

Fall 1992

# Beyond Memos: A Journal of the UMF Faculty, Volume 5, Number 1, Fall 1992

University of Maine at Farmington

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# BEYOND MEMOS

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A Journal of the UMF Faculty

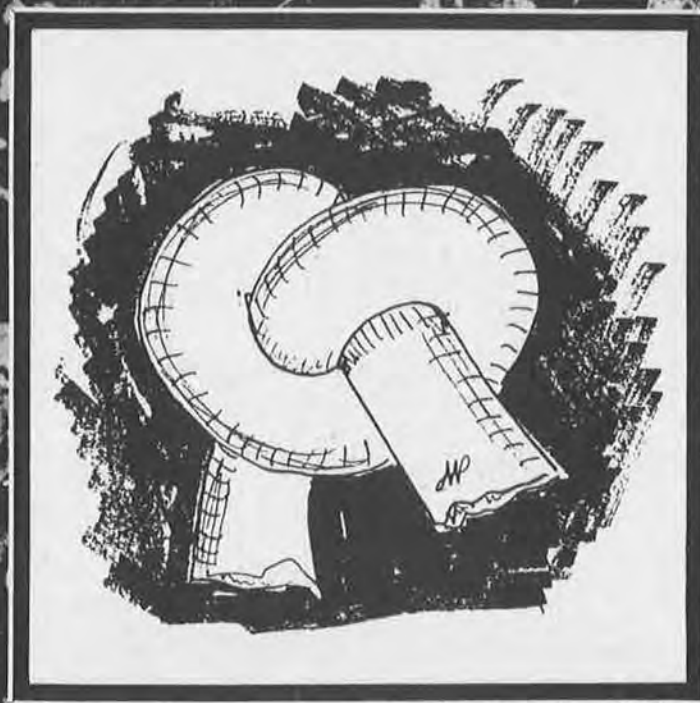
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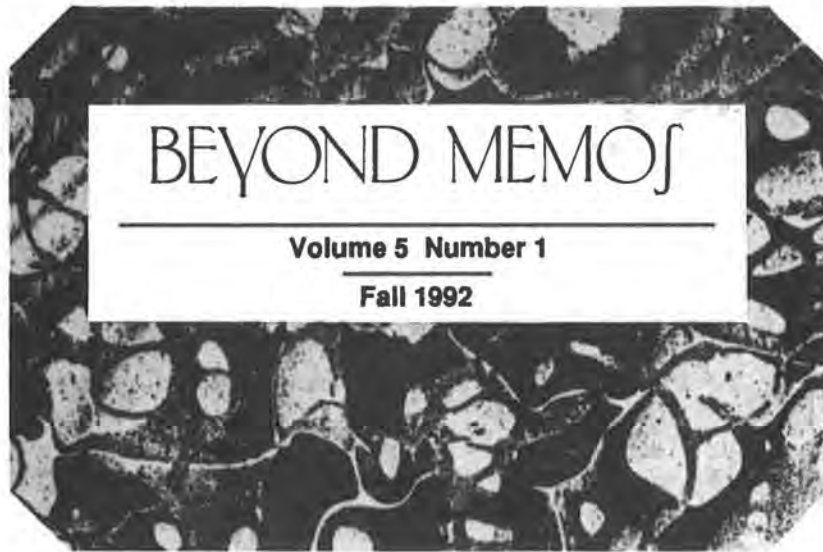
Volume 5 Number 1

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Fall 1992

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**Editor:** PHILIP CARLSEN  
**Cover Design:** SVEA SEREDIN  
**Cover Illustration:** MAGGY WYCKOFF

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# CONTENTS

- Wind Cave** JONATHAN COHEN 3
- ode to the deer** KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN 5
- walking after skating** KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN 6
- To Carol: A Teacher** DOUG RAWLINGS 8
- Mutual Awareness in *The Scarlet Letter*** ALLEN FLINT 9
- Veterans' Day: 1992** DOUG RAWLINGS 13
- The Path Not Taken: Keys to the  
Liberal and Conservative Mind** ROY VAN TIL 14
- The Far World Comes Back** ROD FARMER 16
- An Accounting** ELIZABETH COOKE 17
- Celtic Knot Drawings** MAGGY WYCKOFF 4, 8, 13, 15, 16
- Self-portrait** KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN 7
- Photographs** PHILIP CARLSEN 11, 19

**BEYOND MEMOS** is meant to be just that—a forum where UMF faculty can share ideas and creative work that go beyond the day-to-day campus routine of teaching, advising, committees, and memos. We welcome submission of anything of general interest: poems, stories, essays, drawings, photographs, interviews, humorous pieces, etc. Send materials, inquiries, and comments to Philip Carlsen, Editor, **BEYOND MEMOS**, University of Maine at Farmington, Farmington, ME 04938.

# Wind Cave

ALVIN stood, brushed the dust from his overalls, held his candle out before him and saw a sight that nearly caused him to scream.

There, on a small, flat ledge, was a human skeleton. It was in perfect condition, perfectly clean of flesh or clothing; both had decayed in the dank air. The bones were curiously arranged, and it took Alvin a couple minutes to figure out the pattern. The head rested in perfect balance, nose down. It was framed by the arms, which pointed away from the rest of the body and towards the opposite wall. The thumbs pointed inward, indicating that the palms had been down. The remainder of the bones were clustered together: thighs next to shins; ribcage, front down, on top of them; spinal column—still attached to both pelvis and head—on top of the ribs. All were aligned so as to point to the opposite wall. Alvin had to put himself into the position suggested by the bones before he realized what position that was. He immediately jumped up and, astonished, still staring at the skeleton, stepped back from it. The skeleton had prostrated itself before one wall of the cave chamber.

Alvin examined that wall. There was nothing unusual about it—no marks, protruding ledges, or distinctive features of any kind. It was just like any one of the hundreds of thousands of walls Alvin had already seen in the cave. Its only noteworthy aspect was that it had a human skeleton bowing towards it.

