



# Northern New England Review

**VOLUME 41 | 2021**







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*Northern New England Review* is published as a creative voice for the Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine region. *NNER* publishes writers and artists who live in, are from, or have connections to Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine. If you live here, were once from here, lost or found your heart here, or are currently searching for it among the green hills, sparkling ponds, and rocky coasts, *NNER* has the poems, short fiction, and creative nonfiction you want to read.

*Northern New England Review* is edited and designed by students and faculty at Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, New Hampshire. Questions can be sent to Margot Douaihy, editor, at [douaihym@franklinpierce.edu](mailto:douaihym@franklinpierce.edu).

Cover Art: *Birches at Home* by Laura Mason

Volume 41 Theme: Chrysalis



ISSN 0190-3012

# Northern New England Review

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*Shawn Keller*

## **PALIMPSEST**

It's like this.  
Everything bleeds.

They locked the doors to the Augusta House in 1973.  
Home to transients, broken widowed men, old ladies  
and their cats. They swept out those nearly destitute remainders,  
padlocked the doors, and demolished it.  
The baroque columns replaced with the concrete brutalism  
of another faceless bank.  
Yet as I make the turn onto Memorial Circle  
and past Rotary Cleaners, I can smell the sweet tobacco  
and my eyes see the old Fat Cats of Maine's Gilded Age,  
with top hats and gold pocket watches, engaged in discussion  
before they trek down State Street to the Blaine House.  
Clouds of pipe smoke mingle with the wax of handlebar moustaches  
as they shout about mill rates and transportation bonds  
quaffing bourbon and beer.  
This sepia-toned daguerreotype. This transmission from 1873.  
I can see all of it.  
Because everything bleeds.

It's like this.  
She is approaching the Augusta Airport in her yellow Piper Cub.  
The runway guarded by a tank from Camp Keyes, turret pointed  
at the sky.  
Her father sits in the co-pilot seat.  
This is her first landing. She is taking the Cub down alone.  
The wind is intense.  
The puny metal of the wings begin to buck on the descent.  
The engine sputters.  
The Piper begins to shudder in this instant gale and as the engine

finally stalls, her final cough transforms into a chickadee's call.  
The gale transforms into a hurricane and the summit  
of Winthrop Hill returns.

The airport is gone, the tower replaced with an elegant hillcrest.  
Low, rounded slopes sprinkled with the stately homes  
of Augusta's wealthy Fathers, who look out at the Capital Dome  
and Gannet's Woods, and talk of the possibilities  
of air travel as their horse-whipped stagecoaches approach  
Winthrop Street.

The whip crack is the backfire of the Plymouth Fury that now  
descends Winthrop Street.

I am parked next to the tower watching the Piper Cub land.  
It sits safely on the tarmac.  
She stands close to her father as they walk away.  
I can see all of it.  
Because everything bleeds.

It's like this.

They call it the Calumet Bridge now.  
Then it was the Father Curran Bridge.  
The Father Curran Bridge bleeds through as I cross the oily water.  
Upriver, the bleak-Blake-Satanic mills of the Edwards Dam  
harvest the hydropower  
of the Kennebec for simple pedestrian paper.  
For that we have a river that rots of sulphur in the summer.  
For that we have mercury fish.  
My grandfather's Industrial Harvester is idling outside the entrance.  
It is the cold dark of December. The exhaust is clouding.  
He is going home.  
From the AM radio I can hear a cresting flute and The Marshall  
Tucker Band's "Heard It In A Love Song."

The twang of Doug Gray's vocal mixes with the earth loop  
drone of the AM signal; the final flute note fades into the chime  
of St. Augustine's bells as they strike six.  
He puts the Harvester into gear and roars away.  
His exhaust envelopes me and the Calumet Bridge bleeds through.  
The Edwards Dam is gone.  
The fall line of the Kennebec has returned to smoke water vapor.  
The smell is intoxicating and fresh. I inhale that gorgeous smoke.  
I can see the salmon jump.  
I can see all of it.  
Because everything bleeds.

I remember the first time I saw time bleed.  
Summer, 1979.  
Dust motes swim in the tobacco smoke while Pablo Cruise's  
"Love Will Find A Way" plays on WABK.  
I run out into the sun to my mountain.  
The one I saw on TV.  
The one where mountain-grown Folgers comes from.  
The one where I ran away.  
Always running.  
Up the wide path to the crest the sky opens. Out in front  
of me is our whole neighborhood;  
laid out on the green grass of suburbia.  
But it was more.  
It was what was, there and not there.  
It was and wasn't all at once.  
Right there.  
I saw the future and the past bleeding out of our little red house.  
I saw the neighbor's pond evaporate and then rise.  
I saw Charles Kelly's general store on Dirigo Road empty out,

dust settling on the bodega shelves packed with Shur-Fine  
vegetables and Chef Boyardee cans.  
I saw 20 years pass in the space of a moment.  
I saw futures that never came to pass. I saw pasts that never were.  
I saw all the timelines, the dark and the light, sweating out in blood  
all around me, pouring into the present, a time palimpsest,  
hiding in plain sight behind everything I see.

It's like this.  
Sometimes I'm here. Sometimes I'm not.  
Because I bleed, too.  
Time is a permeable membrane and I am osmosis.  
I flow through the membranes to places I am not.  
I thought the blood was only the past,  
but the blood is everything all at once.  
The future and past are both open to me,  
but in all this time what I've never seen is myself.  
I am never there.  
I flow to places I am not.  
I can see my parents with other children.  
I see houses they lived in that never were.  
I see my wives with other husbands. I see their children.  
I feel their joy.  
I see my brothers at Christmas with someone else  
who looks like them.  
They give gifts to him in a house I do not know.  
I flow to places I am not.  
My friends are playing "Dungeons and Dragons" in the basement.  
I know the group.  
But this party has a different druid. I see my echo in his face,  
but it is only an echo.

I see a headstone with another name.  
The choir of my life stands apart on the grass in the rain  
as he is interred.  
I flow to places I am not.  
Nature has found an aberration she wishes to correct.  
Nature abhors a vacuum.  
I flow to places I am not. I am osmosis.  
I can see all of it.  
Because everything bleeds.

*Shawn Keller*

## **HIRAETH ON GOOGIE AVENUE**

It arises as a memory cloaked in vapor.  
Like all dreams do, surrounded by gasoline mist  
and the smell of tires in the August heat.  
The chainsaw scream of the two stroke  
mixes with the peals of childhood delight,  
as they lay righteous go-kart rubber.  
Soft-serve chocolate swirl dipped in Magic Shell  
for the victor.  
This hiraeth on Googie Avenue,  
where freshly scrubbed 1960s Greatest Generation  
parents, confident victors of the war and the peace  
tow children into the promise of tomorrow.  
And the moon. And America triumphant.  
On Googie Avenue.

There's a Googie Avenue in Des Moines, Iowa and  
Bemidji, Minnesota. There's one in Los Cruces,  
New Mexico, and one in your town.  
You know it.  
An avenue of consumer dreams for the newly ennobled middle class,  
fully prosperous in the Keynesian model of the postwar economy.  
Neon signs point the way.  
To Zayre's for shoes, the noble gas  
bent into crimson cursive,  
buzzing above the doors with the promise of Keds  
and tube socks by the dozen.  
And after, take the kids for McDonald's, arches spitting yellow neon  
into the sky, Arby's for the adults, a cowboy hat outlined  
in flickering red incandescence.  
Then to IGA for food shopping, the departments glazed

in red neon for meats, green neon for produce,  
items spin by the checker into paper bags  
for the wayback of the Ford Country Squire.  
Dad finishes his Winston and decides on Bonanza.  
The windows of the Country Squire magnifying the bright woodfire  
sign, pumping up the colors like a hallucinogen.  
The sweat of the steak sear in white flicker.  
The flames under the wood, orange and cozy.  
Dad has his fill with money to spare, and thinks he might  
sleep it off at the Holiday Inn.  
The 50-foot blinking yellow arrow topped with the star points the way.  
It was all on Googie Avenue.

Googie Avenue is the best and brightest.  
Googie Avenue is the smartest guys in the room.  
Googie Avenue is gonna win the war in Vietnam.  
Googie Avenue is gonna build the Great Society.  
Googie Avenue is gonna wipe out poverty.  
Googie Avenue is gonna end hunger.  
Googie Avenue is gonna contain communism.  
Googie Avenue is gonna Freedom Ride.  
Googie Avenue is gonna take us to the moon.

Googie Avenue didn't think about OPEC.  
Googie Avenue didn't think we'd elect Nixon.  
Googie Avenue didn't think about inflation.  
Googie Avenue hurt the 444 days they were in Tehran.  
Googie Avenue saw all the money go to Wall Street.

Dad's job went to Mexico.  
Dad lost the mortgage and got a divorce.  
Bonanza shut down and the Winstons gave him lung cancer.

