him.

"Lordy," Henry continued, "Witt use t'mistreat that cat somethin' awful. Kept him half-starved — so's he'd be fierce for the customers, y'know. Well sir, one day Witt Bowden went just a little bit too far. That old cat busted clean outa his cage and laid into Witt like the devil himself. Weren't nothin' left but bones and a belt buckle. Folks say that cat musta lifted the latch himself. Lotta talk. Folks talkin' about the cat comin' back, too. His spirit, y'know, hauntin' the place. That's how come they burned the old place down. Folks just tryin' t'perfect themselves, y'know. . . ."

In Defense of Marshall "Dodge-ism"

(For F. G.)

As Marshall Dodge's performing artistry becomes art for me, the "reality" of Maine life assumes a metaphorical cast and hue. In his "Bert and I" stories, Dodge, like Robert Frost, creates from traditionally flinty, wintery Downeast Yankee realism a social metaphor of light humor which is very human and descriptively incisive. Through humor, Dodge's characters project both a kind of unconscious manifestation of individual isolation and an acceptance of community by Mainers.

Most characters of "Bert and I" I perceive as window dressing, attempts to enliven this basic metaphor of individuals accepting their communities by referring beyond them, to nature.

Many critics see Dodge's monologues as "stereo-typing" Maine people. But Dodge and his partner, Reverend Bob Bryan, are working, like Mark Twain or Finley Peter Dunne in "Mr. Dooley", squarely within a valid vein of American humor.

Philosophically speaking, the Dodge-Frost metaphorical creation is generally Aristotelian, an empirical breakdown and categorization of life and nature's parts, of their substance and accidents. This has led in Dodge's case to the creation of a "person", often called "Bert", whose actions, responses and solutions imitate Maine reality.

As if they actually were the Maine persons and communities they represent, Dodge and "Bert's" underlying metaphor is that resolutions and explanations are produced naturally, so to speak, from within the communities and episodes and stories.

This kind of naturalism is inimical to many modern modes of thought and to some social conditions now facing Maine. It is often viewed as "quaint" or "romantic", a throwback to the "social physics" of Isaac Newton in a twentieth century age of high technology and abstraction. And as social science analyzes and "opens up" Maine communities, intangible community methods of dealing with good and evil and love and hate seem to disappear. The gulf between ideals and feelings become apparently unbridgeable. The result is often yearnings for a romanticized past or an unrealizable future because resolutions to the questions asked are beyond the hypothetical capabilities of social science.

Some people legitimately resent a "natural" solution to social problems. But this is no reason for Marshall Dodge to abandon naturalism in folk art. If one creates art strictly for purposes of "proving" a point, policy or study, one generally ends up with whatever one started with or were originally looking for. The same is true of the audience or perceiver of art, which essentially defies a preconceived conceptual mindset. True, good art engenders belief, brings one to the threshold of empathy, awe and universality. However, art is more of a capturing and sharing of meaning *within a form* than a general transmitting and communicating of knowledge as reality. Dodge's art form is humor.

I recall discussing a recent review by Sanford Phippen re-printed in MAINE LIFE, which commented on "Dodge's stereotypes" and the general lack of contemporarily meaningful social truth in Maine fiction. Leaving aside publishing and marketing considerations, a writer-friend observed to me, "Phippen's right. Dodge and Maine fiction do mask social reality!"

My reply was that masking is an essential, legitimate tool for theatre and performing artists like Dodge. And my friend pointed to a particularly obstreperous description of Maine by Helen Yglesias, a racy, journalistic marriage of a morose rendering of hallucinated statistics and a sacrosanct theory about primates:

"... A subterranean, unreported life of intense social melodrama exists — alcoholism, incest, illicit love, illegitimacy, homosexuality, madness, a high incidence of feeble-mindedness; violent and lasting family ruptures; couple switching; drugs, vandalism and rebelliousness among adolescents — in a setting where the ratio of living space to human beings should insure a bucolic

peace and soaring mental health statistics."

