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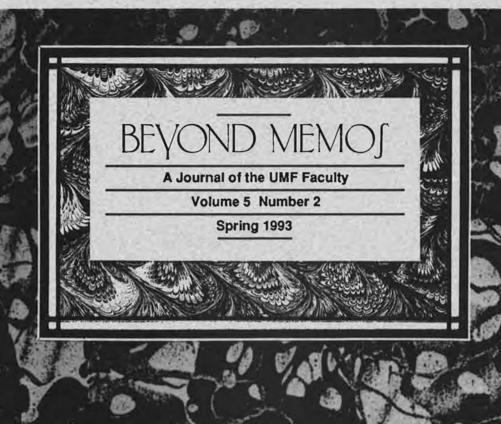
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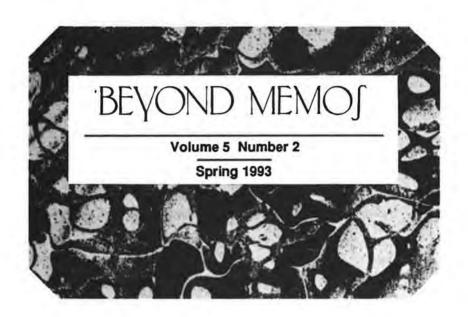
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\*with apologies to Ruth and Vincent Megaw in Celtic Art: From its Beginnings to the Book of Kells. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989.

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.

# A Hideous Howling Wilderness

The Berkshire Hills, Massachusetts

We set out from thence toward Albany the nearest way through ye woods. . . . Ye greatest part of our road this day was a hideous howling wilderness.

Rev. Benjamin Wadsworth, August, 1694

ILD AND FORBIDDING, pastoral and inviting-two views of the Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts call attention to a three-hundred-year change in land and mind. But even today traces of earlier attitudes and physical realities still linger within the hidden recesses of this country's sharply dissected topography, for there are forests of trees still living from that time when the Reverend Wadsworth accompanied a group of Massachusetts's commissioners to a conference of the colonies in Albany. And when one comes into these original woods, the mind forms a vivid image of the high, rough, pathless wilderness that halted the frontier here until the mid-1700s. Today, only the settlers' fear of hostile aboriginal encounters is difficult to imagine.

Change is not new to these hilly uplands carved from the eroded roots of ancient Taconic mountains. From that once high, craggy range and its progressive reformation into flat plains, uplifted plateaus, and glaciated, deeply incised highlands, the Berkshires, as we know them today, emerged as distinctive features of the New England landscape.

For eight thousand years now, a mixed northern hardwood-coniferous forest has clothed the northern region of these hills. Beech, sugar maple, yellow and white birch, white pine, hemlock, and other species still nestle in the valleys and cling to the steep hillsides. And, amazingly, despite the rigors of fires, hurricanes, disease, and 250 years of clearing the land, there still remain pockets of pristine forest untouched by human hands.

I remember my anticipation on the way to one of these secluded places—a cove, as it is called, containing the headwaters of Fife Brook. Indeed, it looked like a cove when my companions and I gazed into it from a back-country road. And I was struck at that moment by the aptness of the term, cove: here I saw a safe haven for a forest.

Steep slopes surrounded the basin and dropped sharply to a narrow vee. Below me, beneath a crush of fallen boulders and a tangle of vegetation, earthy-hued from the November frosts, the brook rushed noisily. To my right, the sun cast its low, morning light on the south-facing slope. Somewhere on that hillside, near its top, our ancient forest stood—the remnant of a "hideous howling wilderness."

Slashwise, across the "close" contours of our map, we struggled up the steeply inclined slope. Newly fallen leaves, as frictionless as an ice-glazed walkway, forced a hand-holding intimacy with every limb and trunk within reach. We rested briefly, finding secure footing in a large pit where the roots of a gigantic inhabitant of this slope had been torn from the ground when it toppled. Now, only a long mound of earth showed where it had fallen.

The November sun shined warmly on the steep slope, angled perpendicular to the rays of incoming light. Here the warm soil favored a deciduous forest and, to our surprise, a plant in flower, for on a brightly lit, sheltered ledge among protruding garnets, a pale corydalis still bloomed. Its delicate pink and yellow blossoms were as unexpected as the forest that was discovered here.

The hemlock grove we entered leaned against the sharp incline of the hill. The trees stood tall and stately, but one caught my eye. Its girth was immense—over ten feet around. Since the late 1500s, it had stood in this place, each year strengthening its grip on the uneasy hillside. I wondered what it had witnessed during those four hundred years.

We walked on, in and out of groves of conifers and stands of hardwoods—a few very old, others young, and some dead, still standing upright or lying where they had fallen. We paused at a 1700s sugar maple, its yellowing crown towering more than one hundred feet over the forest floor. Beneath, clumps of maidenhair ferns added patches of bright green to the muted hues of fallen leaves. We passed another maple, alive during Reverend Wadsworth's trip; an old, black cherry more than

two feet in diameter; a grove of ancient oak high up on the hillside; huge birches; and an aged horn-beam. A hemlock log lay wedged between boulders and trees, stretching a hundred feet across the side of the hill. We counted more than 250 rings. Here was an old-growth forest of magnificent diversity—one of Massachusetts's finest examples, I was told.

