

The background of the entire page is a detailed, sepia-toned collage of various insects, including beetles, crickets, and other arthropods, some shown in profile and others from a top-down perspective. A large, dark, textured triangular shape, resembling a piece of bark or a pile of organic debris, is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping the insect illustrations. The title text is located in the upper right quadrant, overlaid on the insect collage.

THE CAPILANO REVIEW

... I held his face against my belly until he stopped, his head in my hands about the size of the child before it was born. I don't know why sharing a grief will make you love someone.

— Michael Crummey

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Detail from
Earthmakers

FRONT & BACK COVERS
Barbara Zeigler and Joan Smith

Highly qualified individuals are needed to develop and implement the program. The program is designed to provide a comprehensive education in the field of environmental management. The program is designed to provide a comprehensive education in the field of environmental management. The program is designed to provide a comprehensive education in the field of environmental management.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hilary Clark's "Folding (2)" and "Intervals" were originally published in *TCR* 2:17/18. Unfortunately, a sequencing error resulted in the misprinting of her work. I'm happy, therefore, to publish these two poems, in their correct form, in this issue. My apologies to Hilary.

Hilary Clark / TWO POEMS

FOLDING (2)

*And I will come to you, and make
my dwelling with you*

In May evenings, when new leaves
are polished gold, clouds
take the colour of imperfection —
purple, a dusky ink
signed with a flourish,
splendid

Words stream on the wind, quick
and dying

Hers was the first garden:
rain, always rain, pink
dogwood by the eastern window,
forsythia in yellow sprays.

Her hands wet
among stars, her face
erased by light

*Where words foment
a largeness, where the warmth
of spring, supple skin
of this moment — dispersed,
gathered again, love's elegaic
slow unfurling*

A life unfolds, refolds, between us.
The dying sun is grafted
in the heart, just a slip,
tissue of blessings

If light had a shape, it would be
that young fern curled
in your palm, that lily
figuring sleep

Sun and shadow enfold us,
this nimbus, brief
entangling

the Beloved
is the murmur at the edge,
birds startle at her touch, just a kiss
fleeing

INTERVALS

1

to sink into sleep, tracing the vein
on your wrist, stripped
moonlight

intimacy of hollows, dark rose-prints
in the skin

a life, a signature creased
and folded

licks of thunder,
dusky intervals between leaves

moths swoon in the shadows
and other guests,
flickering

2

lachrymae christi, purple
sails in the heavens

what would it be to write light,
streaked

tulips weeping
in their stems?

stress of love or air
about us, skin bereft,
recollecting

such tongues,
as if the very stones would shiver,
split

death slips among the leaves, brief
wings and nocturnes,
ghostly

3

a strong wine of spit
and tears

believe me,
we are robed in reflection, flesh
stricken in every glass

impelled in our syllables, wind's
reminiscence

discerning that trace or musk
in the next garden
feather and sinew, tongues racked
and singing

twilight scales, arpeggios
of the darkening heart, such messengers

The first Western visitor to China was Marco Polo, who arrived in 1271 and stayed for 17 years. He was a Venetian merchant and explorer who traveled through Asia and Europe. His travels were recorded in his book, *The Description of the World*, which was written in Italian. This book was one of the first Western accounts of China and its culture. It provided a detailed description of the Chinese Empire, its cities, and its people. Polo's travels were a significant event in the history of Western exploration of Asia.

After Polo, there were several other Western visitors to China, including Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary who arrived in 1582. Ricci was a member of the Society of Jesus, a religious order of the Catholic Church. He was sent to China by his superiors to spread Christianity and to study Chinese culture. Ricci spent most of his life in China, where he learned the Chinese language and adopted Chinese customs. He was instrumental in introducing Western science and technology to China, and in introducing Chinese culture to the West.

The first Westerner to travel to China by sea was the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who arrived in 1498. He was a member of the Portuguese Navy and was sent to India by his superiors. He traveled around the Cape of Good Hope and reached India by sea. His travels were a significant event in the history of Western exploration of Asia. After da Gama, there were several other Western visitors to China, including the Dutch explorer Willem de Witt, who arrived in 1602. He was a member of the Dutch East India Company and was sent to China to establish trade relations. He spent most of his life in China, where he learned the Chinese language and adopted Chinese customs. He was instrumental in introducing Western science and technology to China, and in introducing Chinese culture to the West.

Susan Crean / SURFING THE ZEITGEIST

Ten days after my fiftieth birthday, my father, hale and hardy and still playing tennis at eighty-four, had a stroke and within a few weeks was dead. His exit marked the end of an era for me in a way that seemed almost brutal at the time. I have seen it happen in other families, of course; the disappearance of one member breaks the chain, or the spell binding the unit together, and it disperses. The dislocation most often comes with the passage of one generation and the assumption of seniority by another. Like the turning of a kaleidoscope, the pieces shift to form another pattern — or patterns as modern lifestyles and the laws of multiplication predict.

We forget that the family is in constant motion. As a social institution it may seem immutable as iron, but the real thing and one's ultimate experience of it are doomed to transformation given that its members are habitually aging and will all eventually die. Among other things, the demise of the elder generation in my culture signals the end of childhood for the next, the end of any memories of it, save one's own and those of one's contemporaries. Those adults who knew us as little kids depart taking with them a wealth of familial stories, anecdotes and secrets about how we all lived together, leaving a few snapshots, some letters and artifacts, but nowhere and no occasion for these to be shared or relived.

So the end of an era in my family time constitutes a severing or diminishing of the personal connection with the past. Moreover, being literate and addicted to paper, we have come to rely on documents to do our remembering for us, and in strange ways to validate our existence. We can't actually claim to be alive — or dead for that matter — without a certificate to prove it. Even more bizarre, if you think of it, say, from the point of view of someone raised in an oral culture, is the way we interact with our past in libraries where few people ever find more than passing reference to their flesh-and-blood ancestors. Perhaps this absence of history explains the late twentieth

century's obsession with documentation. People have taken to recording themselves with gusto, using every conceivable device to immortalize themselves, their progeny, their trips, their triumphs and occasionally even their crimes. Idiot-proof video cameras and desktop publishing programmes would make amateur producers and publishers of us all.

Life the movie has arrived, yet life the Quotidian Event carries on in its usual messy, unprogrammed fashion, ebbing and flowing in cycles. Like families, like cultures, it seems. Both can be dysfunctional or successful, or the two combined. It is possible to talk about a society in terms of its creative vigour and general health. Some definitely are stronger than others, more expansive and more likely to bring out the best in their citizens. Some have suffered terribly in war, or from poverty and prejudice. It has been recognized, for example, that aboriginal societies all over the globe have encountered devastating cultural repression at the hands of invading civilizations.

Calamity, though, is not the only reason cultures change. As history demonstrates, cultures, like languages and the people who speak them, are neither inert nor immortal. Some flourish, others don't; some die young, others being genuinely toxic live too long. On this subject, cultural critic and political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis once wrote (in 1979 in the French journal *Sociologie et sociétés*)

The death [of a society] is not necessarily or usually instantaneous, and its relationship to the new life, for which it may be a precondition, is each time a new enigma. The "decline of the West" is an old theme and, in a profound way, false. For the slogan masks the possibilities of a new world that the decomposition of the West may set free, and ignores the potential of this world by covering a political affair with a botanical metaphor. . . . We are not interested in establishing whether the flower will wither, whether it is withering or already withered. We want to understand what is dying in this socio-historical world. We want to understand what is dying and possibly why. We want to discover, if possible, what is in the process of being born.

It usually *is* difficult to see your own historical era clearly, and it is

especially hard to predict where the zeitgeist is blowing you when it feels like it is blowing you off your feet. That is certainly the sensation I get when I contemplate the bungled attempts at constitutional reform by our political leaders over the past few years, or the backlash against government which threatens to destabilize bedrock institutions like medicare and the CBC. For artists, watching the desertification of arts programmes — by committed and uncommitted governments everywhere — is to experience the proverbial Nightmare at High Noon. Public funding for the arts never was very secure, but now the paradigm has shifted and public allegiance to the very idea of state intervention in support of cultural objectives is apparently losing currency. The mainstream media dismiss nationalist actions as protectionism and victim coddling, effete behaviour in a REAL country, instead of the self-assertive and quite normal activity it actually is. Arts organizations and artists' unions are disparaged as greedy special interest groups and grants are described (by the neo-con elites yet) as a tax on the poor to benefit the rich — presumably meaning those who appreciate art. The degree to which that picture is true, I suppose, is the degree to which arts policies have failed in the task of creating institutions which reflect the art of most Canadians, or motivate Canadians to learn about the art their fellow citizens create.

Our *fin de siècle* is developing a remarkable hostility for minorities, artists included, and it is easy to understand the individual disorientation, despair and depression. Whether this is the end of an Era or not, it is the end of a distinct period in the cultural history of the country. At the same time, other endings loom: Confederation is on the brink of fundamental restructuring if not wholesale disintegration, and Canadian society itself seems to be in full blown transition. With precious little leadership to inspire confidence or courage, or even to mediate the process, we are left with the anger and the confusion. I find myself thinking of Gérald Godin's poem "Mal au pays," written a few years after he was jailed for two weeks without charge or bail during the War Measures Act in 1970 thanks to his open advocacy of Quebec independence. The poem rages at the corruption and ineptitude of politicians and the political system infecting his country. *J'ai mal à mon pays* goes the refrain. I am sick for my country. English cannot convey the sense of physical affliction Godin expresses here,

although that sort of body and soul weariness occurs in all cultures and every language. What always strikes me about the verse, though, is the unquenchable passion for Quebec which flickers between the savage wit and combative assertion. "For the garbage cans of Canada my country my profits/ For the hucksters of people/ in the pawnshops of nationhood/ My country aches."

Godin went on to become a politician himself, running for the Parti Quebecois in the 1976 provincial election when he beat the incumbent Premier Robert Bourassa in the multi-ethnic downtown Montreal riding of Mercier. For the next eighteen years, until his death in 1994, he was continuously re-elected and continuously worked toward the dream of sovereignty in a vibrant Quebec, making common cause with Quebecers from all backgrounds, native and newcomers alike, and from time to time with Canadians like myself who had similar dreams for Canada within North America. That dream — for me, anyway — has been fading since 1988 ushered in the age of Free Trade. For the agreement between Canada and the United States, rhetoric about protecting Canadian cultural sovereignty notwithstanding, ended up guaranteeing the Americans their revenues from Canadian audiences and readerships while forcing Canada in advance to pay compensation should any national initiatives cut into the American share (anywhere from 75-97 percent) of our cultural markets. *J'ai mal à mon pays*, all right.

To return to Castoriadis' horticultural metaphor, the withering flower eventually does become something else. Every waning year, or story, or century offers possibilities for the phoenix's return. Godin was right, I think, to turn from defeat to poetry, for the best defence in such circumstances often is defiance, to continue to produce art in the teeth of adversity. Personally, I have concluded now is a good time to tune out of the official debates in the hope of regaining some psychic equilibrium, to transform myself, in a word, by feeding what is creative and regenerative in my own work and in my surroundings. Thus, with the distance that transformation provides perhaps we will decipher the enigma of our era's becoming. It certainly makes it easier for us to get the garden planted.

Sally Ito / SHRINE MAIDEN

Hanako neatly folded the red *hakama* and placed them on the square, kerchief-like *furoshiki*. The red trousers contrasted starkly with the drab cotton cloth she used to wrap them in. Taking the ends of the *furoshiki*, she tied them together to form a neat bundle. She would return the costume to the shrine priest that day. It was the last time she would ever wear it.