I responded, "Do you want to be so depressed by this description you see Maine life as 'social melodrama', or would you prefer to lighten things up just a little with Dodge's humor?"

The drawback to Dodge, as most Maine social critics aptly observe, is their inability to accept his image of "Bert" as reality, as Maine. But one has to accept this image in some respect in order to criticize. Thus, Dodge's art form undergoes personal transformations in the eyes of perceivers, from made-up stories to actual fact, from allegories to logical analogies, from metaphor to concept, and perhaps, ending up as an adjunct of some sort to striving for that elusive and purportedly exclusively individual commodity, personal identity.

If as idealists we see Dodge's characterizations solely as literally truthful, flickering representations on the cavernous walls of our Maine hearts, as personal images of reality, we easily miss the metaphorical meaning and humorous pleasure of his artistry. Worse, we could plunge into the escape-to-nature mentality of some summer visitors, or into the concept-minded maze of feelings of some well-intentioned critics of Maine social reality.

If we personally identify too heavily with "Bert" or some of the "parts" put into his creation, we tend to counter with another unexperienced or partially experienced reality. Because we are not Marshall Dodge, the artist creating characters and monologues, in a sense we can become characters ourselves in search of an author, almost unconsciously performing seriously what Dodge offers through "Bert" in jest.

"Bert" does not perceive abstractions. Data from the social sciences mean next to nothing in his hornet's nest of family, friends, enemies and assorted kin living in small communities, isolated or fragmented enough to lack rigid social and economic stratification. "Bert" knows Maine as the place where one can give a piece of his mind to anyone, lawyer, banker, clergyman, factory worker, artisan, storeowner, or housewife. Young people migrating to Maine, cleverly experimenting with their lives according to the age's prevailing scientific methodology of proving selfhood (while everybody else knows what they're doing), do not bother "Bert". Presumably, "They don't know nothin'!" Which is often the case.

My choice of the best description of Maine public-policy social reality was penned by Allen G. Pease, a tempered idealist with a long and distinguished career in state government and with deep personal roots in Maine:

"I instinctively bristle at outsider's observations, such as Toynbee's that 'New England is a finished piece', or with a gloomy preoccupation with poverty or backwardness in Maine. Seems to me Maine is relatively free from divisive social problems of race, bigotry, political corruption and organized crime. Maine people stand high in their average level of education, our minimum wage for state government employees is good by national comparison. Maine's so-called reticent people have established some of the strictest environmental control laws in the nation... and our relatively low per capita income is in large measure a function of population statistics. Maine has a rather large percentage of retired workers and youthful dependents for our labor force to support, but this will change."

Contrary to the above description, the 'natural predators' of "Bert" are people who can't relate their pragmatism to a community that does not fit into their preconceived vision of reality, people who can't "fit" without thinking up something to fit into, whose tools are conceptual or highly romantic, perhaps compatible with high technology, but not wholly meaningful to their experience of Maine. It is a view of nature having been conquered versus one where nature still retains great mystery.

For example, any number of people could obtain computerized geophysical and meteorological data that there's enough space and air to breathe in Maine, and run the concept back to its roots in the pre-Penobscot Maine community when one ape socked another with a gnawed moose leg bone and the skull of the second ape got dug up thousands of years later to prove this very fact. Naturally, "Bert" would agree with this logical progression. It is impeccable proof of the "territorial imperative" by which native lobster fishermen operate.

So why climb on old "Bert's" back? He has control over his own technology. He understands his tools, which produce the results he wants. He knows if he's nasty, petty, selfish, and venial in his "town" somebody will be nasty, petty, selfish and venial right back to him — probably a close relation, too.

In communities where the existence of good and evil is more or less accepted as natural because control is almost unconsciously achieved through traditional values and social structures and limited economic options, lives are lived in close quarters and character armament or expressions of affection become relatively common knowledge. Dodge draws on this public social legacy for characterization, the key ingredient in his yarns. In "Bert and I" the author is not writing and performing comedy with plots, story lines or a "statement". Dodge does not compose drama or tragedy, but humor.

