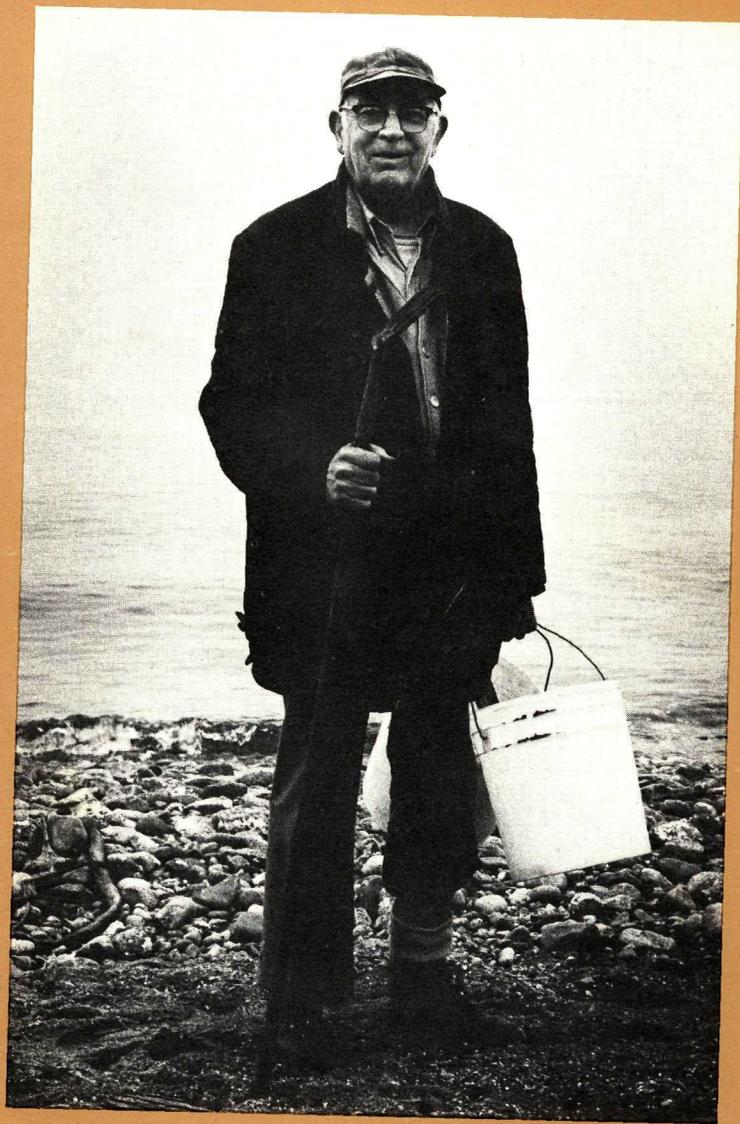
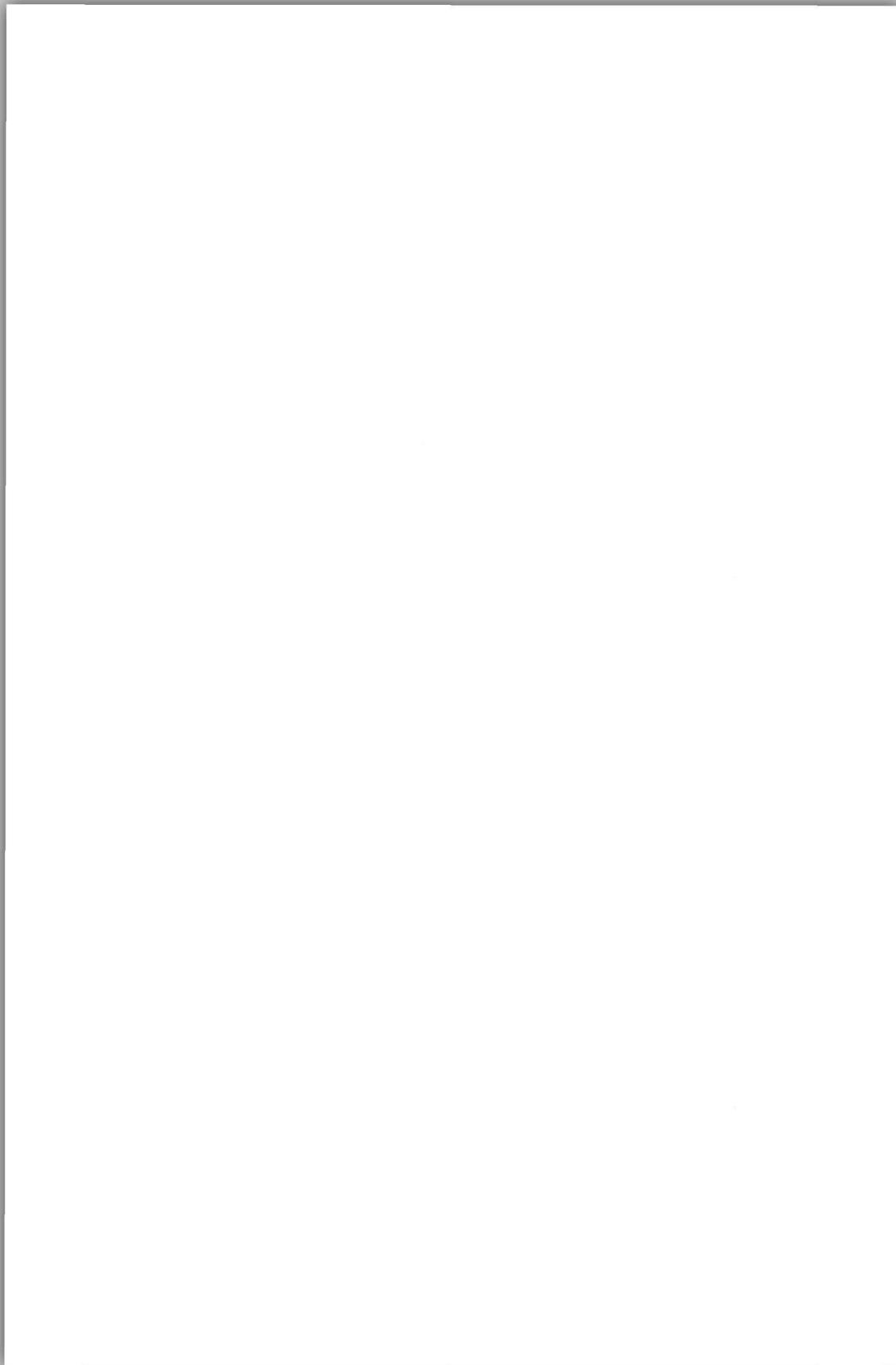


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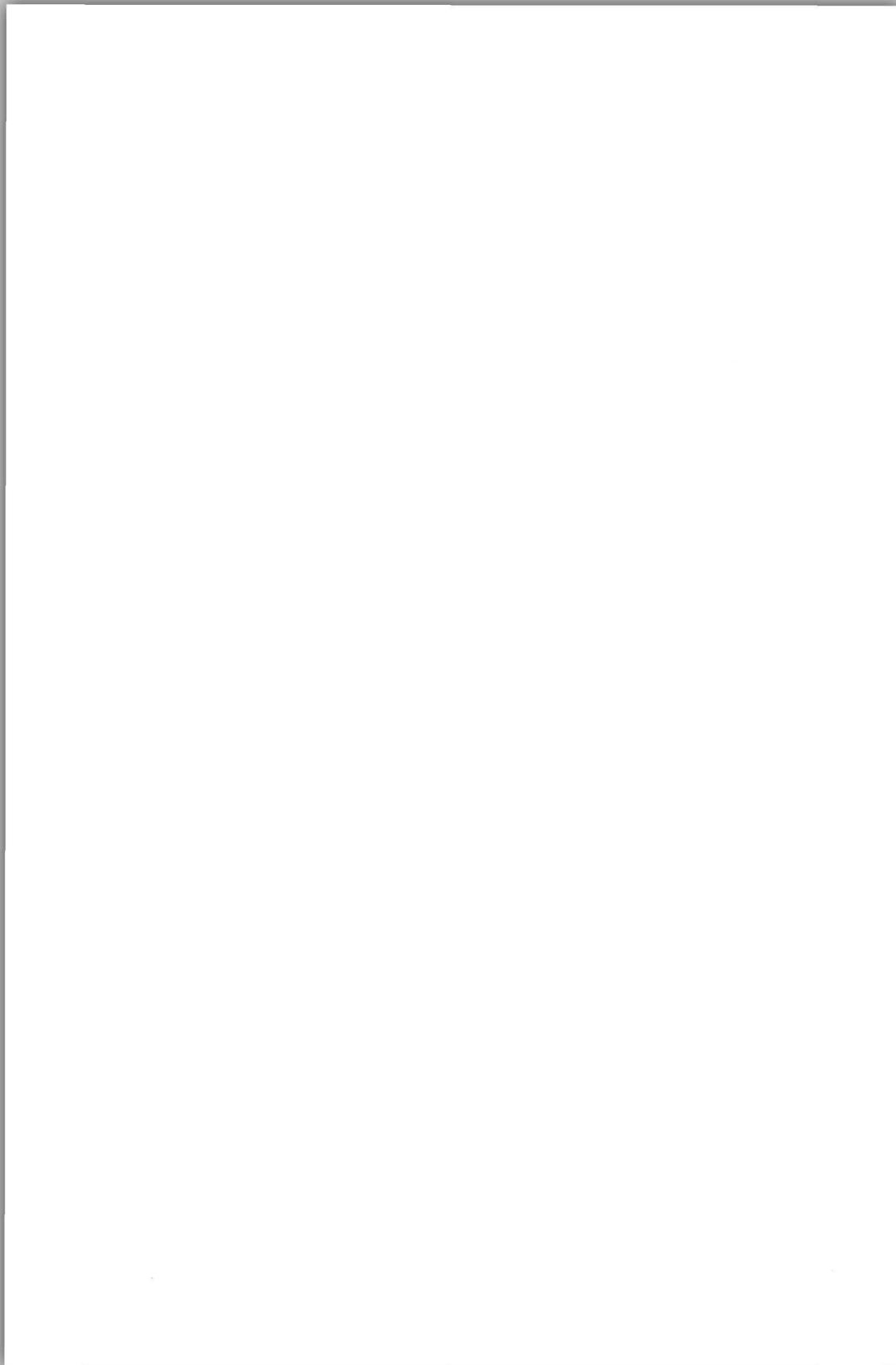
SPRING 1980



Voices from The Maritimes



PRISM *international*



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A JOURNAL OF

CONTEMPORARY WRITING

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All manuscripts should be sent to the Editors at the above address. We must remind contributors that all manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope or international reply coupons. Manuscripts that arrive with insufficient return postage will be held for six months and then discarded.

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CORRECTION: Mr. Solomon Ary wishes to make the following correction pertaining to the information he presented in the interview in our last issue, Vol. 18:2.

In the interview, he said that his daughter, R. Malmquist, did the initial translation of his stories from Yiddish to English and that Sacvan Bercovitch did the final translation, putting the material into better English. He informs us that the correct information is as follows:

"The stories were translated both by my daughter, Rochel Malmquist, and by my brother-in-law, Sacvan Bercovitch, and they worked together through all the stages of the translations."

NOTES

“Oh, East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet . . .”

Not so. With this issue of *PRISM* we give a “thumbs-down” to Kipling’s old adage. Introduced in this issue’s special section are six writers from the Maritime provinces, Harry Thurston, Liliane Welch, H.R. Percy, Leigh Faulkner, Allan Cooper and Gregory Cook. Although all six have been writing for a number of years, it is only recently that their work has begun to receive some recognition in eastern Canada. We hope that this issue of *PRISM* will introduce their work to more of our readers.

We have been accused in the past of being “west coast”, “Black mountain”, “surrealist”, etc., in our editorial tastes. Our interests always have, and continue to go beyond those narrow scopes.

A number of Canada’s most well-known writers were published in *PRISM* very early in their careers. In this issue we welcome back three of those writers—Dorothy Livesay, Gary Geddes and Elizabeth Brewster. We are pleased to be able to present some of their recent writing along with that of our younger artists. And we also have two fine translations of German novelist Hans Erich Nossack, done by Sammy MacLean.

And finally—we still welcome new subscribers, and renewed subscriptions. Don’t be shy.

—The Editors

The Whipped Cream Kiss

The man asks, "Can you tell me please, doesn't your sister live close by here in the neighborhood?" He asks very politely, that's true, but it's just this politeness. . . .

I am terribly afraid. I didn't hear his car approach, I wasn't even thinking about cars. Perhaps he drove up behind me with his motor turned off so I wouldn't run away. People like that know all kinds of tricks. They frighten you with their politeness.

This man, for example, pulls up in his car alongside the curb right next to me. He has to support himself with his arm on the empty seat in order to get as close as possible to the right-hand car window. Most uncomfortable for him. He's defenseless. He's giving himself up to me. I could easily have grabbed him by his hair. And then beaten his head hard a few times on the edge of the open car window. At least his nose would have been broken, and maybe one or two teeth.

Someone else would have done just that, I know it. People expect it from me, too. I see that people are already looking at us. They are standing behind curtains at their windows on the other side of the street waiting for me to do the right thing. One impatient hand even opens a curtain a small crack, then lets it fall quickly back together again. But as the people breathe, waiting, the curtains billow up a bit, you can see them.

I don't do anything of the sort. I feel paralyzed. After all, you don't just drive up and ask an unknown pedestrian about his sister. In the middle of the street, in the middle of a large city. What would become of us? Admittedly, I had quite forgotten that I have a sister. It's been such a long time since I've thought about her. Very careless of me, I admit. Something like that can naturally be taken advantage of. The joker smirks politely. It's clear, I'm lost.

I move my lips. The people behind the curtains mustn't notice that I'm lost. A polite conversation, nothing more. But not a sound comes out. *This is terrible.*

"Oh yes, Catherine Street!" says the man, and squeezes back in behind the steering wheel. "Many thanks! And no harm meant!" Exactly

those words. This "No harm meant!" will stay in my memory forever. Nothing can be done about it. I've let the right moment slip by.

One small chance remains for me. As the man drives away, a cloud of blue smoke comes out of the exhaust pipe of his car. That's the kind of contempt I'm being treated with now. I'll put it to good use. I turn quickly into an arcade. Hey, a one-way street! I can get there ahead of the man. I even run; the people at the windows can't see me now.

And my sister comes walking up to me. Her name is Lucie. Of course, what else? This occurs to me immediately when I see her, even though I'm out of breath.