The neon signs came down. One by one.  
They were unsightly, people said. An eyesore.  
So garish and assaultive to the senses.  
Light pollution, they said.  
We should be looking at the stars.  
We should be looking at the moon.  
Googie Avenue crept into the dark with the flicker  
of a dying electrical grid, and the hiraeth disappeared.  
If it ever existed.  
Replaced by a tile flooring store.

I have no photograph. So I stare at the store.  
Where I hope with the right kind of vision,  
I can make the go-kart palace appear again.  
A palimpsest of the eyes.  
An image just beyond the windshield.  
It shimmers. I smell the gasoline, the heat, the rubber.  
But it is only the traffic.  
The light turns green, and I turn left on Googie Avenue,  
hoping to find the moon.  
But all I found were the suburbs.

*Herbert Levine*

## **WINGSPAN**

A needle-nose damsel fly  
flits from reed to reed,  
a bright blue thread  
from some fancy-dress gown.  
On a dock's edge  
a double-crested cormorant,  
wings akimbo, hangs its laundry  
to drip dry.  
Checkerboards  
of white on black blazing in the sun,  
four loons dive and surface  
to fill their lungs again.

All this,  
when I've rowed out  
just to see the eaglets  
trying out their six-foot wings,  
vacuum up  
all the space between us.

*Anthony Emerson*

## THE SMOLDERING VALLEY

There is a point in the Penobscot River where the East and West Branches converge. Just south of Medway, the falls from Hathaway Farm settle into gentle eddies and shallow pools that smell like the fish that live there. On humid mornings in July and August, the valley is alive with birdsong, and moose are seen haunting the riverbanks in a drunken stupor brought about by ticks and black flies.

On a restless morning this past July, I put Pop's aluminum Old Town in at the base of the falls, fished the outer currents for bass, and drank beer. This was one of the few things Pop and I enjoyed doing together, and normally it cools the tubes on nervy summer days when bottle rockets and pyrotechnics pollute the sky—and the station floods my radio with work calls. But that morning the beer hit quick, and I must have been lulled into a trance by the boat quivering in the slow, undulating rapids, because I didn't see the rock until it collided with Pop's boat. It sounded like a shotgun blast. The bow of the boat passing across the white light of the sun was the last thing I remember seeing before I was submerged, wrestling the riverbed and trying to find the surface in the sepia waters.

I emerged from the Penobscot in a violent fury, slick with blood and sputtering river water like it was ectoplasm. Groping for anything solid, I thrust my concussed head skyward to the smattering of clouds above me, yanking at reeds and rocks, cutting my stomach on the craggy shore, convulsing like a fish plucked from a hole in a frozen lake. I crawled across unfamiliar earth to a point of light in a nearby glade and fell still when my body was awash in sunlight. And then: Nothing.

After a dizzying eternity, I awakened to myself and the wilderness. The first thing I noticed was the smell of rust—the stench of dried

blood and river muck caked along the ears. My mouth tasted like beer and blood. The heat was thick in the air and distorting, like looking at the world through a thick pane of glass. I heard furtive splashing over the sound of the rapids. Across the river was a bull moose feeding and bathing. He looked almost approachable standing to his chest in the river, chewing listlessly on nutgrass—unaware of me or my accident. His antlers looked like the underside of a fallen tree; though the color of rich soil, they somehow reflected sunlight and made it dance on the water—a shimmery gold. I sat and watched him for a long time. The clouds swelled and passed in opaque bursts. Eventually, so much time passed that my clothes were nearly dry of water and blood, and still I remained, watching the lethargic movements of a giant. I was in awe as I watched the colossal moose stride through the water with a lazy elegance. I wanted to see him swim, to ford the river and stalk me like Pop and I used to stalk the late autumn forests of the north woods for game. Time was nothing to me, then or now. The moose had total dominion over this holy acre, and I was beautifully invisible. I was utterly drunk and hadn't a single drop of beer left in me. With a sound like bones breaking, Pop's canoe dislodged from the grip of rocks and tree limbs and cascaded downriver, startling the moose into the dusky stand of hemlocks, each one dimpled with notches that looked like hollowed out eye sockets.

Later that evening, I was sitting on my porch smoking a cigarette and drinking away my headache when I heard the call come over the radio. An errant fireworks display torched the campground one mile north of the spot where my boat capsized. The stand of old hemlocks where I watched the moose disappear into the firmament were giant matchsticks waiting to ignite. I hopped in my pickup and raced up route eleven to Grindstone. I knew I was close when

the smoke turned my throat to sand. I stood on the banks of the Penobscot—where the East and West Branches meet—and watched the flames move through the understory, spitting embers into the sky. As I unloaded gear from the back of my truck, I thought about that old bull moose whose morning routine I had witnessed, and I wondered if he made it to safe ground. I watched the flames drive through the trees, scorching them bare, hoping the cinders flickering in the twilight were not the moose's burned up flesh. I knew that heaps of ashen dust would be swept up in the wind and blown across the landscape like a gasping breath and would settle on some distant forest floor. And the following autumn, I would take Pop's boat out to the clearing where I laid with a bloody head and I would forage for mushrooms among the charred birch trees—walking slowly and quietly, keeping an eye out for that moose. I'd walk the shores of the still smoldering river valley and listen to the wind play songs of my childhood—happy to be back home in the wild. I would strip down to my skivvies and wade into the unceasing torrent of the Penobscot, hands outstretched like antlers.

*Jeanne L. Bamforth*

## NEW SONG

*A Viral New Bird Song in Canada is Causing Sparrows  
to Change their Tune —Gizmodo*

It would be easy to politicize  
the white-throated sparrows  
learning a new song, replacing  
their previous melody. A community  
of breathers sings in two syllables  
what had been sung in three. Wildfire.

Interesting to study  
the jacketed humans  
who recorded the change,  
holding up their phones.  
A constellation of backyards  
gather aural evidence.

But what of that close  
listening by the birds?  
Each noting, noticing that  
finessed refrain, even  
without our pointy  
funnel of an external ear.

*These songs are learned*  
across meadows,  
between branchlets,  
before engines reignite  
at dawn, after shuddering  
thunderstorms.

*Elizabeth Colbert*

## FOR THE BIRDS

*If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.*  
—Anne Bradstreet

I can't call myself a birder. I don't keep a bird sighting log or memorize bird calls. I probably would have gotten a D+ in my Beginner Birder class had grades been given, the D for my inability to remember bird names, the plus for my enthusiasm. I simply enjoy the majesty of a flying bird and the flash of beautiful color, especially the flaming orange of a Baltimore Oriole. Every Mother's Day I go searching for an Oriole in a nearby waterfront park. It brings me joy to spot their vibrant color, a feeling of accomplishment. I see you, beautiful bird, and you see me.

II.

My daughter texted me this morning that she was dreading an upcoming meeting with a stubborn client. I texted back that, as women, we feel badly when we aren't submissive and compliant. That she shouldn't be afraid to take a power position. She should trust in her abilities, have confidence. But as I look back to the mothering I did in the 1990s, I see Disney princesses, Fisher Price kitchens, makeup sets for girls. I loved to dress my daughters in frilly dresses that I made. Dresses to match their dolls. I was unwittingly training them to be Stepford wives. Why didn't I see the importance of my daughters being in touch with their powerful, strong side? This is my downfall, not seeing the whole picture, of not seeing beyond. Maybe this is why I have such a hard time finding those Orioles, I just don't see.

### III.

Growing up in the 1960s in a Roman Catholic family made me a narrow-minded person. I lived by the rules of the church, my parents, and the strict nuns that taught me. I only saw the world one way. I remember sitting on the floor in a semi-circle at my first Girl Scout meeting. My first time being in a room with kids from public school. I can still feel the snap of my head when the girl next to me told me she was Jewish. *What? You're not Catholic.* That didn't make any sense to me. I actually thought everyone was Catholic.

Growing up Catholic meant growing up with the fear of God. Growing up with my over protective, anxious Italian mother meant developing a fear of everything. Stay in the lines, don't have an original thought. Don't dare, don't risk. Don't peek under the covers at who you really are, who knows what you will find!

But peek I must. The time to grow and learn is now. My kids are adults. The mother I cared for has passed away. All that is left is me. And now that I'm spending so much time with myself, I'm not sure I like what I see. How did I mother my children? What should I have done differently? How can I still make a positive difference in my adult children's lives? How can I make a positive difference anywhere? What has this taxing year of 2020 with its pandemic, racial injustices, burning wildfires, presidential election taught me?

Will the Orioles return to this bleakness?

### IV.

The doctors and pundits say it is going to be a long, dark winter

in the United States. There is more difficulty and sadness to get through. My hope is to get through it. To learn and grow through the alone times of winter. To land on the other side in the comforting warmth, sunshine, and promise that spring brings. There is so much more learning I need to do. I need to purge myself of any small-mindedness left in my nooks and crannies. Learn to see the world, people of different races, socio-economic means, sexual orientations, in a new way, from other points of view.