The sun settled quickly over the hill, and with the enveloping shadows came an instant chill. We turned to head back, dropping down towards the bottom of the cove and closer to the sound of the flume below. The ruts of an old wood road showed faintly between mature trees: the forest's reclamation was nearly finished. The road had stopped here, the loggers unable to continue beyond the barrier of slope and ledge. Clearly, all who value those old trees on the hillside above us owe a debt to terrain.

Today, if we should wish to remove this forest, there would be few if any obstacles. But if we should wish it to remain wild, there is one barrier—
the one in our minds. It is the one in which we see
nature only in terms of enhancing the forest's
human worth to the exclusion of values we associate with preserving its self-worth.

Later I learned that one of the region's first settlers, Mrs. Jonathan Taylor, used to converse with contemporaries of the old Fife Brook trees. It was said that she worried she would lose her power of conversation to the effects of isolation. Two-hundred-and-fifty years later four of us sought the isolation of that old Berkshire forest so that the trees of Mrs. Taylor's time might talk to us. And they did. Those trees—those original inhabitants of a wilderness barrier once called hideous and howling—helped us to see even more clearly the need to overcome the cultural barriers that separate us from nature. They spoke in their own defense and, in so doing, ours.

—DEAN BENNETT

This essay is from a forthcoming book tentatively titled *The Forgotten Nature of New England*, copyright 1993, to be published by Down East Books, Camden, Maine. Much of the research for this book is being carried out in conjunction with a Libra Professorship.

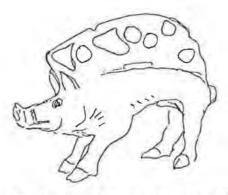
FACING PAGE: A gray jay, Perisoreus canadensis, becomes excited after spotting a Canada lynx, Felis canadensis. The lynx is now thought to reside principally in the remote headwaters of the Allagash, St. John, and Penobscot rivers. (From a book by Dean Bennett on the natural history of the north woods along the Allagash Wilderness Waterway—now in press at Down East Books. The pen-and-ink drawing won second place in the mixed media division of the juried 1992 State of Maine Sportsman's Show Art Contest.)



### СЛИВИ

ODAY I BOUGHT plums in the market. The phonetic spelling, in the Roman alphabet, would be something like "sleevah" (singular) and "sleevey" (plural). These are not the factory plums sold in U.S. supermarkets, so uniform they can be stacked into little pyramids for display. Bulgarian plums come in all sizes and some are adorned with stems and leaves. They wouldn't stack well, but then the old man comes to the market to sell plums, not display them.

We exchange waves each morning as we go to work. I go down the hill in the Peugeot; he comes up in a donkey cart ferrying water to his orchard. I assume he knows who I am; even this small Peugeot is a luxury car in Bulgaria. It has a standard transmission and the first manual choke I have used in thirty years. But in a sea of Ladas and Trebants, it might as well have two small American flags flying on the front fenders.



Bronze boar, Luncani, Romania, 10.5 cm., 1st c. BC. Muzeul Cluj-Napoca.

One afternoon I risk hiking up the cart path, hoping he has gone for the day. I do not want to meet him on foot where the pace of movement demands more than a wave. I do not want to test the sense of camaraderie I have fabricated in my mind. "Nice fellow, that new university president," I imagine him saying to his wife in the evening, "he waves to me every morning." Word gets around. I am accepted by the locals. But

Bulgarian peasants do not talk that way.

I proceed warily up the path. I should stride confidently, whistling a country air, so that anyone I might meet will know immediately that I belong. Instead, I peer around furtively. In the silence of the hillside, each footstep crashes loudly against the rocks, and I am overcome by the sound of my labored breathing.

I finally reach the top and feel even more like a trespasser. It's not an orchard really, only a few trees around the perimeter of a level spot on which he grows cabbages, leeks, and savory. The plants are protected from his goat who is tethered to one of the trees. The rope must be tied to the trees in rotation because the foliage of each one begins exactly one goat's length above the ground.

"Добер ден,"

I wheel at the sound of his voice. He is coming up the path behind me. I feel suddenly panicky. Where did he come from? How long has he been following me? How does this little gnome move so silently?

His broad smile does not lessen my unease. I must look like an idiot, standing next to a goat wearing a three hundred dollar suit (actually, I am wearing the suit; the goat is not) and trying to look at ease. I have to get away quickly. I want to exit with some modicum of aplomb, but mostly I just want to leave.

"Dober Den," I reply, using up about ten percent of my Bulgarian repertoire.

I start down the hill trying to assume a gait and expression which say "Just out for my evening constitutional; nice to see you again," but the goat cuts in front of me, and I become entangled in the rope. I smile at the old man as if to say, "Don't worry, this happens all the time. Nothing I can't handle." But as I continue my lame attempt to influence what the old man thinks of me, the goat has circled behind me. Maybe he thinks I have food for him. Or maybe he works in team with the old man. The goat ties them up and the old man picks their pockets.

The old man is now jabbering in Bulgarian. He pulls a clump of weeds and, waving them in front of the goat, circles around me. With his circling and chanting, I begin to feel like the object of some primitive Balkan religion (is the goat to be sacri-

ficed?). The billy follows the weeds and I am freed from the rope. I point down the hill as if I just heard my mother calling and break into a slight jog.