"We still have time for a 'whipped cream kiss'," she says, and pulls me by my arm into the cafe on the corner. But she stops suddenly in the revolving door so that we bump into one another. In our haste we squeeze into a booth which is meant for one person.

"Do you have enough of your spending money left?" Lucie whispers to me, "I don't have a cent." The cafe is completely empty. We sit down at a marble top table. We don't need to order. The proprietor shuffles up and puts the kiss for Lucie on the table. With a lot of whipped cream. Lucie attacks it right away. She's probably very hungry.

"Do you want music?" asks the confectioner. He's wearing a white jacket. A large man, bloated. His light blond hair is cut like a brush. This profession is unhealthy. Bakers often have lung trouble.

"For God's sake!" I say, and gesture my refusal. We could have had music on the street.

"We don't need to watch out," says Lucie with her mouth full. "He's at the barber's now having that disgusting moustache shaved off."

The man in the car did in fact have a walrus moustache and long thick eyebrows. Who would wear something like that these days? That's really a much too ridiculous mask to fool anybody anymore.

I put my hands on the table top. Oh, ice cold! That doesn't seem to bother Lucie. Everything is a matter of course to her. She's got used to things.

She chatters gaily on. "Mama has strictly forbidden me whipped cream. She thinks it will make my hips large. But I do so love whipped cream! And anyway, I'm not fat at all."

No, she is slender, my little sister. You notice that. She's wearing a long skirt which reaches to her shoes. A skirt with a high waist and a wide patent leather belt. And a blouse, and a brooch at her throat. She got the brooch from our grandmother as a confirmation gift. A small golden basket on a blue background with tiny pearls as flowers. Everything just as we know it from old photographs. And how young Lucie is! Much younger than the young women you meet in the subway these days. And her blouse so neat! And her hair parted in the middle! And her cheerful gray eyes! I'm completely charmed. Words can't describe it.

And there goes the revolving door again. It's too late to say anything. Especially in the presence of the man.

"Please keep your seat," he says, and bows. So I just keep my seat, and he stands by the table, so correct, so grand, so modern.

But Lucie gets up. "We just had a quick 'whipped cream kiss'," she says, and wipes her mouth with a handkerchief which she takes from a small silver chain purse. When she closes it again it makes a little click.

Then we hear the music from upstairs. Not loud. Refined, as they say. A tango, I think. There's probably a dance floor, and alcoves. In general, everything much grander.

They both go toward the back, where the stairs are. Lucie first, already moving in time to the music, and the man a step behind her so she can't get away. She lifts her skirt because of the steps. On the landing she turns around and waves to me. So cheerful! So unconcerned! Completely without fear! She even calls out, "Hey!"

Why shouldn't she dance if it's so much fun for her? I am never sad. I have a sunny disposition, Lucie says. I'm accustomed to things this way, that's why I'm never sad. You can't very well dance with your brother, that's quite clear after all.

I go over to the counter. The pastries are behind glass panes, you need only point with your finger to the one you want. The fat confectioner sits hunched over filing on a key. How easy it would be for metal shavings to fall into the whipped cream. And people wonder why they have to die. Their stomachs are bleeding because of that. But I don't say anything, it isn't my business. Everything is such a matter of course to them. How could I say anything to that?

"Would you like something else?" asks the confectioner without looking up.

"I'd like to pay," I say.

"The gentleman has already paid," he says, and indicates the upstairs with a nod of his head. He keeps on filing. An unpleasant sound. That's his business. His business. Well then, since everything is paid for . . .

What shall I do with my money now? As I step outside, the north wind is blowing the first snow flakes in the street. I have to turn up the collar of my raincoat. It's already all spotted because I always have to turn it up.

Good, at least, that Lucie has it warm up there. I'll take my coat to the cleaner's as soon as it isn't snowing any more. Lucie told me, you can't let yourself be seen looking like that.

*Translated from the German
by Sammy MacLean*

Hans Erich Nossack

The Pen Knife

My room is on the ground floor. I sleep with my window open. Because of the oxygen, you know. But that isn't important. The reason I mention it: it isn't at all difficult to climb in through my window. You only have to support yourself with your hands on the ledge and then lift yourself up. I'm no gymnast, but I'm sure I could show you how to do it. Without making much noise. You would have to be careful of the tin along the ledge.

In our neighborhood there are a lot of soldiers, white, brown, and black. At night they practice maneuvers in the woods in preparation for the next war. No doubt about it, one of them might see my open window and say to himself, why shouldn't I enjoy a good night's rest in there while the others are training? It's an obvious idea. Besides, it's warmer in my room. And then he would find me in here. That would be very unpleasant. It would be unpleasant for both of us.

You take the risk. But up to now I haven't been murdered, as you can see. I sleep very lightly. There is gravel on the paths outside, it crunches when someone walks on it, and I wake up immediately. You would have to sneak up in stocking feet, and that hurts. Of course, a cat might jump in, too. Cats are curious, after all. Just imagine, you are lying peacefully in bed and suddenly a huge tomcat is sitting on the window sill. That could be very frightening as well.

Fright! One day — yes, this happened in the light of day — I'm sitting at my table, thinking. Suddenly a head peers in through the window and asks, "Will you give something for the kingdom of God?" And I scream at it, "No! Not interested!" Excuse me, I was frightened. You would be frightened, too, if a head appeared in the window and asked you something like that. It was someone from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Afterwards I was sorry.

But that's only by the way. Naturally, there are all sorts of other night life out there. Very active, too, I suspect. You notice it mornings from the tracks in the garden. Here and there someone has left his droppings. Or there's a yellow spot on the grass, stained by urine, excuse me. Sometimes someone has only rummaged in a pile of leaves and not put

them back in order again. But in general they're very considerate, I have to admit that. Once or twice it has happened that the lid to someone's garbage can has rolled down the cellar steps. That, of course, causes an awful racket. Very aggravating when you're trying especially hard to be quiet. As I said, these are exceptions. I can't complain.

Then, too, you deceive yourself sometimes. You think, stop! someone is sneaking up there, and it turns out to be only the big vine leaves on the house wall rubbing against each other with a sound like tinfoil. I mention this only because I want to prove to you that I sleep lightly. It isn't so easy to take me by surprise.

But let's leave that. Let's get to the apple trees. I mean, it isn't a matter of them, either, they're only a pretext, so to speak. The apple trees are accidental. You might ask, and rightly so, why apple trees? Why not plum trees? Well, they're there, that's all, and you have to rely on something. I didn't plant them, excuse me. I love them very much, you see.

Not because of the apples, no. The apples don't interest me. You can buy them at the store if you insist on eating them. Anyway, they're mostly green when they fall from the trees. We often have sudden rain storms, the mountains are not far away, and then in the morning the apples are lying in the grass. Well, good, let them. I'm not a fruit dealer, after all. If you want to, you can make apple sauce with them.

I love the apple trees in winter, too. The twigs, the way they reach out from their branches and feel around, I like that. I think people call that "structure" these days, but it doesn't matter. And please don't be offended when I say, I love. An unclear concept, certainly. It even sounds foolish to say, I love the apple trees. But they just make me think about them, that's all. They stand outside there in the cold, and with us here it sometimes gets terribly cold. Not that I'm sorry for them, that would be petty, but I ask myself, how can they stand it? I wonder what they think? Certainly they think something, it can't be any other way. It must be possible to find out. You might assume that the writing would be easiest to decipher during the time when they're bare. The bluish shadows on the snow are drawn very clearly, too, without excess ornamentation. All these things are expressed very clearly and reasonably. So what are they trying to tell us? Or, if not us — one shouldn't overvalue oneself — to whom are they trying to speak?

Too bad one can't find out. There stand the apple trees, and here one sits. Both are thinking something, no doubt about it, and in between . . . Yes, precisely this in-between! Really too bad! It irritates me. Please don't laugh.

But to the point! One day they begin to blossom. In spite of everything. And how they blossom! You become quite silent with astonishment. If you don't have yourself under control, you can even cry. That doesn't happen with any of the other blossoms people talk

about so much. With roses, for example, you can always say, look, how beautiful! and that's enough. But not with apple blossoms. Try it sometime, you won't be able to utter a sound. Only with the bluebells you see sometimes on meadows do you get a similar feeling. You stop short and don't dare open your mouth — it would disturb. But I digress, excuse me. It's different with bluebells too — you don't cry. And please don't consider me sentimental because of this. It isn't a question of me, it's a question of the apple trees. I only mean to say that whoever doesn't stop short at the sight of a blossoming apple tree or even of a blossoming apple branch and stop talking, he . . . he . . . you can't trust someone like that. Try it yourself sometime. I advise you to be careful.

In short, you can't find the words for it. Or the ear. Yes, that seems more exact to me: you can't find the ear for it. It's quiet at night, after all, and I lie or sit here, it doesn't matter, and the window is open. I'm alone, wide awake. You might believe that I could hear what is being said by the apple trees or in them or among them, but no! If it were only a question of a foreign language which I don't yet understand, that wouldn't be so bad, with time it could be learned, through comparative study. But no! Even though I know that talking is going on out there, I hear nothing. My ear, as I said, that's what's the matter. And when your ear is no good, that, sir — don't think ill of me because of this remark — is really extremely depressing. I intentionally avoid using stronger expressions for sorrow. We should, after all, remain objective, realistic.

I even got up one night and went outside. I hoped that if I walked up and down underneath the apple trees, perhaps I would hear it. Perhaps they're whispering only not to disturb the night, I thought, and not because they want something. I caught a bad cold out of it. The ones outside who are speaking don't suspect. They speak to me and think I hear them. And think I'm indifferent because I don't answer. That's no good, you have to realize that. That's really no good. I don't say this because I'm tenderhearted. If I were tenderhearted I would have stayed in bed.

That didn't satisfy me. My curiosity, if you like, didn't allow it. After all, I could simply have closed the window. Oxygen or no oxygen. Some say it's better for the nerves to sleep in a closed room. But nerves don't interest me. I live alone anyway. I had to find out what was going on with the apple trees. I wanted to have some part in the activity out there. And not only during blossom time, no, winter and summer, too. In the autumn, for example, people have the habit of picking up one apple or the other, taking a look at it and then letting it fall into the grass again because it's green. That can be heard, of course. For something like that my ear is sufficient. But during blossom time the activity increases a great deal, you can feel it. Some nights it becomes positively oppressive. That proves that the blossoming is more important than the apples. So it wasn't just a frivolous expression of

fancy on my part, it's a fact. A quite unromantic fact.

All right, then! All right! Let's stick to the facts. Since a few nights ago I haven't been able to stand it any longer. The activity is too great, the space for the apple trees was probably no longer sufficient for them. It flows right up to my window and presses against it and even into my room so that I, too, become oppressed by it. In short, I can't bear it any longer. You can get asthma from it.

So I lean out my window and shout, "A little louder, please! I can't hear you! You can see that I'm ready for anything!" What else should I have said?

I ask loudly. It's night, after all, everyone is asleep, and I'm alone. No danger that anyone might hear me. But please, keep it to yourself. It would be embarrassing for me.

How loudly I can't say, but loudly enough. Because they heard me, sir, I can assure you of that. The ones out there have better ears than I, they hear me when I speak. They not only hear, they understand my language as well, while I . . .

Because they were definitely speaking and calling and signalling and trying to make themselves understood to me and were surprised when I didn't react. They definitely talked about the situation and deliberated as to how they might communicate with me. Not just one, not just a few, but many, many. There were more of them all the time. They either came voluntarily, as if attracted, or were sent for so that they might help. Yes, they were seeking someone who had more experience and could make a suggestion as to what to do in a situation like that.

Oh, you should have seen the crowd! They came flowing in from all directions. See? Did I say see? Yes, you're right: why see? Because, of course. . . . But anyway, I saw it. The night billowed up to me. The night, the apple trees, everything. So intense was the crowding. Like a picture, a canvas that's stretched loosely on its frame. Like stage scenery on which the night and the apple trees were painted. Like a heavy curtain, it doesn't matter, and behind it all that crowding. I could have touched it, and it would have touched me, too. There was an especially large swelling where I was standing at the window. They were crowding up thickest of all there and trying to tear through the picture.

Elastic material, but unbelievably strong. And opaque. That is, opaque to me, because they could see me from the other side, you know. Some kind of modern synthetic material. There are eyeglasses like that, made so they reflect. The person with them on his nose can see everything he wants to, but people like us see only the empty mirror and no eyes. Very unpleasant indeed.

And soundproof into the bargain. Because, as I said, not a sound could be heard. What is a person supposed to do with material like that? What would you have done? Put yourself in my place for a minute. I held my breath. I leaned forward more so that I might hear something.

I held my ear, so to speak, against the material, or whatever it was. A little louder, please! It's possible that I repeated it. Who can remember things like that?

Finally they must have understood that I couldn't hear them. The swelling stayed in the picture. They pressed with all their strength against it, quite near, in order to see me better, and stared at me. And the ones standing further back raised themselves up on their tiptoes and leaned against the ones standing in front. They were probably holding their breath too. There was a pause, it was completely silent. More than silent, because it had been silent before, of course. They no doubt had made signs to one another, psst! psst! don't disturb now.

Then I saw what they had planned. There must have been someone very clever among them who gave them advice. Someone who had more experience. They had waited for him. Suddenly I saw it.

At first only a small bright spot. Just in front of the window, where the picture was billowing out the most. Or maybe actually in the window frame. Like an optical illusion. And I snapped my eyes shut, I didn't want to deceive myself. But when I open them again I see it more clearly. The spot has become clearer and is getting clearer all the time. And whiter. They are carrying something toward me, very slowly and very carefully. In order not to scare me away, probably. They carry it up to the material which separates us, right up to my eyes, and hold it there pressed flat against the material so that I can see it, and give me time, and wait.

It was a piece of paper. A rectangular piece of paper. A piece of white letter paper. And they had written something diagonally across it. In large clear writing. In our writing. In my writing. They had imitated my writing in order to make it easier for me and, of course, so that I would be able to understand them, too. And now they all waited, anxious.

They had written, in large letters. . . Please, get hold of yourself, because you won't have counted on this. They hadn't even forgotten to paint the question mark on the paper, although they and I both would have understood it without the question mark.

They had written — I hesitate to say it — "*Is Paradise in there?*" Only those four words and the question mark.

I ask you: Paradise. Childish! Really laughable! You stay awake nights, wide awake, as I said, in order to discover what they want of you. You're ready for anything, prepared to do them any favor, and they. . . all they know how to do is ask you about Paradise. Why Paradise? Really, you lose your ability to laugh in a situation like that.