Alvin sat and regarded the skeleton. After the initial shock, his first emotion was disappointment. He had always thought he was the only person to have ever explored the cave. He thought back to the day he had discovered the small opening, embedded in the side of a tussock of grass at the end of a meadow behind his parents' farm. At first he thought it was an animal's lair, so small was the opening. But when he came nearer he noticed that air was rushing into the hole. He knew then that behind the opening must be a chamber cool enough to induce the Dakota summer air to move at all, and large enough to accept such a vigorous rush of it. Alvin named it Wind Cave and, though he had never explored caves before, began to spend an hour or so a day at it. His parents, who knew him

to be fond of late afternoon walks in the black pine forest behind their farm, never missed him.

Alvin became quite good at cave exploration. He was very careful with his candle in the drafts that blew through the cave, and after a while constructed a special lantern to protect it. For the first few months he would tie a string at the cave mouth and trail it behind him to ensure a safe return. But as he became more familiar with the cave he felt the need to tie the string less and less. Before long he navigated the cave's intricate chambers by heart, and found his way back as surely as if he were in a fenced-in pasture.

The cave was endless. Alvin's mind had long resisted that conclusion. Nothing is endless, he told himself as he poked through shafthole after shafthole downward. Nothing is endless, not land, not sea, not planets, not stars, not even the universe itself. How can something go on forever, he asked himself, as he went on and on, east and west, north and south, forever through the cave's serried cells. He would drop pebbles down shafts, to learn their depth, but he heard nothing, not even a distant echo. For months he would push in one direction, determined to find the edge to this underground dominion. But months later he found only more darkness, felt still the drafts blowing further on.

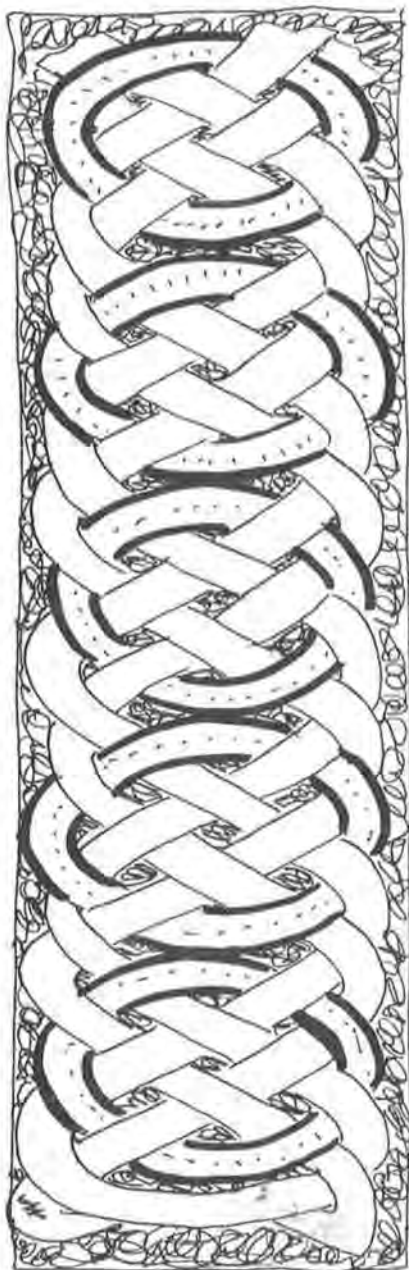
The cave's infinity began to brood in him. At first, to gaze into the endless darkness thrilled him; now he regarded it intently, suspiciously, as if it meant something but wasn't giving its meaning freely. Complicating his mood was a growing sense of the imbalance between the cave's infinity and his own position as its "Discoverer and Sole Explorer", as he fancied himself. Finding the cave, conquering the difficulties of its exploration, bestowing names on the major chambers, had made him feel big and powerful—it was *his* cave. But infinity was so ungraspable—how could he truly claim it as his when he couldn't find its boundaries?

Now, however, the simple imbalance between his loneliness and the cave's infinity was thrown completely askew. There, before him, on a low ledge, was a human skeleton. This doubling of the ranks of the cave's explorers made its infinity less threatening somehow. But it also diminished Alvin's own role. He was not the discoverer of the



cave. He was not its first explorer. Here was another, or rather the bones of another. Thus his disappointment.

The disappointment gradually dissipated. After all, it detracted not a bit from his accomplishments. He had done all the exploration himself and was, he thought, quite a skillful explorer. He could proudly match his talent against that of his predecessor.



This reflection made him curious about the skeleton. Who was it? Male or female? How had it found the cave? What were its exploration techniques? Had it given names to the various chambers, as he had? What were those names? Alvin wanted to compare notes with the skeleton, and resented it for being dead and unresponsive. Especially since Alvin had a very important question to ask—how had his predecessor felt about the cave's endlessness? He had to admit to himself that all he knew about the skeleton was its current position, bowing towards one wall of the chamber.

Alvin noticed a shafthole near a side entrance to the chamber. He brought his lantern near it, and noted it to be twice the lantern's diameter. He removed the candle from the lantern and carefully set it near the rim of the hole. He took the string out of his pocket. It was a huge wad, twelve hundred feet long, which had, of course, long since ceased to be useful in the cave's immensity. Alvin unbound the wad, and tied one end to the lantern. He coiled the string on the edge of the shafthole, and tied the free end to the candle. He moved the lantern so that it rested on the very lip of the shafthole.

Alvin stood and moved back to the skeleton. He looked at it for a long time, and at the bare, undistinguished wall it faced.

Alvin knelt on the chamber floor next to the ledge on which the skeleton rested. He reached over and carefully lifted one knuckle out of the skeleton's near hand, leaving the other bones undisturbed. He turned his upper body to face the shafthole and took careful aim.

Alvin's throw caught the lantern on its far rim, the bone bouncing off and down the shafthole. The lantern teetered once, then plunged after it, the string uncoiling behind. Alvin turned back towards the wall opposite. Bending slowly, carefully, deliberately, he brought his forehead down to the chamber floor. He extended his hands, palms down, towards the opposite wall. When the string had completely uncoiled, and the still-plunging lantern had pulled the candle into the shafthole behind it, he was still in that position.