"Blagoderia," I call out several times, but he is still talking as I reach the bottom of the hill.

Market days are Wednesday and Saturday. These are not the gentrified markets in the U.S. where yuppies go to feel self-satisfied about not shopping in Safeway. There are no Safeways in Bulgaria. If you do not buy food from the open-air stalls in the market, you risk hunger. The few small grocery stores are mostly empty because the producers do not want to sell wholesale when they can get retail twice a week.

The old man has only plums today. They are deep blue, the color of Milk of Magnesia bottles, and they have highlights which look like frost even in the warm morning sun. The plums are in the same large porcelained metal containers he uses to carry water up the hill. He smiles when he sees me

approach.

At first I dreaded this moment. He had seen me with my ego naked, and I was embarrassed. But in the week since my narrow escape from the Boa Goat, I had come to see the event differently. So what if I looked foolish? At least I had walked up the hill. I hadn't let suit and standing inhibit me from making contact with the locals. And it was his goat, after all, who committed a social faux pas. He was probably more embarrassed than I was (the old man, not the goat).

"Dobro Utro," I say to him (it is too early for

"dober den").

"Добро утро," he replies and shows his brown, crooked teeth in a huge smile.

"Kolko struva?" I ask, pointing to the plums.
"Пет леВа за килограм," he answers. He
then adds something else which I do not compre-

hend.

I do not want an entire kilogram (about two and a quarter pounds); they will go bad before I can eat them. I don't mind the price (five leva is about twenty five cents), but I hate to waste food in this country. I know the names only of the whole numbers. I resort to hand signals. Pointing the index finger of my left hand skyward, I cross it with the index finger of my right hand, indicating, I assume, "one half."

He stares at my hands. The smile leaves his face, and he steps back, leaning away at the waist. I glance at my hands and realize I am making the sign of the cross. I appear to be fending him off as if he were a vampire. I look back at this wizened Lon Chaney and fix his uncertain eyes. Is he

disappointed in me? Scared?

"Edeen Kilogram," I almost shout. Then I repeat it several times.

"Един килограм," he repeats, and we begin to chant it in unison, finally ending up laughing together. He has relaxed. We are reunited. But he hasn't understood. He makes no motion to put any plums in the plastic bag I have brought to market (you must bring your own sacks).

Repeating "one kilogram" again seems pointless; we have both said it already a dozen times. Finally, I hold the sack out, but he doesn't respond as I hoped. Instead, he leans closer and begins to talk. His warm, acrid breath washes over me. I strain to catch a word, any word, which might give me a hint, but I am not yet good enough. Whatever he is saying is heartfelt. Perhaps, I flatter myself, my few words of Bulgarian have been so well pronounced that he thinks I understand everything he is saying. Or maybe he's just a senile old man.

As he pauses for breath, I risk a response. "Da, Da," I say, remembering to shake my head rather than nod as I do so. He seems satisfied. He begins to load plums into my sack. I am filled with self-satisfaction. I have concluded a business transac-

tion in Bulgarian.

Once the sack is full, I take out my wallet and begin to count out five leva. The old man grows distant again. He steps back and looks at me with yellow, sad eyes. He utters a few words, more slowly than before. I catch the word "podaruk," and I'm mortified. He intended the plums as a gift.

"Vtori Kilogram," I offer. Then I add, ungrammatically, "Preyatil." I wanted to say that I wanted a second kilogram for a friend, but perhaps what I said, if indeed I said anything at all, was "A

second kilogram, friend."

He smiles and loads a second kilogram into my sack. He takes the proffered leva happily. We shake hands. I start to walk away. Everything has worked out fine except that I now have a year's supply of plums. Then I turn and, in the first unpremeditated action since I first saw him coming up the valley, I offer him one of his own plums. He accepts it gleefully. I pull one out of the sack for myself. We stand together eating plums. He begins to talk again. I don't know what he is saying, but I feel I have begun to understand him.

—MIKE ORENDUFF

## Two Poems

#### **ANTINOO**

Un viejo campanario tañe una muerte nueva Es un ciervo ensombrecido bordando en el barro un río que pasa despertando en Adriano los milenios

El Ganges dromedario guarda la sed austera del lóbrego escanciero auriga fugaz del vértigo divino Llevas en tu estela mármol de un destino vendimia indomable embriagada de siglos.

#### **ANTINOO**

An old bell tower
tolls a new death
It is a melancholy stag
tracing in the mud a river
that passes by, waking
in Adrian the millennia

The Ganges dromedary guards the austere thirst of the gloomy wine server coachman fleeting of the divine vertigo You carry in your wake the marble of a destiny the untameable vintage intoxicated by centuries.

Soy el numen divino que tropieza el vado y el risco la voz prolija y el vago ritmo Soy escollo advertido que al velero asiste en su gran presagio Soy el vuelo que arrastra un corazón de siesta La gran serpiente que vuelve a ser marisma y luego ermita, el largo horario donde el sol medita su lento rayo Soy enhiesta figura de algun sudario y así mismo la carga inquieta de algun corsario Soy esclavo, voltario cubeta y río Soy el largo escenario donde Dios anima su eterno cirio.