With "Bert and I" the state at least has an icon which is identifiable and pleasing to outsiders, offering them a remote possibility that things could turn out good "naturally". And Dodge's humor is funny, even tolerable to less self-conscious Mainers.

The late author of the Great Society, President Johnson, remarked about his small Texas community, of which he was Emperor, "They know when you're sick. They care when you die." By some quirk of national character, Americans are supposed to achieve success alone, and then die in communal repose, depending upon, as "Bert" might say, "how much you have to leave them". In Maine, for better or worse, we still live and die in a community.

Now, as far as "Bert" is concerned this article probably won't generate bookings enough to get out of Maine for the winter. But his humor has, and if he does get warm, he can come home.

On the Granite Crest

*We sat on the granite crest of a glacial knoll
Over a hemlock-tattered scape of white.
Eastward, black was bruising into night,
A brilliance bleeding west in the lake's white bowl.
Your eyes were charged with that red emberlight
But wind at our backs leaned steadily and cold
While, in the woodslope, footless, sure and old,
A climbing panic kept just out of sight.
You said love dares the envy of the gods.
Tenderness might then have spanned and fenced us
Weatherfast, but my hand had frozen stuck
On some steel scruple. The inhuman odds
Of change and winter silence ranged against us
And had their will. A man has his bad luck.*

Richard Sewell
Waterville

Patrick Flynn
Rockwood/Salem, MA

To Eat an Icon

*The right of first refusal belongs to me.
I exercise it often because it is important
to be firm and difficult and be as a knife
is or a fork is to a child in Bangladesh,
or some place like that, and be a belly
that looks full.*

*People like me insist on the refusal because
we are distant souls, though perhaps browned
like lettuce edge left wet and standing next
to butter and a grapefruit.*

*Refusing women and fortunes and god on a stick
is nothing. Really. It is easier to dance,
waltzes especially, and it is far from final*

*and the words of a blind man to a radio; it
bears not so much weight as it may seem.*

Terrence Day
Waterville

The Fooling of Ralphie Post

Jesus loved the fishermen because they told the best dirty jokes around. Ralphie Post is one of those fishermen — he lobsters down to Metinic. Right now he is substituting for Chet Mason but he'll be pulling up his traps soon and breaking his collarbone doing boogie skiing up to Sugarloaf or knocking back a cold one at the Elks club.

But to get to the point of this story we must go back to the summer of 1971 just before I had my orchidectomy. It was the day of my sister's wedding and since she was marrying a parson there was no alcohol at the reception so after the water punch was all served we went up to my brother's house in Camden and got down to some serious drinking.

Ralphie Post was there and he started telling jokes and I did too and for some reason on that night I sparkled as much as he did and we kept the crowd in stitches till four in the morning when I finally took my Thorazine and crawled into bed. It was a once-in-a-lifetime night which I have never been able to duplicate but remember with great fondness but I am sure that Ralphie has had many of them.

The next spring I had stopped taking my Thorazine and was producing work at a rate I had never done before so I decided to try to fool Ralphie Post. I made up this very official sounding letter from one C. C. Cleaveland, director of the Bailey Island Lobster Plug Museum. In the letter I asked Ralphie if he would carve some plugs (they were already using bands on Metinic) and soak them a few days aboard the boat to make them authentic looking.

Ralphie was living at the time over George Hall's Garage and every morning the noise of the truck and the smell of the diesel oil wakened in him a fury. So the morning he got my letter he wasn't in what you call a pleasant mood. When he first got the letter he believed it and talked with his wife about why some fool would want him to carve plugs when he could still buy them by the thousand down to Bailey Island. But he considered doing it and was trying to think of a good way to soak the plugs when he decided the letter was a fake and showed it to all his friends. They all got a big laugh out of it and he was happy to have another joke in his endless story line.