I don't know what you would have done. I don't know what I did. Apparently I shrugged my shoulders and made a helpless gesture with my hands, just as now. What else could I have done? Gestures like that happen entirely of their own accord. You don't think anything special

when making them, you don't mean any harm, you don't intend to offend anybody, but. . . Well, anyway, they with their question, saw my gesture. I'm sorry.

And how could I have suspected that they were so impatient? They could have waited just one second longer and I would have taken up the matter with them. I would have tried to understand what they meant. No doubt about it! You can't just suddenly up and answer a question like that, you might talk nonsense and do harm. Really, Paradise! These are extremely esoteric questions, after all. Who among us has time to occupy himself with such things? It seems, obviously, to be very important to a few, I know. All right, that's their business, I have nothing against it. But when someone asks me for advice, they at least have to give me a second's time to think about it.

But they didn't give me any time. They took my gesture for my answer. What a regrettable misunderstanding! They immediately withdrew the paper. And then they withdrew, too. All of them! They didn't even leave a guard behind. The material on the curtain flowed away. The picture stretched itself smooth and flat again. Only the apple trees were there. And the night. A dog barked in the neighbor's yard.

And how cold I was! I was wearing only my pyjamas, after all. At apple blossom time the nights usually get quite cool in our part of the country. You can always count on night frosts.

That damned dog next door! Let's go ahead and consider quite calmly what might have been done, since we're already talking about it. Truthfully. Not much could have been accomplished with words, that much is clear. They would have noticed immediately that words are nothing but lame excuses. Perhaps they would have listened out of politeness; but in their hearts they would have thought, that person has absolutely no understanding of what it's about. All lies! Afterwards, one is ashamed.

Now what do you suppose would have happened if I had used my pen knife? I own a small pen knife, you see, for cutting the leaves of books. I keep it lying ready there on my table. It's very sharp. I make sure of that. I sharpen it on the whetstone in the kitchen. I also use it to cut hangnails, excuse me. Just imagine — because the thought suggests itself — that I had picked up the pen knife in order to slit the picture or the material with it a little. Exactly at the spot where it was bulging into my window and was very tight. Of course, it isn't certain whether the pen knife would have been strong enough to slit the material, but let's just go ahead and assume that it would have been. Naturally I would have made only a small slit, as a test, so to speak. Just to see if I can better understand what they want of me there on the other side. Not want, no, because they wrote on the paper what they want — just to be allowed to participate a little in their conversation.

No, the risk is too great. I threw the pen knife down. Understand me

rightly, now, I'm no coward. When you're accustomed to being alone at night and wide awake into the bargain, you have to be prepared to assume some element of risk. But it isn't a question of me at all. I wasn't thinking of my risk, but of the risk for them out there.

Look, even if you decide to make just a very tiny slit, who can guarantee that the pen knife won't slip on through and tear everything up? Everything! Because the swelling in the picture was already stretched too tight. So tight it was ready to burst. Dangerously tight.

But even that would not be the most dangerous thing. There's something much worse. They're pressing against it on the other side with all their strength, after all, in order to be as close as possible to me. You do have to take that into consideration. How would it be now if I wounded one of them with the pen knife? And blood flowed through the slit? At first only a few drops, then more and more. And I couldn't stop the wound and couldn't bandage it?

No, I'm not entitled to do that. Don't think ill of me.

*Translated from the German
by Sammy MacLean*

BIRTHDAY

Born in late August, as the season changed,
after the last heat wave of summer had broken
in rain and thunder

the last child of ageing parents

born in one grandmother's house
while my other grandmother was dying
an old woman
and my father sat by her bedside
telling her they would give me her name

I opened my eyes first
on the light of autumn
motes dancing in the sun
a clear morning
with wet gold flowers

And the leaves grew gold and died:
the grandmother I would never know died.

Brothers and sisters leaned
curiously over me sleeping
and the sister next me in age
was jealous, and wanted to sell me
to the cousin who tended my mother.

Of course it's all too far back
for me to remember,
but I know how it must have been.
Every year at this time
in late August, in September,
I celebrate my New Year,

the first season
through which I lived
outside my mother's womb.

And I try to remember my grandmother's house
my self in my mother's arms
my life beginning
as my grandmother's life ended
my father's tears
baptizing me with her name.

It seems sometimes as though I might remember
back before that,
the hot summer,
my mother walking heavily
through the blueberry fields
the smell of crushed bracken
somehow reaching me

back before time
back before I was

conceived in November
wintry weather
the moon visible
through frosted windows

and my grandmother already
beginning to die

COMPARING PARENTS

Your parents broke up
bitterly
were divorced
still don't speak well of one another
put you and your brother through agonies
of inability to decide between them.

Mine, after fifty years
and all those grandchildren,
were still lovers,
billed and cooed almost
embarrassingly
at eighty.

As the neighbours would have said,
she never looked at any other man,
and for him she was always
his Girl, the apple of his eye:

knight and lady
sleep together still
under their mossed and snowed coverlet
semper fideles

patterns of antique virtue.

Nevertheless, for all that,
I also find it hard to love,
remember that though my parents loved each other
they did not understand each other

puzzled

He always brought her chocolates
and chocolates gave her headaches.

She never cooked shellfish
though she knew he liked them.

They disagreed
on politics, religion, money,
and how children should be brought up.

Neither set of parents
the best models possible.

I always said when I was young
orphans would be luckiest to marry

but orphans, I am told,
have other problems.

COMPARING DREAMS

Your happy dreams were of flying
or of nesting in trees like Tarzan,
and your nightmares of Rasputin
(as you saw him in a boyhood book
about old St. Petersburg)
first shot, then flung to die
under icy water,
so that his murdered face
stared up from under ice.

I too am afraid of freezing
some night or other;
but my nightmares have been more often
of being buried alive
or smothered;
my happy dreams, of journeys
by train or sea,
or gardens through which I walk
pleasantly lost,
but drawing closer and closer
towards the garden's heart,
its fleshed marble statue
or ornamental fountain.

And on the garden's edge
there is a castle
convoluted as the garden
where supper waits
in a central firelit hall

and beyond the hall
the room with an old oak bedstead
carved with grapes and flowers
where I lie sleeping
dreaming these dreams.

MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY (1)

A fat man
has lent us
this place
in the mountains.
The nine empty beds
are big enough for bears.
A dead mouse floats
in one of the toilets.
Up in the gallery
my husband shoots
billiards. The balls
knock and clack
like sharp warnings.
I rattle through
three kitchens
trying to fix a meal,
some dark fear following me
gnawing my ankles.
I trip over a box
of rat poison. The tidbits
scuttle across the floor.

This place is no favour,
old moneybags.
No house should be this mammoth.
When night comes
I will head
for the safety
of black mountains.

THE SAVAGE TRADITION

There is a brown datsun
full of gas
and clean from a car wash.
There is no driver.
It is run by a wish.

In the freezer
there are pork chops
balls of hamburger
wrapped in tin foil
honey-bran muffins
piled on a package of beans.
A whole week cold as ice.

In the closet
a suit hangs
neat in its plastic coat.
The laundry is up to date.
There is no wife.
It is all done by plan.
The brown datsun shines
and moves off.

There is a tunnel with no lights
a spinning clover-leaf
a mile of black road
firm as the wish.
There is the wrong lane.
There is no road.
There is the crash of a concrete wall
and the brown datsun
dead to the world
like a woman
with hard despair
driving through her veins.

Kim Maltman / *Two poems*

ICE FISHING CESSFORD LAKE

Often there is that deep blue light that comes
before dawn. Over your face you pull the scarf
and step out from the cramped warmth
of the station wagon, from the stifling scents of bodies, coffee
laced with rum, out onto the lake.
The surface powders as you
tramp across it. Tufts of snow whirl up sporadically.
You find an old hole, frozen over,
and begin to chip, the steady heft of the ice hammer
wrenching at the layer of mitts and gloves. After a while
you scoop out all the loose bits, then begin again.
The ice re-formed inside the hole is no more than a day old,
yet you're down a foot at least before it gives out
and the weight of the hammer
yanks your hand down after it into the frigid blue-green water.
You put a dry glove on and drop the lines in.
Standing motionless you feel the wind swirl in from all directions,
and there is no shelter.

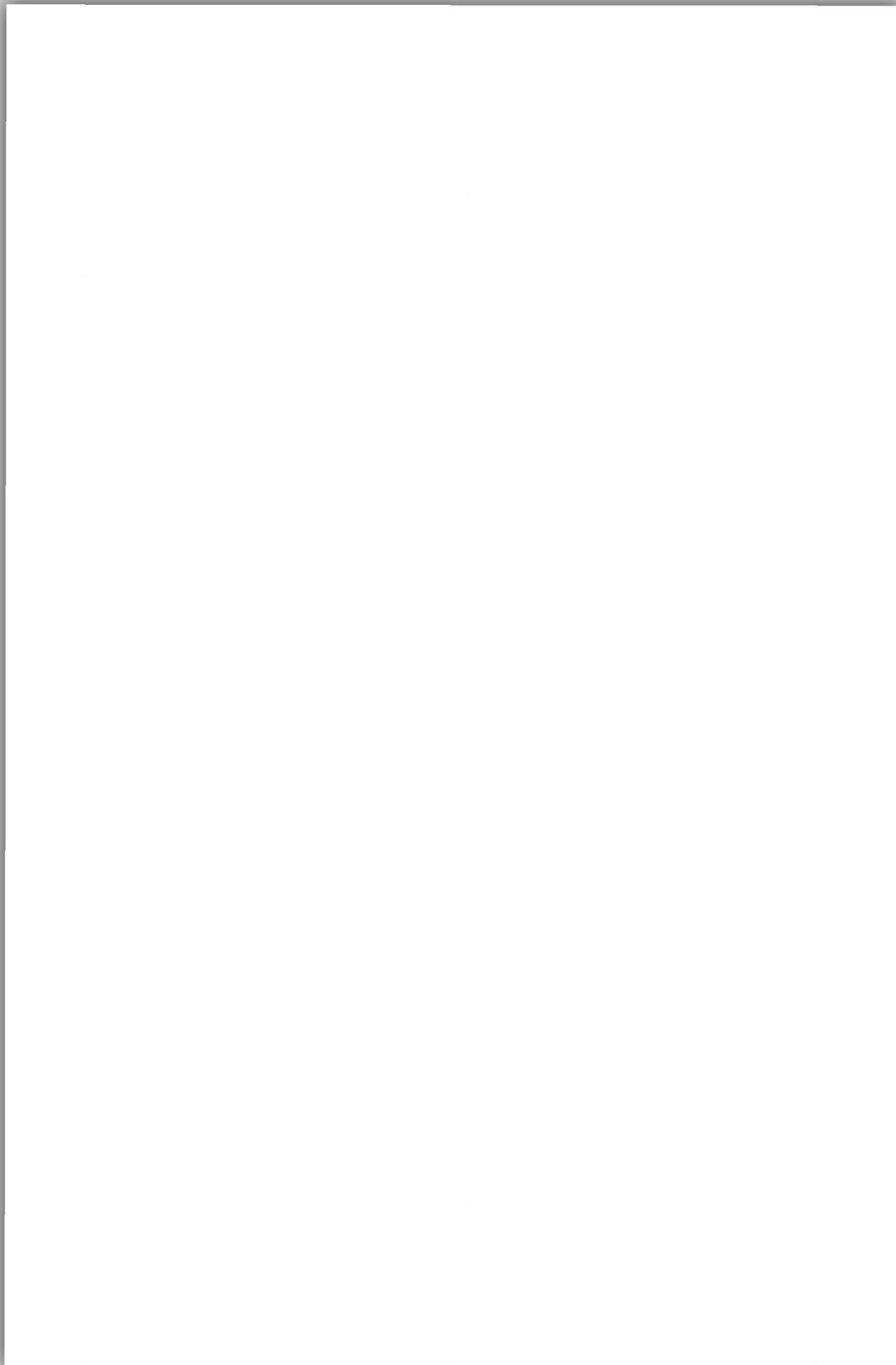
The fish pile up without a fight, small
barren perch the color of wet leaves matted under trees in spring.
Along their backs the sharp spines
poke out from the fins. They take the hook deep,
so you have to bare both hands to free them, one
sliding back from the head, pressing
the spines down to avoid the poison on them,
squeezing till the mouth opens. Strange,
in summer you can fish for days
and hardly catch a thing but now they just keep
coming. Soon your hands are numb, you start to catch
a few spines, but it's all so easy, you keep wanting
more, a few more. And it's
cold, you feel it working up your legs.
Along the shore the rushes
poke up stiffly through the ice.
An hour past dawn,
a faint glow straddling the skyline.

NIGHT

It hasn't been dark long
but already the grass by the roadside
has begun to blur and the dust
spilling forward from around the tires
marks the high beams with a strange near
clarity. Sometimes you can drive for miles like this,
out on the back roads, without passing a single car,
without a single sign of any other man-made light.
After a while there you can even relax a bit,
and enjoy it, loosen up on the wheel,
not bother to fight every bump, just drift,
and watch the dust roll up into the beams
in slow motion, layer after layer.

Something flashes through the headlights.
It hits the grillscreen with a crack
and then the body bounces once more, hard,
against the bottom of the car
with a heavy meaty thud.
Something odd about that sound,
the way it lasts, as if the air were
unusually heavy tonight. You stop the car and get out,
walk back down the road to look for it.
Either you've misremembered or something's
playing havoc with your sense of distance,
but you can't find it. It's as if
you'd been hallucinating except for the feel
of the thump through the floorboards.
You can still feel it, even over the pressure
of the ground as you bring your weight down on it.

You want it to have died quickly,
not dragged itself off into the ditch, too weak
to defend itself. So you go back and turn the car around
and check the road carefully this time, using the lights,
but there's no trace of any kind.
You stop and get out. With the engine off you hear each sound
magnified, the click of coins, like crickets, headlights
humming faintly. And even when you switch them off
there is the air, a distinct chill to it now.
You shiver, but just once, a long
isolated shiver. No doubt there will be frost
again tonight. You cough but your hand is next to useless,
the sound carries like a rifle shot.
Far off a coyote or a wild dog begins to howl,
off to the east where, just now,
the moon is coming up out of the fields.



Voices from the Maritimes

Six writers from Atlantic Canada

INTRODUCTION

Voices from The Maritimes is an introduction to the work of what we feel are six outstanding writers from Atlantic Canada. The selection is not intended to be representative of all writing in the Maritimes. In fact, no writers from Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland are presented. The focus is on these six particular writers from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and their work.

All six of these writers are at a similar stage in their writing careers. Although they have all been writing for a number of years, their work is just now beginning to be published in book form.