Hanako gazed at the mirror in front of her. Now in her city clothes, she looked like any other ordinary Japanese woman, dressed in a white blouse with a lace collar, a tight brown skirt, and taupe stockings with reinforced toes. Only her hair looked slightly odd, its wavy bulk a little too sensuous, too voluptuous for the demure features of her face. At the shrine, Hanako kept it pulled back into a long thick braid that looked like the gnarled straw rope that hung in front of the shrine. Now that work was finished, Hanako loosened the knot at the end of the braid and shook out her hair. A trembling mass of newly permed curls swept over her back. She opened her purse, took out a brush. Languorously, she pulled it through her hair. *Shaaa. Shaaa. Shaaa.*

There was a thud of footsteps down the hall, then a flutter of red *hakama* rushed through the door, white sleeves flapping like wings into the room. *Hana-chan! Are you leaving already? Hana-chan, we'll miss you! We've got to go, the priest's waiting!* The young women hurried out of the room as quickly as they entered. Hanako suppressed a smile. They're all so young! she thought to herself. Maybe they seemed more so to her, now that she was leaving. She had announced her engagement to the priest last week. He seemed disappointed, although he tried to hide it. *Getting married, eh? That's a shame, it is, I mean, for us. But for you, my goodness, what an occasion.*

She was sorry to have to quit. It had been a good part-time job. But the shrine's position on the matter was clear. Only the unmarried could be shrine maidens.

The crunch of Hanako's shoes on the gravel path from the shrine echoed through the trees. The red cedars lining the path were like pillars in a great hall, mute wooden monuments to the primeval source worshipped in the shrine's inner sanctum. Only the head priest was allowed inside; only he could glimpse the secret of the gods. But Hanako was only vaguely curious; whatever the truth was, it was simply out of reach. Her role was to assist the priest — hand him the sacred wands with the white streamers, pass him the cups of rice wine. She was to be a perfect instrument of ritual, pure and chaste in the performance of her duties.

The wind sighed through the trees; the branches creaked and shuddered. A spray of needles fell to the ground. Hanako paused and turned back to the shrine. She could see in the distance, the lone straw rope, thickly braided, hanging down from the roof. It was swaying slightly, as if someone had shaken it to make a prayer, but no one was in sight. A dull but resonant sound, the noise of the bell when the rope was shaken, echoed through the trees. *Kah-ran, kah-ran, kah-ran.*

Hanako turned again, this time forward. She took a few steps down the path. Now she could hear the sound of traffic beyond the shrine's gates. The muffled roars, the honking, grew louder, clearer as her feet moved ahead in quick, clipped strides. At the threshold of the gate — the orange pillared *torii* — she could see the whole city spread out before her. Plunging into its midst as if into a dark stream, she let the traffic of the passing pedestrians swallow her up, carry her to the centre of the city.

Norihide was waiting at the train station.

"Oi — Hana-chan!" He called out, waving to her. "You're late." He grabbed her hand, squeezed it a little too tightly. The smell of his cologne was overpowering. He was wearing his usual date ensemble — a pair of chinos he had bought at a store in San Francisco, a polo shirt with a cardigan tastefully draped over the shoulders, dark tan loafers. Tucked under his left arm was a square leather pouch.

"It was my last day at the shrine," Hanako said.

"Gan-chan told me a good place for steak." Norihide pulled Hanako through the crowded intersection. "It's around that corner, near the west entrance."

Hanako nodded. Norihide wasn't listening. She followed his back as it wriggled through the crowds, darting in and out of the light. She saw him as an object then, the muscled back moving like a carved plank through a faceless sea of people. *I don't know him very well*, she reflected to herself. They had met at a college function only a few months ago and had gotten along rather well. They exchanged phone numbers and began dating. He was pleasant enough. At the very least, Hanako could say she did not mind him.

The only thing she regretted was losing that shrine job. But then, she could not blame him for that.

After dinner, they went to a movie. Norihide picked an American one, a romantic comedy. When the couple in the movie finally got together after all their troubles, Norihide squeezed Hanako's hand in the darkness as if in triumph. Later, after they left the theatre, they went for a walk around the station. Although it was not very chilly, Hanako felt obligated to slip her arm through Norihide's and lay her head against his shoulders as she'd seen other women do with their lovers. She was always watching other couples, even on their walks, noticing how they'd slip quietly into a darkened nook where she knew the entrances to the love hotels were hidden. Norihide and she were too timid to go to one. The most adventurous thing they had done was sit on a bench in the park together at night. He had kissed her using his tongue and attempted to touch her breasts. Hanako did not protest, but arched her back and looked at the moon. All around her, she could hear the rustling and grunting of other lovers. It was an oddly soothing sound; it made her feel as if she and Norihide were doing the right thing. They fit in splendidly.

Their walk that night led them back to the station with its bright lights, its bustle of people. Norihide walked Hanako to the platform where her train was waiting. She rode the *futsu*, a regular train that made all the stops on the line. Her station was a minor one near the end called SAKURANOMICHI. The area was given its name a long time ago during the spring when its narrow streets were covered with fallen cherry petals.

Norihide gave Hanako a swift peck on the cheek. Hanako's head dropped deferentially, properly, as if out of habit. She could see the glint on her engagement ring; it was as bright as a star.

The trainmaster blew his whistle. Quickly Hanako boarded the crowded train, letting the bustling throng draw her inside. As the train pulled away, she could see Norihide through the cracks between the bodies of those standing in front of her. He stood stiff as a board waving his right hand.

Hanako took hold of a handstrap as the train speeded up. She felt suddenly tired. The day had been long — working at the shrine all afternoon, then meeting Norihide in the evening. She leaned her head on her upright arm. Norihide, she thought, will make the perfect husband. He came from a good family that was not the meddling type and he was a graduate of a prestigious university. That was all that really mattered to Hanako. She closed her eyes, remembering the way the temple priest's eyebrows arched approvingly when she told him Norihide was a Keio man. Everyone was *so* pleased. Hanako smiled to herself. Things could be the way one wished.

At the next stop, a rush of people flooded out of the train, leaving it suddenly empty. The velvet, wine-colored length of seating was now plainly visible, a plush invitation to sit down. Hanako sat in the corner at the end of the car. The trainmaster blew his whistle. *Peee-eet*. There was a lurch and a rumble as the train pulled out of the station. The stark, harsh light of the platform was suddenly engulfed by the gloom of the night sky. Hanako stared straight ahead at the black glass where her face was dimly reflected. She looked pale, ghostly — a silhouette against the passing darkness of the city.

The train picked up speed, rushing ahead to its inevitable terminus. Hanako's eyes fluttered and fell between the glass and the empty red seat in front of her. The reflection dipped and bowed, the head dropping forward onto the chest. The breathing slowed into small, deep ohs, the sound of sighs in a row.

She did not hear him getting on. He was just suddenly *there* as if he had been in that seat across from her all the time, a relic from the past now visible. He sat upright in his seat, legs set apart, arms crossed over his chest. Black hair, dark and coarse, bristled on his head. His hands, tucked inside the flaps of his sleeves, made dark bulges in the stiff

fabric of his kimono.

He did not look like anyone Hanako had ever seen before. But that he was a *man*, she sensed immediately.

He was staring at her. Quickly Hanako lowered her head. She noticed to her chagrin, that her knees had spread slightly. She promptly pulled them together. A warm flush crept into her skin, reddening her cheeks.

She could see his feet. They were squarely mounted on a pair of wooden *geta*. Between the *geta*'s thick black cords was a broad plain of skin, sparsely covered with wiry strands of hair. Two ankles, sharply defined, stood completely parallel, the rest of the legs disappearing into the dark cotton of the kimono trousers. Hanako's eyes lingered on the hem; she could look no higher. Her eyes moved back to her own feet, tucked into white shoes with golden buckles. There was a mud stain on her left shoe. Hanako frowned. Norihide had inadvertently trod on her foot in the movie theatre, and the stain was dark and obvious, the color of dried blood. Hanako had to fix it. She felt for her purse and quickly pulled out a tissue. Carefully bending, she neatly brushed away at the stain until it had almost disappeared. Then she folded the soiled tissue into a small bundle so that the stained part would not show. She put the tissue back into her purse.

Feeling somewhat satisfied, Hanako looked up. The man was still staring at her. Quickly she looked down again. She felt panicky but it wasn't an unpleasant feeling; a vague excitement seemed to accompany it. It was similar to the way she felt standing in the wings behind the priest as he waved the mysterious wand that summoned the gods. Everything and yet nothing was about to happen. *Sha-ka, sha-ka, sha-ka*. The sound of the wand. Then silence.

Slowly the priest would turn around, and his transformed presence would become hard and sure as the man in front of her now was — a dark material being fleshed out of the ether; hair, bone, skin suddenly there so that she, too, might taste of transformation, find breath to speak of it.

Startled by the thought, Hanako's eyelids snapped open, the eyes jerking down from their sockets into the harsh light of the empty train. There in the window was her pale reflection. The night that had shaped things out of the darkness fell back behind the glass and once

more became an invisible stream.

Sakuranomichi — *next stop, Sakuranomichi*. The trainmaster's tinny voice floated over the intercom. Hanako stood up. As she walked towards the door, she noticed the stain on her shoe. *Didn't I wipe that off?* she thought absently. She raised her head, looked through the glass of the window as the train pulled into the station. A lone man stood on the platform waiting to get on to the car she was about to leave. When the train stopped, they brushed past each other without a word.

Sylvia Legris / THREE POEMS

bones: almost discernible

poses with her brother for a man under black [a woman
staples blankets over windows is
listening through eyes she is *smile* smiling]
smile for the . . .

all she sees black
light glaring pupils

[test test attest

color bars
ed sullivan reruns
judy garland

a grid

somewhere somewhere some-

several
gradations
of grey

hold

-ing pattern

hol-

ding

dong

the witch is dead

*

click

click

click your heels together three times
make a . . .

*

[nuclear medicine:
radioactive substance swallowed or injected,
distribution watched via special machine]

*

click:

view-
finder

*

find her

a violent woman in the violent day [†]

pacing

hugging her-
self,
holding a

single
breath

single

breast

*

this is a dream:

her father in the front room plays piano
— ghostchords echo stairs
shudder house

[†] Muriel Rukeyser

[shutters
the house:
she shrinks under light

*melting, i'm
melllll ting*

shrieks
under

*

a dream:

her father composing
arrangement of tones

[arrangement
of bones

half-asleep dreams ivory,
the cat downstairs pad across keys.

over two hundred tones in the human body
— she's heard them, listens

in her sleep

*this is the world/not these words/
not this poem/this is the world — bp nichol*

marginal notes

my mother plants plastic k-mart flowers in the snow.

*kiss
her*

from the road
a red and yellow blur

*kiss
her*

— trick of the seasons
a trick
of the senses

*kiss her to
[death]*

*

everything moves so fast.

*

a writer friend says these poems are too earnest.

(when my mother dies

my brother and i dance a do-se-do round the kitchen table

ding dong the witch is dead swing your partner . . .)

“where’s the irreverence?” she asks.

*cut it
here*

silence cut it
there

(dead
silence)

in the middle

enough pinning insects
i spend 4 years pinning my mother
(see,
there she is, in the relaxing chamber,
head a distant bob.
this is not the love boat,
this is love/is *this* ____?).