Conversations with my millennial children have helped. Listening to their thoughts on equality and fairness in the world, on conservation, on politics. Reading the books they suggest by Black authors and politicians with other viewpoints. I even changed my political party affiliation for the first time in forty-two years. My eyes have opened to a new way of thinking. There is not just one right way to live, to be.

I am here, in the tree, you just need to look.

V.

I look forward to being outside in the crisp spring air, the purple crocuses peeking their necks up through the new green grass. The world again opening up, and new possibilities presenting themselves. A healthier, kinder world. An open-hearted, more open-minded me. To look beyond, to see beyond.

To spot the flaming orange wing of a Baltimore Oriole and text my daughter a triumphant, *look what I see!*

*Kate Kearns*

## WHITEHEAD CLIFF

Back turned to Monhegan, far from your country  
as you can sit, waves beat the igneous shore to shards.  
Magma poured this land into light, and light

drew it into pitch-sweet shelter. Far as far, all the way  
to the brightward rim, sharp, fresh salt rushes,  
wrecks, retreats. This body is larger than anything

living, all voice, its din absolute, a racket so smashing  
even the hardy gulls fly low. Stone shingled into  
a thousand small ravines persist the iron wind.

Without soil, beach roses feast the edges, find nooks  
in which to root. You scraped for months to get here,  
sure, but here you are. The hardwoods, their arms,

went to timber in your name. Woman, don't you  
look away. Face into the holler and be brave.

*Kate Kearns*

## DEAR AFTER

Someday soon or not soon,  
for one of us

then the other, this poem will  
become an elegy.

No telling where we'll go when  
we're gone.

The resurrection fern, down-curved  
and drought-crisp,

waits dry in a grey between,  
then, when water

steeps it again, revives to evergreen.  
In limbo it thrives,

patient, like the wood frog  
whose eggy body

freezes solid in winter, its blood  
a tangled icicle.

Though heart and brain clink  
like crystal and stop

their vital work, livingness,  
somewhere inside,

lives. Thaws with the brook silt  
and starts back up.

It goes on. Just like that. And water  
fills the dirt-brown fern

to green. A frond of warmth,  
the long fact of it,

holds, like a body's imprint  
in its bed.

Dear After, I don't know what  
to ask for,

I don't know where this  
correspondence goes.

Remember it's possible to feel  
this *this*.

It's possible for atoms to disperse  
as they will,

by all evidence scattered,  
and wake home.

*Kate Kearns*

## **TO THE LIVING**

*for Gail*

Hello, dearests. Hello sunflowers, dewy,  
open, tilted toward daylight. You're lighter  
than the ones we've lost and my arms  
ache from holding up their names.  
Grass-fresh and petal-bright, let's be lush  
as long as these lines last.

What a gift, knowing there's an end  
to missing you. Flash on wave's peak,  
impervious to my knack for solitude—  
I've always found it deadly to be needed—  
you are the best of me.

Unsure of hereafter, I am  
certain of you, earth shine you, weighty glass  
in hand, dirt under fingernails and nothing  
but gravity beneath your feet, babe, you.  
You can't uncrack a chrysalis. Please,  
stay until I've said it all.

## CHRYSALIS

*Blessed are the crops, because my sons lie beneath them; blessed is the rain, because it moistens their faces.* —Federico García Lorca

1.

His hands were wet. He looked at them briefly trying to recognize the fluid, but the low light did not allow him to discern an identifiable color. Below his dripping hands, a severed arm seemed to wait for its owner. The mud-scented air suddenly changed direction announcing the arrival of a new helicopter. Private Garcia took the arm by the wrist and put it inside one of the many plastic bags littering the ground. The body bags kept coming, pushed from the hovering helicopters above the field, like sacks of old potatoes. The rumble of the propellers intensified as the helicopters flew off to fetch more.

The sergeant's harsh voice shouted above the din. "Close the bags tightly, so nothing falls out. Line them up in rows. Neatly, privates! Neatly!"

His orders were followed without question.

Twenty-eight bags, now arranged with military precision, sat half submerged in the muddy lake formed under a downpour that hadn't stopped since the beginning of November. The last delivery fully changed the training field into a geography of black mounds. As the weak evening light faded into darkness, someone remembered to turn on the floodlights. Thousands of diagonal strands of cascading rain became visible as they pummeled the bags on the field below.

The harsh voice returned, “Private Garcia! What time will the inventory be done?” “I’m not sure, sir,” he replied. “We will have to wait for the rain to stop.”

“Tomorrow morning, Private. Rain or shine. There must be at least fifty of those little dolls out there.” The sergeant’s eyes dimmed briefly and then refocused on Private Garcia. “They steal everything here, Private. Even the dead. Go get something to eat and be back here by zero hundred hours for babysitting duty.”

2.

The scent of mud followed Private Garcia into the barracks. He had plenty of time for a shower and a change of uniform before he had to return. As he trudged into his shared quarters, his mood lightened when he saw Private Ortiz waiting for him. They walked to the shower together.

As the water hit him, Garcia began to scrub frantically at his skin. “I cannot get this stench of death off of me,” he cried. “Turn around, Gabriel,” Ortiz soothed. “Let me scrub your back. I will lend you my lotion and cologne after we’re done. You will smell like life again. And then we can go to the commissary and ask for coffees loaded with sugar. You’ll see, you will be good as new, ready to tend to all of those dead guerrilleros.”

Garcia turned and grabbed onto Ortiz roughly. “They’re not just guerrilleros—they’re policemen, civilians, children.

They are all mixed up in the same bags, just useless pieces. What happened in that town was carnage,” Garcia whispered.

For a few moments there was no sound but the water falling on the tiles – two constant jets descending in a tubular drowned echo. The two young men moved into a corner. “You don’t smell like the dead anymore, Gabriel,” Ortiz said softly. “You smell like green apple, no?” Private Garcia smiled into Ortiz’s chest.

3.

“Death walks among us, with or without these dead bodies, Private Garcia,” rasped the Sergeant. “This land is so old it is nothing but a gigantic cemetery, so you’d better get used to it.” He turned and walked away, jumping over the puddles in an oddly child-like fashion.

From his guard stand, Private Garcia could see the orderly rows of the black plastic bags that he’d helped to make earlier that evening. The rain grew heavier as he watched, gushing down onto the plastic. Soon, several of the bags began to open exposing hands, arms, legs. The skin glistened in the rain. Under the flood lights the painting of limbs started to lose its blood color. Private Garcia closed his eyes tightly and wished for Ortiz to be with him.

Unaware of how much time had past he opened his eyes again, but when he did, or perhaps because he did, the rain stopped. He scanned the field. The bags were empty. They

looked like abandoned cocoons. He looked around in a panic and then focused on the end of the field as movement caught his eye. Far from the plastic and mud was a group of people milling about. They were mostly women and children, but some were men in police or guerrilla uniforms. They talked to one another, some laughing, others smiling as the children wove in and out of the legs of the adults. Private Garcia was able to count the group several times before they noticed him at his post and approached him. He didn't bother closing his eyes, he was sure this was just a dream and he'd wake up in the rain again soon.

"Excuse me, young man," said one of the women. "The bus...the bus into town, do you know when it stops here?"

"I'm not sure," he said.

Suddenly, one of the children fell and began to cry and she rushed back to the group to tend to him. Garcia watched them coexist for some time after that. He could almost make out their conversations. Thunder crashed above, startling him and drawing his eyes skyward. As he looked back from the sky, the crowd seemed to evaporate into the mists surrounding the trees as a new downpour exploded out of the sky. In their place stood the Sergeant and the relay guards. He fumbled for a way to explain the missing bodies but realized by the silent gaze of the other privates, that the bags were intact.

"Get back to your bunk, Garcia! Tomorrow morning, we do inventory! I want a full report of the enemy's losses."

Private Garcia stared straight ahead and took a deep breath before responding.

“There were 55 people in total, Sir. It doesn’t matter what side they were on.”

Garcia turned and walked through the rain in the direction of the barracks with his rifle pointed at the sky.

*Michael Campagnoli*

## **AUGUST**

big  
blue heron  
stalking the eel grass  
in late day shadows

pre-historic grace  
serene

self-possessed  
ballet on stilts

a warrior-king  
reviewing his troops

*Michael Campagnoli*

## SEPTEMBER DAWN

three rabbits  
nibble grass

near the water

down by  
my overturned rowboat

long ears  
no tails  
like miniature kangaroos

Buzzy, the coon cat,  
chases them away

*Michael Campagnoli*

## **OCTOBER**

three  
yellow-eyed black-purple  
crows  
in my tree  
clucking

big as fish hawks  
sulking  
in my tree  
clucking

no, no, no  
that way madness  
lies

## GEMINIDS IN A PANDEMIC

Orion suffers the visitors (will outlive our children's children), as they cross his stillness. Their cyclical orbit was a securely commonplace way to live, their fall a flamboyant flare of dying.