Harry Thurston's first collection of poetry, *BAREFACED STONE*, will be published within the next few months by Fiddlehead Poetry Books in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Liliane Welch's first book-length collection of poetry, *SYNTAX OF FERMENT*, was published by Fiddlehead Poetry Books in 1979. Two more collections, *ASSAILING BEATS* and *OCTOBER WINDS*, will appear this year, one of them from an Ottawa publisher as indicated in her bibliography.

H.R. ("Bill") Percy's first book, *THE TIMELESS ISLAND*, a collection of short stories, was published by Ryerson Press in 1960. That book is long out of print, and Percy's work has only begun to appear with some frequency again in the past five years or so. He has twice appeared in Oberon's annual anthology of the best Canadian short stories. His first novel, *FLOTSAM*, was published by Breakwater Books in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1978.

Allan Cooper's first collection of poetry, *BLOODLINES*, has just recently been published by Fiddlehead Poetry Books. Leigh Faulkner has published in a number of literary journals and anthologies. Although no book is in the immediate plan, a collection by this poet in the 80's is inevitable. Gregory Cook's first book was *ERNEST BUCKLER: CRITICAL VIEWS ON CANADIAN WRITERS*, which he edited for McGraw-Hill in 1972. His first collection of poetry, *LOVE FROM THE BACKFIELDS*, will be published later this year by Breakwater Books.

All six of these writers speak with strong Maritime voices. Harry Thurston, Gregory Cook, Leigh Faulkner and Allan Cooper are of "old Maritime stock", some of them 8th and 9th generation Maritimers. A strong sense of this background, and what Thurston refers to as a sense of the "past as extant in the present", runs through their work. With Faulkner and Cooper it forms a backdrop for an interior, sometimes mystical poetry. With Thurston and Cook it figures in a more immediate, sometimes startling context.

Welch and Percy are more recently landed Maritimers. Welch brings a European influence to her writing. A strong sense of New Brunswick's past figures in her work as well. She focusses an uncompromising, ironic eye on her subject matter — be it a woman choking to death on pumpkin pie in her kitchen, or the failure that "stares blankly/from smashed windows" in her desolate landscapes. H.R. Percy's story, "Like Heaven", could happen anywhere — and yet the atmosphere of the Nova Scotian small town pervades the piece. The story also touches on the lives of the blacks, a large segment of the Nova Scotia population that appears surprisingly little in writing from the Maritimes.

This strong sense of place is the one common element in the work of each of these writers. And yet, the usual generalizations about writing from the Maritimes (i.e. "close to the land", "colloquial", "folksy", etc.) do little justice to the richness and variety of these voices. And any comments to be made in this section about the Maritimes have been left to the writers themselves. They have each offered their own statements on how they feel about living in and writing from Atlantic Canada.

Their comments come from a variety of experiences and perspectives. H.R. Percy speaks as a past editor, as the founding President of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Provinces Representative of the Writers' Union of Canada. Gregory Cook is currently Executive Director of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia. Harry Thurston edits *Germination*, an impressive small poetry magazine from River Hebert, Nova Scotia. And Allan Cooper is a past editor of *First Encounter*, a literary magazine from Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

The names of these writers will probably not be familiar to most of our readers. And yet each of them has an impressive list of publication credits. For the most part, their writing has appeared in magazines and anthologies published by small literary presses in the Atlantic provinces. Many of their first books are also being published by these same presses. Although the two major literary publishers in the Maritimes, Fiddlehead Poetry Books and Breakwater Books, have respected reputations, limited distribution, small press-runs and other factors limit the amount of exposure and recognition these writers receive. Even with a first and

second book published, their work often fails to reach the larger audience it deserves.

In Canada, a Toronto publisher means better distribution and wider recognition. But all of the outstanding writing in this country is not published in Toronto. If that means such work is not as readily accessible to a wider audience, it does not diminish its importance. These are important writers. They have important things to say. We hope that this special section of *PRISM* will introduce more of our readers to their work.

— PETER CROWELL



Photo by Catherine Thurston

HARRY THURSTON

ICE & FOSSIL

Under this river
red with marsh mud,
a black vein branches
and narrows, lifeblood
nearing a dead end.
Twice daily the tides
bore the river banks,
now pocked as a miner's lung,
a cratered cancer specimen.

Bergs, the size of boxcars,
career into brackish waters,
Quake the bank,
lie on the riverbed,
their peaks jutting out.
I walk the dyke,
bystander to this grand spectacle
which promises openness,
a return to colour.

While below
(where it is midnight always)
blackened men, their faces
smeared with fossil,
load the legacy laid down once only.

STRAW MEN

Their season is over:
In the stubble
the bone-amber stooks
lie among the ribcages
of archaic rakes,
phalanges of forks
that have hefted
their last load.
I pity them a little:
Today begins a month of Sundays,
The smell of wood
takes them by the throat,
The sky shivers so
its gleaming teeth
fall from its head.
I pity them a little:
their strange harvest.

CLOUDS FLYING BEFORE THE EYE

*for my grandparents,
Hilda & Jeremiah Reede*

Blue-lipped, laurelled in kelp,
He levitates through frigid fathoms,
to find the family riven, exiled
from the ancestral Island —

*Rub the trunk of the body all over with salt;
It frequently recover them that seem dead.*

Memory? A grappling hook
that would snag, dredge up
God-knows-what flotsam
from the maelstrom of blood —

*Set the patient under a giant waterfall
as long as her strength will bear.*

Let slip their boats:
Christened for wives and children.
Let slip their hours:
Occult as lighthouse candles.
Let slip their love:
Overboard, its body lost to kin.

Clouds flying before the eye,
he drifts rudderless in my salt blood;
One bleary eye, the mark
of him I bear —

*Take a drachm of powdered betony every morning.
Or, be electrified.*

Shriven, rocked by a sea-ague,
Her years were a widow's walk:
She kept watch
over the empty berth —

*Let two strong men carry the patient upright,
backward and forward about the room.*

Let slip my tongue, name them:
Hilda, Jeremiah.
Let harmonica and fiddle have sway:
lightfooted in a shanty.
Let earth cover the eyes:
out to sea so long.

Italicized passages taken from *Old Settlers' Remedies*, compiled
by Marion Robertson for the Cape Sable Historical Society.

MARCH SOUND

Purple blotched and red haired,
one eye closed by the instruments
attending a difficult birth,
I came one month too early
(an arm and a leg first)
And would not suck at my mother's breasts—

Here I am with these big things, she cried,
and he won't even look at them.

Forgive me: perhaps it was the wind
which howled three days on my arrival,
as if consciousness were a pricked
pocket of air.
Before my eyes opened or skin dried,
March sound was the first sign
of a new world.

Twenty-eight years in this atmosphere:
To celebrate the wind has blown
three days.
I watch as it lifts the horizon,
sets it down elsewhere at will,
snuffs the sun's candle out.

Outside it grafts skin to ice,
blows at your back, then your face,
until you understand why men
curl up like babies in the snow.
Twenty-eight years in this atmosphere:
I know enough now to suckle comfort,
frost bitten cheek blooming again
in the kitchen heat.

HARRY THURSTON

Autobiographical Notes

Yarmouth/Landed

1784: Robert Thurston, a British soldier who fought in the Revolutionary War, comes to Shelburne with the Loyalists—genealogical version. Or, he jumped ship in Lockeport, arriving in Yarmouth, overland, the next year. In any event, he settled in Yarmouth in 1785, where the Thurstons have been ever since.

I grew up on the family farm in Chebogue. My father moved there in '39, the farm failed in '59. The subsequent move to town was traumatic. I fantasized stowing away on a tramp steamer, as an act of revenge against my parents' treachery. Somehow, my sense of Yarmouth as it was in the late 19th C., a thriving world class port, was intact and undiminished. This anachronistic perception of time, of the past as extant in the present, has persisted.

One ancestor, great-uncle Charles, sailed out of Yarmouth circa 1898, jumped ship in the Sandwich Islands, and married into the deposed Royal family. The rest of my father's direct line seem to have been 'of the land'. My mother's natural parents were "Cock'a'witters," generically, Cape Sable Islanders. Her father, a fisherman, was lost at sea.

Yarmouth, because of its closeness to the sea, its land's-end exposure, holds a strong attraction for me. I may be the last of my line to be born and to grow up there.

1972: Married Catherine Rideout at Cape Forchu Light.

Greenfield/Back-to-the-Land

1817-1975: Greenfield, ten miles from Truro, ironically named, rocky, hemmed in by hills, the kind of place that steadfastly resists man's best efforts to tame it, after 150 years of logging and stone-picking. Backdrop for my first collection, *Barefaced Stone*.

I rediscovered two vital things there: a sense of community and an oral tradition. And for the first time, I saw the land through the eyes of my parents' generation.

Casual farm labourer. Meantime, close friends were headed back-to-the-land for real—clearing bush, working with horses, building with hand tools. I was seeing through my friends' eyes the challenge that the land presented a century or more ago, and in Greenfield, the thin edge of the same agrarian struggle; Timeless cycles in No-man's land.

Greenfield provided me with my first audience, a handful of neighbours who humoured me.

Ridge/Dirge

Wolfville Ridge: At various times, home to Greg Cook, Sharon Lake, and myself. Collectively, we are The Dirge Poets. (Dirge: tongue-in-cheek anagram of Ridge.) The Dirge Poets & Their Merry Men (two musicians in our extended family) toured ten small Nova Scotian communities in 1978, reading from open air bandstands, park picnic benches, fisherman's halls, and at an agricultural exhibition. A kind of Robin Hood literary experiment, a giving back to the people what was their own.

Roots/Future

1969: I wrote my first poems; then, a science student, bent on a Ph.D. or M.D., with not the least literary pretension.

1971: B.Sc. in Biology & Chemistry. Acadia; unemployed and still writing.

1980: Full-time freelance; eclectically edit *Germination*. First book.

I find it difficult to ferret out specific influences. A friend says, "For one, Dylan Thomas." I like Thomas' line, its length and music (which sets me in opposition to Black Mountain physiological poetics), but beyond that, he is as inimitable as Nowlan. Buckler and Nowlan are certainly literary forebears, but not models one can emulate. (I sometimes feel like Chekov did, working in the shadow of giants—in his case, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.) Incidentally, I read quite a bit of poetry in translation.

I write slowly, from first draft to final form averages better than a year. By today's norm, unprolific; a little above average by Robert Graves' standard of five poems a year.

No novel. But I would like to write a long poem that would sustain the average reader's interest, an ambition most of my peers would likely consider atavistic. I have radical—some would say reactionary—ideas about the role of poetry: the need for poets to reclaim an audience, beyond that of other poets and critics; the imperative to prepare a future for the form.

—Harry Thurston
River Hebert, N.S.

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Photo by Cyril Welch

LILIANE WELCH

Liliane Welch was born in Luxembourg. She studied in Europe and in the United States, and has taught French literature for the past thirteen years at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. She and her husband, Cyril Welch, usually spend their summers hiking and mountain-climbing in Europe. In a letter to PRISM she says:

“There is nothing exciting to be said about me in the ‘I’ form. When Fred Cogswell reviewed for me last spring the ‘exciting’ lives of some of the poets in his stable, it dawned on me that into such a crowd I don’t fit. You see, I didn’t have a traumatic childhood, never felt the urge to commit fratricide, matricide or patricide, I don’t drink, smoke or dope myself up, I’ve been married since time immemorial to a man with whom I get along and I have never spent a night in jail. Sounds pretty boring doesn’t it . . .”

PUMPKIN PIE

Her portrait has hung
in the shuttered room for years
the paper old and faded.
Flesh came upon her,
she was twice the man he was.

Her screams
in daytime placated heaven.
Grim solitude:
she armed with her Bible;
he planting squash.

Turnips burst from the earth
the sun baked the prayers
in the kitchen
she choked on pumpkin pie.

THE BIRTHDAY

Today's his birthday.
We fetched his body home
to an empty room
then buried it:
Dispossession ends with death.
On the family portrait
he's the precocious axis
with impenetrable eyes.

The outrage.
A wild animal
trampling our good name.
He laughed at us crass and loud:
eloped with that whore.
Then the accident:
In the backyard
birds streak the dusty car
with lime.

A DRINKING MAN SPEAKS TO HIS JEHOVAH

A sack of meal
over a shoulder.
Is my face painted
on that child's balloon?
My attic is ruined:
I snore with whiskey,
set pans and buckets
under the leaks.

Bright glare, rags
broken crockery
atrophied speech.
I'll endure
when you blackjack me:
I've thinned out my delusions.

It's better than the theatre
I'm marooned
in sweet sleep.
I hear your blow resounding
as I'm ejected from each bar.

THE IDIOT

My shadow hunts,
it's gone,
it hunts in the grass.
The booksatchel climbs
up the unbuttoned coat.
The head and combed hair
swings behind;
it's caught on the fence.
Mother stands on the door;
my hair snags on that nail,
gloves, cap: all holding me.
Be good, Mother says,
I don't cry:
Grampa stomps inside the house,
it's bright and grows.
I want candy:
the dog takes it.
In the grass my shadow
has reached farther than the house.

HUNTING

Want that
cow moose.
Flow of blood: warmth.
The burst of shotguns splitting
the wood's dark centre.
Ankles cold:
have I lost the track?
She'll be gunned down.
A mountain of thighs.
Odours: heavy,
breaking into me
as a dance of hooves.

A dog barks.
A train blows.
Free as the salt wind.
When I cross the brook,
the ground opens
as a wound.
I'll wade through
the muddied red
— probe the peat —
into a closing bush.

A WOMAN'S VOICE, DEEP IN NEW BRUNSWICK

On the over grown fields
I see our dreams teetering
and sold for a pittance.
Failure
stares blankly
from smashed windows.

What do I do?
I spruce up with make-up,
strike an absent pose.
Our stunted children feed
on the howl of snowmobiles.

When I bake bread
you drink our shame.
What has become of you?
Studying how we failed
I see two
shaking hands.

NOTES

Things speak loud in New Brunswick. Within the silence of the lonely 'mute fragment, with which Canada bends into Fundy Bay' the voices of the earth call out most insistently.

I am always overwhelmed by a great joy upon my return from the Summer migration to Europe when 10,000 meters below the airplane the first fingers of Labrador stretch out into the Ocean. For this vast, distant and ancient landscape already contains the vibrations of the language in which I hang suspended for a good part of the year. These mountains of the sea where there are but few human oases hook me into the crisp Maritime mornings with their cold wrists and stiff ankles. I write best in the early morning hours. The high winds bring a vigil, a clarity and sobriety which for me are the preconditions for the making of poems.