I am the divine muse that stumbles over ford and cliff impertinent voice and vague rhythm I am the invisible reef that reaches for the sailboat, an omen I am the flight that sweeps away a heart at rest the great serpent that again becomes a salt marsh, and then a hermitage, the long day where the sun ponders its slow rays I am the standing figure of a shroud and likewise the uneasy burden of a corsair I am slave, fickle cask and river I am the long stage where God gives light to his eternal candle.

> —MONICA CASTILLO (trans. by Linda Britt)



# **Crow Searching**

here are days when I have to push myself from behind to get anywhere. The slow moving low energy humid days of summer when I succumb to a plodding pace. Today.

This morning there is a dead crow in the road—finally I achieve my crow! Excitedly I stop the car, turn around and pull up beside the road kill. I hope that no one comes along to squash it before I pick it up. I also hope that nobody sees me collecting a dead crow. It is a private and crazy mission of several months now—this dead crow

search. Actually dead crows are very rarely seen at all on the road—too smart to get hit? Or do they eat each other immediately? Mysterious.

Funny thing is, today I really already have a dead crow. Yesterday, Amy called to proudly announce that she had a crow for me. Bobby, the farmer across the road, pops them off to get them out of the corn. How many did I want? This prize was in a Shop 'n Save bag in the freezer. Just help myself if she is not home.

So after two months of dead crow search, I



very suddenly have two dead crows. This one in the road has a large thick gob of blood, very bright red blood next to its black beak. It had spit this blood and died, not mangled or deformed at all. Wow—my stomach lurches at the thought of picking it up. I chicken out and run to the car for a Shop 'n Save bag. Then I handle the bird sort of with my hands and sort of with the bag, leaving the blood behind on the steamy hot road.

I'm deciding that I can't do it. The dead animal limpness, the empty stare and the memory in my body of its weightlessness. It's there but not there. It's all too much.

From the driver's seat I can see the claws, curled up, large black, dead black feet. The smell. I imagine the dead smell, and I roll down the window. The fresh hot air combats the imagined stench of dead crow. It is still early in the day. My stomach is lurching and rebeling at the thought of slitting this bird's belly with a knife, at peeling the flesh off the skin, at removing the eyes without damaging the eyelids.

It is still early in the day. Every Monday morning the life drawing group meets at the university and I arrive just as they are starting. Barbara is modeling and there are only six of us drawing today. All women, all ages—Marcia is 18, Liz is 83 and I'm in-between. There is room to spread out with so few of us. I indulge in the space. Standing, I roll out huge sheets of cheap white paper and use soft chunks of charcoal. When my hands are covered black, I sculpt the life-sized figure with my palms. We all race the timer that is ticking off the minutes for each pose. I have drawn





Barbara many times before but decide today that she has the perfect figure. She is small and graceful. Her breasts and buttocks and thighs match, round and full and firm. I am small on the top and larger jigglier on the bottom. I feel sensuous but not perfect like Barb.

Drawing from life is always absorbing, challenging and intense. It is important not to think, but to draw, to get to the creative side of the brain. I can't be judging myself while drawing. I have to trust that this drawing will help another drawing at some later time. And these life-sized drawings are great fun today because they are big.

So Barbara is now in my car rolled up. The crow in the front and Barb in the back. I'm off to Shop 'n Save to buy the groceries and when I come out with five bags, I am very aware of this collec-

tion-the bird, Barb, the food.

The next stop is Amy's freezer. I'm thinking that one crow is plenty but it might be good to have a backup. What if I blow the first one? I'm also thinking that this is gross and why do I want a stuffed crow to draw from? I want a beautiful stuffed crow with its wings spread in flight because I am working on a series of charcoal drawings which picture black coats turning into black crows. Actually it is one coat, my old one, over and over again in different poses dancing across forty feet of wall. The only stuffed crows to be found in Farmington are mounted on round wooden stands in boring poses. After exhausting two of these, I began this mission of finding my own crow to stuff with wings in flight. My mother had stuffed countless birds and skinned animals, so she was



my inspiration for this project. My daughter picked a dead blackbird up for me earlier this summer. Thinking that maybe blackbird and crow would be similar enough, I asked my mother to help me stuff it. She said she had decided not to do that any more since my Dad died this winter. I understand. But it means that I am on my own tonight with this crow thing.

Amy is not home, but her father is puttering in the garden and looks towards me quizzically. I mention that there is something in the freezer for me and I can get it myself. He wonders if I am sure I know what I am looking for? Very funny—how many dead crows in your freezer? I never say crow to him but disappear into the garage for a minute, then wave and take off. I am driving home with two crows, one fresh and one frozen, five bags of

groceries and rolled-up Barbara.

Sleepy on the way home, I arrive craving a nap. I force myself to unload the car. I unpack the food first and put it away. I bring Barb in. I put the crows on the grass and start looking at them, really looking at them. I touch the fresh one first. I dump the frozen one which appears blacker out of the bag. There is watery blood in the bottom of the bag. The neck is all uncomfortably bent and the body distorted from the gunshot. I notice bugs on my arms and brush them off. Then I feel more bugs on my arms and that does it. I've associated birds with bugs and I am jumping, scratching and screaming. I just can't do this. To hell with the mission. I am not brave enough for this since my Dad died.