My mood this year is to give a name to each immolation—remembrance does us, the living, good; but too few come down on my watch. So many mourners under every sky have held

such vigils: what does mine matter? There are watchmen in all the great classic and prophetic literatures who never prevented a war or massacre. What son has watched a father back

to life? “Gramps” Garrison for one may as well have been in outer space for all the help oxygen was to him—or both younger generations outside his window at the Veteran’s Home.

I should not keep count: “one death is a tragedy, ten thousand a statistic.” Should anyone discover a meteorite on the ground, still warm, it’s a pearl of great price. Pick it up. Covet it.

*Edie Meidav*

## THE MOTHER

Since birth she had felt as if she were a tourist in the land of motherhood. Her own typed furiously while the girl, under eight, got to lie on the itchy mustard couch in that room cramped with books: this distance marked the closest they got. Once the girl made up a story about how, during womb-time, if the mother so much as drank coffee, the girl, held in the paper bag inside the mother's stomach, hated it and spat it up. The mother listened, for once she listened and typed this truth up, and something in this listening may have sealed the girl's fate: who knows truly how such things work?

Experts flock.

Many of them she read when she herself was pregnant with daughter #1. She heard tales of her friends throwing books by these same experts across the room, fed up with the self-abnegation each seemed to extract.

Attach, attach.

Enter this land and you must be silent.

Fast-forward a few years: once she and her daughters had been crossing borders in a scary country with impossible border control rules. They had needed to look neat, to stand up straight, to will the official who with a wayward flicker of his eyes could have sent them into a bureaucratic hell from which it would be almost impossible to emerge for reasons of a 72-hour layover, a 48-hour visa, an enmity between two countries exacerbated by grown children posturing as adults.

Toward this official in the airport they needed to parade, looking neater and of better posture than was their wont, as if they were

exactly that thing: a neat contained family. So silent. Later one of her daughters recalled this time in this scary airport (and all the other ones in which their plane also, on its own, chose to land in this same country, no part of any itinerary they had been handed) as being one of the best parts of a packed trip. Not the elephants they peeked at in their destination country; the time in the country in which they stood out, messy and odd and big.

To be silent means you live in either a state of supernal calm or fear at least some of the time.

This is why the day the new tenant in the boarding-house she was running and called their home brought in the copy machine that looked part like a blunderbuss and partly like a piece sawed off of an old northeastern whaling ship, she was not displeased. We can put it in the living room.

At that point, the living room was bare but for items donated by charitable friends. A baby grand piano, yes, a red couch that smelled of dog, an odd steel bookcase which made books hang, as if climbing a ladder mid-air. The mother was trying to create a life out of all the platitudes: a new, safe, loving, joyous, abundant, and happy life for herself and her daughters. Such orientation was both a screed borrowed from one of many books, but it also came from someone she called the divorce doula, available at any point to text slogans useful to life. She was retraining her brain toward the positive, preempting the dynamic which in its toxicity had so mired the marriage. Up a tall tree hopped a red bird. On such beauty she wished to focus. Part of this focus meant accepting all gifts that came: the copy machine was one such gift.

The first day she used it—just redoing a field trip permission slip for school, oddly done by her former mate—she thought the copier worked fine, if in spurts, as if it had an ancient printing press inside. She lifted the front cover and then the back to find no plastic but rather wood joinery, a Japanese carpentry that impressed her. The second day, she saw that there was a button you could push that said fold.

When she did, an old-fashioned carny light glowed: insert clothes or sheets.

These instructions she followed: an old shirt given her by her mother, which soon popped up folded.

The next day, she dared: into the wooden copier she threw her daughters' shirts in, artsy loose cottony things. She did not know, in truth, how to fold: not having had a certain kind of mother, she found folding to be one of many acts which eluded her, among so many. Nose-blowing, gift-wrapping, shoe-tying, table manners: she had not been schooled in such graces but had, despite all that, learned how to write thank-you cards and pack for trips and managed somehow to get on in society despite her feral ways. When she went out to lunch with one of her more domesticated friends, they laughed at her habit of ordering the kid's meal or the cup of soup, a way of scrapping by as a savage on the outskirts. Yet when her children were in the house, she wanted them warm and comfortable, eating soup from tureens, a feeling of life and warmth, whatever had eluded her.

By the third day she used the copy machine, she saw it: a hand reached up, placing the clothes. Someone happened to be dwelling inside.

Now she opened the vast belly of the machine and out came a mother, holding a baby, with an older son and teen daughter. All that time they had been cramped in there, refugees from one more policy made by the government.

Come out, come out, the mother said. She had no idea how any mother could have kept her child so calm, so peaceful, inside the copy machine. Never mind folding—how had they managed? And yet would this baby grow up peaceful because here he had his mother so near? What fortitude was in this woman. You don't need to hide, she said.

She saw the woman look around, taking in her environ, choosing to trust it. You can be safe here, the mother said, and the woman seemed to trust, patting her baby. How were these children so calm?

Downstairs, a small gathering was taking place. There the mother saw two girls, a bit more grown up, who had terrorized her daughters back on the other street. Now they wore makeup, answered adult questions without simpering or dismissal, and seemed grown into decent if plebeian people who had lost their bite. How had anyone ever been so scared? How much there was to learn. The woman who had been inside the copy machine had her lanky daughter refusing a second slice of cake. The world awaited all of them. The passport went into the shredder function of the copy machine. The woman wanted to stay right there. The only thing these children ever needed was presence.

*Bridget O'Donnell-Muller*

## **SADIE, EVERY ANGEL IS TERRIFYING**

When my well-connected mother-in-law drops me off, she introduces me to the old Jesuit, who is hard of hearing but astonishing in his friendliness.

“This is Bradley,” she says. “The boy’s tested our faith.”

“Thanks a lot Margaret,” I say.

The priest says, “The boy’s worn out, is he?”

“He’s not to be trusted,” she says.

“We got your email, Margaret,” the priest says. “Hello,” he says to me.

“Hi Father,” I say. We shake hands.

The priest tells my mother-in-law thank you to her family, the Molloys of Baltimore (a multi-generationally prosperous Catholic tribe), for their ample support. The retreat place, on the North Shore of the Massachusetts coast, has just been remodeled, thanks in large part to the Molloys, whom my wife—Rosemary—enlisted once again because of the shape I’m in: freshly out of jail, rail thin, haunted by evil desires and by the discrepancy between my dreams and how they sound when I say them out loud.

I’m to behave on this silent seven-day retreat. I’m waiting in a place where I can be safe from myself while the Molloys pull strings to get me into rehab again.

After attending the welcome meeting, and before I lie down in bed that initial night, I make a list in my notebook:

1. Breakfast.
2. Meet with assigned spiritual director.
3. Lunch.
4. Watch the Atlantic.
5. Mass.
6. Dinner.
7. Plan to read a Rilke book (*The Duino Elegies*) you found here because you remember his poem from that Robin Williams movie about Oliver Sachs—*Awakenings*—in which DeNiro is catatonic. Something about bars behind bars.
8. Toss and turn.

*Stick to your schedule*

The first morning, through the floor-to-ceiling cafeteria windows, I see a ship on the horizon looking like a building that was erected overnight while I slept.

The second day, when I take my therapeutic walk toward Gloucester Proper with the day-time companion Margaret has paid for, I stop at an overlook. Ahead, the toy city of Boston. From the North Shore, the skyline is diminutive and perfect—like stacks of gray blocks assembled by a fastidious child.

My hired companion walks ahead of me in a black fisherman's hat, his hands clasped at the bottom of his spine. It is what I see on our walks, the back of my companion.

As the third day sets, after three days spent watching the ocean—my companion reading on a rock nearby—I become the cold orange lip of the sun. I am twenty-seven years old.

In front of the fireplace on that third night, I open *The Duino Elegies*. In the translation I'm reading, it goes this way: "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?"

Who?

If I cried out.

The line levitates out of the book and presents itself to me. Like the poet is way beyond loneliness shouting from a wind-sprayed rock across centuries.

One of the men watching the fire gets up and leaves the room.

One of the women watching the fire gets up and leaves the room. So, big deal. What if I actually had the balls to make a movie? No one's ever going to watch it.

Mostly everyone here is old. One by one, the retreatants leave. The fire dies. And I'm left with the words that poet made for me.

1. Film idea: An epic road trip in which two lovers drive through the desert and meet a couple who are their doppelgangers, except in gender reversal; i.e., the woman from one couple is the man from the other and vice versa. There are robberies. The woman from one couple jumps to her death from the Rio Grande Bridge in Taos. The man who is her doppelganger then becomes overly machismo because he lost her. He leaves his lover, enters an underground fight-to-the-death tournament, which he wins.
2. Film idea: Two people swim across the world in yellow bathing suits. (This is a metaphor and probably a short.)

3. Film idea: Three people (a couple and their daughter) camp for days in the Catskill mountains. They get lost and when they come down, they find this crazy inn where the owner is missing teeth and always has a bottle of beer in his hand. He shows them a photo of himself holding a breast of chicken between his remaining teeth. On the other end of the chicken breast is a black bear. The man and the bear are both biting an end of the same chicken breast. He thought I was an animal, the man says. The man is very sad because he has not seen the bear yet this season. The man of the couple drinks beer with the owner of the inn for days. The mother and daughter see the sights. (This is partially true, and the ending is not clear.)