—JONATHAN COHEN

# ode to the deer

her spirit rose  
her body lay on  
the center line

when i returned  
there was nothing  
but the body

a beautiful doe  
two years old or one  
never kidded  
maybe pregnant  
her coat thick & full  
white bush bright, fluffy  
nipples never been sucked

"a rib through the heart"  
the meat cutter said

when i go  
i hope it's as quick  
dancing or skating or making love

our meeting—a deliverance

I sent you on  
you jolted me awake

I saw your beauty  
gentleness  
your perfect being

now  
we are connected

—KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN

# walking after skating

walking after skating  
is  
a  
fall  
from  
grace  
after  
sweet high flying  
sweeping  
swerving  
swaying  
after  
gliding  
waltzing  
a  
n  
d  
rch  
a ing

it's penance to walk  
heavy, slow, dull, clumsy work

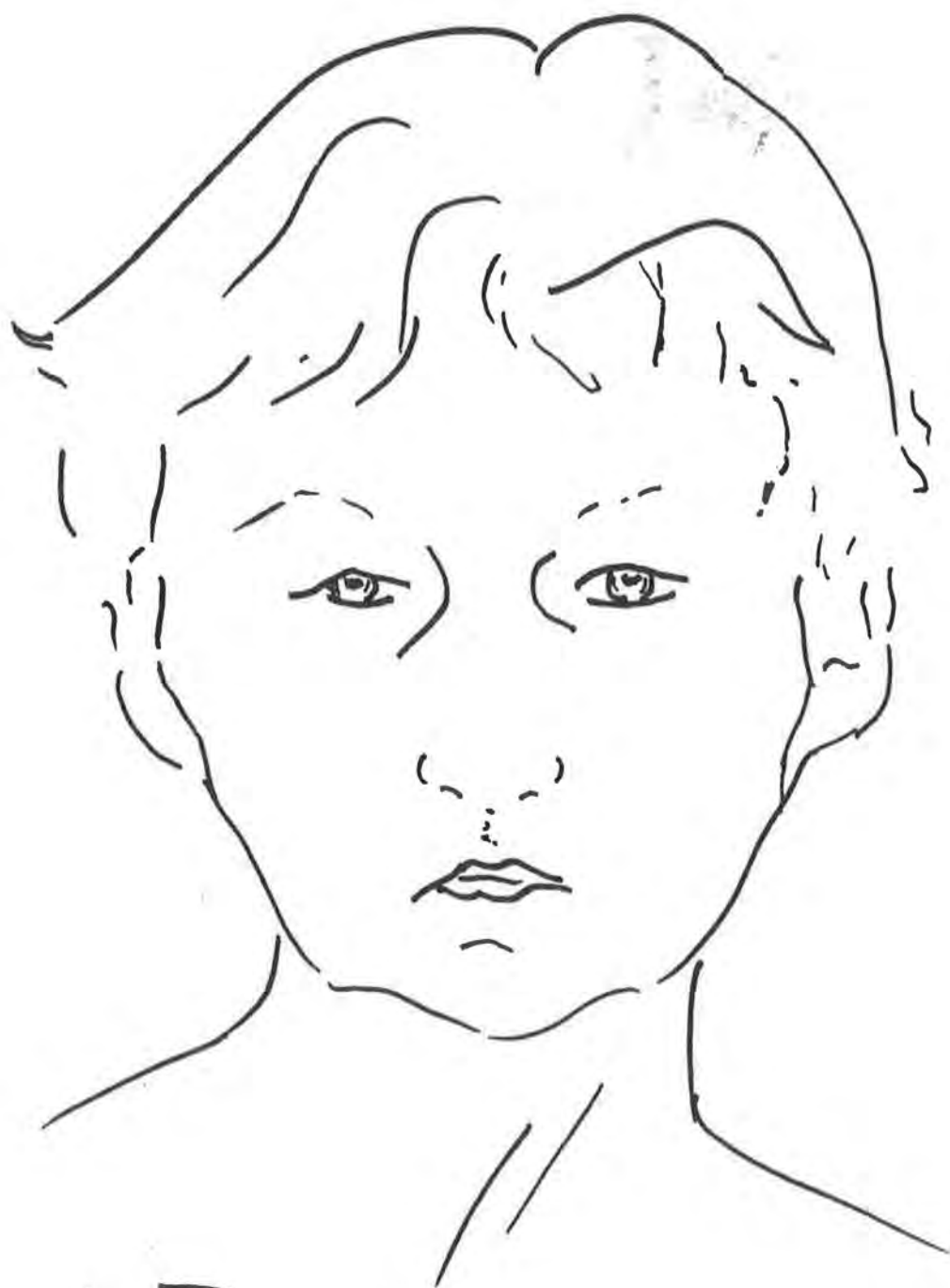
after being a lark  
it's purgatory

to be a lizard  
stuck  
on lumpy, knotted, rough terrain

is sad, is real, is temporary.

—KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN





Kathy Beaubien

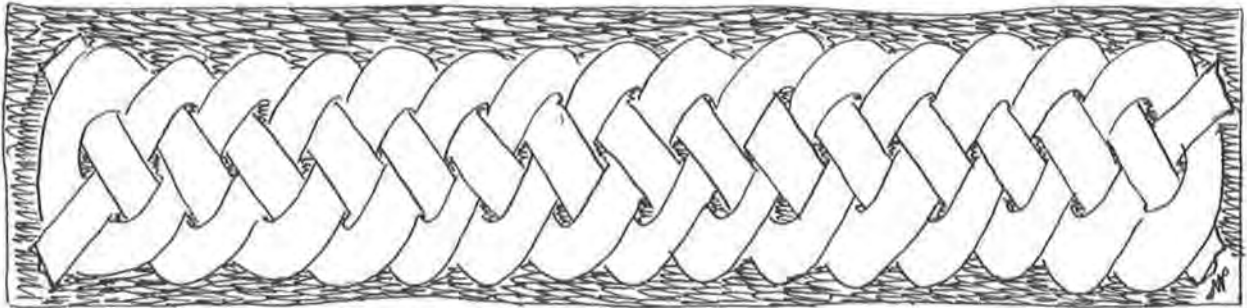
# To Carol: A Teacher

and the moon  
could be a wise fisherwoman  
hauling her jeweled net  
through our seas

and you too  
could be of the moon  
having pulled your tender web  
through my son and daughter  
these past five years

and as the sea  
following the moon  
forms the shore  
so have you come  
through them  
to shape me