In New Brunswick's powerful ebb and flow of absence and presence, the voice of things past, present and future pound. As I wander over the lonesome dykes on Fundy's lip and track across the overgrown mill-roads in the forests, the Acadian dyke-builders and the early mill-workers come at me. But it is also here that the memories of the Old World sound most clearly: the small post-war Luxembourg mining-town with its silent streets, where the hoofs of horses in funeral processions and the echoes and laughter of human voices punctuated my childhood; the Alps and Dolomites with last Summer's scalings over rock and ice. In this place, in the writing of poems, I find my orientation, where I came from and toward what I move.

I see no special problems of writing here owing to the rarity of publishers or the lack of contact with other writers. I write poetry the way I climb mountains: for the love of the words and the love of the mountains. It's nice when a publisher or editor is interested in my work (and believe me, I send it out with great gusto, saving all the rejection slips!), but I would go on writing even if no one paid any attention to my poems. As to fellow writers: I am fortunate enough to be living with a writer/philosopher. We write each morning in rooms next to one another and thank the gods that we are in a position to do this. Our hobbies of mountain climbing and hiking afford us many opportunities for discussing the problematics of writing poetry and philosophy.

— *Liliane Welch*
Sackville, N.B.

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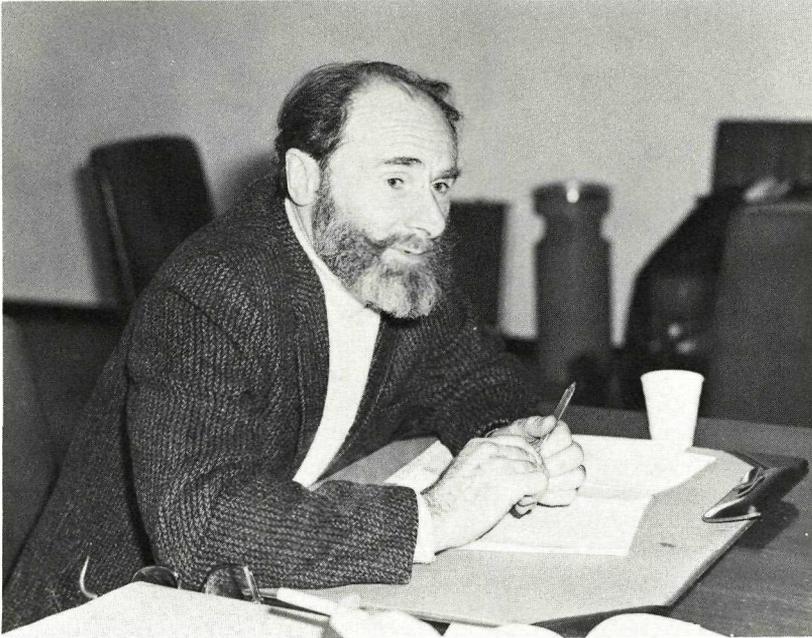


Photo courtesy of Writers'
Federation of Nova Scotia

H.R. PERCY

After twenty-eight years in Canada — nearly twenty in the Canadian Navy — I guess I'm about as Canadian in outlook, especially when I sit down to write, as anything but the accident of birth could make me. And enough of those years were spent in Nova Scotia to impart a distinct blue tinge to my British-born nose.

Even when, in accordance with family tradition, I joined the Royal Navy at the age of sixteen, I knew I had to be a writer. I procrastinated a lot, and was in any case a slow developer (which is not necessarily a bad thing), but the conviction was powerful and it never wavered. I wrote as a more or less secret vice while serving during World War 2 and after, and published several short stories and essays before coming to Canada with my family in 1952.

Cont. on p. 63

H.R. Percy

Like Heaven

My mother, who died when I was born, comes into the kitchen wearing a wedding veil and carrying a big bag of flour. She looks about her bemused, trying to remember what she came here to do. I sit shivering in the draughty corner by the cellar stairs, but she glows with warmth from the open stove-front and a great comfort shines out from her, or rather through her, for she has the shone-through radiance of a church window seen from the inside on a sunny morning.

Oh, yes, I know about churches, although you might not think so to see me. In fact it was in church that I first saw The Banana, singing fit to bust and looking Heavenward like she thought God had nothing else to do but listen.

I'm chained to the refrigerator, which is leaking cold, spitefully. The chain is at full stretch but I'm still a good ten feet from Mother and her comfortable glow, her visible warmth. She knows I'm here but she takes no notice. Less than no notice, in fact. Her avowal of me is on the negative side of the scale. I can tell this even though her features never move. Not even her eyes. Her features indeed are indeterminate, faded a little. Not long enough in the hypo and perhaps even a little out of focus in the first place. Her movements have a certain woodenness, which is not surprising after all those years of immobility. Just how many years I'm at a loss to say, for there's no way of knowing whether I'm me then or me now. My physical being is defined only by its own sensations. I am a me-shaped misery for the cold to press in upon.

Mother dumps out the flour in a tall white cone on the kitchen floor and proceeds to mix it into a dough. She scoops a hollow in the middle and slops in buckets of water, mixing it like cement. In very short order she has this lump of pastry big enough to crust over the Grand Canyon. It rises rapidly, puffing up like a cumulus cloud on the grubby linoleum, but she punches it down, kneads it into vaguely suggestive shapes, all humps and hollows and fanciful crevices.

She reaches for me as for some stock ingredient, always ready to hand, requiring neither glance nor thought. The chain it turns out is no chain at all but a long bubble-gum umbilicus which she ties off nimbly as she folds me into the dough and slides me into the oven.

I'm apprehensive but I don't struggle at all. I'm too glad of the warmth, the soft enfolding, as of a big, bottle-warmed feather bed. Sleep is stealing gratefully over me. Mother has taken up her bouquet and stands twice framed in her frame and the oven door, looking demurely at nothing. I must remember to dust her when I'm done.

The oven door swings shut of its own accord and at once my temperature begins to rise. The dough accepts my shape and draws at my body like a big amorous poultice. I feel the first sluggish currents of convection in my blood, and the tickle of tiny bubbles forming in my lower parts, as on the bottom of a saucepan.

All this time I've been nightmare-mute, but now as I find myself coming to a boil I start to shout so loud that I scare even myself. The oven door opens.

Hope is short lived. Instead of succor comes a gigantic fork bent on testing to see if I'm tender. I fight madly to extricate myself from the morass of dough, but the harder I struggle, the worse I become ensnared. The great fork swoops and catches me under the ribs. At its first stab I let go this god-awful scream.

"Wake up, you crazy son of a bitch," Darren says, giving me another dig.

"Hey, lay off will ya. Wanna break my ribs or somethin'?" I disentangle myself slowly from the boa-constrictor bedclothes and sit up. The sheets are soaked with sweat.

"Same dream, huh?"

"Yeah. Third time this week."

"You sure was lettin' rip. Wonder you didn't wake the Old Man."

Luckily he's still snoring in the next room. He gets tetchy as hell if you break his sleep. Different story, though, at six in the morning when he wakes up lively as a hungry flea and wants all the world hustling around him.

"Let's go get some coffee," Darren says. "I can't sleep good neither, thinkin' about that bitch."

He's been thinking about that bitch ever since she stood him up a month ago. So have I, if it comes to that. Not that I ever had much to do with her, apart from exchanging the time of day and passing her the salt and the like of that. She tried to make talk with me a couple of times but I just got tongue-tied and didn't know where to look. She gave up on me. Probably thought I was stupid. The Old Man wasn't much better. Nor for that matter was Darren, but of course he could get away with just gazing into her eyes. I used to watch them sitting together on the stoop while I was working about the yard and think what a difference it would make, having a woman about the place. There hasn't been one since Mother, and she's been under ground for twenty years. Apart, that is, from old Grammy Foster, who comes in to clean, and you can't really think of a homely bag of bones like that as female. Darren's Pamela,

now, she was plump and shapely, and her long blond hair was a treat to see.

She didn't seem to mind about us being black. Not really all that black, either, come to that. The first time I told Darren about my dream he said, "Well then, I guess I jes' got you outa that oven in time, man. You's done to a turn." He always puts on this nigger accent when the question of our colour comes up.

The Old Man's pretty black, all right, but Darren and I are just sort of dusky, like our mother must have been. The time I saw Darren and Pamela swimming down at the brook I thought they were just about the perfect combination. From the way she looked at him I guess she thought so too. But when this airforce colonel came along she dropped Darren like a hot potato. Which he was. It's no joke being the only coloured family in the county. Grammy and her crazy cousin always excepted. You have to except them from just about everything.

"Well," I say while Darren makes the coffee, "what you should do is drop the word around town that Pamela is due to produce a little brown brat along about Christmas. That'll throw a scare into his colonelship."

"Listen, little brudder. You talk about her like that an' you won't see Christmas."

"Mister Chivalry," I say. "Big deal." But I respect him for it. I feel the same way myself. Reverent, is how women make me feel. Most women, anyway.

"Specially as it may be true."

He has me fooled for a minute, but then I know he's lying. Boasting, rather. Wants me to believe he made out with her.

"Ya don't say!" I act all impressed, admiring. "Say, what was it like?"

"What sort of damfool question is that? Ain't you never slept with a woman."

"Sure," I say. "Sure I have."

"Well, then, you tell *me* what it's like."

Cagey. That's Darren all over. He gives a sarcastic laugh.

"It's. . . it's like Heaven."

His hand comes down hard on my shoulder. "Yeah. That's it. Like Heaven." And he laughs so loud he wakes up the Old Man. The Old Man's sore as hell, but at least it gets me off the hook.

I was only twelve at the time. For a couple of years, off and on, I'd been going to church because the Old Man said it had been Mother's last wish. Darren tried it a couple of times and quit, but I became quite a regular attender. He used to ask me what the hell I saw in it and I'd say I liked the singing. Which was only partly true. Mind you, I did like the singing. That's how I got into the choir. That and the fact that Doreen and Lesley joined the choir first. But the other reason I kept going was that something of Mother seemed to be there. Silly, I know, but I really felt that. Perhaps it was because I found the church a

womany place and although I didn't realize it at the time my life was a desert when it came to all the things guys with mothers and sisters take for granted and even pretend they'd like to be without; soft, feminine things you can measure your manhood against, nourish your masculinity's myths upon.

At first I always tried to sit behind Mrs. Robertson because she smelt so good. I never knew what perfume it was, but you always got a great waft of it when she went by on the street. I used to hang around outside pretending to read the gravestones until she arrived and then follow her in. Another thing that fascinated me was the way she was always messing with her hair. Her long pale fingers scuttled deftly among the coppery curls, checking, arranging, chasing errant strands, always ending up with a small approving pat that just about drove me wild. I used to wait for it as one waits for the last inevitable note of a familiar piece of music. Her hands' movement was so feminine, so mysterious and so different from everything in my male-dominated world.

Then one Sunday Doreen Lesley smiled at me and I switched my allegiance to her. She wasn't beautiful but her smile was. All you need to fall in love is a little hope of response. Given that, you can create all the beauty you want for yourself. So all week I used to dream those vague pre-pubic dreams of Doreen with her severe, crash-helmet hair and her thin shoulders stooped in devotion. She always smiled when she turned to leave and saw me sitting there, as though she knew.

When I asked to join the choir Mrs. Bonani was doubtful.

"You're small," she said, as though it was a crime. "You're thin. Thin people can never sing. My hubby, now, he was thin. Never could strike a note within half an octave. And not enough lung-power to blow out a candle."

"Doreen Lesley's thin."

The Banana gave me a quick look.

"She's also got a rich father."

This was new to me and it caused me a queer little lurch in the stomach. Not only white, but rich.

"Anyway, you're black, aren't you?" She said this as though it was a matter of opinion and she expected me to contradict her.

"So's Belafonte," I said.

Her great body began to bounce and sway like my Old Man's truck starting up on one cylinder of a cold morning. "My," she said, "you've got some idea of yourself." She slapped her fat thigh and spilt her melodious laughter all over Main Street. People turned to look, and I felt myself shrinking. I felt conspicuous there with her. More conspicuous, that is.

"Not, of course, that I've got anything against your being black," she said for half the town to hear, "but some people are funny that way."

I debated whether I should kick her shin.

"In any case, you'd have to take a voice test."

It was a terrifying prospect, but I told myself I'd be doing it for Doreen.

"That's O.K."

"Well, then," she said, puffing herself up until I thought she'd float away and drawing out the first word in a way that made me feel uneasy. "Let me see."

Elation. I didn't have any doubts about my voice. Darren and I had sung together for years.

"All right, then." The Banana raised her conducting hand. "Give me the first two verses of 'There is a Green Hill'. One, two. . . ."

"What, here?"

"Of course, here. Ready, now. One, two, three."

So I let her rip for all I was worth, Mrs. Bonani conducting away like she had the whole Orpheus Choir right there on the corner of Main and Tupper. An audience gathered in no time, and one old man even took out his change purse. A couple of people clapped when I finished.

"Hmmm. Well, all right. Seven-thirty Thursday for practice." She strode away and I looked with adoration upon her titanic receding rump. But along the block she turned, and her diamond-crusted finger found me out among the multitude. "Oh, yes," she shouted. "And no monkey business in the vestry with that girl."

Monkey business in the vestry was more than I dared dream of, but I did see myself, as I ran jubilant homeward, basking in the warm regard of "that girl" as the two of us filled the church with ecstatic harmony.

As it turned out I couldn't even see Doreen, during the service, without leaning perilously forward to look around Mrs. Bonani's bosom. Even at practice when The Banana stood out front there was usually someone else's bosom, or Miss Robichaud's folio hymn book. And in any case if I started gawking around, The Banana would silence the choir with an imperious tap of her baton on the lectern, cast up a long-suffering look at the Lord and say, "Belafonte! You're wool-gathering again."

Otherwise, Mrs. Bonani paid me little heed. Her attention was taken up by Loretta Dimsworth and Hector Sobey, who sang solo, and by Miss Robichaud, whose ability to read the music (but not the words) in her giant book was a source of continuing exasperation.

"Miss Robichaud," The Banana would say with her machine-gun tap of the baton and a voice of venomous sweetness. "Dear Miss Robichaud, I know The Book says otherwise, but here we dwell an extra beat on 'blessed.' I've O.K.'d it with the Almighty."

For me, practices were a problem. After school I delivered groceries for Snuffy Legrand, and to get to the church by seven-thirty I really had to rush. The first couple of times I missed my supper, so after that I always took along a sandwich. Often the practice had already started

when I got there, so I'd wait in the vestry until there was a suitable pause and then sneak into my place on tiptoe. The Banana would pretend not to notice, but later in the evening she'd come out with some crack about "the late Belafonte."