*Totally derivative projects you'll never start.*

The fourth night, after the reading by the fire routine, I start creeping around the mansion, a rambling, Gatsby-style behemoth the Church rescued. I look in the kitchen for some cooking wine—for anything. I flip on the lights. The silver tables gleam. I see a bin marked Flour and one marked Salt. There's only an empty bottle of sherry. No wonder the food is so bland. Not a drop of vino. I'm drawn back to the sacristy, the small room where they keep all the supplies for mass and communion. It's right next to the chapel for adoration, where, during the day, people sit on pillows and close their eyes, breathing so secretly. When I walk by now, it's like passing a museum. There's a bald someone sitting cross-legged on a pillow, face bowed, the moonlight making the person marble. There's a half bottle of wine sitting on the counter in the sacristy, and I wonder if it's blessed or not and I know if I drink it, they'll notice (probably the handsome priest who never has a hair out of place). If I drink two glasses, then I'll break out of here and find some kindreds in town and end up lost

in the back streets of Gloucester like I did in the corners of Baltimore because two glasses will only whet my unquenchable. One time I came home after a long bender, and my daughter, Sadie, had grown two new teeth. They were like little pieces of shell. Poor baby. I pick up the bottle and put it under my arm, knowing I won't survive until my daughter grows up.

"What are you doing?" the marble lady hisses. Her eyes reflect light, and she wears a knitted shawl, the colors of the rainbow. Sneakers. Shaved head. I've not seen her around at the retreat.

"Please, lady," I say.

She leans around me and presses a button.

I hear footsteps. This echoey place. My whole mouth is awash with saliva, longing for the taste of it.

The shorter Jesuit with the ruddy face rounds the corner. He's flipping out lights, leaving hallways of darkness behind him.

"What is it Clara?" he asks.

The woman maneuvers her shawl around her shoulders. I see she has two stubs for arms. "He has the blood," she says and spreads her stubs. The shawl hits the ground. The priest retrieves it.

"Okay Clara," he says. "I'll take care of this from here. You all right son?"

I hand him the bottle. "You people should lock that room up," I say. Unfortunately, he hugs me.

The lady hustles away down a dark hallway, her shawl breathing behind her.

1. Try to paint an impenetrable circle around each day.
2. Ask my companion, isn't he supposed to be taking me to meetings instead of reading novels all day?
3. Why did that bald woman spread her stubs?
4. She should wear prosthetic devices.
5. The sea sounds hideous at nights.
6. In the dark, the sea is a death rattle.
7. How do people sleep?
8. Holy people experience doubt.
9. I'm sorry Sadie.
10. I'm sorry Sadie.
11. I'm sorry Sadie.

- A. *List of things that hit when you wake up from a nightmare and cannot find the lamp.*
- B. *Sentences you will never say out loud.*

On the fifth day, the ocean is most definitely like the biggest IMAX screen I've ever seen.

The water rises, gunmetal gray and mottled with foam, its glassy sheen holding nada of all it becomes: a violent explosion, then pools of sizzling cream around the rocks. Against the black shining rocks, the cruel ocean geysers, gorgeous.

I'm sheltered between huge rocks in a little cave that's privy to a spectacularly violent show; walls of glassy water rise and rise before they break. The autumn sun beating down on me, and I'm the only

person seeing the unbelievable green and blue and white mayhem.

The rhythm is relentless.

The waves avalanche.

Well, there's my companion, but he's reading again, of course, on a rock in the sun, like a dark stone himself. A Brazilian novel, he says.

Okay, I say. I'm clearing words out myself.

Just how the light coruscates.

I start filming the ocean with my phone.

The applause as the water smashes into the rocks. It's sensual, sounds like somebody brushing cymbals as the rocks denude.

Two waves collide irreparably, innocently, unintentionally, and what shoots up from their smashing into one another is a momentary clear and exquisite pane of water suspended in the air.

In every wave, in its severe curve and the peak as it transforms from green to white as it climbs—in the meat of each wave ligamented by foam—is a reminder of the famous Japanese woodcut of a wave and not vice versa. I can't wait to tell this to my wife, Roe, who makes prints. How that Japanese woodcut is more real than an actual wave.

That night at mass, I close my eyes and all I see are waves rising and rising and rising in front of me. It's a wave disability. I'm a wave savant.

Endless rising.

The sixth day my spiritual director, Joanna, whose order of nuns has like ten members left, nationwide, is sitting in her chair. She's wearing a pink blouse, a large silver crucifix and burgundy polyester pants. Black utilitarian clogs. Bible on her desk.

I close the door. My companion sits out in the hallway on a wooden chair. Yesterday, on the therapeutic walk, I dragged out of him that he's never been married, never had children, and likes it that way. Told me he was in love once, but, unfortunately, she'd been irrepressible. I asked him wasn't that a compliment. Shook his head. He's a professional house sitter slash errand runner for wealthy people.

Joanna says, "So you want to make movies?"

"I thought so," I said. "At one time I thought so."

"What about now?" Joanna says. There's a small window above her head. Outside, a dark branch holding a few yellow leaves leans across the glass.

I have to make it through just one more day here, I think. Rosemary's family has secured a place at my regular rehab, an expensive program on the Eastern Shore founded by a Catholic priest who struggled himself. There I know what to expect: the bleak repetitiveness; exhausted, darkly hilarious sidekicks still looking for any kind of trouble they can find. No soul shifts, just a systematic lurch towards rickety sobriety.

"Nothing's permanent," I say.

Joanna has this little spider plant in a sad pink plastic pot. The plant cascades its thin leaves off her desk and toward the floor. A few baby plants grasp upwards. Then there's a gold-framed picture of Joanna's mom, who looks ancient. Sitting in a chair covered by a white blanket.

"I still kind of want to make movies," I say. "But maybe it's just one and maybe it's about the ocean."

"Go on," she says.

"For my daughter, Sadie," I say.

That day, the waves.

*Suzanne S. Rancourt*

## **QUILTED**

wind-wolf cloud blazes  
across cerulean sky plain  
spotted birds purr their pecking in maples' teetering height

jittered thumps burrow through air  
wet with post snow storm silence  
settles into my home

awoke by moments, sparked revelations  
& the "duh" of enlightenment  
I wouldn't have done anything different

except, perhaps, ask  
for a realization easement—a moment  
to grasp that people really can be jealous and embittered

over strengths that one has never acknowledged  
I don't know what motivates people  
to cause harm to another

unnamed emotions howl  
as a child, I'd crawl under tee peed fir canopies where  
nor'easter accumulation muffled the intrusive outer world

now it is a Star quilt I wrap myself in  
and travel to lessons & memories  
in the blackberry patch

stepping barefoot with slow ease as instructed  
by the unseen—guided  
to break ice in March—strip nude & cleanse

the winter from a child's body  
I recognized as my own

*Suzanne S. Rancourt*

## **SHAKE IT OFF**

wind rustled up a flock of last fall's maple & ash leaves  
that hopped skittered across brown grass patches  
along with spring shrubbery the deer hadn't kicked up,  
pawing for fresh greens

robins, juncos, chickadees and nuthatches: they all return—  
scuttle among leaves—their movement en masse, larvae-like  
undulating beneath the skin of winter's carcass  
life never looks like life in death's immediate aftermath  
torrential rain scores the earth, Fumikomi thunder  
the lightning slices

*Suzanne S. Rancourt*

## **THE DAMNDEST THING**

It rained outside and she was glad. Vermont hills, a red dress, stars and a piglet mask (hailed as helmet) with a scarf-ish neck. This mask of sheltering in with hot coffee while wearing her extra wide striped tights, an alter ego in black & white resistance, even belligerence, emerged from false employment structure. Contemplations birthed with each swirl in her cup—revelations, courage to become everything the reign imposed. There is no going back. Coffee never tasted so good. Red, never so alive.

*Richard F. Fleck*

## **NORTH BY EAST FROM BOOTHBAY HARBOR**

I know a spot along the coast of Maine, east of Boothbay Harbor, called Ocean Point, once visited by the novelist Thomas Wolfe. It also served as the collecting ground for marine zoologist N.J. Berrill who described it well in his book *The Living Tide* (1951). For me, Ocean Point was and is a mystical place where bell buoys clang in the distance and where, on foggy days, nearby foghorns blare and a distant one from far away Seguin Island (at the head of Casco Bay) can be heard as a faint “wee-hump.” On clear days, Monhegan and Manana Islands—ten miles off shore—can be seen as well as occasional clipper ships and numerous lobster boats. Always there is the pungent smell of seaweed and salt spray from crashing waves.