Soon after that I went crazy from not taking Thorazine and spent a few weeks up to Togus, a grim place in those days — there might have been some fishermen there but no jokes. I've only seen Ralphie a couple of times since then and I never have any new jokes but all he wants to talk about is the time I fooled him with that "letter about lobster plugs." So I feel pretty good about my own sense of humor even if it only comes on only twice a decade. It just makes me wish I could stop taking my Thorazine again and write some more of those letters.

Kendall Merriam
Richmond

X-ray Room

*Spring. They appear
in their hospital gowns as snow women.
I with my perfect eye
stare, tell them to breathe.*

*Their bodies against the steel table,
I preserve them for winter,
their soles silvered with ice,
their gait slow like a great Pole bear.*

*"Now hold. Do not breathe."
Snowmen are by nature white.
But snow women, the pale
of fallen tea roses, the perfect*

*distribution of light.
"One more time, breathe."
They exhale, snow-deep,
the breath of ghosts*

*as they walk through fields,
leaving a print as rhetoric.
I with my perfect eye
stare. I cannot breathe.*

Mary Ann Meade
Lewiston

Recipe

*Flay flanks. Batter eviscerated bodies.
(Discard dead eyes.)*

*Scrape skins. Slice white flesh beneath.
(Gouge out live eyes.)*

*Plunge into unctuous hell.
Serve with spiced sanguinity.
(Beware of bones!)*

Patricia Morgan
Rockland

*EDWARD HOPPER
knew it was
the way
he cast the light
across the canvas
that told more
than all the pulled shades,
empty streets, and city rooms.*

Maureen Walsh
Bangor

Cord of Birch

*It was high summer, that time when winter seems
Implausible, a moralist's admonitory dream,
That I, shortsleeved, took through the neighborhood
A question, revealing it only when it was understood
All round that the amenities as to the heat and flies
Had been upheld, when something like response might thrive.
A hundred-sixty years of working in the woods,
Their lives were sure to contain the fact or two
I wanted about some birch I'd cut that spring
And the extent of its aptitude for making heat.
To a man they grunted, that to let me know they knew
That I was bothering about a very poor thing.
I relaxed in the shade of their attitude,
Ignorant that each was to recall, surmise, delete,
And say that which the others had said was untrue.
Gravely I agreed with their unblinking contrarities.
My hand shook hands and the doubt inside of me
Hurrahed. Back home there was the cord, a pile
I'd left beside the back path. I pouted a while,
Hefted a piece — it was wood. Nothing descended.
At night in bed I defined and mused and pretended;
Nothing came of it all but dismal sleep.
By New Year's the snow was over two feet deep;
Load by load my dilemma was taken away
And often I stopped to stare on my way
Back from the shed at the smoke the fire had freed
And let myself be gratified by the wisdom of need.*

Baron Wormser
Mercer

Aroostook 13: Farmer in February

*Nothing recognizable that will grow—trees mere,
the hammered sun frigid beyond the gesture of this pale field.
Far-sides are lighted; width untracked in wave-lengths
moans where the snow-mounds are purple-flanked.*

*The maple drily measures the crystals meaningless,
chilled season, rigid run-off; in emptiness the maple
measures the thought of a wasting plant.*

*A swept external farm dwindles westward
where a day bites off its unwillingness.
My neighbor west—should I walk over there,
despite wind and stove-heat?*

Brian Fitzgerald
Presque Isle



Photo by Charles Lamson
Circa 1870

And Still the Moon Waxes

*It is the night before Full Moon
And all over the land
Beds are filled with picked off
Fingernails and toenails.*

*All day yesterday
Sockets of extracted teeth
Ballooned with old blood
As cheeks became chipmunked with edema.*

*Throughout the Greater Portland Area
People have been eating more than usual
All week. There was a riot
Among diners queued up at the Baker's Table
And two people were taken away
In the Medcu wagon. Three others fell
Down the steps but stayed for dinner.*

*Out in Scarborough, encroaching tides
Lapped up Black Point Road
Down by the marsh, then swallowed
An orange Volkswagen in broad moonlight.*