DOUG RAWLINGS



# Mutual Awareness in *The Scarlet Letter*

Compiled by Allen Flint from the writings of Michelle Carr, Jennifer Corson, Krystal Cyr, Beth Ann Dorsey, Angelina Frost-Whittier, Kelly Gaboury, Judy Howard, Carrie James, Amy Johnson, Anthony Mello, Tracey Murphy, Reid Murray, Brandon Pomelow, Kerri Ryan, Gail Sanborn, Denise Spinney, Jennifer Staples, Charles Sullivan, and Allison Thayer.

**T**HAT OLD CHESTNUT about faculty members' "borrowing" ideas from their students was brought home to me in Nineteenth-Century American Novel, Fall 1992. One essay question asked for analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* by responding to T.S. Eliot's assertion that Hawthorne "is the one English-writing predecessor of James whose characters are *aware* of each other . . ." (Eliot 131)

The essays were quite good, richly addressing the issue, and going far beyond my expectations and my knowledge of that text which I presumably supposedly arguably know best. Hence, I thought I would compile the evidence to share with *Beyond Memos's* readers, as my students shared with me.

To appropriate from Hawthorne's "Custom House" introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, I thus "put myself in my true position as editor, or very little more" in presenting this brief look at a very special set of relationships in Hawthorne's novel.

HENRY JAMES is the first major American writer to publish a book about another major American writer; he is joined by Eliot in expressing high regard for Hawthorne's work, and for the difficulty Hawthorne faced in writing from the experience of a country that had so little experience. Interestingly, two of the three most celebrated American literary expatriates [nutty neo-Fascist Ezra Pound is the third] were drawn to Hawthorne. Perhaps as expatriates they responded most sympathetically to Hawthorne's complaint (in the Preface to *The Marble Faun*) that, "No author . . . can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong . . ." In his *Hawthorne*, James wrote of that which is lacking in American life: "No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no

palaces . . ." [etc, etc, etc.]

Are characters in earlier American fiction—say in the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and Edgar Allen Poe—not aware of each other? Possibly—Cooper's preoccupation with the love affair between Natty and Nature provides the central focus in his finest work, the *Leatherstocking Tales*. Poe's game-playing in detective stories and mind-games in horror stories erode the ground on which deep character analysis might otherwise stand. Irving is the story-teller *par excellence* (in fact the earliest affirmation in American literature that literature is telling stories), but to him plot is more important than intimate interaction of character or characters. (The contrast with Herman Melville is striking; his characters, especially in *Moby Dick*, are *isolatoes*.)

So, on to Hawthorne.

Eliot may be guilty of a bit of hyperbole, but the point is that one useful approach to *The Scarlet Letter* is to note the interrelationships, perhaps especially as they denote responsibility, among the four principal characters. (Hawthorne's major works have four characters—two male, two female—with patterns of similarity in their interaction, mutual awareness, and degrees of success or failure in meeting their responsibilities to each other.)

"The three formed an electric chain," Hawthorne writes, when Hester and Pearl join Arthur on the scaffold in Chapter XII. Perhaps that is an apt figure for the nature of awareness among the characters; it is not the characters *per se*, but their sense of each other that is at issue. Arthur and Hester were lovers, Hester and Roger were (are?) married, Hester and Pearl are mother and daughter, and Arthur and Roger live in adjoining rooms. Unbeknownst to the community, Arthur is Pearl's biological father and Roger her legal father, the most striking irony in the story.

Eliot's statement seems to suggest Jamesian levels of interaction, psychological insight, sub-

conscious understanding, responsibility, and sensitivity (perhaps hypersensitivity) to each other. Generally, sin and guilt have made the characters hyper-sensitive to each other; they tend to be mutually attractive, but also to avoid each other. In a way, the novel is *about* the characters being and becoming aware of each other.

To be aware is to be intertwined, related, emotionally involved, perhaps responsible, and to interact at several levels (physical, mental, spiritual), in a subconscious or mystical sense of the presence or of the influence of another. *This* is what Eliot means elsewhere in the essay about Hawthorne and James and the "psychological romance."

The very chapter titles suggest awareness, some quite directly, others less so. Note in particular:

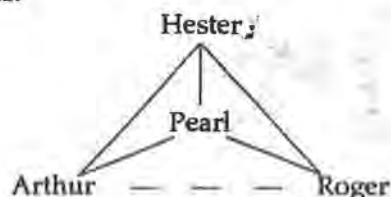
- III The Recognition
- IV The Interview
- XI The Interior of a Heart
- XII The Minister's Vigil
- XIII Another View of Hester
- XVIII A Flood of Sunshine
- XX The Minister in a Maze
- XXIII The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter

Further, five chapter titles identify pairings of characters:

- VIII The Elf-Child and the Minister
- X The Leech and His Patient
- XIV Hester and the Physician
- XV Hester and Pearl
- XVII The Pastor and his Parishioner

Half of the titles of the chapters call attention to the awareness of characters to each other; they watch each other, and they *do* interact.

In an order the logic of which will, I trust, become clear, I would like to look at the six pairs: Pearl-Roger, Arthur-Pearl, Arthur-Roger, Hester-Pearl, Hester-Roger, and Arthur-Hester. Imagine a triangle with Arthur, Hester, and Roger at the points and Pearl in the center and you have a sense of the structure of the relationships that inform awareness.