As a boy, I accompanied N.J. Berrill of McGill University to special tidepools where we would collect specimens including slithering brittle starfish, sea urchins, mussels and tiny green crabs that almost scuttled away. Back in his laboratory across Linekin Bay, he would show me teaming life in a drop of sea water viewed through a microscope. He encouraged me to become a marine zoologist which I almost did, but I chose, instead, the study of literature including Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward Angel* (1929) partially written in Ocean Point and one of my favorites, Henry David Thoreau’s *Maine Woods* (1864) that I, much later in life, wrote the introduction to the Harper Perennial Classic edition.

I remember returning to my aunt’s cottage after blueberry picking to warm up by a crackling driftwood fire burning with red and blue flames from sea salt in a huge beach-stone fireplace. After a dinner of fresh crab cakes and fried Maine potatoes, my mother would serve fresh-baked blueberry pie for dessert, and my father (who served as reference librarian at Princeton University) lighting his pipe before reading Kenneth Robert’s *Trending Into Maine*. I actually looked

forward to going to bed so I could hear the surf pounding on the rocks and see the moon and stars out my window.

After breakfast and morning chores, I enjoyed taking a ramble through the Maine woods filled with the distinct notes of the white-throated sparrows and melodic hermit thrushes. I associated Ocean Point with Thoreau's Walden Pond and its pagoda-like white pines. It, too, was a ferny, misty place for contemplation and writing, something I started in earnest at age thirteen. Some sixty years later, as I sit in my backyard in Denver, Colorado, I can still sense the strong presence of Ocean Point deep within my inner being.

On a cool evening with the rich scent of a spruce forest, we all sat on the front porch talking about our trip out to Monhegan Island almost directly east of Ocean Point ten miles out to sea. We checked our nautical charts to mark the route our ship *Balmy Days* would be taking the next day. As nighttime fog rolled in with a symphony of foghorns, we hoped that the morrow would be bright and clear. Awakening early, we all felt relieved that local strands of mist quickly burned off in the rays of a rising sun.

We headed to the quaint town of Boothbay Harbor to stop in at Robbins Café on the waterfront near where our ship would depart. In my opinion Robbins served the best homemade blueberry muffins in all of New England. We ordered one a piece with cups of coffee and proceeded to spread butter over plump blueberries oozing from the depths of piping hot muffins; we savored each tasty bite until our stomachs were pleasantly full. As the *Balmy Days* horned sounded, we boarded the ship and took our stern-side seats to watch sea gulls flutter in circles above the waterfront of Boothbay Harbor. Soon our ship slowly churned through the harbor dotted

with yachts past Brown Brother's pier, the Catholic Church's high steeple and on out past Spruce Point and Ocean Point where the Balmy Days picked up speed to create a large wake directly behind the stern. Shortly, the Balmy Days passed White Islands whose naked, gnarled forests served as nesting grounds for cormorants. It was amusing to watch the clumsy cormorants attempting to take off from the sea hitting their tails four or five times before becoming airborne quite unlike the graceful herring and great black-back sea gulls. Cormorants were originally land birds that are still adapting to the sea. But they are great underwater fishermen that can hold their breath for minutes on end.

In the distance loomed the masses of Manana and Monhegan Islands, between which is Monhegan harbor, or, as Captain John Smith put it when he "discovered" them in 1614, "Monahigan is a round high ile and close by it Monanis betwixt which is a small harbor where we rid." The islands slowly grew larger until we could clearly discern the coast guard station on Manana and the lighthouse atop Monhegan. As the Balmy Days pulled up to the dock, the little settlement of Monhegan village spread before us with several homes, a hotel named The Island Inn and a lighthouse high up on a hill dominating all. This very harbor is portrayed in paintings by such marine artists as Ernest Fiene, Norman Rockwell, and Jacqueline Hudson. But it was the seaward side that we wished to get to during our several hours before our ship would return to Boothbay Harbor.

We immediately hiked up the trail to the lighthouse and then proceeded through the woods to the magnificent seaward side. From the lighthouse we could see a good thirty-mile stretch of the jagged Maine coast in the misty distance. To our east lay a thick black

spruce forest that steadily slanted upward until it reached 160 feet above the glistening Atlantic. Deep in the woods, we could hear white-throated sparrows, hermit thrushes, and chickadees. After we walked through rocky portions of the woods and open meadows flush with pink fireweed, we suddenly found ourselves perched atop an awesome Whitehead Cliff pounded with surf from far below. We ate our sandwiches and drank some lemonade before taking a Cliffside hike down to Squeaker Cove to see the twisted remains of a shipwrecked vessel being bombarded with constant and powerful surf. My father caught a glimpse out of the corner of his eye of a monster wave coming right towards us. We three quickly scampered up to safer grounds before it smashed with such force that we felt the earth shake. Its spray fell out of the sky to drench us even though we stood forty feet above when the wave hit. What brute force the sea can have! By the time we hiked back to the lighthouse through the forests, the strong Monhegan sun had dried our damp clothing. All too soon we boarded our ship in the peaceful waters of Monhegan harbor to sail back to the mainland thinking that the rogue wave we experienced was but a dream.

Monhegan Island whetted our appetite for more journeys to outer islands. Matinicus Island is not only farther out to sea by ten miles than Monhegan, it is also steeped in early history. We wanted to learn more about Maine history when this state was still part of Massachusetts and colonists attempted coexistence with tribal peoples. The following week found us going northeasterly to Rockland and taking the Mary A to Matinicus Island far out in the Penobscot Bay where we would pursue early seacoast history. We left at low tide when the docks and wharves lay exposed with coatings of mussels and brightly colored periwinkles, when boiled, as sweet as a nut. As a boy I often wondered why the early English

settlers continually ran out of food—they must have come from the midlands and not the sea coast. One small colony of them at Popham Beach died from starvation at the turn of the seventeenth century. The British built forts to “defend themselves.” But as Charles Mann explains in his book, *1491*, it’s clear that the Abenaki people offered considerable help to the original colonists.

Once the *Mary A* got out to sea, the ocean swells grew larger and larger creating a pleasant roll to the ship. The heavily forested Camden Hills which inspired the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, rose high directly northward. On the distant horizon ten miles toward eastern Canada, Matinicus appeared as a faint sliver of darkness. Though today the sun felt nice and warm, I could readily imagine this ship being caked with ice during the winter months as it continually delivers mail year round. To our portside, two large gray porpoises curved gracefully through the glistening water. Mainland sea gulls followed our ship all the way from Rockland as Matinicus gradually loomed larger and larger. The clanging of a bell buoy and larger flocks of sea birds marked our closeness to the harbor of Matinicus, an Abenaki word having two meanings: “a group of grassy islands” and “a flock of wild turkeys.” Indeed, several small grassy islands lay offshore including Wooden Ball. In the old days, Matinicus was home to wild turkeys.

As we pulled into the island harbor at 10:00 a.m., we caught sight of a large floating lobster pound shack that served as a lobstermen community storage cache. About fifteen homes surrounded the docks with clotheslines in their backyards loaded with wash to dry in sea breezes. Most of the hundred or so residents earn their daily bread through lobstering. Lobster floats and traps lined the docks. We disembarked and rambled out of the village into peaceful and

fragrant forests of balsam fir and black spruce reminding me much of Nova Scotia. Among the creaking trees there stood a historic plaque dedicated to the first settler, Ebenezer Hall, was “ruthlessly killed by the Penobscot Indians in 1757.” There was a good reason why, however, Ebenezer Hall met his fate on this peaceful island. In 1749, according to the Maine Historical Society records, Governor Dummer signed a treaty with the Penobscot people that stated white man could settle as far as saltwater flows and no farther. The islands belonged to the Indigenous people and any Englishman or Frenchman caught on these islands was to be captured by the tribal people and brought back to white man’s justice. In 1752 the Penobscot and Saint Johns peoples complained that Ebenezer Hall and family had broken the treaty by settling on Matinicus to hunt seals and wild turkeys.

Not only did he hunt animals, a year earlier, in 1751, Hall had murdered two Indigenous people and buried them in his Matinicus garden because, he alleged, they had been fighting a settler who should not have been there in the first place. In 1753 Hall and his family (a wife and stepson) were removed from the island, but they returned within a few months. Those Matinicus turkeys must have been mighty tasty. Finally, as the historic plaque states, Ebenezer Hall was killed by Indigenous people. However, the plaque does not state that Hall murdered one more Indigenous person that year who, with a group, was trying to capture this unlawful settler to bring him to justice. Instead, this “sterling” settler was killed in a provoked battle. Present-day Matinicus, so peaceful with its forests and rolling meadows, bears none of the scars of over 250 years ago except for a misleading historical plaque.

Today the people of Matinicus, unlike unruly Ebenezer Hall, have become “Matinicusized” into living in harmony with nature having

no desires to return to the busy mainland. As they say to tourists, “We like our island the way it is.” As we boarded the ship to return to the busy mainland, an old man stood by the dock and told the captain of the *Mary A*, “ya ain’t goin’ nowhere-y’er headed the wrong way!” As our ship proceeded out of the harbor and Matinicus slowly faded in the distance, I sensed that a little piece of me remained out there in those fragrant balsam forests.