—DONA SEEGERS



# Baba Yaga

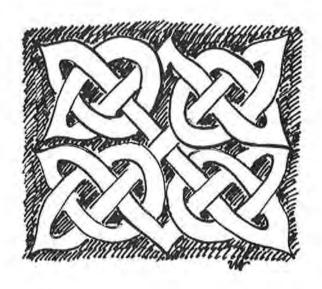
To watch our own hair silver, the skin loosen and buckle, what a surprise.
One day the men no longer see us fit to possess, we will bear no more, and we make our exile like Baba Yaga to the hut that rotates on its chicken legs this way and that in the forest.

She has been mulling the play of shadows, settling her days within the sway of birch. Solemn and frivolous, the girls beat a path there one by one; the stepmother's sent them for the needle, for the coal to light the wick they weave by. Baba Yaga puts them to the test: The door faces the deep woods; they never think to walk around. Stand as your mother stood you, they command the hut; she resists until she imagines kneeling women propping their children under flightless wings, turns her house around.

She consorts with the dead, the girls remember the warning, so when you enter the hut, don't laugh. She can hardly keep from laughing at their transparent faces. Very well, she'll show them what desire is. She devours a pot of borscht and half a cow, twenty chickens and forty geese, two whole pies and an extra piece, cider and home-brewed ale, beer by the barrel and koas by the pail. She threatens to eat them unless they show their mettle, complete the task of the seasoncleaning barley, sorting poppy from the peaslies down on a bench, placing her chin on a shelf, covers herself with her foot and begins to snore so loudly that the forest trembles and shakes.

Each girl befriends
the grumbler-rumbler cat, the dog, the mice,
the tomtits, pigeons, and sparrows,
who do the work, and let her
sneak off with the fire. Then Baba Yaga rises
from a dream of a lost dwelling,
takes the measure of what's missing,
flies after in her tin mortar,
whipping the wind with her pestle,
sweeping traces of flight with her broom
so we can't read where she goes.

-LEE SHARKEY



## **Berries**

At the end of our brief yard swollen blackberries are strung upon barbed vines, thimble-sized canisters of nature-packed wine, which I devour in handfuls. This earth is so infinitely inventive it is good to be caught by this world in this way, to be a child of all its mothers while sort of drunk on juice and texture of these soft-small black cones. My only hangover, purple fingers.

-ROD FARMER

# **Albert Snow Twining**

October 17, 1849-May 19, 1936

F WINTERPORT, MAINE, on the tidal west side of the Penobscot River all his adult life, Albert was born just a few miles south at Frankfort, a younger son of Addison (June 24, 1810-Apr. 3, 1882) and Emeline Colson Twining (Apr. 12, 1831-Jan. 12, 1914). Addison's parents, who had settled in this lower section of Penobscot county, were Abner and Mary Twining; they died respectively on Jan. 27, 1853, at age 81, and on June 18, 1851, at 81\*.

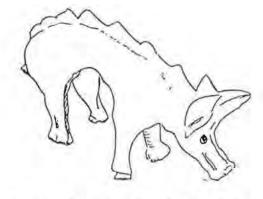
When Albert got to be 15 years and 4 months, he did something he'd been wanting to do for nearly a year—enlist. He lied about his age. The date was Feb. 15, 1865; the place, Belfast, Maine; the obligation, one year; the outfit, Company D, 20th

Maine Infantry. Credited to Winterport's quota, Albert was 5'8", blue-eyed, brown-haired, and "solid." The 20th Maine had long since made a lasting name for its tenacious repulses on Little Round Top that second day at Gettysburg. Pvt. Twining did get into a modest bit of front-lines exchanges during the closing campaign in Virginia; he caught up with his regiment at Hatcher's Run and stayed there until late March. With them, Albert took part in the action at Lewis' Farm (March 29th), the skirmish near Boydton Road (30th), the action at Gravelly Run (31st), the Battle of Five Forks (April 1st), the move to Sutherland's Station (2nd), their swift return march to Jarrettsville (3rd) on the Richmond and Danville



Railroad, skirmish at Amelia Court House (4th & 5th), action at High Bridge (6th), the Surrender at Appomattox Court House (9th). Pvt. Twining, buoyant when the fighting was ended, marched for ten days with the men of the 20th until their arrival in Washington on May 12th.1 Then they all bathed, cleaned and polished for their Grand Review of the Army of the Potomac on the 23rd. It was the most glorious day of Albert Twining's life, bar none. Pvt. Twining was mustered out July 16, 1865, still three months shy of his sixteenth birthday. He proceeded to Portland, Maine, arriving on the 20th and being discharged and paid off on the 25th. Albert's brother, Eugene, born in 1846 in Hampden, had enlisted but two weeks earlier than he and served from Winterport in Company F, 12th Maine.