Roger and Pearl's awareness of each other makes only a minor contribution to character or plot, hence is relatively unimportant. Roger does wonder if careful examination of Pearl would reveal her father's identity. And in the end Roger is seen to be more aware of Pearl than suspected, as he bequeathes his fortune to her, thus permitting her to become the first Jamesian-like heroine to go to Europe and marry well (or at least nobly). But he largely ignores her, as she him.

Not only is Pearl aware of Arthur, but she extends little kindnesses to him as well. In III (when still an infant) she reaches towards the sound of his voice, and in VIII (at age 3) she caresses him. But in XII (age 7), he must take her hand, and in XVIII she rejects his kiss. Then, in the climactic revelation scene, Pearl "clasped her arms about his knees," they hold hands, and she kisses his lips.

Pearl is as aware of Arthur's duplicity in not holding hands in the daylight as she is of Hester's different attitude when she lets her hair down in the forest. Most significantly, Pearl and Arthur interact more or less intimately, hence meaningfully, in the five most important scenes in the novel: the three scaffold chapters, the confrontation in the Governor's mansion, and the meeting in the forest.

Pearl is not exactly aware of the meaning behind the symbol, but she intuits connections without being able to complete the equation; she sees the links without being able to put the chain together. Her awareness of Arthur is largely intuitive, whereas circumstances make Arthur quite aware of Pearl in important scenes in Chapters VIII and XIX.

ROGER LEARNS Arthur's identity in Chapter IX, while Arthur doesn't learn about Roger until Chapter XVII. Hypersensitivity, or hyperawareness of each other, explains how Roger and Arthur happen to be roommates. Something draws them together; perhaps without quite knowing why, they do deserve each other, and need to be together. Even though Arthur is intelligent and sensitive, he does not sense the presence of evil in Roger because some part of his perspicacity has been blunted by sin, guilt, and secrecy.

Roger eventually knows everything about Arthur, even making Arthur acutely aware of Roger. Unfortunately, Arthur's secret sin has blinded him to the obvious; he *feels* the punishment Roger inflicts without being aware of Roger's true identity. (What is Roger's "true identity?" Is he Hester's husband or is he the Devil?) Roger knows

all at a glance, then realizes he should have had foresight. (62) Roger's awareness of Arthur is too subtle for Arthur fully to be aware of it. But in a way he is, as is suggested by "who is that man" and "nameless horror." (156)

THERE IS VERY NEARLY a perfect balance in the ways Hester and Pearl are aware of each other. Hester's letter makes her aware in a very special way of Pearl, her daughter and (in the mind of the novel) the product of her sin. When in Chapter IV Hester and Pearl are sick from the ordeal on the scaffold (Hester distraught at her public humiliation, Pearl unfed and in the hot sun for three hours), Pearl is the "type" of Hester. (70) Chapter VI is *about* intricate degrees in the levels of mutual awareness between Hester and Pearl. So aware of each other are Hester and Pearl that Hester's only comfort was when Pearl slept. (93, 96). Pearl is aware that Hester without the letter is wrong—in

fact, some kind of violation and rejection by Hester of Pearl, if Pearl is the letter. Pearl sees Hester mirrored in the suit of armor (106) and is endowed by Hawthorne with insight enough to comprehend her mother's loneliness. (93)

Pearl makes connections, but she's too young to be able to understand, to be aware, because all three of her parents keep her in the dark. (And in a way she's more nearly a symbol than a person.) She is motivated by her perception of Truth, yet is too young to understand adultery, duplicity, and Puritan morality. She is very aware of the letter on her mother's breast, and of the minister's habit of holding his hand over his heart, and she seems to be aware of Roger's evil nature.

In moments when Hester is most troubled by sin and vexed at the difficulties of single-parenting, Pearl is "aware, through some more subtle channel" and smiles—less sympathetically than knowingly—upon her mother. (96)





HESTER AND BOSTON believe Roger was lost as sea, yet she senses his presence in the community before she sees him. Hester and Roger are aware of each other in the crowd scene in Chapter III, when their eyes "locked on each other" (in language Eliot might have invented), and immediately know each other's secrets. Such unspoken communication suggests heightened awareness, as intuition, mental telepathy, or a sixth sense; it enables subconscious communication. Roger asserts his presence in a manner that makes forgetting him nearly impossible, although Hester's more immediate concerns (surviving her ordeal, and raising a difficult child) in part succeed in doing so. The letter she wears is a perpetual reminder to Hester and to the community of her sin. She feels all eyes upon her, making her acutely aware of Roger. She turns "pale as death" when Roger speaks, and is "still as death" when he enters her cell. (68, 71)

Hester is aware that Roger is destroying Arthur, and that Roger is destroying Roger. Hester notices changes in Roger as early as Chapter VIII. Conversely, Roger's awareness of Hester is relatively unimportant, his energy being directed towards Arthur.

ARTHUR'S AWARENESS of Hester is more self-consciousness than meaningful awareness of her life and troubles; perhaps he is more aware of Hester's letter than he is of Hester herself.

Hester, on the other hand, is painfully aware of Arthur, constantly reminded of him by the letter she wears. One reason for remaining in Boston is to be near him. Imagine, however, the intensity of her feelings when Arthur berates her for adultery in Chapter III and posits his defence of her right to retain custody in Chapter VIII on penance for adultery. In the first instance he occupies a lofty position on a balcony, and in the second he's allied with the Governor and his staff. Later (XII), Hester's acute awareness of Arthur leads to a re-awakened consciousness of Roger, and conscience about his revenge.

THE SCARLET LETTER makes Hester always aware of her sin, of Pearl, of Arthur, and of the community. As outcast but moving about the town freely, day and night, she is unusually sensitive to rumors, constantly aware of those who feel that she doesn't belong in Boston, and that the village is torturing her. Hester is, as a result, the most totally aware character in the book: Pearl is a child, Roger is blinded by revenge, Arthur is blinded by secrecy, and the community is aware only of the letter's

superficial meaning, not of its deeper meaning. Hester's awareness grows; she progresses, whereas Roger and Arthur regress, Roger because obsessed with revenge, Arthur because crippled by his secret.