28

i paint my mother with nailpolish, periwinkle blue (lungs brim with
seaweed and brine).

norman bates norman bates, is it true a mother is a son's best friend?
what about a daughter's?

she is drumming her nails on a kitchen counter, ceramic tiles, a
mahogany

cough
cough

even from six feet under i hear her . . .

shut up
shut
up

*

turn 360 degrees
add earth 1 shovelful at a time
stir until silent (dead silent)

[was that irreverent?]

maternal: ma(e)ternal

problem:

to construct a mother
from bits and pieces
name here, date there, not enough
to fill a picture: an incomplete
formation

incomplete

**question: does a mother die when
her body dies?**

a woman lies in bed,
right arm bent over her eyes
against the light

genetic memory

sometimes catches herself
in the mirror
head held at a certain angle
lower lip curled under her teeth

familiar poses (family
postures)

information:

my only knowledge of her relatives
comes through memories she related
to me even these i remember in-

-completely:

she was born on sunnyside. had one brother, five years older who some days would walk her to school and other days pretend he didn't know her. her father was a musician, a music teacher. he left when she was eight. sometimes in the middle of the night her grandmother would hear the piano mournfully playing by itself and on the mornings following her father would turn up out of nowhere. briefly. she was embarrassed and made fun of: she was fat, ate lunches other kids laughed at (leftover stew sandwiches, lumps of potato and turnip squeezing out sides). once she wet her pants in school and had to spend the rest of the morning sitting on the radiator to dry, pee steam escaping, filling the air with laughter. she longed for her father who eventually stopped coming. she longed for her grandmother, who took care of them, to love her. she longed for her mother who lingered with cancer for years to die.

my mother's memories go

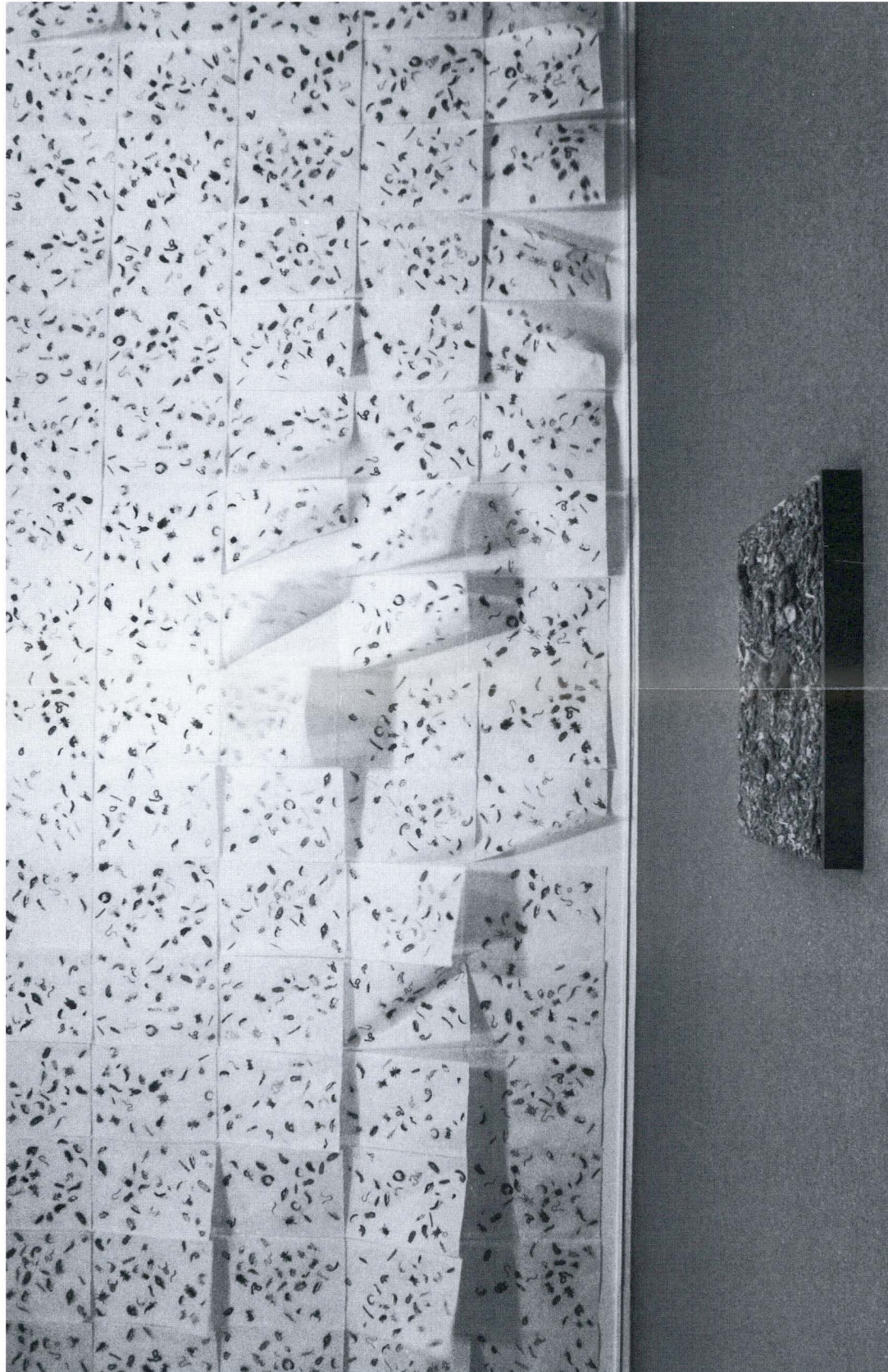
something like that

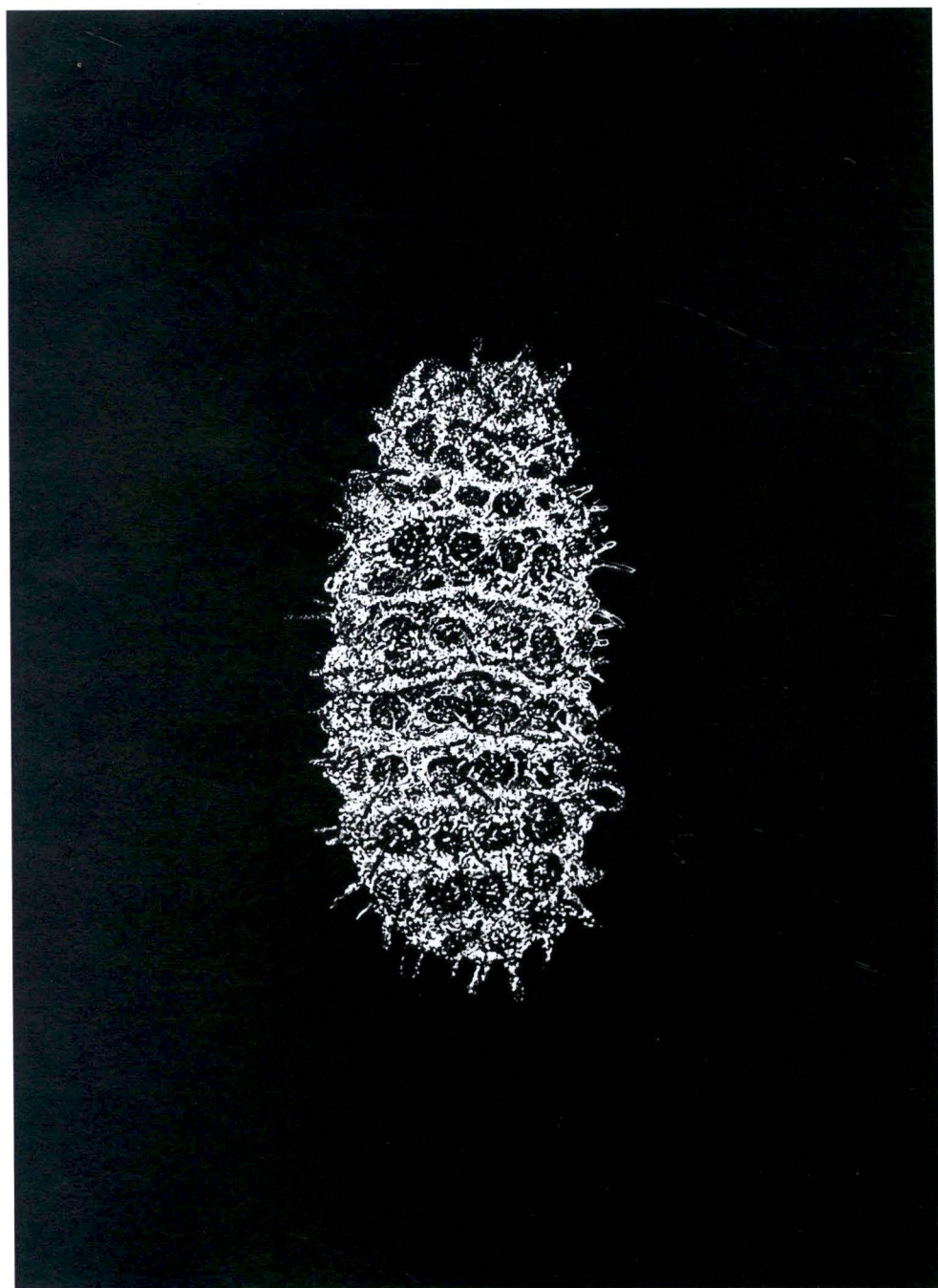
Barbara Zeigler and Joan Smith
EARTHMAKERS: PHOTOGRAPHS