Albert returned home to his folks, where he helped them "consid'rably" before he initiated his own agrarian independence. He married a girl named Mary J. (1860-1887) about 1877; their



Bronze boar, Bata, Tolna, Hungary, 7.8 cm., ?1st c. BC. Musée Historique d'Orleanis, Orleans.

contented home lasted ten years until sickness took her. Not until Jan. 5, 1925, there in Winterport, would Albert, 75, again marry. His bride was Elsie Maude Joyce (July 18, 1890-June 18, 1975), 34-1/2, daughter of Oliver and Nellie Gott Joyce and a native of Gott's Island, or Great Gott Island, seaward of Bass Harbor Head Light (Mt. Desert Island). They lived for the remainder of Albert's life—11-1/2 years—on a farm bequeathed to him by his Uncle Nathan Twining (1806-1869), who had been a merchant in Blue Hill. The Twinings were members of Winterport's Sunrise Grange, each for

over fifty years-some sixteen, contemporarily.

However, five years before Elsie's birth, Albert, as a comrade of Winterport's Warren Post 66, G.A.R., was among his post's delegation to attend the mammoth 19th National Encampment in Portland, Maine, in 1885. Comrade Twining was one of Maine's 6000-plus who marched in this largest parade in the city's history—probably the largest gathering of her Boys in Blue ever at one time and place since the war itself. Minnesota sent 3000 veterans; Massachusetts, 3500. That June 23rd was probably Albert's second most memorable experience, for he marched in the Second Grand Division-all Maine men, who marked time for late-arriving older veterans from Tennessee and Georgia to get into line just ahead of them. Grand Army men from California and the Territories of Washington and New Mexico were marching that day with Albert when some 23,000 Union Blue shook the pavements in "the Forest City by the Sea."2

During an April 1972 interview with Elsie Twining at her downtown, 2nd-story apartment, the writer made her acquaintance as one of Maine's last two Civil War widows. Said she at that time:

Albert seldom spoke of the war. He told me he recalled seeing Lincoln reviewing the troops. Here's his Testament he carried. They used to eat hoe cakes made of corn meal, salt and hot water—barely enough to stay alive on. Albert, like many of his buddies, had a case of typhoid from rice not cooked enough. The swelling likely caused the typhoid. Every Memorial Day time I go out to the Twining Yard Cemetery off the Cole's Corner Road and place flowers by him—Section B, Lot #7. He was well into his 87th year.

The last Civil War soldier of Winterport and Warren Post 66, his funeral was held at Sunrise Grange Hall, Cole's Corner. Thirty-nine years later, he was joined in eternal rest by his widow.<sup>3</sup>

-JAY S. HOAR

- Dyer, Frederick H., Compendium, p. 1226.
- Hoar, New England's Last Civil War Veterans, 1976, pp.49-51.
  - 3. Bangor Daily News, May 4, 1972; June 26, 1975.

My appreciation to Theodora W. Weston, Archivist, Winterport Hist. Assn., for her letter of 11/24/92.

# A Great Mystery: Fit Lit.

R ECENTLY I enjoyed a mid-winter's orgy.
Six or seven sleety days in the company of a fire, a cushy chair, a good lamp, and six or seven new paperback mystery novels. I've already donated them to the library's spring book fair, and the plots are a blur (the very point of an orgy, I should think). Therefore, I can't give you titles, authors, or exact details of plot beyond saying there were some corpses, a scam or two, money, car chases, weapons, and naturally, justice at the end.

In real life I read and teach Brit. Lit. and sometimes Lit. Crit. and don't read much of anything new; if I do, it's bathtub lit. in the form of mysteries. I've probably read thousands. Generally I prefer the "who could possibly have done this to our dear vicar by putting nasty weed-killer in his sherry" type books, but lately I've been on a California kick. Smoggy sky-lines, snarled L.A. traffic, bleached bones on the desert floor, monosyllabic cops, bright (but ethically troubled) lawyers, kinky crimes. The detectives of either sex are single, young, thin and smart as whips, either forget to eat or occasionally force down a salad, and spend their off-duty hours jogging or working out at a fitness center.

It's this last item, more than the perennial wickedness of humankind, that keeps me up nights: why all the running, step aerobics, weight-lifting, cold showers afterwards, and why does the author keep telling me about it? What's at the bottom of this? A trim bottom, you pertly reply. But I think this is a weighty subject myself, worthy of investigation.

For one thing, the mystery novel is a staple, a time-honored formula, a dependable pleasure. The criminal is caught because the detective spends a lot of time thinking. There is no precedent for detectives doing physical exercise, nor any precedent for spending narrative time on descriptions of bench presses and shin-splints. For example, Miss Marple solves every loathsome deed while sitting and knitting. M. Poirot sips herbal tea and at most, flexes his little gray cells. Sherlock Holmes stares out the window and smokes. Inspector Morse lies on his couch and listens to Mozart. Lord Peter Wimsey plays Bach fugues or reads Greek. Maigret sits in murky cafes and watches pretty women. Campion doesn't even drive his own roadster or

shine his own shoes. Until recently, respectable American detectives typed their bills, used the phone, cleaned their guns, and otherwise drank whiskey and chatted-up reporters.

In brief, the main focus in mystery novels has been on the detective's thinking, absent-mindedly doing whatever robotic, sedentary activities that aid thinking: knitting, drinking tea, cleaning guns, thinking about sex, staring out at traffic. We never suffer a glimpse of Lord Peter dressed in Spandex and pumping iron. Poirot never sweats. We don't see Holmes heading towards the showers, towel around his neck. Miss Marple likes buttered buns, not celery sticks with a side helping of sprouts and nasturtiums. You'd be hard pressed to find anyone in Mickey Spillane or Dashiell Hammett ruminating over a split of Perrier.