THE REVELATION of the scarlet letter at the end of the story evolves from or leads to recognition of each other among the four characters. Arthur has a breakdown, a mental collapse, so Roger as shrink fails, even though as satanic tormentor he succeeds. As with other mad scientists in Hawthorne's stories, he cures the patient, but the patient dies. The sense or meaning of awareness is taken to new levels when we realize that Pearl is aware in a way even she doesn't understand.

Awareness of each other becomes an essential clue to the center of novel, which I take to be a lesson in human interdependency, illustrated by its successes and failures.

#### TWO NOTES:

*Aside from Pearl's ambiguous touching of Arthur, there is surprisingly little physical intimacy in the novel. Hester does hug Pearl "to her bosom" at certain crucial moments, Pearl touches the letter as an infant and again as small child, and she throws flowers at it, but Arthur and Hester barely embrace in their big forest scene.*

*Intriguing but not quite central are self-awareness and awareness of nature, both of which buttress that awareness of each other so admired by Eliot. Hester's self-awareness is present in various ways, from "vivid self-perception" to wild, desperate defiance in passages on pages 78, 84, 86, 91, and 94. All of the characters, but especially Pearl, are aware of Nature. Roger learned herbs from the Indians, Hester comes into her own in the forest, and even Arthur walks in the woods.*

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—ALLEN FLINT





## Veterans' Day: 1992

Why this particular memory  
that always comes for me  
from a world  
a half a world away

with its distinctive rhythms  
and its telling rhymes  
so different from  
the silences  
of the incandescent tamaracks  
of the blackened oaks and maples  
hushed in this November rain

If not to join  
in ghoulish adagio  
with the gutted deer  
swinging in the dooryard  
with the shards of pumpkin skulls  
glistening in the village streets

If not to remind me  
that we are never  
that far away from  
a time and a place  
where no one  
is entirely sane

—DOUG RAWLINGS

# The Path Not Taken

## Keys to the Liberal and Conservative Mind

**I**N EVERY ELECTION SEASON, the arguments and the name-calling rage between the liberals and the conservatives. But it is important to understand what shapes different people. This assignment [given to the students in *Economics 101*] will help you to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Maybe then you will better understand where people are coming from when they voice a political, social, or economic opinion. The following are all absolutely true facts selected from the biographies of two living American men whom you

have surely heard of. As you read through these hints to their identities and values, try to picture the type of individuals who are built by such very different experiences. Be imaginative, and see if you can figure out what kind of personalities have developed from these contrasting but equally interesting backgrounds. Do you think either could ever be your neighbor or friend? Which one would be more likely to have achieved success or truly enjoy their life?

### **PROFILE #1: Details from the biography of "Dr. Jay Kool"**

CLASS VALEDICTORIAN at a rich suburban high school. Scored 1500 on his college boards. Played on a state championship tennis team in high school in a large northeastern state. Won a top scholarship to an elite private college in western Massachusetts (Williams). Went skiing at Alta and Stowe.

Never consumed a single alcoholic beverage, cigarette, or controlled substance in his life. Drove a Corvette and a Porsche around the U.S. and fifteen other countries. Never homeless, poor, or out of work. Parents lived in a luxurious lakefront house. Favored the death penalty for first degree murder. Morally opposed to the practice of abortion. Married the head cheerleader who was a well-educated professional—ceremony was at a posh ski resort in the Swiss Alps. Honeymooned in Barcelona. Never divorced, they raised their children in the Catholic faith.

Never ran from the draft during Vietnam War, and had friends and relatives who attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Earned advanced professional degree in a technical field, later engaged in research and planning. Never received a speeding ticket. Never cheated on taxes. Lived in Colonial mansion in affluent suburb of an eastern metropolis. Later in life, lived on a landscaped 7-acre estate in an all-white town. Dislikes hunting and fishing.

Regular reader of *Smithsonian*, *Consumer Reports*, and *Newsweek* magazines, as well as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *L.L. Bean Catalog*. Attended many Broadway theatrical productions. Traveled by kayak through Germany. Detested many ideas of Jerry Brown. Tried to lived by the ideals of Jesus. Strong family values.

## PROFILE #2: Details from the biography of "Mr. Ride"

BORN IN NEW YORK during World War II. A loner, he often wore black at his public high school. Played on a state championship basketball team in a major northeastern state. Wrote crude skits for the beer blasts at his animal house fraternity. Twice evicted from dormitory room at college in Pennsylvania.

Marched in huge demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Got a professional haircut every twenty years. Never believed in the existence of God. Rode a Triumph motorcycle across the U.S. and Canada. Lived in a slum apartment with members of the first band to play at Woodstock.

Parents' house was built on a coal strip-pit in the heartland of America. Parents worked in education and the civil rights movement in the South. No ancestor ever served in the military. Worked sixteen years before first promotion.

Was regular reader of *Mad*, *Car and Driver*, *TV Guide*, and *Entertainment* magazines. Drove a muscle car from the 1960s. Loved rock music from Elvis to the Stones to George Thorogood to Metallica. Liked African drum rhythms. Didn't own a suit. Slept overnight in car on many long trips.

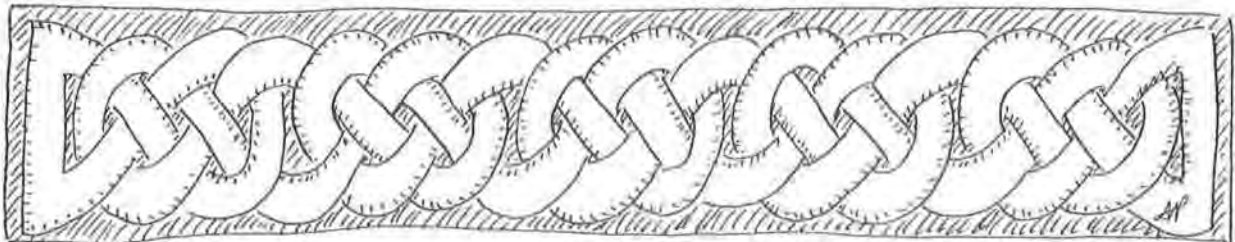
Detested ideas of Richard Nixon and Pat Buchanan. Pro-choice on abortion. Married in New York into family of longshoremen and waitresses and cops. Eloped and hired two tipsy strangers as witnesses. Spent wedding night on a crowded train.