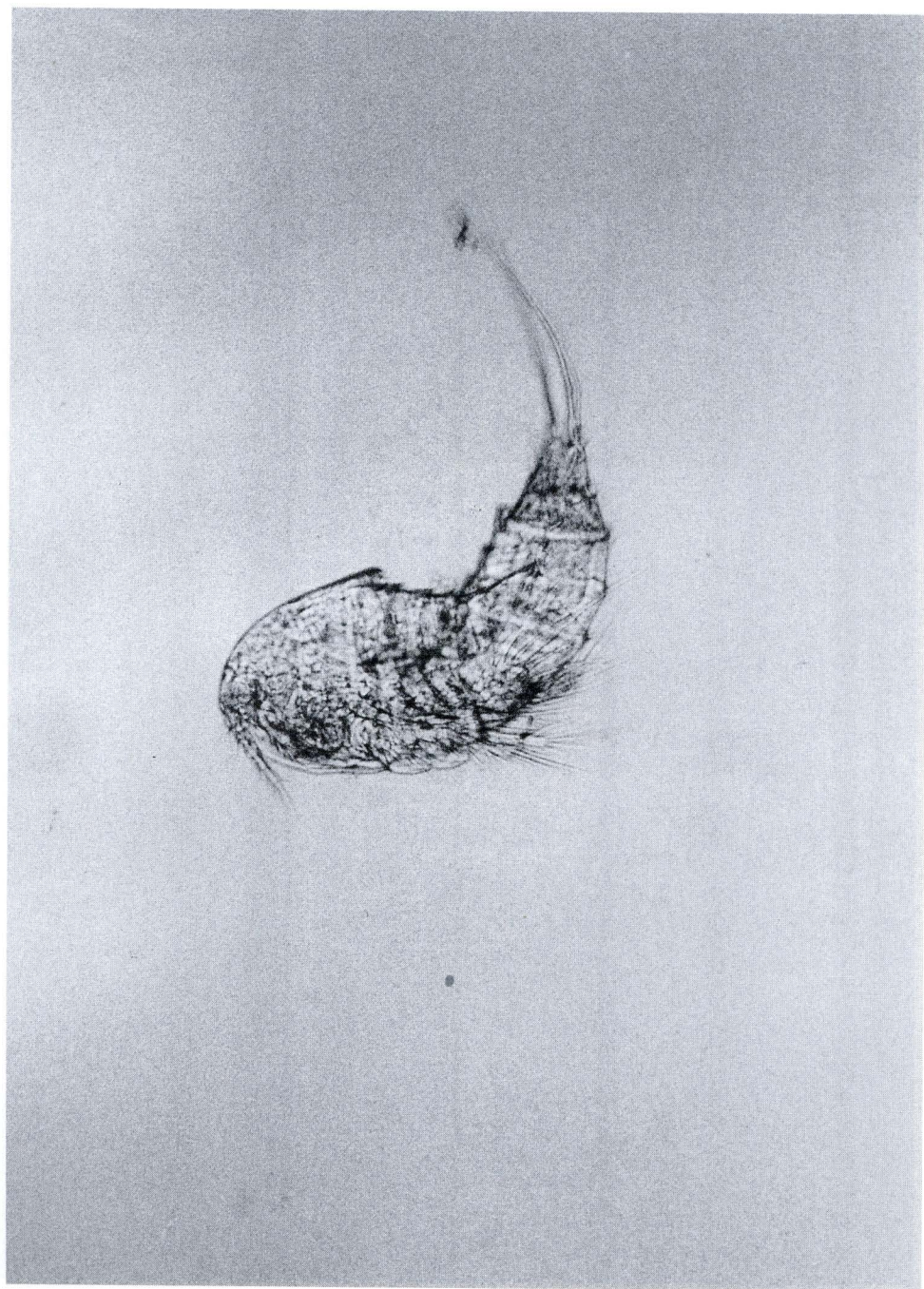


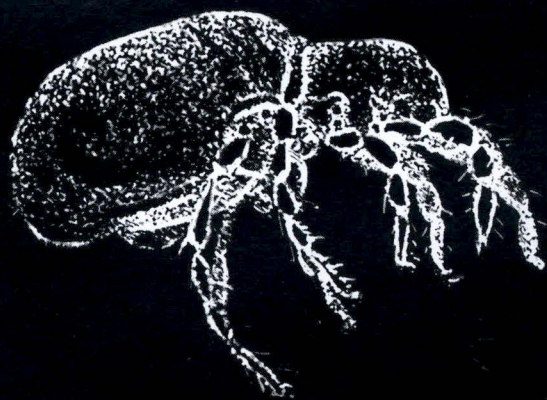










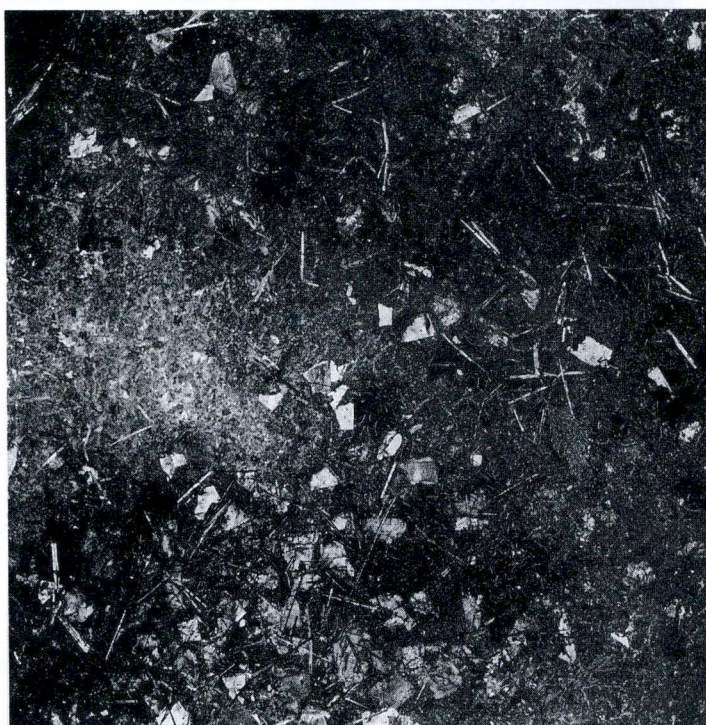
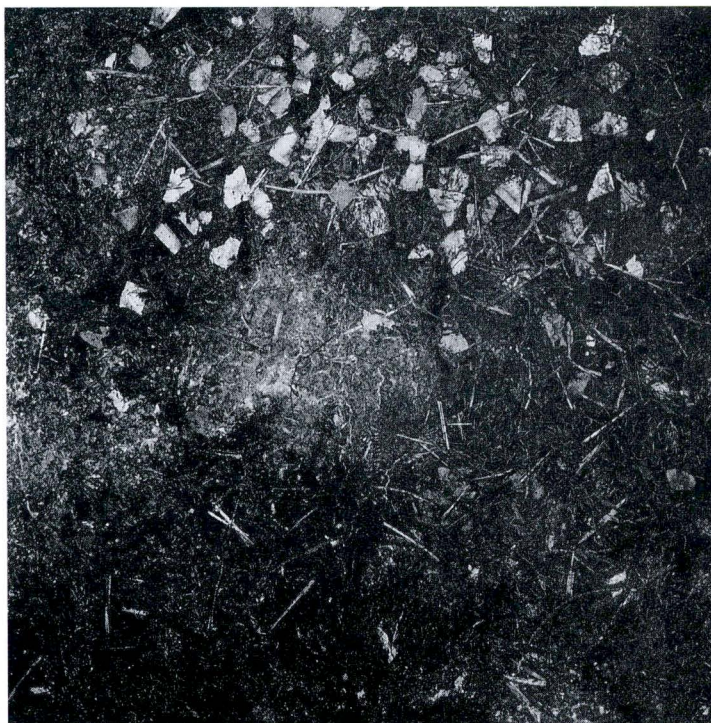