But the lean, mean, sweating detective of modern mysteries isn't even half what makes up the message. Whoever is narrating has, shall we say, an exquisite concern with the smallest visible amount of fat on any character, however minor. The reader is constantly keep in touch with how much can be pinched. This concern gives new precision to the old expression "Sizing someone up": size 4? size 12? XXL? When did description dwindle to the quick once-over? A supermarket check-out clerk, part of the random scenery of a shoot-out, nameless and never encountered again, is described: "she was dressed in the store's brown uniform with name-tag, was around ten pounds overweight, and had obviously let herself go." A stenographer appears for three lines in Chapter 1, reappears for half a sentence in the final scene "nearly unrecognizable, having dropped quite a few." A prime suspect is "still beautiful at forty. She worked out, you could tell in a glance." A sexy lab technician looked "as though he burned calories just by standing around." An assistant D.A., "though nearing forty, was just beginning to run to fat." A clerk in Records "looked great. Well, he works at it."

Words such as "bulge," "blubber," "flab,"
"puffy," "droopy," "paunchy," and "jowly"
abound, as do descriptions of gaping shirt fronts,
waggling fannies, thick thighs, thick necks, double
chins, and eyes nearly invisible in rolls of fat.
"Blurred features" gets used quite a bit, as well as

all the terminology of will power. "he let himself go," "she hadn't caught herself in time," "he/she allowed him/herself to go over the edge," "upkeep," "discipline," "sacrifice," and "slacking-off." In one of my books, an assistant detective is offered a dish of ice cream. She replies, "What are you trying to do to me? Create another chubbette?" She turns it down. The much reiterated words "thin," "slim," "slender," and "fit" are always accolades which need no explanation. And by no means is the line "He was a damned good cop but he must've weighed in at around 190" a neutral statement of fact. It carries a modern punch (because of the paunch) and is freighted with moral significance.

All this adds up. (Sorry about that.) I'm reminded (great sex) of that funny guy on (great sex) Saturday Night Live who (great sex) does subliminal messages. The (fatso) subliminal message here (fatso) is: if you're not fit and trim, working at it, you (fatso) can't either commit a crime any reader will respect or (fatso) detect it. Or (fatso) intrigue the reader. No reader is going to



Glazed ceramic boar, Hot Springs, Arkansas, USA, 8.5 cm., 20th c. AD. Private collection, Farmington, Maine.

take a (fatso) fat character seriously. This (fatso) character is going to fail, fall short, somehow screw up. Or, amazement all around, succeed in spite of being overweight. Believe it or not! One of those ancient paradoxes of the Western World! Even though this murderer had a double chin, still he managed to murder his old mother-in-law and bury her body in the root cellar! And even though the detective assigned to the case failed to jog on any regular basis, still he was able to notice the pick-ax and shovel leaning against the turnip bin!

"He was like skin stretched over bones, beautiful against the desert sky as he leaped in the air to grab the frisbee." Excuse me, anything else about him? All gone, the "comedy maiden," the

"ample matron," and the "well set-up farmer in the prime of life" sort of thing. Gone pages of loving description, without nudges and hints and codes. Fatties, all those old folks. Half the stuff in the great novels wouldn't even have happened, probably, if those characters from Fielding, Dickens, Hardy and so on had joined Nutri-System and gained some self-esteem by losing a few.

Not only does this short-hand weight-check violate the reader's expectation of the superintellectual form of the mystery novel, the tic-like concern with eternal fitness distracts from the ongoing suspense. Your mind is pulled away from the identity of the man on the floor in the pool of gore in order to admire the trim haunches of the coroner, and so forth. More puzzling than this distraction is why would any author want to make you worry about your own body while you're comfortably reading?

It's 4:30 on a winter afternoon, you're alone, and 40 miles of glare ice away from any gym. The stove is going, the dog snores. You've got a new mystery in hand. You press back the cover, hear the spine break a little, and begin. Face it, are you getting any exercise? Unless you count moving your eyes from left to right, turning pages, and getting up to let the cat out, are you burning significant calories? Not. Nor, glancing out at the ice, do you intend to burn any beyond stirring the soup and rushing back to who done it.

I'm not at the fitness center because I'm reading. But, the author isn't at the fitness center either, because he or she is writing, right? (Do I detect some chair-bound spread, there?) So whence cometh all this competitive concern with taut buttocks and clean jaw-lines? And who gives a damn? The author is sitting someplace with all the time in the world, so how come they don't give us some long, meaty descriptions that let us take the measure of the soul of the character, not the waistline?

I think I've got it. Control is the quality admired these days, just like always, and fat is only its modern exercise. In other words, fat is to late 20th century what heathens were to Crusaders, Aztecs were to Cortez, east Africans were to slave traders: just some ignorant body in need of control. I get up and go out to skim the fat off the soup; I turn on the news. A slim anchorperson is fretting over the "epidemic" of "eating disordersanorexia, bulimia, willed starvation" among American young people, especially girls. No mystery about this, I think.