That evening we enjoyed sitting on our cottage porch to reflect upon our day trips to these two small islands packed with beauty and historic significance north by east of Boothbay Harbor.

*Robbie Gamble*

## ZAMBONI

How we revere the features on our machines:  
seventy-eight horsepower motor    studded tires  
hydraulic augers    stainless steel shave blade  
filtered tanks for hot wash water and waste slush  
hydro-dynamic steering and brakes  
and a sixteen-foot turning radius.

How the public gets to see the Driver  
hooded    aloof    attentive posture  
one hand guides the steering wheel  
the other resting on the blade crank  
impassive gaze sweeping the ice  
gauging from sideboards to corners.

[The molecular behavior of water is unparalleled  
in that its volume expands upon becoming solid.]

The Driver has the mien of a monk  
always seated with the motor running  
two minutes before the end of a period.  
He can clean a regulation hockey sheet  
in just under eight minutes. The fans  
who file out for a piss and a beer  
don't know what they're missing:

“Well, Gord, he's coming out of the end zone just  
now, and he seems extra sharp tonight, just look at  
how he bisects the red line, the blue line, all clean  
right angles, now he's going into the corner, just  
kissing the boards, coming around the far side,  
and it's a perfectly parallel glistening swath!  
Absolute poetry on ice.”

“No doubt about it, Doug, I don’t know how he does it so consistently night after night.”

How to decipher  
the hieroglyphics  
of the game the gouges  
those bloody spatters  
from that first period brawl  
all glazed over.

The Driver has an acolyte  
who polishes chrome  
tops up hot water tanks  
deploys shovels and squeegees  
behind the sideboard gate. He sleeps  
on a sofa in the Driver’s cramped office  
tucked in behind the service bay.

[At the foot of a glacier, the enormous pressure  
of layered ice weighing down upon itself causes  
the base to behave as an ultra-viscous, slow-moving  
substance that is neither liquid nor solid, flowing  
downhill at a rate measured in meters per year.]

On off-nights, the two of them are never to be found  
around the arena. The ice sheet abides, puddling in the dark.

[At current warming rates, one-fifth  
of the world’s population could be  
displaced by the end of the century]

The Driver never comments on game scores  
never follows the flow of play once parked on the ramp.  
He has heard of Antarctica but can't locate it on a globe.

How the puck drops here.

Last night, I dreamed I was hauling  
on the tiller of a small sloop, listing  
along the long swells rolling up the bay.  
A king tide was cresting, though winds were light  
and I cleared the seawall with ease  
tacking inland and further inland  
past the rooftops of my childhood.

*Shon Mapp*

## CHOREOGRAPHY LOST

Bend as no one should.

Slide bone  
    shift ligament.

Watch breath  
    engage and disengage.

Mind, limb, and organ  
    fit, fold, or flee  
        into iotas of interstices.

She shrinks small.  
    Belies her being, into a glass grave.  
Caves athwart its corners.

Contorting amidst the dust.

*Shon Mapp*

## **ALIENS WITHIN US**

They hailed me in the market,  
between neatly paralleled stalls,  
as I meandered the color spectrum  
with false belonging. Certain that the onions  
and strawberries sensed the 'other'  
of my mother tongue. Foreignness  
lounged between flitting eyes. Landed on sellers,  
tourists, and crowds of three, sipping seidls of lager  
under rust colored heaters. All  
knowing that my bounty exceeded its spoils.

They knew of the waning opportunity  
to casually cozen extra currency.  
An expat tax,  
An immigrant irritant,  
Cloistered between bitte and danke,  
until the days each of us became suspects,  
reduced to molecules and vapors.  
There was democracy in disease.

Masks muffle all manner of things. Momentarily move truths  
beyond specious smiles and quiet quibbles.  
Sanitized and susceptible. Scared and skeptical. We  
become the same beings.

*Shon Mapp*

## IN MEMORIAM OF FISH & FRIDAY

Arched around the porcelain bowl, we fix our eyes on a rigid  
misshapen fish. Mourn its final descent into the pipes.

Our third water burial this year. Love isn't enough,  
in spite of what fairytales proclaim. The small fish tank,

she hugs like a soothing blanket, leaves horizontal ridges  
across her belly. The light trails her shadow, into the hallway.

Unable to play with muddied hands, next to neighborhood friends,  
crafting pretend-pies with soil and lake water. This new world

is hard to understand. Full of screens, meters, windows, and hours.  
Undisturbed earth and reclaimed stillness.

What is summer break when there's no school? How does a week end  
when Friday's chase themselves to nil and spiral down porcelain bowls?

*Jeri Griffith*

## **SNAPSHOT: 1981**

Most people felt Jon and I should be getting on with things. And we weren't. To others, our life seemed wrong-headed, maybe even a little bit crazy. What were our plans? Were we just going to play at life? Didn't we want children? After seven years of marriage, why were we still mucking about? It was time to grow up. Why not get jobs that would allow us to settle in, buy a house, go out to eat, and take nice vacations?

We weren't really sure we wanted any of those things.

We wanted to write and paint. Writers and painters were our spiritual guides. With both of us working part-time instead of full-time, we had the hours we needed to be creative. And even though it wasn't bringing in a lot of money, we were beginning to have success with our creative work. Jon was publishing short stories and reviewing books for *The Kansas City Star*. Advance copies overflowed our small board-and-brick bookshelf and were stacked all over the floor in our living room. I was showing my paintings in regional galleries and museums. My newest images hung on our walls where we could study and critique them.

We lived frugally but well in a two-bedroom apartment with banks of windows that let in lots of light. It was a cheerful place. We slept on a mattress on the floor in the dining room so that we could each use one of the bedrooms as a studio. The kitchen was small but there was room enough for the little table where we ate our meals. We owned a car, but we did not own a television. Instead of children, we had a dog and a cat.

Mostly, we kept to ourselves. We did things our way. We did not use credit cards. We couldn't afford to build up debt. We only spent

money we actually had. When we bought a used Toyota, the car dealership was upset that we wanted to pay in cash. They made their money on loans.

During the spring of that year, I was sketching from vintage photos in a book about the Rosebud Sioux people called *Crying for A Vision*. The timeless faces of long-gone individuals gazed directly at the camera as if to communicate the gravitas of their situation. I owned the book because I worked for Mid-America Arts Alliance, and this was the catalogue for one of their touring exhibits. The mission of this regional arm of the National Endowment for the Arts was to expand quality arts programming throughout the Mid-American region.

Although I worked there, I did not feel part of that mission. I did not want to promote art. I wanted to make art. In my head, so many things seemed related and connected—Byzantine mosaics of saints with wide eyes, Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein, photos of Sioux people—these felt like part of one big picture puzzle I was trying to assemble.

I made some studies of the Stein portrait thinking it would help me to see similar planes on the faces of the Sioux people. In a book about Byzantine mosaics and frescoes, I studied the faces of religious men and women. I felt that, with their round, wide, penetrating eyes, they were looking directly out at me. Their hands were always carefully posed in some symbolic gesture. Even if I did not know the meaning of those gestures, I could sense they meant something and meant it with great intensity.

On my 29th birthday, we didn't have a party. We didn't even go out.

I recorded in my diary that, because I was reading Simone de Beauvoir, we had a long conversation about existentialism. We probably drank a couple glasses of inexpensive wine or maybe a few beers. That was my idea of a birthday. It was all enough just to be alive, to be together, and to be conducting our great experiment. Our seventh wedding anniversary came and went. I wanted all the rest of our years to be like this one. I loved our life. I loved sunny spring days with skies so excruciatingly blue they exhausted me with their radiance.

Outings for us tended to be simple. We might treat ourselves to a Coke and then browse through a bookstore. We took long walks with Thea, our beloved chocolate lab. We'd break to sit on the grass in the park with her and return home to find that the onion sets we'd planted in our small garden were already up. We called our intrepid grey tabby cat Ishmael in honor of the main character in *Moby Dick*. The four of us were our own little family and we saw ourselves sailing together on the high seas. Our ocean was unlimited, without fixed points or boundaries. Almost anything seemed possible.

My favorite coffee mug was round and deep with images of sailing ships on both sides. One day it was just there sticking out of someone's trash bin. Had I found the cup or had it found me? At that time, my world was so loaded with feeling and sensation that even inanimate objects such as a coffee cup could seem to have volition. This found object resonated with my life. It felt good to hold and I used it every day.

We lived in a way that allowed such epiphanies to manifest. I remember lying on the bed in Jon's studio looking out the window at the sky for the longest time. I was reading about St. Francis. I was interested in

the idea of sainthood, of foregoing material possessions, of becoming a mystic. I believed that life had a mystical and contemplative dimension to it and that one way I might approach that dimension was through art.

Obsessively, I began to paint the same single figure again and again—a female with great shoulders, hips, and placid face. She felt like someone I knew or had once known, perhaps in another life. Looking back, I can see that those small gouaches of her, now lost, prefigured much of my mature work. But I couldn't see that then.