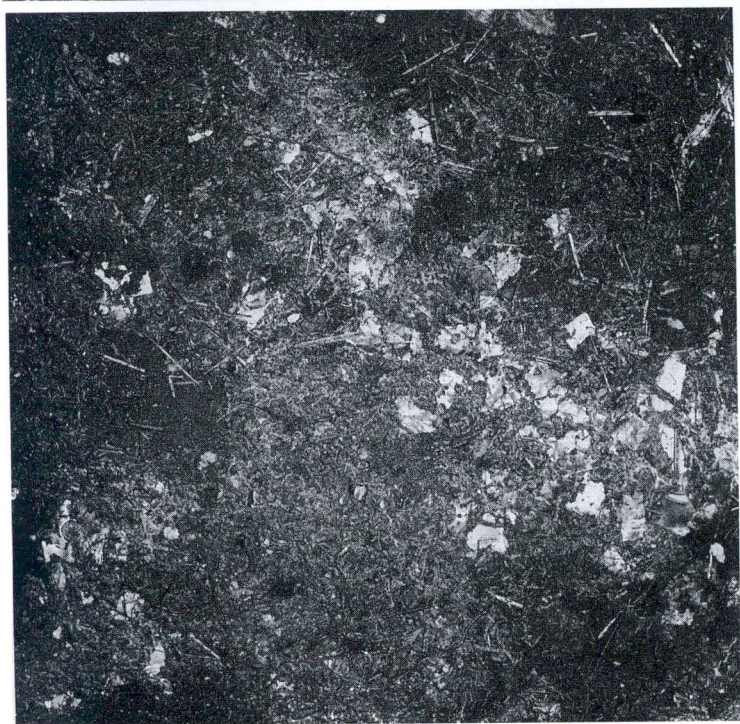


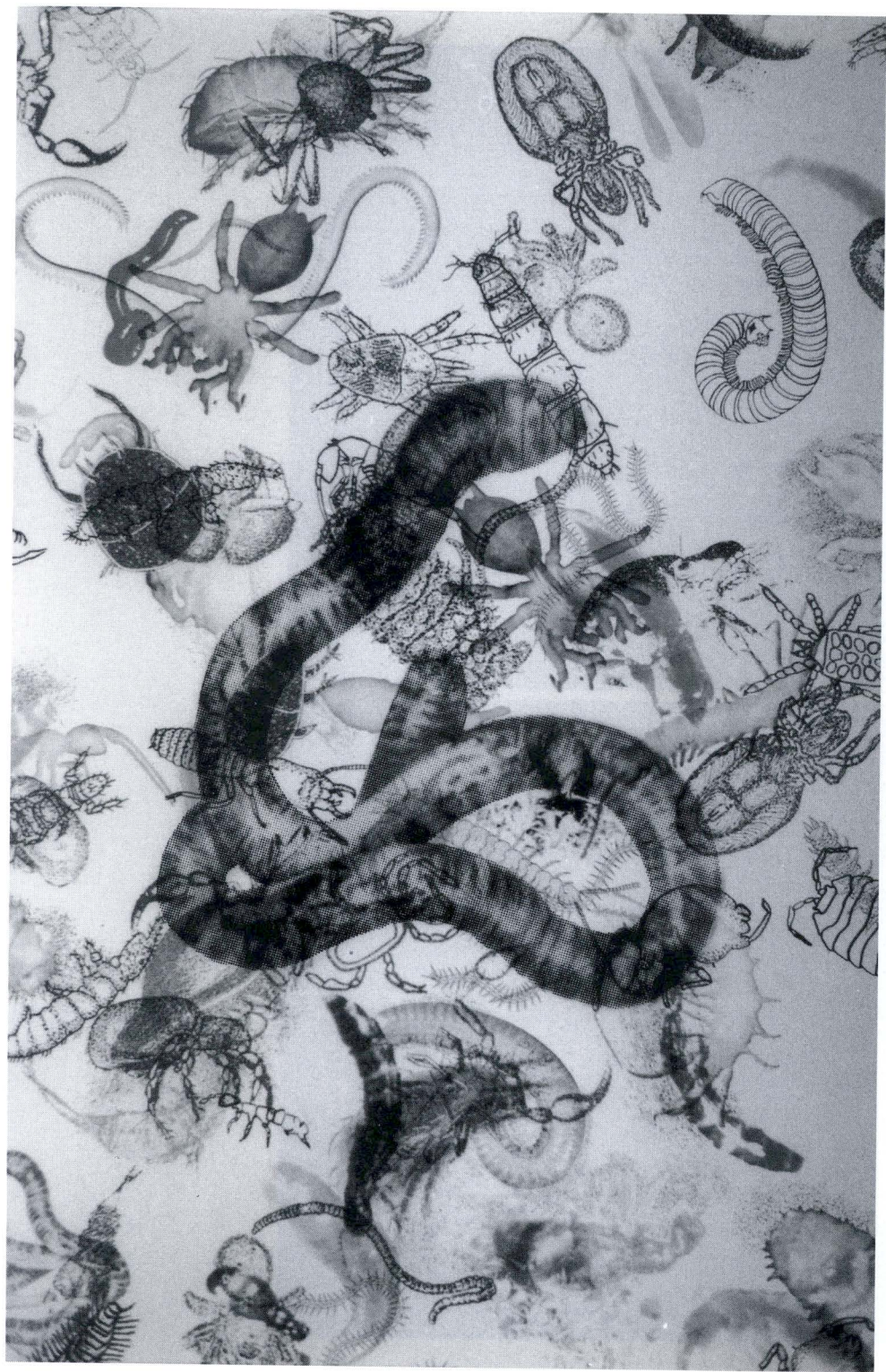


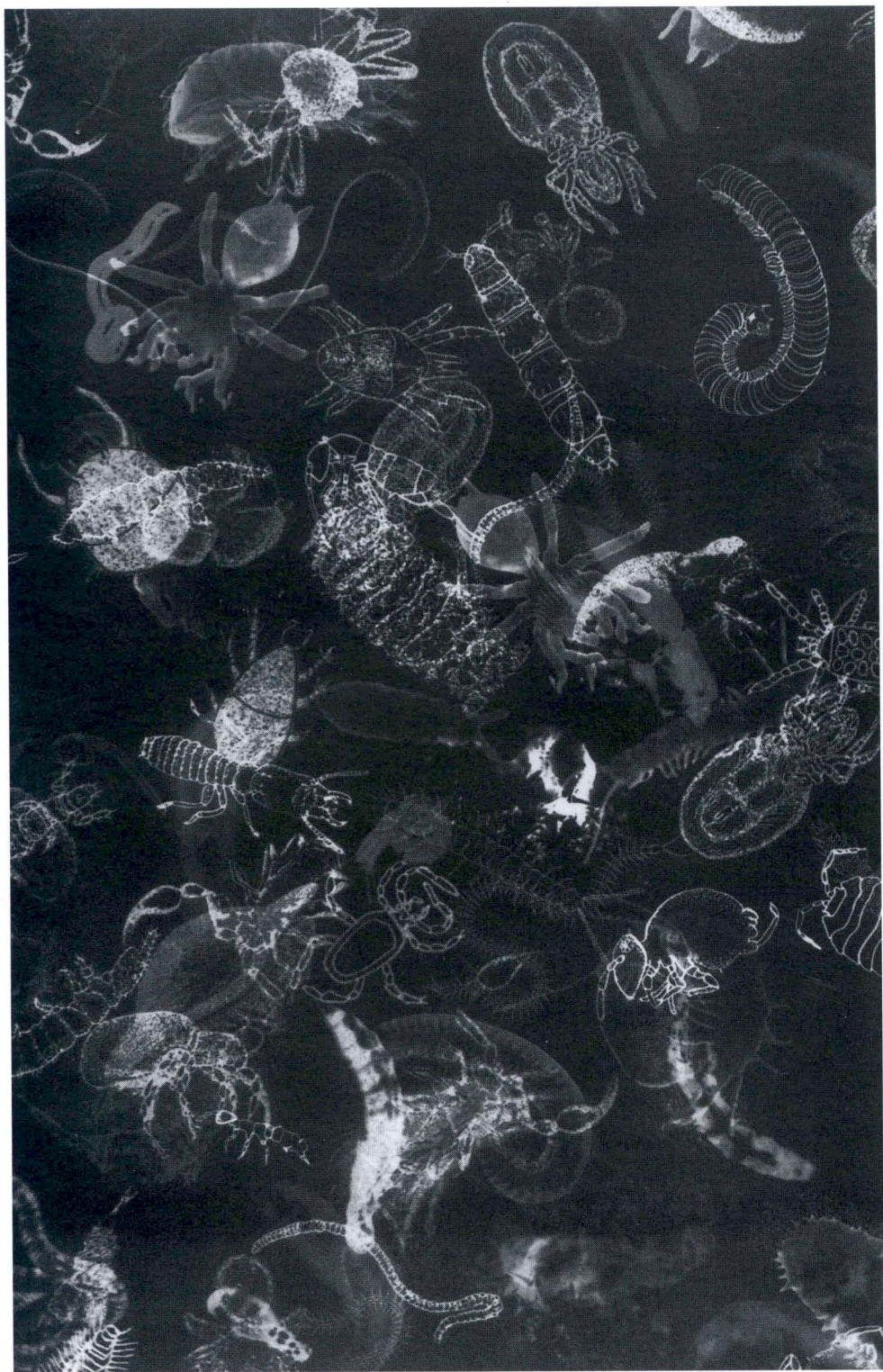






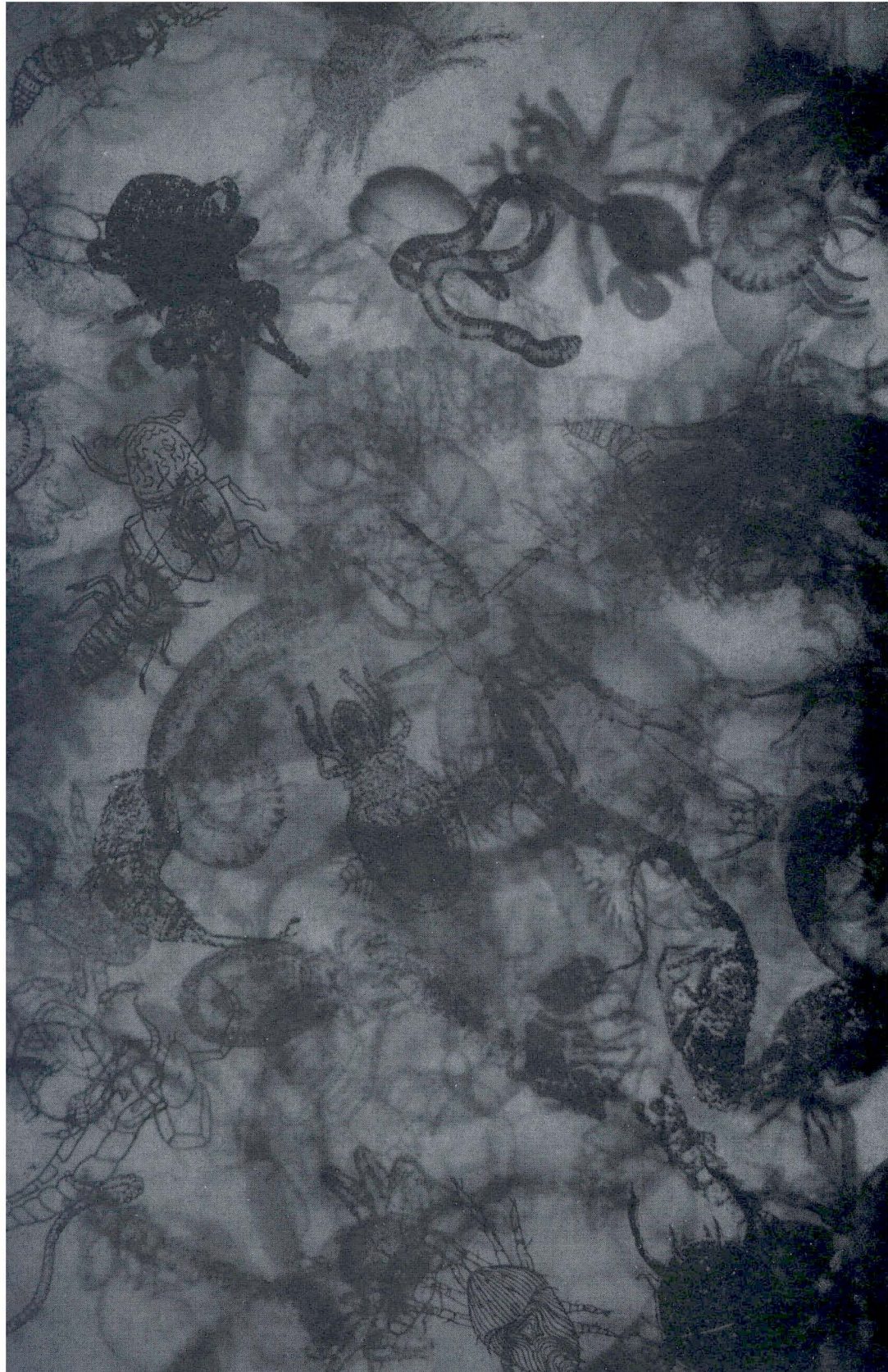




















ARTISTS' STATEMENT

Earthmakers speaks of the passage of time and the natural cycles of life and death: the continual, the interrupted, the altered, and in some cases, the obliterated. Through this work we hope to activate a consciousness of the specific forest site referred to, and thereby serve increased awareness of the essential part soil fauna play in the delicate life-cycle of the forest and Earth's ecosystem.

This photographic bookwork is an extension of *Earthmakers*, a collaborative project that we have been working on over the last five years. Combined here are layered, juxtaposed and montaged images derived from the *Earthmakers* installation, with images related to the making of that piece.

Earthmakers, the installation and the works evolving out of the project as a whole, pays homage to the approximately three and one-half million organisms that inhabit one square meter of B.C. forest soil. The installation, which provides the basic source for many of the images published here, depicts over 5,000 soil organisms (i.e., bugs, also referred to as soil fauna and soil animals), site specific to an old-growth forest site on Northern Vancouver Island near Port McNeill. The installation is comprised of two hundred and sixteen 24" X 36" photo-etchings printed on thin sheets of Japanese Kozo paper. The prints are pinned individually on gallery walls thereby allowing them to move slightly from air currents generated within a gallery space. The organisms are portrayed through the medium of printmaking, and combine drawn, photographed, photocopied, and computer-generated images in the making of the transparencies for the photo-etched matrices, making various levels of mediation in their presentation subtly evident.

The installation also includes a modular collage made of recycled forest products that refers to the litter layer of the forest floor from and beneath which the soil organisms originate. It is comprised of twenty-five 31" X 31" units that may be arranged in different configu-

rations on the wall or floor, or added to depending upon the place of installation. The remaining elements of the installation are a square meter of cedar, a sound-tape of rain mixed with the sound of footsteps and voices recorded underground in Grand Central Station in New York City, and an index. The index briefly details the source of the creatures shown and the processes employed to depict each one, and classifies the organisms in regard to scientific classification of Order and in some instances to those of Family, Genus, and Species.

Our collaboration on the *Earthmakers* project began approximately five years ago after we discovered we had many parallel interests. Independently, we each had been producing throughout our careers works focused on the physical landscape or on the evolving relationship between nature and culture. We were interested in finding a way to portray an aspect of the "natural environment" that would allow us to comprehend something that we had not yet understood, in a visual form that we had not yet explored or encountered. After considerable discussion, we decided to attempt to reframe our way of looking and sense of place through focusing on a specific site. We chose to investigate a square meter of B.C. old-growth forest soil and its inhabitants.

Out of necessity our work became increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary. We sought expertise from the UBC Soil Sciences Department and Forestry Canada in Victoria, and enlisted the expertise of Peter Braune of New Leaf Editions who holds degrees in Forestry and Fine Arts in the printing of the etchings. We became fascinated by the diversity, complexity and multitude of the soil organisms we were researching. We were astounded by our ignorance of that which is literally right beneath our feet, and by the ramifications of the lack of importance given to that which is normally unseen yet essential to our existence. The collaborative dynamic initiated through this project has influenced our attitude as artists and thoughts regarding process as it relates to art production. Also, it has extended our conception of the depiction of landscape in art.

The large scale installation of *Earthmakers* was recently exhibited at the Edmonton Art Gallery and a smaller version at the Capilano College Gallery in 1995. Selected prints from the installation have been shown at exhibitions in the United States and Finland. Further exhibition of this work is in the planning stages.

Philip Russell / HALLOWEEN

The loneliness was there first, the void wanting to be filled. Before I even knew Alice's name I was waiting for her. I made the light that attracted her, and she came into it, the single worst thing that would ever happen to me.

I never saw her come up to the back porch that night; I jumped at the sound of her knock. When I opened the kitchen door it seemed she had just materialized there, formed out of nothing, black eye and all. Her eye wasn't magical, I'll be the first to admit. It was singularly ugly: purple turning to green and yellow, the skin all cheesy and dead looking in the bare overhead light. It was a revolting black eye. I thought it was a joke initially, a Halloween disguise, and I stood with my hand on the doorframe, trying to smile. It was hard to look casual, though; the wood was old and splintery and you couldn't comfortably lean on it.