*In every living cranium
The Circles of Willis have overflowed
This week, causing a cerebral rash
Of murders and general mayhem. Rapists
Were maimed by their victims for a change.*

*Hospital labor rooms overflowed
With amniotic fluid drawn out
To see the moon, that being
Primary; the baby birth incidental.
The height of the Full Moon tide
Is populated by a plethora of Pampers.*

*But with the ebbing of that tide, the scale
Is balanced by the floating to eternity
Of ancient spirits at the edge of death for weeks,
With others saying it would be a blessing.
That lunar invitation was all they needed
To give it all away
For a chance to walk on the water.*

Louise Pieper
Scarborough

Beyond My Own

*No more than eight, I ran with full blown fear
From a now faceless older boy whose breath
It seemed to me was in my hair, whose hands
I all but felt about to collar me
And whirl me full around to face my death.*

*Down a long hill into the drive and then
Around the corner of the house I sped,
Across a little field and on into
The woods along a pathway to the sea
Until at last I felt my legs going dead.*

*My eyesight blurred, my whole face running sweat,
My last ditch thought was to pick out a tree
And swerve behind it to a stop, then hope
I could move round it left or right to keep
Its trunk somehow between his grasp and me.*

*And so I did, and, standing there, realized
Through wrenching gasps — I was the only one.
I peered out, and, astonished, saw him stop
some distance well back up the path, then turn
And start with steps back the way we'd run.*

*I felt saved by a life force beyond my own,
And filled up with its silent victory shout.
And since, when I have seen a deer in flight,
The salmon at the falls, I understand
Not from the outside in but inside out.*

Richard Aldridge
Sebasco Estates

Styles

*Joel, I hike the steep short trail up
Maine's Bald Mountain with my
yellow-haired daughter racing ahead,
and I remember you, all those years
ago, scrambling the rugged Sierra
switchbacks up, out of Pate Valley.*

*You climbed so fast! Looking neither
right, nor left, nor down at your GI boots.
At the top, at White Wolf, where
you waited for me to catch you,
your laughter: a spring-swelled
high-country creek; your raw boy's
pride: you had peaked in record time.*

*(And I remember thinking: those
Marine Corps years of his! And
how I blamed THEM and your father.)*

*For whatever reason, it was never
my way of hiking, and I see why, now,
we had to break camp at that trailhead.
You were primed for a bed in the valley,
and an outsized meal.
I, for a meadow's nest,
in fingering reach of stars.*

*And now, these many years later,
I still hike slow and stop a lot.
I still fool around with stars.
And I wonder, are you still
that high-stepping manchild,
climbing fast, eyes fixed
on the scalp of some mountain?*

Are you still setting records, Joel?

P.C. Peterson
Dryden

It All Began With Ginni Wren

*It all began in the 3rd grade
when I did the Feather Dance*

*I was not just another
heavy footed head stropping boy
wishing for scalps*

or for Ginni Wren

*but her eyes from the 2nd row
would feed my white Indian spirit
into the drum which circled with me
round the pageant feather*

quaking in a mote of clay

*I danced harvest spells
my back bent like a bow
teeth bared above the quill
& Ghost Dance War Dance
& wishes prancing
like dowsing bees
into ears as into cells*

sweet as honey

*& golden visions I danced
& my bare feet made the feather tremble
& they heard me
& saw how she watched
& willed not for Ginni Wren
to burn me as the rest.*

Glenn Avery
Trescott

KENNEBEC:

A PORTFOLIO OF MAINE WRITING

This is Kennebec's sixth year of publication. Our format and newsprint make possible a selected distribution of 5,000 copies, thus providing Maine writers with an audience no "little" magazine can offer. We publish as many new writers each year as possible, while trying not to neglect the established ones. In this endeavor to bring Maine writers to the attention of the public we are supported by the University of Maine at Augusta, Forum A, and an increasing number of writers whose submissions enable us to present Maine writing that is worth reading.

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