Most of the time, because of my late arrival and the fact that her Daddy came in his big car to whisk her away right after practice, I saw less of Doreen than I did when I was just an ordinary member of the congregation. (Oh, yes, I was an *extraordinary* member now, up there in the choir stalls, consciously angelic in cassock and surplice, with a limp and slightly grubby ruff around my neck. I gloried in it, even though Darren said my head looked like a plum pudding on a fancy plate.) But one Thursday Doreen was late too, and we stood together in the vestry waiting for them to finish the first hymn. She gave me the old smile, that always seemed to have something special in it, and raised her shoulders in a way that suggested we were in something exciting together. I could only nod and grin. I found it suddenly very hot in there. We waited together awkwardly through one verse, then I went to look out at the choir through the crack of the door. Doreen came and stood close, trying to see out too. Her hair brushed my face as she turned to whisper.

"Do you play?"

You have to remember I was only twelve.

"Play?" I guess I only said it with my eyes. Our noses were almost touching and I could feel the warm buffet of her breath.

"You sing like a dream," she said. "Perhaps we could get a group together. But we need a guitar. You don't . . .?"

"Only the mouth organ."

Doreen giggled. The merry meeting of our eyes was like an embrace. The Amazing Singing Mouth Organ Player.

The choir launched into the last verse.

"We could practise at my place," Doreen said.

The two of us singing together in one of the rooms in her big fancy house. She's in a frilly dress, all lace and bows, and her eyes are full of adoration as I show off my miraculously-acquired skill on the guitar. Servants bring us cake and ice cream.

Suddenly I was alone in the vestry and the singing had stopped. Doreen darted back in, hissed "Come on," and dragged me out into the chancel by the hand.

Mrs. Bonani let the silence stretch, her baton raised and her gaze going off into some far distance. Then she said, "Well, hey nonino!"

She quelled the resulting uproar and we got stuck into "Abide With Me."

Next day, winter came ravaging across the Bay of Fundy. When I left for school it was a grey, sullen morning but still mild. The sort of morning you don't talk at breakfast. If I'd looked up at the sky I'd

probably have seen the high clouds scudding and the gulls spread out stiff on the wind, growing whiter as I watched. But I was still practising at her place. And I was late anyway.

By the time I got to Snuffy's store after school there was a lace collar of ice on the rain barrel and the last of the autumn leaves were hurtling along the road in panic retreat. The lights were already on and they looked eerie in the early dusk. Already my ears felt like they belonged to someone else, and I remember wishing they did, because they stuck out something awful.

Mr. Legrand was late with the orders on account of his arthritis, and by the time I left the store it was already dark. A sleety rain was beginning to fall. The old bicycle with its enormous baskets back and front went flying before the wind, and although the cold was already gnawing into my flesh I shouted and laughed with exhilaration as I went spinning effortlessly along. I did the outward half of my round in record time.

The bike was a heavy, antiquated machine. When the baskets were full it took all my strength to hold it up while I mounted. More than once it had got away from me and spread groceries all over the road. Even with the saddle set right down it was too big for me, so I used to propel it by standing on the pedals. When I got off after an uphill stretch my legs would be weak as liquorice and I'd have to stand and wait for the strength to come back.

I had one scare on the outward run. The bike got going at such a lick that the brakes wouldn't hold. I coasted for a good half-mile before a bit of a grade slowed me up enough to get off. It was when I turned back to deliver the order I'd missed that I got a taste of what the homeward half of the trip was going to be like.

The sleet changed to freezing rain and then to ice pellets. An icy crust had built up on the back of my head, and when I turned lumps of it broke off and slid down under my collar. By the light of a street lamp I saw that the bike was goose-pimpled all over. I could see the street-light upside down in the iced-over road. I got off and walked on the shoulder, but my hands ached so much I could hardly grip the handlebars. My shoes squelched as I walked, but my feet were numb by now, for which I was thankful. I really had to lean into the wind to make any headway.

It's a measure of my wretchedness that I passed up the pleasure of my usual detour past the Lesley place. Only once I'd ever caught a glimpse of Doreen, cut into slices by the venetian blind and somehow poignantly beautified by the mutilation, but always I loitered by, conjuring her image from every shadow, every stirring curtain.

Head down against the pelting ice I battled the interminable mile of Back Street. Every stitch I wore was either sodden or frozen stiff. At each glance up to get my bearings I gagged on the bitter wind. Only dimly, like the memory of delirium, comes back my recollection of

grovelling about in eternal torment on my hands and knees, retrieving onions, pursuing oranges, restoring canned goods to their soggy bags, weeping with misery and vexation. By the time I delivered the last order I was on the point of passing out.

It was a place I'd never been before, a house with a glassed-in porch and a shrub like a giant bottle-brush at each side of the door. No bell. I kicked the door. There was a light at one of the upstairs windows but I couldn't seem to make anyone hear. When I lifted the old iron latch the wind flung the door wide and drove me into the porch. The bottom fell out of the bag.

I sank to my knees in the midst of the mess and began to cry. And at that moment light celestial burst around me.

"My God, you poor kid."

It was a wonderful vision I had of Mrs. Bonnai, like a Sunday school stamp come to life. She was bigger than any human being could possibly be; big not merely by warrant of her obesity but with a Biblical grandeur as she stood outlined in light and holding up her hairbrush like a sceptre of majesty. The broad expanse of her body was a tangled field of flowers into which, more dead than alive, I fell.

Pigeon noises brushed my mind like wings. Light was laying siege to my eyelids but for a long time I kept them tight-shut and shrank within my keep of darkness. My body seemed still assailed by storm, but now the buffetings and abrasions were prophetic of comfort and warmth.

"Poor kid. You're absolutely perished. Poor Kid."

I opened my eyes. Mrs. Bonnai's chins were bouncing violently as she towelled my naked torso. The towelling was none too gentle, but she had none of the drill-sergeant look of choir practice nights. The brushed-out hair, which I was accustomed to see braided up into big forbidding earphones, slid down over her shoulders in long shimmering cascades. It made her head look monumental, like a primitive sculpture. But every fold of her face shone soft with compassion.

"There. Now we've got to get you warm."

For a moment her hands, warm and lingering, cupped my cold cheeks. She bent close. In her eyes, big and moist and shiny, I saw what she was seeing: the dark flower of my face cupped in the plump white calyx of her fingers. Then with a soft humming sound as though giving a note for the next hymn she opened her housecoat and gathered me into the shimmering folds of her flesh. I felt her flinch from the icy contact, and then the heavenly warmth of her seeped slowly into me.

I cried a little as the blood flowed back into my hands and feet, but she held me hard against her, with her huge breasts heavy upon my shoulders and her lips pressed to my wet hair. The gaily flowered folds of housecoat cocooned us both, creating for me a warm, musky twilight in which, as the pain subsided, I began deliciously to founder.

"You can't sleep standing up, dear," she said in a voice all warm and soft like her body.

As she carried me upstairs the gentle benediction of breasts was upon me.

Mrs. Bonani lay on the big frilly bed and took me with a sigh upon the fervid billows of her body. So I slept. And yes, it was like heaven. I lay steeped in warmth so pervading and so exquisite that in some sultry limbo between sleep and sleep I woke to a terrifying sweet seething in my blood, like milk in the moment of boil-over.

It was past midnight when she drove me home, still half asleep. As I got out of the car a great white, Godlike moon ensnared in our neighbour's new antenna found the eye-whites and welfare teeth of old Grammy Foster as she lurked in the dark cavern of her doorway across the street.

Mrs. Bonani held my hand and said, "Thank you, Belafonte."

"Welcome," I said, too sleepy to be surprised.

"You know," she tousled my hair and smiled. "You know, you've got the markings of a good voice. You must let me train it for you."

"Goodnight Mrs. Banana." I ran in the gate and didn't look back.

Darren never knew why I quit the choir and joined the boy's club.

Cont. from p. 53

When my first book (*The Timeless Island*, Ryerson) came out in 1960 I was serving as engineer officer of HMCS Swansea. Somehow the tremors of this earth-shaking event were detected in Ottawa, and soon afterwards I was posted to Naval Headquarters to write and edit training publications, which I did prolifically for about four years. During those Ottawa years I edited the *Canadian Author and Bookman* and did a weekly literary column for the *Ottawa Journal*. My short stories and essays appeared in various literary magazines, and some were read and dramatized on CBC radio.

Nova Scotia drew me back when I left the Navy in 1971. Since then, living four miles from where Canada began, in a village whose charm has to be seen to be believed, I have written two novels and two short biographies (Joseph Howe and T.C. Haliburton) for Fitzhenry & Whiteside's "The Canadians" series. The first novel, *Flotsam* (Breakwater, 1978), had in manuscript won the first Nova Scotia writing award, and was runner-up for the Gibson Award. The second is still in the mill and I'm working on a third. During this period my stories have appeared in various Canadian, U.S. and British anthologies. I've also done a TV play and a couple of sponsored film scripts.

In my spare time, between writing, gardening, woodcutting and helping my wife Vina run our guesthouse, "The Moorings" (y'all come!), I've served as founding president of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia and as Atlantic Provinces Rep. of The Writers' Union of Canada.

A WRITER'S LOT IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

Writing in the Atlantic provinces is exciting. Publishing is depressing. Being a writer here is exciting because the region is rich in challenge and offers endless grist for the imagination. "Characters" come ready made. Other writers are doing exciting things, and in Nova Scotia, at least, the federation facilitates their getting together now and again.

Publishing is depressing because most of the publishers are. With the inspiring exception of Breakwater, in St. John's, Newfoundland, they are parochial in their community vision and usually in the content of their lists. Governments are sympathetic but unsupportive, and spend their educational dollars elsewhere. (There are signs that this may change). Good magazines begin publication and fold with depressing regularity, although here again there is an inspiring exception in

"Atlantic Insight," edited by Harry Bruce. In the present general state of publishing, it's more necessary than ever for the established writer to be able literally to twist publishers' arms to make a sale. Most Toronto publishers' arms are not that long. But I wouldn't want to work or live anywhere else.

—H.R. Percy
Granville Ferry, N.S.

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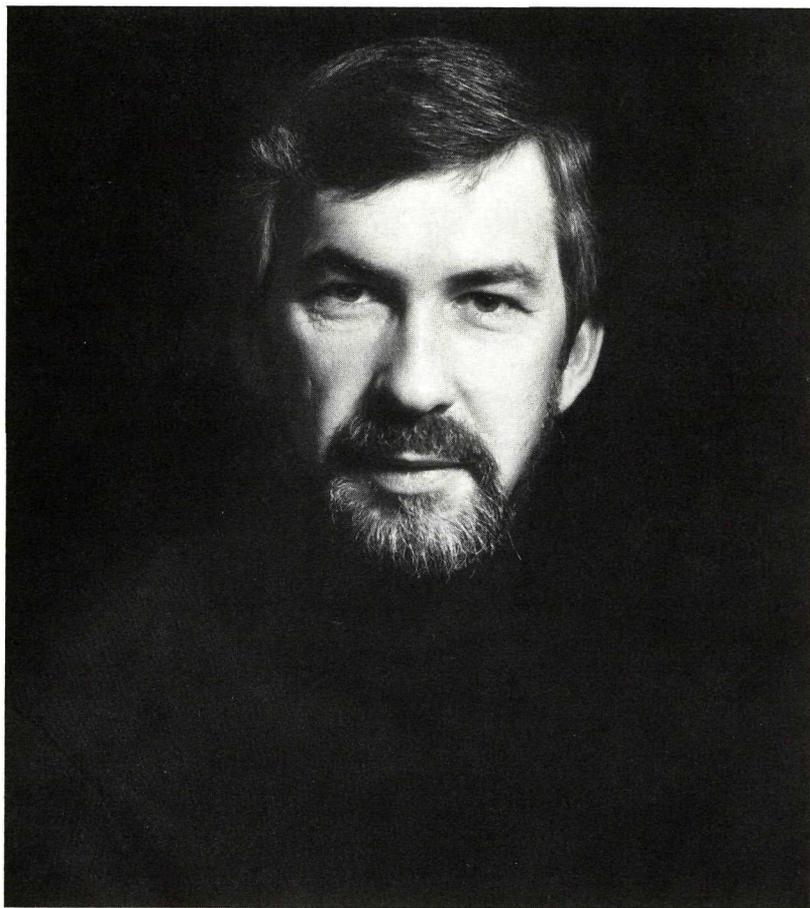
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LEIGH FAULKNER

Born (1941) and raised in Bass River, a small community on the Cobequid Bay (arm of the Bay of Fundy) of Nova Scotia. My family, of British stock, has resided in the province for several generations. In the days of wooden ships, some were ship-builders (including my father and paternal grandfather), and one gained a degree of fame because of a sea disaster off the west coast of South America.

Cont. on p. 71

RAT'S BIRTH

Before all others was Rat:
At birth he devoured his mother;
years later, as she sat troubled in her rocker,
he tore out the old midwife's heart.

The new light was bitter . . .
He rebelled.
A dark male menaced:
Rat sprang up and flashed his teeth . . .
His father withered and crawled away to die.

Rat swallowed the light,
digested it
and, upon defecation,
threw the bits at God . . .

Only then did Rat laugh,
when he saw the droppings of light
stuck all over God's black face.

Then Rat slept,
his creation complete.

RAT MASTERS GEOMETRY

White Sky crept up to the hole where Rat lay.
“Come out, Rat,” White Sky whispered;
but Rat wouldn’t move.

“Come out!” White Sky shouted,
Rat remained still.

White Sky sent a battalion of immense, colourless cubes
to dance outside the hole.
They rose and fell hypnotically.
Rat tore out his eyes and the cubes dissolved.

Then White Sky filled the air with a phalanx of lines
to sing outside the hole.
They chorused enticingly.
Rat severed his ears and the lines fell silent.

Finally White Sky called up a host of pliant circles
to pulsate outside the hole.
They throbbed seductively.
Rat gnawed off his genitals and the circles collapsed.

White Sky turned black with rage and crawled away.
Rat stood at the entrance to the hole
and congratulated himself on his cleverness.

RAT PLAYS WITH THE NATIONAL
PHILHARMONIC

Rat enjoyed biting nipples.

A little man came to Rat:
“Hail, Brother!” he welcomed.

On the promise of many nipples to bite,
Rat went with the man.

The orchestra pit was encircled with electrified barbed wire.
Rat’s instrument was fear:
He frightened women onto the barbed wire;
when they fell,
he bit their nipples—
and if they were particularly tender,
he would devour entire breasts.

This enraged the little man,
who demanded greater efficiency:
“Play!” he screamed at Rat.

Rat turned his instrument on the man
and tore open his chest,
but there was no heart.