Except for her eye she had a very elegant face — high cheekbones and a fine distinct jaw. "Guinevere did that," she said, speaking first. I nodded slowly. "My bitch," she explained, stroking her temple gently with long fingers.

She didn't wear any makeup. Generally I preferred women without makeup, but with an eye like that it was different. She looked straight at me with it. "I was just bending down to feed her, and our heads collided. Hers was harder." I had no idea what she was talking about. When she smiled her lips tightened, stretching back over the narrow arch of her teeth. That was nicer than her eye; she had a magnificent smile. She lowered her hand and held it out to me. "I'm Alice. I called about the apartment."

I nodded my head again. "Right." I'd forgotten about the rental ad. "Matt," I said, and I took her hand, of course, but I didn't believe her one bit. I was learning about this town, and I was pretty sure some boyfriend had ruined her eye. Now here she was turning up at my door. Great. If I rented to her there'd be fights on the porch, me in

the middle, probably blood splattered around, maybe body parts, anything. No doubt my editor would expect me to cover it.

I'd been advertising for a month to sublet part of this house I couldn't afford. So far only three people had come to look at the rooms: a thin scruffy kid clearly running away from something; an old man without any teeth who showed up drunk; and a pretty young woman named Jackie who couldn't manage the security deposit and wondered if she could spread the rent out over time. I had to say no to Jackie — I was running out of money myself — but I've wondered since how things might have turned out differently. Life is all so confused with small choices, millions of them, and most of them don't mean a damn thing, really — you could almost leave them to chance. But always there are one or two that go on to change everything — and there's no way to tell those apart from the rest.

I lowered my gaze, not wanting to marvel at Alice's eye too much. She wasn't wearing a jacket, although it had been raining on and off all night — just an old reddish vest, goose down, thoroughly faded. She wore it unsnapped over a blue chamois shirt, tails loose and partly unbuttoned. She didn't look cold, though — only hurriedly dressed. I stepped back and held the door open.

She didn't act like a person who'd just gotten beaten up, either. Alice came inside bouncing, swinging blond hair and tight white pants. I couldn't help staring. The danger of loneliness is this: it puts you at risk.

"Can I keep dogs here?" she asked.

"I guess so." I looked at her face once more. "I like dogs all right. I had one when I was a kid." I closed the door behind her. "It was my stepfather's dog, actually."

"Great. This is the eighth place I've looked at. Landlords usually hate dogs." She stepped into the kitchen and took off her vest.

"I'm not really the landlord." I put my hand out for her vest, and hung it on the back of a kitchen chair. "I'm just subletting the place. Part of the place. Come on, I'll show you around." I was renting out the back ell, two rooms and a bathroom. Alice was walking down the hallway as if she already knew the house. "How come they hate dogs?" I asked.

"It's not just dogs: they hate kids, too." I looked at her closely. "No

kids." She grinned again. "Not yet. Three dogs, though." I nodded. "Big ones."

"I should ask my landlord."

The first room was hard and glassy, with windows facing each other across a quarter-sawn oak floor. My books were still there on temporary shelves along one wall. Alice stopped to look over the titles, mostly hunting and homesteading. A lot of field guides. "I'll move those out," I said.

"Don't you read fiction?"

I frowned slightly. "You don't need to make up stories."

"Really?" She laughed, running her fingertip slowly down the row of spines. "I could change your mind about that." She pulled out a volume on bow hunting and shook her head. "I know lots of stories." Riffing through the pages, she sighed, then snapped the book shut and shelved it. "More than you've ever seen between *these* covers." She looked at me curiously. I wished she didn't have that black eye. "I'll bring you a couple of novels," she said, "and some poetry. I work in the library sometimes. Let's see the other room."

She turned on her heel and walked toward the door on the far wall. The swing of her hips was arresting. I said, "You don't look like a librarian."

"It's my eye," she answered, without bothering to look back.

The end room was smaller, with windows on three of the walls. Outside the rain had increased; you could hear it pound against the clapboards, and the glass on the northern wall was running with water. I hadn't turned on the radiators in the ell, and the room felt stark and cold. Alice shivered, and turned away after a brief glance. "It feels like a grave back here."

"I should show you these rooms in the daylight."

"And with the heat on."

I followed her back through the dining room, where she ran her fingers over the dark table of soft five-quarter pine. I thought I heard her murmur "Leslie," as she went by, but that was impossible; it must have been "lovely."

We moved toward the fire in the living room. "These rooms we'd share, like the kitchen." My fire burned loudly, snapping on the hearth — the room smelled faintly of wood smoke. "What do you think?"

"This fire is nice. I like fires a lot." She turned slowly in front of it. "Fires are the heart of a place." She took off her chamois shirt; underneath she wore a tight knit jersey. She had wonderful breasts. When I looked back at her face I saw she was watching me, her smile amused and a little bit challenging. I bent down and poked up the fire, making it pop and spit sparks. When I turned around she'd crossed the room to the photograph on the far wall. "A pretty lady," she said, without looking at me. She leaned closer to the picture. "And pretty young."

The problem with loneliness is this: it gives everybody an opening. "Yeah. That was from Boston. When I was still a kid."

Alice came back and examined me for a moment. "You look like her a little, especially around the eyes." She turned and extended her hands toward the fire, palms open. "Pretty young," she repeated. Her hair was glowing in the firelight. It made her look like she had a halo, or at least an aura. "You're not related."

"Not anymore."

"You didn't grow up in Boston."

I looked at her back for a long moment before answering. She had a funny way of asking questions. "I grew up in Vermont. North of here. Boston's where I went to school."

"Do you like being back?"

"It's hard to meet people."

She glanced at me over her shoulder with her good eye. "That's always hard."

I shook my head. I was trying to start over, but I didn't know how to explain that to her. She stood in front of the fire and stretched languidly, hands clasped behind her head. I enjoyed watching her muscles flex, the long curve of her body arching like a bow, the fire backlighting her hair.

"Were *you* raised around here?" I asked.

"My family's always lived over the mountains," she said after a moment, without turning around.

"Do *you* like it?"

"It's okay. It's where I grew up." She shifted her weight to one leg, reaching over objects on my mantelpiece, keys and change, my jack-knife, my grandfather's old pocket watch. Beyond my compass and topographic maps were a small rabbit skull I'd found and bleached,

some crinoid fossils from Buttons Bay, a single dried rose and a dull yellow wedding band. "What's this?" she asked, turning toward me and holding out a small leather case.

Leslie had given me that, back when we were planning our return to Vermont together. "An Abney level. Sort of a pocket transit. I've been thinking of buying some land." I didn't remember whose idea that was anymore, hers or mine; dreams go back and forth through time, merging together, transforming.

Alice smiled broadly. "That's a coincidence." She really did have a wonderful smile. "I've been doing that, too." She pulled the instrument out of the soft leather pouch. "How does it work?"

"You sight through the eyepiece at your target, then set the level on top. You read the degree of slope on that curved scale. It gives you the lay of the land."

"The lay of the land. Hmm." She nodded her head slowly. "I've been walking land for the past year." She sighted on the ceiling light. "I want to build a kennel."

"Why?" I asked. I'd always thought of kennels as dog jails, full of little barred doors, rows of cinder block cells, fences around fences.

"Why not? I'm tired of having people hassle me about my dogs. Plus I could make money from boarding, and do some training." She adjusted the level. "Mostly I want to do some serious breeding."

"Serious breeding," I repeated without thinking.

She looked at me through the eyepiece. "Dogs. My dogs are registered kuvaszok. Guard dogs for sheep."

"Never heard of them." I smiled. "Sorry."

"I have two bitches and a dog, all early bloodlines." She lowered the level. "I've been saving for three years now." She frowned. "It's hard."

I nodded. "It's impossible."

Thin maple branches scraped the living room window. A wind was behind the rain now, taking the last leaves down. I put more wood on the fire. Alice sat on the floor in front of the fireplace, her back against the couch, and I sat close to her. I could smell her body — musty, earthy, like leaf mold. "I love fires," she said again. "They make a house alive. Like a brook on a piece of land." She leaned toward me a little. I glanced at her long white legs, my hands restless in my lap.

"It's nice to be here, Matt."

She was cut off abruptly by loud banging from the kitchen door; I had to get up to answer it. Alice went to use the bathroom. There were two older kids on the porch, wanting candy, not in costume but soaking wet. I gave them most of the candy I had: they were the only children to come all night. But no sooner had they run off than two more figures came up the walk — a misshapen yellow form bent awkwardly over a shorter, darker one, shielding it from the rain. In the circle of porch light I saw they were actually three people: a tough looking little kid and his young mother, who carried a child of three or four on her hip. Those two were wrapped in a dull yellow raincoat, I guessed her husband's.

I let them all right inside: it was insane to carry a little child around in that cold rain. The woman was pretty, with short black hair, squarely cut. She unbuckled her raincoat and put her daughter down on the floor. Under the raincoat her body looked lithe and muscular, but I must have admired it too openly or too long, because when I glanced away I saw Alice standing in the hall doorway, studying me critically. Her frown left me uneasy, feeling guilty, remembering my one infidelity with Leslie, that time beyond reason. Sometimes I think we're as mindless as molecules, our lives directed by hormones. Insensate machines, lubricated with adrenaline, estrogen, testosterone. And not very well lubricated, either — always there's friction, endless grinding, pieces fracturing from heat and stress.

Alice knelt beside the little girl, who pointed at her eye and giggled. She was dressed in gauzy white, with a halo smashed down around her head, her hair all in her eyes. Alice brushed it out of her face, smiling. "This is the last place," the woman said, turning to her son with a reproachful look.

The boy wasn't listening though: he was staring at me, and suddenly he shouted, "I know you! The newspaper man!" I looked him over carefully, but I didn't know him. He must have been on one of the grammar school tours I'd conducted ever since early September. Hundreds of children blurred together, the faceless masses. My editor thought it was good public relations. This kid looked like a little gangster — he didn't need any costume.

I smiled at the woman, reached down and tousled the boy's wet

head. "You should wear a hat," I told him. He frowned at me, snarling, twisted his head and snapped at my fingers with his teeth. I pulled my hand away fast. "Little shit," I thought, but I don't think I said anything out loud. Alice looked up at me though.

After they left Alice asked, "Do you always want to sleep with every woman you meet?"

I didn't know what to answer to that one. The thing is, the woman reminded me of Leslie. After a moment I said, "Would you like some cider?"

"Have you got any wine?"

I brought a bottle into the living room. Alice followed, turning out the ceiling lights on her way. Joining me in front of the hearth, she picked up the Abney level again. "So you're not a surveyor," she said.

"Nope. I came here to work for the newspaper. I'm a reporter. Learning to be a reporter." I handed her a glass of wine.

"That sounds pretty interesting."

"Actually it's pretty boring. Except for the deadlines. The deadlines drive everyone crazy. There's a lot of stress. And you make some enemies. The paper's always looking for new people." In fact I was ready to quit myself. The job wasn't what it was made out to be; being part of the salaried staff simply meant I didn't get paid for overtime. All autumn I'd done nothing but sit in front of my word processor until late every night, churning out copy. One night a week was all I had off, and by then I was usually so tired of people I'd hole up in my house, glad of the quiet space and the empty rooms.

"I always thought it would be exciting to be a reporter."

"I did, too." We touched glasses. "But it's not a very good job." Still, it was better than carpentry: I'd never do that again.