Later in life, lived in small cape-style home in the boondocks. Trout stream and deer in backyard. Bought just that one house and one new car in his life. No savings, lived paycheck to paycheck in middle class job. Income half the size of his debts. Picked up after the pets, did much of the house and yardwork, changed the oil, played the lottery, bet on football, etc.

Liberals or conservatives today? How would these two people probably have voted (or would they have voted?) in the 1992 presidential election? What would they think about the defense budget,

welfare, progressive taxation, environmental regulations, and other economic issues? How certain are you of your intuitions? [See page 20.]

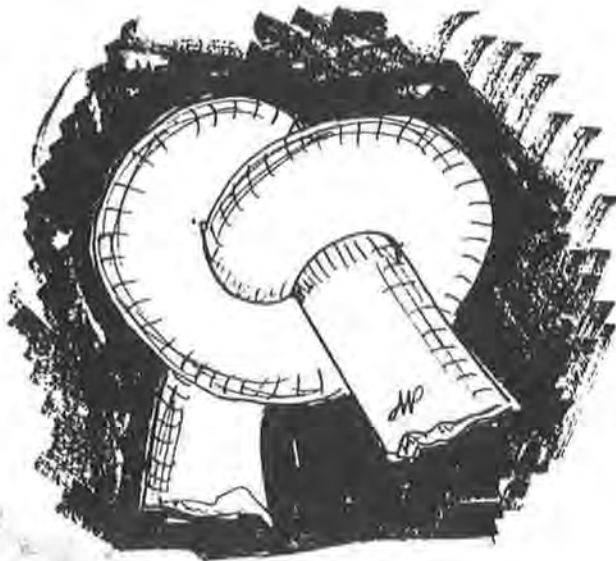
—ROY VAN TIL



# The Far World Comes Back

The town clock strikes four bells,  
darkness slips downward as I awake  
and await in bed  
while dawn-grown distinctions  
arise from the dark  
which had stolen them nightlong.  
Beyond the foot of the bed  
the dresser comes forward,  
my wife's jewelry boxes  
emerge as black bumps,  
the bookcase takes its place, soon  
the day's forgotten far world  
will have reemerged  
to take its part of me  
and habit's strong hand  
will guide me  
over earth's unevenness,  
distinctions always arise  
from a receding dark.

—ROD FARMER



# An Accounting

**T**HE MORNING SUN spills into the upstairs front bedroom where my husband and I sleep, but it is the busy conversations of barn swallows outside our window that wake us. First thing I go to the window to look out at the pond; mist is rising off its surface in silk threads. A line of swallows perches on the telephone wire nearby; I watch as one, then another, then the whole group of them leaves the wire and soars in and out of the mist like eyelashes on currents of wind.

I turn to look at Alan; he is staring intently at the ceiling, one arm beneath his head.

"Have you figured out why we've done this?" I ask, getting right to the question that has been on my mind.

"I'm just trying to figure out what's above that ceiling," Alan replies.

This makes sense, as he has left teaching and plans to work on the house over the next year, relying on his earlier housebuilding career to gut and rebuild the entire structure. I will be writing and teaching.

"But can you put it into words, why we did this?" I pursue.

Alan returns my gaze. "So we don't have to pay a Portland water bill?"

I turn to stare at the pond again. I try to put words to what we've done, but it's vague, intangible, just beyond my reach.

**DOWNSTAIRS** I let the cats out. One by one they scoot out the door and slip off the porch, step lightly to avoid the dew-covered grass. Alan starts the coffee as I pull the binoculars from the hook and head outside; I gaze at the pond, at a tiny speck on the far side. "Maybe that's one of the loons," I suggest as Alan joins me on the porch. But no, it is a rock protruding from the water and I realize we have not lived here long enough to know the loons from the rocks.

Yesterday we discovered turtles in the marshy area of the pond: two large snappers, and four smaller turtles who sunned themselves in the mud, exposing yellow stripes along their necks and up under their chins. We also startled an owl from his perch in a tall pine and watched him flap away, his wings brushing the sides of the narrow corridor through the tree tops. We'd heard that a mother

bear and her cubs were living in a cave up over the first ridge. And that a moose had eaten all the pansy blossoms at one neighbor's house.

In Portland we lived in a lovely neighborhood, but we looked out of every window at bricks, clapboards, or concrete. From one room on the third floor we could see a triangle of the bay if we craned our necks.

In Portland we locked our doors; we installed a motion detector after three men broke the window on the front door and tiptoed into the livingroom while we slept in our bed right above them. Why had we turned off our porch light? the police inquired. Didn't we know it was an open invitation?

No, we replied. We're trying not to waste electricity, we explained.

In Portland there was every kind of store a person could imagine, but it was more than anyone could need and we could want; it was hard to locate the Cheerios and Rice Crispies amidst the Nutri-Grain Nuggets, the Fruit 'N Fibre Cinnamon Apple Crisp, the Mueslix 5-Grain, and the newest: Ice Cream Cones Chocolate Chip. On the highways BMW's and Jeep Cherokees decked out with car phones and ski racks and grill bras sped by us as we chugged along in our '81 rusting-out Toyota wondering if we were making a statement or just rationalizing. Fast food stores threatened to dull our palates, and the Mall's mirrors and fountains made us dizzy. The Back Bay, where we lived, offered a 4-mile course for walking along the water's edge, but we had to cling to our right to the path in amongst the Spandexed runners, the speed bikers, the power walkers, and the occasional freak who picked pockets or squeezed women's buttocks.

We kept a compost heap behind the house, made from the leaves we raked in the fall, while our neighbors packed as many as fifty plastic bags each with leaves to go to the dump; did they not know of Portland's waste problem? We offered to take others' old newspapers to be recycled. No, we were told, we always leave them for the trash pick-up.