Rat ran away and hid,
overcome by such a strange phenomenon.

NIGHTFALL OVER PUGWASH RIVER

leaves roll edges away from the sky
it is night by the river
shore birds have curled into themselves

the dull sun still shines in eyes
setting far back among wind dunes
leaping and candle-falling

a long hand is closing on naked breasts
and owls moan under dark eastern stone
alive to black milk cold in their beaks

painfully time has been stopped
and images gathered by a child's mirror
fall out
are broken

like stars on the water

CANTICLE: IN DARKNESS THE POWERS GATHER

moose move down to the saltwater
to rid themselves of blood-divining ticks
and each noonday
the sun is higher

dusty backroads
reach across their ditches
and smother bushes and ferns

what is laughter in these times?

middle-earth closes:
the machine grinds on

in darkness
the powers gather . . .

a silver bird flutters in anguish,
its throat song-swollen

Cont. from p. 65

Among early influences on my life and writing, I would mention the church (Protestant), the work ethic, the narrowness and rigidity of a small rural community, yet its neighbourliness and community spirit, parents who taught patience and compassion, a near-blind grandfather who was the community's poet-laureate (in the style of William Henry Drummond), and ever-present nature in all its diversity of scene and mood.

Small communities of Nova Scotia were beginning to decay while I was yet young. A way of life was even then passing, and, with it, the sense of identity that gave these communities their distinctiveness.

Since the age of eighteen (with a break of only two years), I have taught school in small communities around mainland Nova Scotia, mainly in areas of economic and cultural deprivation.

All the above have contributed to my sense of place — a sense that is present in my poetry as both external and internal 'place' — and have contributed, also, to the retrospective quality of my poetry.

LIVING AND WRITING IN NOVA SCOTIA

Living in Nova Scotia is a mixed blessing. Here one is close to the land, history, good people; yet, here, life is always "on the line": the struggles are, in many cases, basic — i.e. basic survival — economically and in the face of the process of change as dictated by powers beyond our control and/or understanding.

To be within this setting and subject to these influences is, in a way, to be, at once, immersed in time and suspended from it — i.e. time must be reckoned with *but* poetry has the chance to become 'timeless' in its focus on enduring human qualities and questions. As a result (when regionalism is avoided), poetry can gain depth in that it comes to grips with the human dilemma — i.e. the struggles and essential aloneness of the individual (not unlike the situation of the swimmer caught in the ongoing tide over a Bay of Fundy sandbar).

Writing in Nova Scotia is a lonely undertaking, though the N.S. Writers' Federation is attempting to change that by bringing writers together. One of the major problems is to get feedback — to find someone to bounce ideas off — especially when one does not write in the mainstream. Under such conditions there is the danger of writing to please someone else (most often an editor, who, perhaps, values a particular type of poetry).

While poetry magazines are not numerous in the Maritimes, two — THE FIDDLEHEAD and THE ANTIGONISH REVIEW — seem to be sympathetic to the unknown poet and willing to publish poetry that is not in the mainstream.

One healthy sign for the future of Maritime poetry is that more poets are finding their own voices — are beginning to come to grips with the knot in the gut, rather than being content to poke an ironic finger at the funnybone of human foibles.

—Leigh Faulkner
Bridgewater, N.S.

The Rat Fables

At present there are twenty-one (complete or in first draft) of a projected forty to fifty poems.

In each of my poems I try to place something in the balance; in the "Rat Fables" I think there's a lot at stake. At the risk of being misunderstood (here *and* in the poems), I have tried, perhaps more than in any other of my poems, to look at the blood and raw guts of which I'm composed (as, I assume, are others). In this regard, the "Rat Fables" are among the most personal of my poems. They are also the first in which I have given some freedom to my sense of humour (albeit ironic).

The persona may be discomfoting (and was meant to be so), but was chosen to permit more ready access to corners of the mind that we often do not care to acknowledge openly or sometimes even to ourselves.

—Leigh Faulkner

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ALLAN COOPER

I was born in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1954, and currently live and write nearby, in the town of Riverview.

My paternal ancestors came from England shortly before World War I, and settled in the city of Moncton. Having been city-dwellers in England, they were naturally drawn to an urban area.

My maternal ancestors came to Canada in the early 1800's, some from Scotland via Northern Ireland, and others from Ireland by way of the New England States. They settled in what is now Fundy National Park, on the coast of the Bay of Fundy. They were mainly farmers, but others, at one time or another were fishermen, lumbermen, ship-builders and camp cooks. Four generations of my maternal ancestors are buried in a small cemetery in Alma, N.B., about a mile from the Park.

Cont. on p. 82

FALLING FROM THE KNOWN WORLD

I

a sound begins

the deep whiteness of light
far back in the mind

I fall ecstatic
from the known world

I follow the invisible winding path
the bee drunk on a hill of yellow pollen
the moon rising inside a woman's eye

II

ancient flyways open before me
I lurch into light

into the darkness of pear blossoms
into the growing black of burnt-out stars

III

cold water drips from the rock face

a white fish, sightless
ripples the surface of an underground lake

bat wings waken,
burning the air

and outside,
insects send quiet signals between them

IV

the eyes no longer see
the hands no longer touch
pollen clings to my hair

the red sides of apples
gather the sun

I have come a long way
to break open in the first frost of fall

around me the wildflowers are dying
but something inside me grows
my whole body remembering

THE VOICES

Even though the voices come toward us
over hills, valleys
and long fields, like the sound
of an approaching storm. . .

we continue to lie in our beds,
unaware of the opening door
and the shadow
falling across the room.

A god stands
at our shoulder, filled
with the essence of a sage;

yet we hear
only the sound of our blood,
the silence of our inner rooms.

THE PEARL INSIDE THE BODY

I am sitting at the kitchen table
eating toast and milk;
five years old.

In a moment
my grandfather will walk
in through the woodshed
carrying a string of trout,
the dusk in his voice,
the sound of the brook caught
between his words.

* * *

In the woodshed
there were always kittens
that slept in under wood
piled for winter burning

(The shed was lit
by a bare lightbulb
that swayed slowly
as in wind)

I remember them
chasing each other,
their shadow
on the wall

huge as the cat
my grandfather stalked
until blown snow covered the tracks
large as hands.

* * *

Christmas, 1959;
the house still dark.

I get out of bed,
a young boy
filled with the feeling of Christmas.

In the hall, my grandfather
stands in his long underwear,
the darkness
shadowy around him.

He tells me it is too early yet;
the house still cold.

I return to the bedroom,
my eyes
half-closed with sleep.

From the warmth of the bed
I can just make out
Thin sounds from below,

my grandfather
striking a match.

* * *

The fall I was ten,
my grandfather carried me
from the front porch,
around the house

to the garden
where cucumbers grew
in the heat of the sun
twenty summers.

I remember his steady gait;
the warmth in his voice;
the red hunting cap
blown off in sudden wind. . .

He died in winter;
his voice rose
like longing
in my throat.

I carry it now
like a pearl
inside the body.

WOMAN LISTENING

After heavy rain,
the trees bend in prayer
like a woman heavy with child,
listening inside:

How long the child has grown there,
a seed or bud,
eyes closed in womb-light,
feeling the placental rise and fall . . .

She listens
with her blood
to the child

that now
begins its journey
through the earthy dark . . .

Cont. from p. 74

I have lived in Alma for periods of only two or three months, but it is the place which provides much of the imagery for my poems. Alma River and Cleveland Brook (which I first fished with my father and grandfather over 20 years ago), Owl's Head Beach, the wood trails and logging roads all figure imaginatively in my poems.

In 1977, I received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B. While at Mount Allison, I edited the journal *First Encounter* for three years, and studied under Herb Burke and the poet, the late John Thompson.

My poems are forthcoming in *The Malahat Review* and *The Fiddlehead*. A review-article of John Thompson's second and final collection, *Stilt Jack*, has been accepted by *The Antigonish Review*. My first collection of poems, *Blood-Lines*, is recently out from Fiddlehead Poetry Books.

—Allan Cooper
Riverview, N.B.

NOTES

Although I hope my poems speak from the 'interior world' and of 'inner landscapes', the Maritimes, with its severe contrasts of seasons, wild stretches of wilderness, and rural, slower pace of life has had a strong influence on my writing.

It is a fertile place of writing; there is a small but important community of writers and publishers here. Since leaving university, I have met several Fredericton writers, Fred Cogswell and Robert Hawkes, both of whom have impressed me with their concern for, and dedication to young writers. And of course, Fred Cogswell has been the major publisher of Maritime poets. At the time of writing, Cogswell has published well over 350 manuscripts of poetry by both Canadian and American writers. This is important; without such a publishing outlet, many writers would never see their work in print.

There are a number of good literary journals in the Maritimes: *The Antigonish Review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *First Encounter*, and *Germination* (among others). Without these, young writers would find it difficult to open the door to publication. All writers have the desire to see their work in print, but it is even more important to gain acceptance outside one's own region; this is often difficult for the Maritime writer. Perhaps the distinct regional quality of some Maritime poetry is not well understood beyond these provinces, cutting off many from the larger community of writers.

I have had the good luck to have an almost constant exchange of

ideas and material with Leigh Faulkner over the last five years. I have also had a sporadic communication with the American poet Robert Bly, and with a Connecticut poet, Karla Hammond. On my own, I have attempted to gain as great a knowledge as possible of world literature. I have studied many 'interior' poets, including Americans Theodore Roethke, Robert Bly and Galway Kinnell; German poets Rilke and Trakl; Spanish poets Lorca and Jiminez; both ancient and modern Chinese and Japanese poets. All have had a subtle influence on my work; all have spoken to me of depth and universality.

I think that Maritime writers are moving toward a poetry of great depths, and of universal concerns. Several poets which come immediately to mind are the late John Thompson, Leigh Faulkner, and Peter Sanger. There are others. As this 'movement' gathers momentum, Maritime poetry—and Canadian poetry in general—will become a more important and influential part of the world writing community.

—Allan Cooper

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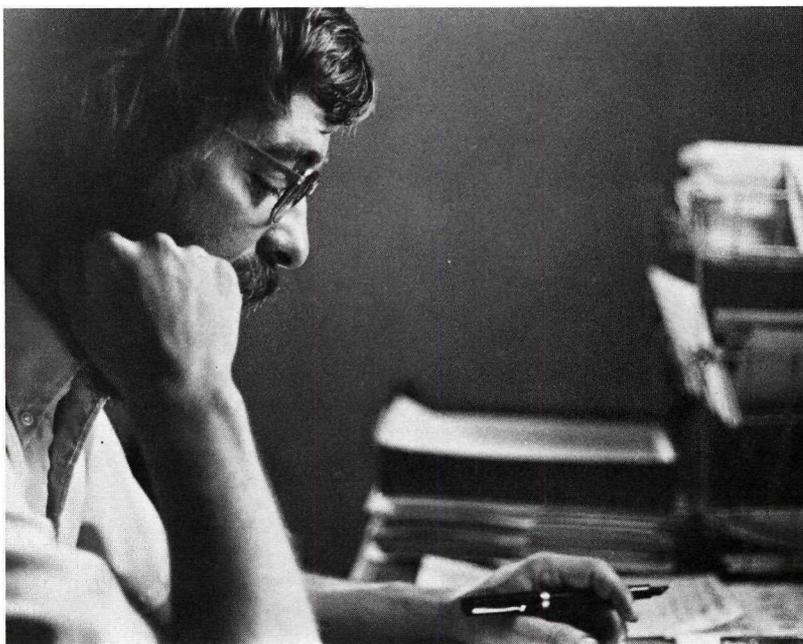


Photo by Harry Thurston

GREGORY M. COOK

Gregory M. Cook was born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia in 1942. He has worked as a student preacher, newspaper reporter, lecturer and freelance writer. His poems, reviews and stories have been published in more than 30 Canadian periodicals, (including *The Fiddlehead*, *Canadian Literature* and *Macleans*), and his work has been broadcast on CBC radio. His poems have been published in nine anthologies in as many years, including *East of Canada* (Breakwater, 1976).

He edited *Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Ernest Buckler* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), and is a member of The Dirge Poets and Their Merry Men, itinerant animators of poetry and music. He lives on the Wolfville Ridge with his wife and three children and is currently Executive Director of The Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia.

THE SAME WIND

The same wind I hold
took my first father
and my second.

The lie would come
if I told you my stepfather
forced me to swim:
he didn't.

He might have chuckled
at the timidity of a child
he had been a long time without:
he did.

He might have chuckled
at his own nervousness,
at his breath already short:
that did it.

I slipped into the water
and held my breath;
I swam with my eyes open
almost too long.

I delivered the fear to him
and his chuckle turned to laughter
at my stubborn test
of his love.

The same wind I held inside
took him, just
as it took my first father.

THE LETTER

The car I drive
and traffic
give me only so much time.

A girl sits on grass
beside the sidewalk.
She cups in her hands
a two-page letter,
shelters it from the wind.

Her caged hands
are tentative as thought,
like those wanting to let
a fallen bird
fly for the first time.

Her eyes lift,
up from the letter,
in the direction the bird would go.
Her eyes are wide with a wonder
only separation fills.

I want to write someone
a letter, a very personal letter.

The car I drive
and traffic
give me only so much time.

GOD DANCES

(For Miriam)

I figure it like god.
He's not much different
than me.
He gets excited
with something finished
or perplexed
with a thing begun
and lights another
smoke.
He chuckles
or sighs
at something unintended
and drinks deep.
He wishes he had you
the option
for giving it all up.
But he has a better lesson:
he knows you won't let him.
So it's safer
for god
to indulge himself
through us.
He figures it a fair trade:
for he dances naked
everywhere we look
outside ourselves.

JULY STORM

A night wood path.
A beaverdam.
Fireflies hatch.
Lightening glows.

I talk lights
meteors
in season.

I say it almost
makes me believe god.
I do, she says.

I bend to pick up
a glowing insect
for her open palm.

A frog has struck it
down in the old dark
and strikes my hand wet.

The morning thunder
cracks close by my bed
and god's eyes, grey hail

large as nickels
wake the children
and animals.

The next noonday
in different towns
she and I come down
with summer colds.

MEANING TO SPEAK

(To Sharon Lake)

Those voices you thought came
from childhood, storybooks,
your grandparents or god —
I've been meaning to speak
to you about those voices —
the one's we've been muting
for too many centuries,
those that come on the wind.

They come in the red flash
pumping me awake nights;
they come in the green glow
rebuilding my days;
they come in dusk and dawn's amber light
each time I drift
into that limbo of caution
where children, stories,
grandparents and god
are lost in the haze.