## Mountain Shadows

I T WAS DECEMBER 1ST; snow had fallen during the night, enough to fill the woods with light. My feet crunched in the new snow that glistened white with red, blue, and gold sparkles. I headed into the woods, up toward a ridge that gives a view of the mountains that had drawn Alan and me to this, our new home.

My goal was twofold; I was in search of a Christmas tree, so I kept watch for a white or a Scotch pine, something that would be full enough to decorate with our lights and colored balls, and something to scent the house with pine.

I was also hoping to escape the sadness that accompanied this holiday season, a sadness that had begun sixteen years earlier on a December day when my older brother drove deep into the woods, attached a vacuum cleaner hose to the exhaust pipe, and climbed back into the car with the hose and a will to die.

But it was hard to avoid the memory since I was on the same mission as had been the man who'd found my brother. On that December day he too had hiked through the woods in search of a Christmas tree. There were tall grasses in the field beyond the woods where my brother had parked his car, tall enough to hide much of the car. But the hum of the engine caught the man's attention so he directed his steps into the field. When he opened the back door, he found my brother, dead, his skin blue as the crisp December sky.

I stood atop the ridge and gazed at the mountains; perhaps it is their age and the sense that mountains withstand the ravages of weather while holding to beauty that gave me comfort and the inspiration I needed to check out two trees before heading down the other side to meet the old railroad bed that took me deeper into the woods. I stepped off the trail to examine some trees and took pleasure in the evidence of wildlife: deer had recently crossed the trail; mouse prints dotted the snow; from the treetops came a chickadee's song.

The trail dipped down and I stepped across the ice-encrusted surface of a stream; then up, through some low hanging branches and over a rise. That is when I saw it: the rear end of a light blue Dodge truck that was wedged into the trail's narrow space.

I froze. Up my spine went a series of shivers. Someone has shot himself in that truck echoed in my head. I saw stars, felt I was swimming in air. Bend over and breathe, I told myself. Then, slowly, I approached the truck. On tiptoes, I could see in front of the truck; there were no tracks in the snow. The truck had been there a while. Reminding myself to breathe, I stepped closer. In my head was a pounding; in my chest, an ache.

I squeezed in beside the truck, fearing the worst. But when I looked in on the driver's side, no one was there. I waited several seconds, holding to the door handle for support. Then, when I was able, I hurried home.

No one else was concerned about the truck. I phoned the police and they checked out the plate. It belonged to someone from upcountry, I was told. "Prob'ly left it there when he was huntin'," the voice said. A neighbor remarked: "He mighta' decided to leave it a couple days." Alan reminded me: "They do things differently here."

On the 10th, when Alan and I searched for and found a Christmas tree, the light blue Dodge was still there. On the 16th, the anniversary of my brother's death, when I went up onto the ridge to look at the mountains, it was still there. On the 25th, when we walked through the woods to celebrate the day, it was still there. Shortly before New Year's, the truck was finally gone.

When I saw the empty space, I let go the dread I'd stored for a month. He's alive, I thought. My brother was dead these sixteen years, but the man who owned the truck was alive. Sadnesses would stay, but life would be found in these mountains that surrounded me and in whose shadow I had found a home.

—ELIZABETH COOKE

## CONTRIBUTORS

DEAN BENNETT is Professor of Education and the author of Maine's Natural Heritage. He was awarded the 1992-93 Libra Professorship to study wilderness values.

ALICE BLOOM is spending summer in a farmhouse in L'Isle sur la Sorgue, Provence, and she is on leave for Fall, 1993. Other than that, it's just grind, grind, grind.

MONICA CASTILLO, Spanish Assistant at UMF, comes from Bogota, Colombia, where she did her undergraduate and master's work. She plans to pursue a second master's degree in Spanish and Spanish-American Literature in Colorado or at the University of Oregon.

ELIZABETH COOKE is an instructor of composition and fiction writing in the Humanities Department. The rest of the time she divides between writing and exploring the woods and hills around Toothaker Pond in Phillips where she now lives with her husband.

ROD FARMER teaches social science education and honors courses in Asian Studies. He has published poetry in numerous journals including *The Hollins Critic, Manna, Pegasus*, and *Thirteen Poetry Magazine*. Although he drives a Jeep, he wishes he had a classic Corvette—any color would be fine.

JAY S. HOAR, the bow tie guy of the Humanities Department, offers a "tame sampling" of a genealogical essay, fairly typical of at least a third of his 140 portrayals (opposite of betrayals) for a national study entitled Youngest Soldierboys of America's Saddest War.

MIKE ORENDUFF has been president of UMF since January 1987, and occasionally teaches philosophy courses in the Department of Humanities. He is currently on leave, serving as president of the American University in Bulgaria, and is expected to return to UMF in September.

DONA SEEGERS teaches art education and studio art at UMF, and is the art instructor at Cascade Brook School in Farmington. She has been involved in free-lance design for years, specializing in serigraphy with her card company, Blue Mountain Print Makers. The art and writing shared here, however, come from a purely personal expression of a recent sorrow.

LEE SHARKEY teaches half-time in the Department of Humanities. She's ruthlessly clearing the decks so that she can write this summer about her recent adventures living and teaching in Russia.

MAGGY WYCKOFF is Professor of Mathematics Education and Director of the Honors Program. She has studied the construction of Celtic knot patterns during her sabbatical.