Once more there was knocking at the kitchen door, and I answered it frowning. Two ravaged people stood there this time, dark figures dripping water and swaying a little. The man wore a canvas hunting coat spotted with dried blood, and a gray slouch hat pulled down so low I couldn't see his face, just lank hair and beard. A woman skulked behind him, standing as far back from him as she could get and still remain sheltered by the roof. She was drenched to the skin, her skin pale and cadaverous, and her face was blotched or bruised — I couldn't tell which. When she opened her mouth several teeth were

missing, and her eyes glinted like ice in the yellow porch light.

I thought she was hissing — *asshole, you asshole* — but it was hard to be sure with the rain streaming off the roof behind her. I stepped forward, but so did the dark man — lunging at me suddenly with both hands outstretched. Yet there was no weight to him; nothing at all really except wetness, coldness. I threw him off easily, pivoting to the side. “Get out of here,” I said. “I’ll call the trooper.” And although I was braced and ready to fight him, I didn’t need to — he stepped back, crouching down; he never said a word.

The hissing continued behind me, however — *asshole, you’ll be so sorry you asshole* — and louder than before. But when I looked over my shoulder the porch was deserted. And when I turned back to the man in the canvas coat, he was gone too. I stepped off the porch into the dooryard.

The run-off from the eaves instantly drenched me; the rain was changing to sleet and the icy shock almost knocked me down. The yard was empty as far as I could see, and there was no sound anymore except the storm. I climbed back onto the porch and stood looking and listening for several minutes, then I went inside, closed the door and locked it.

In the living room Alice had turned off the rest of the lamps; only firelight illuminated the space. “You’re soaked,” she said. “What happened?”

“I’m not sure,” I answered, pushing wet hair back from my face. “It’s all right now though.” But my skin felt frozen. “I need to get a dry shirt and towel.”

“Who was at the door?”

“A couple of hill people. Not kids. A prank, I guess.” I started toward the bathroom. “Maybe connected to the newspaper.”

When I returned Alice had put some music on the stereo, with the volume down low — *Appalachian Spring*, the only classical music I ever liked. It was Leslie’s music, and I was positive I’d left it in Boston.

“That okay?” she asked.

“I guess,” I said. The music was as unsettling as everything else. “Sure,” I nodded, and sat down next to her, a little closer than before, wanting most of all just to pause for a moment.

“I’d like to live here, Matt.” She touched my glass a second time.

"I'd like that, too." We both drank.

We choose such ignorance sometimes.

We sat without talking for a while, sipping wine. The music filled the room like Leslie's spirit. At one point Alice moved closer to me, sliding a tiny bit across the floor so our bodies touched. She hummed something I couldn't understand; I asked her what it was. "That melody that keeps repeating is an old Quaker hymn," she explained. "'Tis a Gift.'" She sang the whole thing through, softly layering her words over the violins' melody. I leaned back against the couch and closed my eyes. I could smell Leslie's scent in the room — beautiful danger, inviting and repelling, sharp and sexual. Alice didn't speak after she finished, and the music on the tape continued quietly. At one point there was more knocking on the kitchen door. "Don't answer it," she said, and I was happy not to. The fire was warm on my face. I took a sip of wine and put my arm around her shoulders — it seemed the only thing to do.

But the knocking continued, loud and persistent, and finally I couldn't ignore it. Yet when I opened the door the porch was deserted. I walked the length of the rain swept deck, searching the forsaken night. It was all just empty darkness, vacant coldness wetly stretching away. I turned and went back inside.

Alice was standing in front of the fire; when she asked me who was there, I said, "No one. A joke. Kids." I put my hands on her shoulders, but her shoulders were cold. Her whole body was cold — I could feel the chill emanate through her clothes. I looked at her face and her black eye was just staring straight ahead. I got up to put more wood on the fire, although the room was already uncomfortably warm. Alice moved closer to the hearth. I stepped to her other side, so I wouldn't have to look at her eye.

"I should go," she said.

"Not yet."

She smiled. I reached out to her. She shook her head. "I'll stop by tomorrow," she said, then she was gone.

From the porch I watched her car's lights dim and then disappear into the wet darkness. But I didn't stand there staring after they winked out — it was too cold and raw. Winter was coming fast; you could smell that, too. I went inside to the fire and sat on the floor with

my back against the couch, the heat and light full in my face. I slid my hand into my pocket, my fingertips touching the slip of paper with her phone number. I closed my eyes. The danger of loneliness is this: you get used to it. And getting used to it isn't as hard as it should be. After a while it doesn't even seem wrong. That's the scary part.

I got up once to get the wine bottle and refilled my glass. I sat there for a long time, watching the fire burn down to embers, sipping the wine, filled with the bitter red glowing of it. I kept trying to recall the sound of Alice's voice, but couldn't, so I replayed the music she'd chosen, listening carefully, trying to hear the exact sound of her song. But I only remembered two lines, *'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free*, and I never heard her voice at all.

I put more wood on the coals, and tried to recall her face, but couldn't do that either. Not with any precision. The sweep of blond hair across her forehead was clear enough, but where it fell on her head and shoulders the detail blurred. I could picture her blue eyes distinctly — the large pupils and striated iris — but the face around them was hazy and dull. Even her injured skin was hard to see definitely. There was a clear image of very fine, downy blond facial hair, the fire backlighting her profile. I could see her wide grin, her compressed lips, but the delicate angularity of her cheekbones and jaw just went in and out of focus, never stopping at a place that was real. I couldn't recall the exact shape of her body, and the harder I tried, the more indistinct everything became.

There was a noise at the door, but it was clear through the side window it wasn't Alice, and I closed my eyes again and sipped some more wine, trying to solidify things, wishing it were already tomorrow. I felt as if I were standing on the edge of my life, shifting centers, putting into motion a thing without limits.

Sitting still became impossible. I got up and wandered through the empty house, looking for any tangible evidence of her visit, wanting to touch things she'd touched, trying to make things concrete. I went back to the ell, flipped on the light in the first room and pulled out my volume on bow hunting, riffling through the pages as she had. I went further back, but there was nothing in the last room except black rain-streaked glass. I tried to feel it as Alice's room, but it felt like the outside, smelled cold and raw, and I left quickly, thinking of graves.

In the bathroom there was a hairbrush like Leslie's, and under the chair in the kitchen I found a large dog biscuit that must have fallen out of Alice's down vest. Near it were two tiny white feathers, no bigger than my thumbnail. I picked them up and went back to the living room. Her wine glass stood on the floor next to the hearth. I looked on the mantle for the Abney level, but it wasn't there — a volume of Yeats lay in its place instead. I read the poem the book opened to, about a man who once glimpsed a magical girl, then spent the rest of his life searching for her. The lines made me sad and I closed the book, put it back on the scarred wood and set the feathers on the worn green cover. I sat against the couch again, the fire hypnotic and glowing. The warmth and the wine made me sleepy, and I dozed off to dream about a beast with black eyes.

The danger of loneliness is this: you tend to adopt it. It's so small at first, sniffing around, that you feel sorry for it. You talk to it and pet it and after a while start to feed it. Eventually you give it a name. With each day it grows larger. Soon it needs always to be fed. It sits on your hearth each night, waiting for your return. You can never feed it enough. Finally you understand that it's *you* the beast wants to consume.

I woke up convinced I heard breathing. The fire had almost gone out and the room was dark. I shook my head in disgust. I'd been there before: it was just a trap. Leslie never kept the beast away; somehow she *became* the beast. Too much loneliness and too much testosterone, a hopeless combination.

I piled more wood on the fire. The dry pine caught quickly; soon flames chased each other up the chimney. I watched the flames and listened to the quiet of the house settle around me, and for just a moment everything felt held at bay, almost peaceful. I felt full of sudden resolve: I'd call Alice and just tell her my landlord wouldn't accept dogs, period. I'd concentrate on remembering her black eye.

I looked at my watch. It still wasn't that late, so I picked up the telephone. Alice answered on the first ring. She said "Matt" before I could speak. She sounded just like Leslie. I could hear her breathing across the telephone lines. I closed my eyes. The wine made me feel dizzy. Spirits filled the room, souls wandering around at will. In the quietness of my house I could hear breathing. "Come on over," she said.

And all I could feel then was an aching in my heart. Or perhaps it was between my legs. I don't know. I feel like that machine sometimes, a body, an animal thing, a beast myself, intent on its own destruction. Alice was silent a long time, waiting for me to speak. Finally I said, "How do I get there?"

Michael Crummey / 32 LITTLE STORIES

This was before Confederation, so I don't know why we were being taught French at the school. We had a textbook called *32 Little Stories*. There was only enough to go around the class, so the teacher would borrow mine during the lesson and I moved back a seat to share with the person sitting behind me.

Kitch Williams would pronounce a word or sentence from the book and we were supposed to repeat it back to him, but I didn't bother opening my mouth half the time, it was all gibberish to me. Kitch decided he'd had enough of that one afternoon and got me up in front of the class alone. I guess I sounded a bit like a wounded animal trying to heave it out of me, it's a goddamn silly language anyway if you want my opinion, and the whole school had a good laugh about it.

Father had an old shotgun I used to take out hunting partridge on the weekends with Jeth Slade and Paddy Fitzgerald, a double-barrelled thing that hardly left enough meat on a bird to make a meal of it. The three of us went out over the barrens that Saturday and I took *32 Little Stories* along with me: opened it to the correct page, stood it up on an old tree stump, stepped back three paces and shot the fucking thing. Had to walk twelve feet past the tree stump to find it.

Next French lesson I moved back to sit at the desk behind me and Kitch Williams picked up my copy to start. The look on his face when he opened it: the book ripped by the lead shot, the paper melded together so you couldn't turn a page. The muscle in his cheek twitching, his eye glasses shifting on his nose. "My son," he said, putting the book on the desk in front of me, "if you're not going to take care of this text, it would be just as well to put it in the stove."

Mother always said it was a wonder I never got myself shot when I was a youngster. I picked the book up, walked to the pot-bellied stove at the back of the class and dropped it in. The crackle of *32 Little Stories* echoing around the room as I went back to my seat through the row of desks, the floor boards creaking under my feet. Quiet, my Jesus it was quiet, no one in that class had a word in their heads to speak, not of English and not of French besides.

FLAME

Breen's Island, Labrador, 1944

When we came home from the Labrador in the fall, we'd take down the stage head and cutting room to save it from the ice that raked the shoreline over the winter. Next summer then, the first thing you'd want to do would be to get the stage head back up and ready to go. There wasn't much in the way of trees in the tickle though and we'd have to take the boat into the bay to cut some timber and firewood. All day in the woods then with an axe, and the flies after your eyes the whole time; if you opened your mouth to speak they were thick enough to choke you.

Before we went in we'd douse our hands with gasoline and sprinkle a little on our hats, it helped keep them off a bit. All the same, when you came out of the bay there was a solid flame of blood across your forehead, behind your ears and along the back of your neck, as if someone had traced your hairline with a razor blade. The year Mike Tobin was up with us he soaked himself before we went in, he couldn't stand those fucking flies. I'd say he had enough juice in his hair to send the boat down to Battle Harbour, you could see the fumes rising from his head like heat over pavement. We split up into pairs then and walked in.

Joe Crowley was with him, he says they stopped for a smoke after an hour and Mike reached up to scratch the back of his head still holding the cigarette. We heard the yelling, and then we could see a small fire tearing through the trees toward the bay. He stripped off his shirt as he ran and he looked like a big wooden match, his head in flames above the white skin of his chest, a tassel of black smoke trailing behind him. It was funny as hell to look at but we managed to hold off until we got him out of the water and saw that he wasn't hurt bad. The hair was mostly gone and what was left smelled like piss on fire, but that was the worst of it.