I've been meaning to speak
to you about this full hush.
But, like a lover once misspoken,
I can never find the words
to interrupt these voices
fingering through our minds,
letting themselves feel —
spoken at last.

ON THE ROAD

(for the Dirge Poets and Their Merry Men)

We are on the road,
The country's luxury
is in the gas tank.
The price passes us:
ditches through forest
and farm that wants seed.
We have only word
and music to give.

We are on the road:
past broken windows
of jagged vision,
past cemeteries
the scythe cuts no more,
past manure piles
and past the mail box
announcing: "Alders"

We are on the road
and counting backwards
by the size of trees,
guessing when the farm went,
forty, thirty-five,
the second world war,
counting past our time,
sixty years ago,
the first old world war,
counting new forest:
eighty years or so,
when the machine came.

We are on the road
and our own natives
and old immigrants
and new land planters
and all survivors
are dead, in motion,
are rolling in graves
the roots of their trees
reaching through them to us.
We are on the road
with this country's luxury
filling us, passing by.

NOTES

My family came to this land more than two centuries ago. The Cooks rode the wake of a long line of sea captains. They dodged war in Old and New Englands. After they began to harvest the land, their line was still only broken by the sea, war and natural causes.

They sought refuge here as pre-Loyalists, or New England planters. They hoped the Indians were subdued and the French gone. They were wrong on both counts. I am enriched by their mistakes and each wave of migration that has followed them.

Nova Scotia is a variety of interdependent communities, each of its own fierce pride. Inevitable immigration to this peninsula on the axis of trade winds has created a place of paradox: it has a stability and heft of breath equal to the rhythm of its tides, while its pulse is always running toward the pace of tomorrow's century.

Perhaps it is this history consciousness and welcome to the future that has created a job for me working for the writers of the province. The people have elected governments that want to support the arts at the grass, rock and waterline level.

The archive, beerhalls, biways and homes are rich in word, song, movement, artifact and illustration — as the sea is in its natural fertilizer and flotsam.

The mail flies to St. John's and Toronto. The writer here can reach *PRISM international*. Of course, the whole country is vast. Filling it won't shorten the real distances between us. We're so history conscious here, we know we voted for independent governments before Quebec did. Of course we haven't had literary presses based here for domestic supply or export of the work of our poets, fiction writers and playwrights. (The reverse appears true in B.C.) In this attic of Canada we introduced the printing and free press. It has been concerned with documents and folklore. But that's changing now.

We're tolerant of our eccentrics (including writers). If that means praise is withheld until one makes his own opportunity, it's not withheld forever. And that common pride comes to him from us — no matter how far away the object of it may have sailed — he has always been one of us.

Yes, the figure skater in this society gets less support than the hockey player. The poet is not on salary when he visits the school, as, say, the banker or policeman is. Writers have been volunteers, like firemen, as necessary. That's changing.

The age of this land and its accidental collective of people has yielded a high per capita of writers and other craftsmen and artists. Opportunities that don't exist will be made. And our song, that looks old in the passing moment, remains. Because it is old.

—Gregory M. Cook
Wolfville Ridge, N.S.

COOK, GREGORY M. — BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ADDITIONAL NOTES

One poem in this section by Harry Thurston, "Clouds Flying Before the Eye", was published earlier this year in a new literary annual from Nova Scotia called POTTERSFIELD PORTFOLIO. It has been distributed only in Nova Scotia. All other material in the section is previously unpublished work.

For any of our readers wishing to purchase copies of these writers' books, we provide the following addresses of the publishers through which they can be ordered:

FIDDLEHEAD POETRY BOOKS

c/o English Department
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P.O. Box 4400
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EUTHANASIA

To leave the world
While still game for it
planting the flower garden
expecting peas, tomatoes, corn

(only animals and humans
sprout no progeny
from the good earth:
they just moulder down)

To leave the world
where all joy seems to lie
is nonetheless happier
than to drag your tired bones
into the eighties and nineties
pretending to be really
alive
with a false leg, aching back
teeth intractable
eyes dim
ears only half
hearing
memory a falter
mind a stutter

Pray pray
for all of us
that our leap into the chasm
be willing and agile
or at least that we know
our time of going
and persuade our children
it has to be
just so.

1979

I KEEP PREPARING

I keep preparing
my death
re-arranging
the pillow
opening and closing
envelopes
re-filing
folders
I keep rehearsing
the last words to be inserted
on the typewriter ribbon

But it won't happen
as expected
it will be like this dream
I wake from:
shaggy cat hissing in the brown grass
and my dog, leaping over the stile
to attack—
she reels and falls back
stiff as a porcupine.

No preparation was needed
for the thunderbolt.

1979

THE YEAR OF THE CHILD

What did it matter, after all,
that we were careful with matches,
never dined on sleeping-pills or Drano,
turned down candy and rides
even from the next-door neighbour
who was old, religious and (we thought) harmless,
kept our pencil-sharpened fingers out of sockets,
did not eat geraniums or dieffenbachia,
looked both ways for traffic
before crossing the street like somnambulists
with both arms extended,
didn't defy gravity or try to breathe underwater,
never stuck our tongues out at passing motorists
lest they be members of the Mafia on holiday,
said our prayers frequently if without fervour,
opened infant bank accounts, allowed insurance
to be taken out in our names for college,
never testified in court against our parents,
or appealed the Bill of Rights.
When the time came, they hired killers
to babysit, glared at us
along gunbarrels, tossed us from windows,
doctored the Kool Aid, set us adrift
in colanders (we mistook the mines
for bulrushes), our burst eardrums
dead to the strains of Brahms' Lullaby.
What did it matter, after all?
The man who pushed the button
resembled Hans Christian Anderson.

JOINT DEFENSE TREATY

Sky is mute
with the memory
of birds.

DESPAIRING LITERATURE IS A
CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

Where is the leader who will see us through?
Will he recognize the problem when he sees it?
Will he bother to look?
Will he sit down at a mahogany desk
to compose the unsatisfactory novel of our lives
so it has unity, purpose,
so happiness is available for take-out
from fast-food restaurants and dispensers?
Or has he already signed the divorce papers
and is now only waiting for the right note,
the right word, on which to end it?
What will that word be?
Will it be a word in a foreign language?
Will it matter?

THE ONLY REAL FORMALISM
IS SILENCE

Now they are pure.
They have purged themselves
of all content,
they are cleaner than geometry.

They paint their dreams
upon the water, dispensing
with line and colour

write legends in the sky like clouds.

Critics will declare them
masters.

LeRoy Gorman / *Two poems*

in the quiet of a sunless dawn
one bird
two

small things in the holiday snow

we crosscountry ski to escape
Lynda from Whitehorse & marriage
I from Simcoe & money worries

the field behind the barn where I've helped Dad hay
we glide over then cross the crick
close to open water
Lynda breaks thru near shore
where she has an easy getaway from the unthinking water
this is not Niagara Gorge
yet there's a sister's hollering
as there was the time she broke thru downstream
I think she was seven

the hill we've skied & tobagganed since childhood
it's all thornapples

above in the open fields
mousetracks swirling in figure eights
lead us to their end in a bloodspotted hole
we speculate on the rodent's speed & the hawk's accuracy
Lynda prods with her pole for clues
starting an avalanche that fills the chasm
(somewhere in the USSR there's a mastadon
deep beneath polar ice)

from the field & along the plowed townline
we take the easy way back

Douglas Smith / *Five poems*
from *The Fat Shaman*

#19

He is fly-quick
faster than a polar bear
in a cage
on a plane headed south
to a new zoo

#15

He barrels from house
to house
calls out all the women
changes them into poplars
On their branches
the scrotums of their lovers
hang like figs

#16

His hands two autonomous swarms
of locusts

His feet pontoons
dancing across the Mediterranean

His breath a mist
only the blind can appreciate

His mind a shipwreck
anchored by the silence
of drowned sailors dreaming of spring instants

#18

He stands there waving not moving Begins to walk
a razor-straight line towards me, gray-green slime
trailing behind him like a mutant snail I freeze,
a deer in the headlights of a night hunter *Stop!*
He lurches, swerves He shouts "Kill!
The Fat Shaman!" and shoots past me, his pupils the
size of squash balls

#23

Now he carries an umbrella
through streets sprinkled

with leeches
snowflakes that will not
melt

Behind cracked windows
people scream
throw cat carcasses
bite their nails

He demands directions
I yell from a rooftop

That way!
Where it's dark as batshadow!
Where blood never dries!
Where dust kills!

But the Fat Shaman
stands still as a pillar
puts up his umbrella
and proclaims the dictatorship of rain

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Brewster is the author of seven books of poetry, the most recent being *SOMETIMES I THINK OF MOVING*, a novel, *THE SISTERS*, and a book of short stories, *IT'S EASY TO FALL ON THE ICE*. She has taught since 1972 at the University of Saskatchewan.

Heather Cadsby is a young writer from Don Mills, Ontario.

Gregory M. Cook — see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

Allan Cooper — see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

Leigh Faulkner — see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

Gary Geddes is a well-known Toronto writer and editor. He is currently working as writer-in-residence at Concordia University in Montreal.

LeRoy Gorman is a poet from Napanee, Ontario. His work has appeared in many Canadian literary magazines.

Dorothy Livesay was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba on 12 October 1909. She has published numerous volumes of poetry and has twice won the Governor General's Medal for poetry. In 1947 she was also awarded the Royal Society's Lorne Pierce Medal for Literature. For more information on Ms. Livesay, and for more of her recent work, we recommend the current issue of *Room of One's Own*, which is a special Dorothy Livesay issue.

Sammy MacLean teaches Comparative Literature and Germanics at the University of Washington in Seattle. He has published poetry, translations of German poetry and prose, and interpretive criticism on Bertolt Brecht and Franz Kafka.

Kim Maltman was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta and grew up near there. He has since lived in Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto. He currently lives in Toronto.

Hans Erich Nossack was born on January 30, 1901 in Hamburg, the son of an import merchant. He studied Law and Philosophy at the University at Jene. During the 1920s he was both unemployed and worked at subsistence jobs. He married Gabriele Knierer in 1925. From 1933-1956 he was independently employed as a merchant in his father's firm. He was forbidden to publish by the National Socialist government. All of his manuscripts were destroyed in 1943 during the bombing of Hamburg, about which he wrote a novel, *DER UNTERGANG* (The Destruction). He was "discovered" by Jean Paul Sartre whose critical support furthers his reputation internationally. In 1956 Nossack became a freelance writer. He died in 1977.

H.R. Percy—see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

Douglas Smith teaches Canadian and Twentieth Century Literature at the University of Manitoba. He is currently acting as Canadian editor of a literary journal from Kent State called *Shelleys*. His poems in this issue are from an unpublished series entitled *THE FAT SHAMAN*.

Harry Thurston—see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

Liliane Welch—see VOICES FROM THE MARITIMES section.

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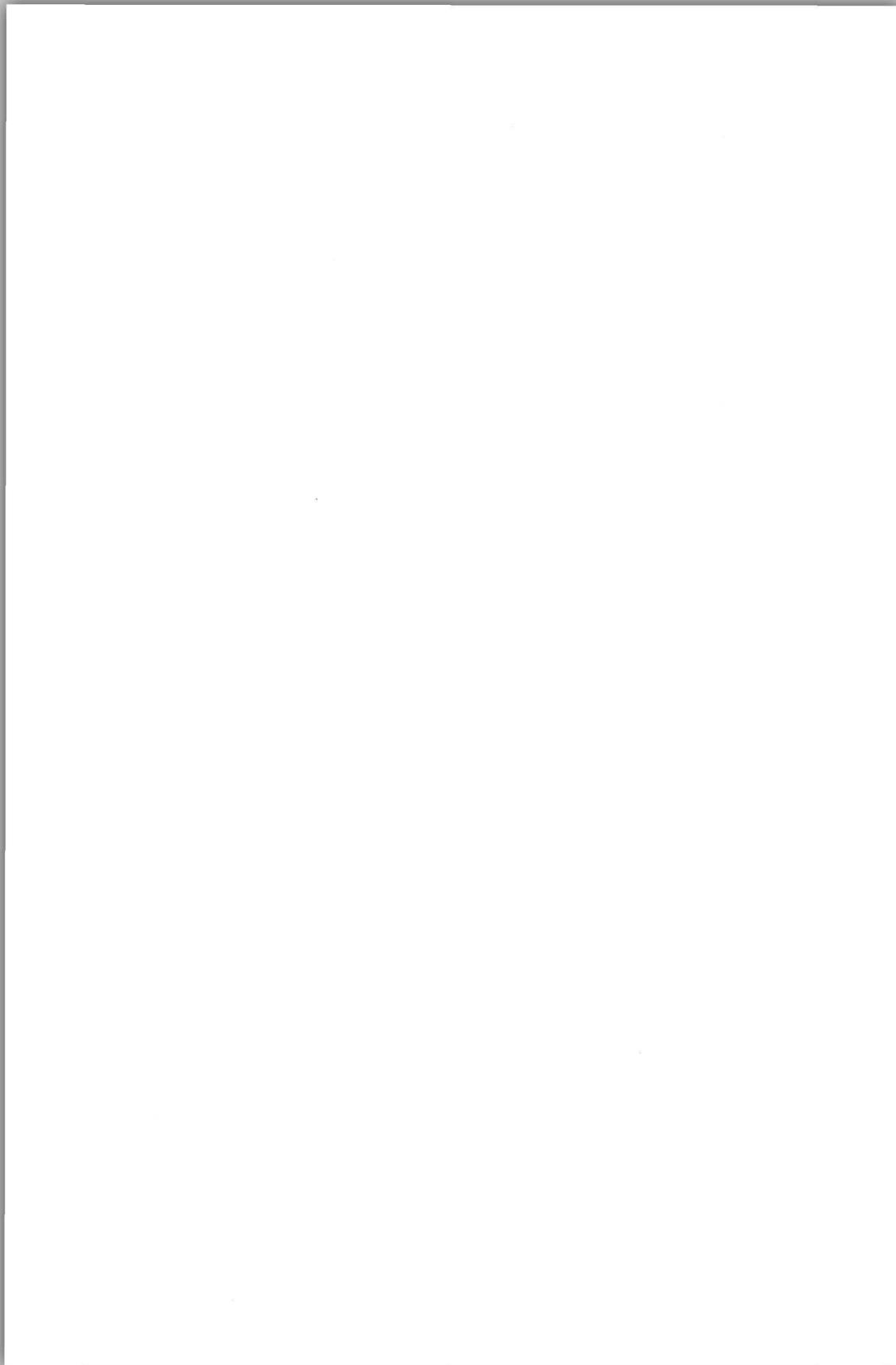


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