Most of the time, I was either depressed or euphoric. On the one hand, I was afraid. Maybe this idea of living by an artist's aesthetic was a fool's quest. Maybe we really were missing out. Still, there were times when I felt confident, calm days when I surrendered. Then it was as though I was being carried along by the powerful current of a great river. No matter what, I was going to make art. I was going to stay married to Jon. We were going to talk, write, and think.

Over time, we did all of that and more.

In the end, I know we were right to ignore the Greek chorus telling us to get on with it. During that crucial year, I came to know myself. I found the seeds of the person I believe I was meant to be. As time passed, our circumstances changed. We ended up owning houses. We began to use credit cards. Some dreams were realized while others evolved or dissolved. It took a long time for me to find myself as an artist, to finally do work that was truly original and truly mine.

These days, I worry about young people. I want to tell them to make space, to slow down. I want to say: Let life take you somewhere. Look hard for opportunity and possibility. Take the time, because in the end, you learn that time is all you really have.

*William Doreski*

## **ALLIGATORS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Alligators have colonized our marsh. Climate change has rendered New Hampshire so warm that these creatures have migrated by the dozens, toting their human-hide luggage. They cackle, whisper, and snarl as they sample the mud and slither about in search of food. I walk down to the edge of the marsh to watch them. One friendly fellow sidles up with a big smile. His teeth look like scrimshaw. His breath reeks of some raw creature. His tough hide flatters him. His rubbery muscular torso looks powerful as a turbine. I speak to him in simple sentences most local reptiles and amphibians understand. He nods with a hint of wisdom and opens and shuts his jaws as if fumbling for words. I don't expect an actual response, of course, but the glimmer in his eyes is unmistakable. We gaze at each other in a friendly way for a while. The warm smell of the marsh thickens with gnats and flies. Then he turns, dragging his limber tail, and slumps back into the shallows. I look over the sullen expanse and note the eyes watching me in the summer dusk. The oily water looks like broth. Hundreds of frogs had been croaking here since the thaw, but now I don't hear one.

*William Doreski*

## **BRIDGEWORK ON A STORMY AFTERNOON**

Thunderheads nod along the horizon. No threat to us, these bullies of the sky rejoice in bombast but usually fizzle before completing the circuit. We park near the bridge under construction. The laborers have gone home, leaving giant cranes standing around with cables dangling against the mottled sky. We should head for the grocery and pick up milk, bread, salad mix, but we'd rather prowl around the construction site and gorge on details. Look at the communications cables exposed for restringing. Look at the huge portable generators and compressors. This is a serious project, nine million in public funds. The river snarls through the maze of beams and pilings installed for scaffolding. The water has risen an inch or two with yesterday's rain. Maybe if those storms shift our way, they'll add some zest to the flow, giving tomorrow's crew something to think about. Downtown in late afternoon always looks deserted, but I feel a face or two watching. Maybe the sky gods have finally noticed us. Look at the clouds: they're brisk and whipped like cream. The sun catches the height of them and spills down the slab-sides like molten brass.

*William Doreski*

## **A VIGIL ON THE LONGEST DAY**

Today's heat puddles in silver mirage on the asphalt. We stand dutifully bearing witness while the Unitarian church tolls for eight minutes. Aren't we authentic? Will we remember on our death beds that we tried to stand for something despite the wilting summer glare? This is the longest day of the year. Elaborate shadows etch every surface, raising wisps of smoke. If we fried ourselves like eggs, we would make the newspapers. If we bent like sunflowers our friends would ignore us. If we exploded as the tempered glass in the bathroom did last night, people would be picking shards from their eyes for days. Look across the street. Other activists wave homemade signs. We have no signs—we don't believe in signs, only in the thing itself. Which thing is that? a stranger might wonder. The thing underfoot, which is exactly the shape of our footprints. Coincidence, or evolution? Our cause is just, or just so much. Everyone rejects the motorcyclists howling past with tattered flags strapped to their bikes. Everyone rejects the snarling blonde who gives us thumbs-down and shouts a nasty racial slur. One day she'll fall off the back of the bike and her head will pop. Most vehicles toot in a cheerful way. We accept the friendly waves of people going grocery shopping or to the beach. But the hour of vigil passes slowly. We're starting to melt, and our shadows look dismayed.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**JEANNE L. BAMFORTH** lives and works in Maine on Merrymeeting Bay, an inland confluence of six rivers. Her work has been published in *Balancing Act 2, an Anthology of Poems by Maine Women* (Littoral Books).

**MICHAEL CAMPAGNOLI** has worked as a waiter, fisherman, journalist, painter, and short-order cook. His work has appeared in *New Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, the *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. He can be seen most mornings running somewhere along the coast of Maine.

**ELIZABETH COLBERT** graduated from the College of the Holy Cross with a BA in Economics-Accounting. She works part-time, volunteers in her community, enjoys reading and editing her son's writing and hopes to fulfill her childhood dream of being a writer.

**WILLIAM DORESKI** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities and retired after three decades at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *Stirring the Soup* (2020). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

**ANTHONY EMERSON** lives and writes at the edge of the North Maine Woods. His poetry has been published in *Visitant* and *Tiny Seed Journal*. His essay on Katahdin and the COVID-19 virus was published in *Appalachia Journal*.

**RICHARD F. FLECK** is the author of the recent work *Desert Rims to Mountains High* (2013), a new paperback edition of his scholarly study *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Native Americans* (2015). He has written numerous forewords to trade paperback editions of Henry Thoreau, John Muir, John Burroughs, and the Shoshone writer, Rupert Weeks.

**ROBBIE GAMBLE**'s poems have appeared in *Cutthroat*, *Poet Lore*, *RHINO*, and *Rust + Moth*. He was the winner of the 2017 Carve Poetry prize. He divides his time between Boston and an apple orchard in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Writer and artist **JERI GRIFFITH** lives and works in Brattleboro, Vermont. She has published stories and essays in literary quarterlies and is currently working on a collection of essays and a collection of short stories, as well as organizing exhibitions of her art.

**KATE KEARNS** is a poet and freelance editor in Maine. She has published a chapbook, *How to Love an Introvert* (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and poems have appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *Soliloquies*, *Literary Mama*, and elsewhere.

**SHAWN KELLER** is a writer living in Brunswick, Maine. His work has appeared online at *Literati Magazine*, *The New Guard*, and elsewhere.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES (CONT.)

**HERBERT LEVINE** lives four months of the year on Sabbathday Lake in New Gloucester, Maine. The rest of the year, he spends in Sarasota, Florida. His poetry books are *Words for Blessing the World* and *An Added Soul*.

**SHON MAPP** is a writer whose work explores multicultural immigrant identities, kinship, and queer intimacy. She has degrees in Industrial Engineering and Business. In addition to writing, she creates abstract art and mixed media projects.

Cover artist **LAURA MASON**'s subject matter consists mostly of nature and light, reflection and shadow. Finding greater satisfaction in the analog process, much of her work is shot on 35mm film or Polaroid.

**EDIE MEIDAV** wrote *Kingdom of the Young* (Sarabande), a collection of short fiction with a nonfiction coda, as well as the novels: *Lola, California* (FSG), *Crawl Space* (FSG), and *The Far Field: A Novel of Ceylon* (Houghton). She is a senior editor at the journal *Conjunctions* and teaches in the UMass Amherst MFA program, where she founded and advises the Radius MFA project. She has served as a judge for the National Book Critics Circle Leonard Award, the Juniper Prize, Howard, the PEN/Bingham Prize, Yaddo, and elsewhere.

**BRIDGET O'DONNELL-MULLER** earned her M.F.A. at Bennington College. She's been nominated for a Pushcart and awarded the J.F. Powers Prize for Short Fiction. She lives with two rescue dogs and her husband in Charlotte, Vermont where she is a flower farmer.

**SUZANNE S. RANCOURT** is of Abenaki/Huron descent. *Billboard in the Clouds*, Northwestern UP, won the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas First Book Award. *murmurs at the gate*, Unsolicited Press, was released in 2019. *Old Stones, New Roads*, Main Street Rag Publishing, published in 2021. She is a USMC and Army Veteran.

Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee **RUSSELL ROWLAND** writes from New Hampshire's Lakes Region, where he has judged high-school Poetry Out Loud competitions. His latest poetry book, *Wooden Nutmegs*, is available from Encircle Publications.

**DANIEL GIRALDO-WONDERS** holds a graduate degree in Hispanic Studies from the Université de Montréal, and a PhD in Latin American Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. His research explores the literary production of LGBTQ+ authors in South America. He currently teaches Creative Writing and Queer Theory at Bard College at Simon 's Rock.

*Northern New England Review* is published as a creative voice for the Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine region. If you live here, were once from here, found your heart here, or are currently searching for it among the dappled forests, luminous ponds, and ghostly coasts, *NNER* has the poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction you want to read.

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