In Portland we saw the gap between the moneyed class and the rest of us grow wider. If you were a doctor, a lawyer, or a stock broker, you



were probably flourishing. Your children carried credit cards and wrote checks, you trekked in Nepal, and your retirement fund secured your future ten times over. If you were a small store owner, a teacher, or a retired citizen, you found that the recession had diminished your buying power; you had a few more dollars but they didn't go as far as they once had.

In Portland our property taxes had nearly doubled two years in a row; our two teachers' salaries were strained to their limits. We lived simply and preferred it that way; but to continue that life, we would have to build up debts. Everyone does it, we hear. It's the American Way, we knew. But we shrank from that.

So we asked ourselves: Why are we living this way? Do we want to? We didn't think so.

We decided we'd rather live in the country, up near the Rangeley Lakes where we go in the summer, up in the mountains where there is space, clean air, low taxes, a common belief that money doesn't buy you all that much and that social interaction means cooperation, not competition. We drove up to the mountains and looked at some properties just to see what was there, not expecting to buy or even make definite plans for the future. We were still "considering," we thought. But we found a yellow farmhouse in Phillips that we could not resist. We put money down that same day.

Our families and friends thought we were crazy. "You've put money down on a house up in—where is Phillips, anyway? And you haven't sold your house here, and you have no jobs up north?" they inquired, disbelieving.

All except my Uncle Glen. "Well, you've never cared about money," he said.

I considered it a full endorsement.

It was a long winter for Alan and me. We wondered if our Portland house would sell in the midst of a market that had plunged and was still plunging; we wondered if any teaching positions would come available in a period of recession when jobs were being cut. "Things happen when you really want them to," Alan reminded me, often at 3:00 a.m. when the fear woke me.

Alan was right. Things did happen. The house sold. I got the job I wanted. Our two children gave us their blessings. Out in Colorado, George had rented a one-bedroom house 3 miles in on a dirt road; he understood perfectly. Ellen understood too, but was sad to lose her Portland base.

I LEAVE ALAN ON THE PORCH with the binoculars and head down to the pond. Just where the

water meets the shore is a conversion of pollywogs sunning themselves in the shallows; there must be several hundred of them, tails fluttering, some with the start of front legs. As I get closer they escape *en masse*; the water bubbles with the activity.

I hear something then, the call of geese. "Up behind the house," Alan calls, pointing through the pines that reach tall above the roof out back. He has moved out onto the grass, lifts the binoculars to follow them. I see them then; three black dots. They get larger, larger, then I can see them clearly, long necks stretched out, their pattern of flight completely in sync with one another, and the air aflutter with their honking as they come in to land. Then quiet, as they sail regally across the glassy surface that reflects the trees that line the pond, and their reflections join those of the trees until I realize there are two scenes: the real one and the reflection.

Yesterday, I recall, Alan found a baby hummingbird in the barn. On one of its first solos, we figured, it had made the mistake of flying into the dark cavernous barn and couldn't find its way out. It kept knocking into the wall and flopping down through the rakes and poles and lumber to the floor while outside its mother buzzed and whirred in search of her fledgling. I watched as Alan lifted it out from under a shovel with his work glove.

There is something mysterious and wondrous about a hummingbird; even to catch a glimpse of one in flight is considered a gift by some. Yet there we stood, watching a baby hummingbird at rest, close enough to study the iridescence of its chest, the fright in its eyes, and the tiny legs tucked in close to its body which trembled with heart beats. We said nothing, merely treasured the precious seconds until it was time to move on.

Alan stepped out into the afternoon light then, opened the glove and held it to the air. For a moment the hummingbird rested there, its tiny body vibrating. Then we watched as it took flight, as it whirred clumsily up to a branch of a pine tree, free at last, becoming at home in its world.

So the words finally come as I watch the reflection of the geese on the pond, as I recall the instant when the hummingbird flew off: Here we can let the past float away, carrying the heart's sadness off on a current of air. Here we can let the future come to us instead of racing to catch up with it.

Here there is just the one moment. In this we can be at home.

—ELIZABETH COOKE





# CONTRIBUTORS

KATHLEEN BEAUBIEN, half-time English Composition instructor, scours the lakeside woods for wildflowers in the spring and summer, mushrooms in the fall. This year, her work has appeared in *Chants, Notes and Queries*, and *Puckerbrush Review*.

PHILIP CARLSEN, Associate Professor of Music, has edited *Beyond Memos* since its inception. His compositions have been performed recently by the Portland Symphony Orchestra, and in San Diego by the Verdehr Trio.

JONATHAN COHEN, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, has recently come out of the closet and admitted that, despite his excellent "ayuh," he is in fact From Away. Contributions to his acculturation are tax-deductible.

ELIZABETH COOKE is an instructor of composition and fiction writing. Before coming to UMF, she taught English in the Portland area for 15 years and wrote short stories and a novel, *Complicity*, that is set in Maine's western mountains where she now lives with her husband.

ROD FARMER, Professor of Education and History, has had over 300 poems published in some 80 journals and magazines, including *The Amaranth Review*, *Black Fly Review*, *Bitterroot*, and *Black Buzzard Review*. He has also published numerous articles and essays. His first book of poetry, *Universal Essence*, was released in 1986.

"ALLEN FLINT" is the *nom de guerre* of Rachel West, who teaches junior high English at a small college in rural New England.

DOUG RAWLINGS is the coordinator of UMF's Basic Writing Program. He is proud to say that one of his poems, "The Wall," was the inspiration for a recently published children's book by Margie Burns-Knight entitled *Talking Walls*, which was cited by the Boston Globe as one of the top 25 children's books for 1992.

ROY VAN TIL, in one person, matches the profiles of both Dr. Jay Cool and Mr. Ride. He is Associate Professor of Economics and is active in campus planning.

MAGGY WYCKOFF is Professor of Mathematics Education and Director of the Honors Program.