Mike would've preferred if we never said a word about it afterwards, but it was too good to pass up. And Joe was the hardest on him. Every time he wanted a laugh that summer he'd take out a cigarette, wave it in Mike's direction and shout, "Hey Tobin. Got a light?"

HUSBANDING

I kept the animals until Aubrey got sick, there was no one to help with the haying after that. Everything else I could do myself, cleaning the dirt out of the stalls and milking in the morning, getting the cows in from the meadow before supper, it was something to get up for.

Spent a good many nights out in the barn too, waiting for the cows to calve in the spring. Sometimes you'd have to get your hands in there, the legs tangled behind the calf's head that was already hanging clear, a foot above dry straw, the tongue sticking out like a baby trying to get itself born from the mouth.

Only lost one cow in forty years of husbanding. Sat out there with her for hours that night and I knew things weren't right, the cow shifting on her legs in a queer way like a lady with a stone in her shoe, and shaking her head when she moaned. Around midnight she still hadn't started into birthing but she was bellowing loud enough to wake half of Riverhead, and trying to kick around her big belly. I sent Aubrey after Joe Slade to have a look at her, he came into the barn with his shirt tail out and boots not tied; he didn't say much, just went away and brought back his gun and a knife. You can save the calf, he told me, or you can stand aside and lose them both.

I couldn't shoot her, but I used the knife after she fell, cutting away the belly to haul out the calf and rub her clean with straw. Aubrey brought a pail of milk he'd warmed on the stove and I fed the calf with an old baby bottle, the jerk of her head when she sucked almost enough to pull it from my hand. The blood, now that was something I'll never forget, we had to rake out the stall and burn the straw in the garden next morning.

Too much for one person though, the haying, three or four weeks in the fall to cut it and get it into the barn after it dried. Sold off the cows a couple of years before Aubrey died. I was sixty-one years old the first time I bought a carton of milk from a store.

STONES

A lot of it was learning to live with cruelty. Learning to live cruelly.

We always had a couple of cats in the house, and the males you could do something with yourself. Father cut a hole in a barrel top, pushed the cat's head into it and had one of us hold its legs while he did the job with a set of metal shears. With females though, you had kittens to deal with once or twice a year. I drowned them in shallow water once. I didn't think it would make any difference, but I can still see that burlap sack moving like a pregnant belly only two feet out of reach; and I had to force myself to turn away. Those kittens were barely a week old but they took a long time dying.

The worst I ever saw was the horses. You'd get a strap around their waist with a ring underneath, and tie the fore and back legs to the ring with ropes. Then you'd back the animal up nice and slow so it would fall over in sections like a domino set, hind end first, then the belly, shoulders, head. Once it was on the ground you'd wash the bag with a bit of Jeye's Fluid, slit the sac open and snip the balls right off.

The cats bawled and screamed through the whole thing, but the horses never made a sound, they were too stunned I guess. Their legs made those ropes creak though, like a ship's rigging straining in a gale of wind. It would be a full day before they came back to themselves, standing out in the meadow like someone who can't recall their own name. Their wet eyes gone glassy with shock, as blind as two stones in a field.

THE TENNESSEE WALTZ

Ingredients:

- 1 quart of dandelion flowers picked from the meadow garden
- 4 gallons of water carried up from the brook
- 2 and one half pounds of sugar from the winter store
- 1 teaspoonful of cream of tartar, the rind and juice of 2 lemons

Boil the works in the beer pot for twenty minutes, turn it out into a pan and let it cool. When the liquid is new-milk warm, add four table-spoons of yeast and let it work for about a day, until you can see the tiny bubbles start to rise. Boil your bottles and siphon the beer from your pan, then cork tightly. Keep them in a cool place or the bottles may burst, the small explosions like rifle shots in the middle of the night, your shoes sticking to the floor for weeks, the house stinking of yeast and alcohol.

Fit to drink after two days in the bottle. A glassful will straighten a crooked spine. Three bottles enough to put a song in your heart and the heart of your neighbour come for a visit; four enough to light the flicker of dandelion flames in your sorry eyes. Five will set your head on fire, have your neighbour dancing around the kitchen with a broom, singing the only line he knows of *The Tennessee Waltz*. Send him home with one less sock than he came with. Wake you early with the tick of a cooling engine in your skull, your face the colour of ash. Your neighbour's wife wondering what became of that missing sock, and he will never find an explanation to satisfy her.

Makes about 3 dozen.

BONFIRE NIGHT

Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the English Parliament Buildings with a basement full of explosives and got himself hanged for his trouble. Burned in effigy on the anniversary of his death in every Protestant outpost in Newfoundland. No one remembers who he was or what he had against the government, but they love watching the clothes take, the straw poking through the shirt curling in the heat of the fire and bursting into flame.

The youngsters work for weeks before the event, gathering tree stumps and driftwood, old boxes, tires, and any other garbage that will burn, collecting it into piles on the headlands or in a meadow clearing. The spark of fires up and down the shore like lights warning of shoals or hidden rocks. Parents losing their kids in the darkness, in the red swirl of burning brush; teenagers running from one bonfire to the next, feeling something let loose inside themselves, a small dangerous explosion, the thin voices of their mothers shouting for them lost in the crack of dry wood and boughs in flames. They horse-jump an expanse of embers, their shoes blackened with soot, dare one another to go through larger and larger fires, through higher drifts of flankers: their young bodies suspended for a long moment above a pyre of spruce and driftwood, hung there like a straw effigy just before the flames take hold. Guy Fawkes a stranger to them, though they understand his story and want it for themselves.

Rebellion. Risk. Fire.

ROOT CELLAR

A mound of sod like a single upturned breast beside the house, a three foot doorway staunched out with logs and two steps down into darkness. Dusty pungence, the warmth of must and dirt, the mossy odour of stored vegetables, that dull smell like an ache in your joints. The walls lined with barrels of potatoes, turnip, shelves of carrot and cabbage, a few beets, parsnip, radish, a sack of onions.

The men away in Labrador over the summer, planting and weeding done by the women and any children old enough to lift a trowel. My grandmother trenching half an acre of potatoes, carting wheelbarrows full of caplin to the garden, the slick silver bodies shovelled over the vegetables as fertilizer, the stink of rotting fish breeding a noisy pelt of bluebottles.

The late summer harvest stored in the root cellar and that was what kept people going through the end of the winter, potatoes still coming out of the cellar in March and April, brown skin thickened like a callous and sprouting wild white roots; the starchy flesh gone soft, gelatinous, like the eye of a dead animal. Potato and scrunchions, french fried potatoes, boiled spuds and pork fat, potato hash.

When Nan came home from the hospital the first time, she went straight to the pantry and peeled half a dozen new potatoes, put them on to boil and ate them plain, just a little butter and salt for taste. She hated hospital food, wanted something prepared by her own hands, something the earth had a claim to. The dry sweetness of them in her mouth. Feeding her body, feeding the tumour. She was seventy-one years old, her belly distended by cancer: six months they said, a year at the longest.

No one uses them anymore now, there's a refrigerator in every kitchen, a grocery store on every corner. Abandoned root cellars still standing up and down the shoreline: hollow skull of sod in a meadow, a blank eye of darkness staring behind the doorway's empty socket.

OLD CHRISTMAS DAY

My father, yes.

Father died on Old Christmas Day, January 6th, 1946. We thought he was getting better, he'd managed a decent meal that Sunday for the first time in months, salt beef and cabbage, peas pudding, he ate the works. Mother used to make fruit puddings in the old Baking Soda cans, Hollis and myself carried one up to him for dessert. He took three or four mouthfuls from the can and then he slumped over in the bed, never made a sound. I ran across Riverhead to Uncle Wel's and burst in saying Father was dead, I don't know what I expected them to do.

Anyway we buried him. Had to take out the kitchen window to carry the coffin from the house and it was cold enough to skin you. Then we buried him.

I'm not saying this like I meant to.

He used to run a sawmill up the brook, it was something to do over the winters when there was no fishing. Mother made a fried egg sandwich and corked a bottle of tea for him every morning, we'd carry it up there together. It was warm inside from the heat of the machines running, and the scent of pine and spruce in the sawdust, I never smelled a place as clean as that mill. Father sat me up on the cutting table while he had his lunch and I usually ate more of the sandwich than he did. The first mill he had burnt down, the second one there weren't enough trees around to keep it running and he had to sell off the equipment or let it rust.

He worked hard is all I'm saying. The only summer that man didn't come to the Labrador he was having cataracts taken off his eyes. That was the year before he died, when he was sixty-two.

No, that's not it, nevermind, nevermind now.

Nevermind, I said.

BREAD

I was twenty years younger than my husband, his first wife dead in childbirth. I agreed to marry him because he was a good fisherman, because he had his own house and he was willing to take in my mother and father when the time came. It was a practical decision and he wasn't expecting more than that. Two people should never say the word love before they've eaten a sack of flour together, he told me.

The night we married I hiked my night dress around my thighs and shut my eyes so tight I saw stars. Afterwards I went outside and I was sick, throwing up over the fence. He came out the door behind me and put his hand to the small of my back. It happens your first time, he said. It'll get better.

I got pregnant right away and then he left for the Labrador. I dug the garden, watched my belly swell like a seed in water. Baked bread, bottled bakeapples for the winter store, cut the meadow grass for hay. After a month alone I even started to miss him a little.

The baby came early, a few weeks after my husband arrived home in September. We had the minister up to the house for the baptism the next day, Angus Maclean we named him, and we buried him in the graveyard in the Burnt Woods a week later. I remember he started crying at the table the morning of the funeral and I held his face against my belly until he stopped, his head in my hands about the size of the child before it was born. I don't know why sharing a grief will make you love someone.

I was pregnant again by November. I baked a loaf of bread and brought it to the table, still steaming from the oven. Set it on his plate whole and stood there looking at him. That's the last of that bag of flour, I told him. And he smiled at me and didn't say anything for a minute. I'll pick up another today, he said finally.

And that's how we left it for a while.

INFRARED

A picture that was never taken, infrared photograph of the square wooden house in Western Bay, a record of heat and its loss. Most of the building sits in darkness, a shallow haze of escaping energy pink above the shingles, deeper and more insistent where the chimney rises into the night air.

Downstairs, the kitchen is a ball of flame, the draughty windows spilling fire. The wood stove at the centre, as dark as a heart, stoked full with birch wood and throwing heat like a small sun. The family sits as far back as kitchen walls allow, shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows, sweat on their brows, the temperature pushing 85 degrees.

In the next room, behind the closed kitchen door, a film of ice forms on water left sitting in a cup. Steam rises from the head of the woman who walks in from the kitchen to retrieve it and in the photograph her neat bun of hair is haloed by a shaggy orange glow.

Later, the outline of sleepers under blankets in the upstairs bedrooms mapped by a dull cocoon of warmth, a bright circle lying at their feet: beach rocks heated in the oven and carried to bed in knitted woolen covers. The outrageous autumn-red pulse fading as the house moves deeper into night, the incandescent warmth of it slowly guttering out into darkness.

JIGG'S DINNER

Out of bed by seven to leave plenty of time to dress for church. The salt beef in soak overnight to take off the brine: put it on to boil in the largest pot in the pantry. Drain off half the salt water and replace it with fresh every hour. Clear a spot on the counter, run the knife across the whetstone to keep the edge. Begin the vegetables.

Potatoes

Potatoes are inevitable, like grace before a meal. They're as passive as trapped cod fish, sitting in cupboard darkness below the sink, waiting to be baked or boiled or thinly sliced and fried with onion and scrunchions.

You'll want a spud for everyone eating, two if they're smaller than your fist. The skin is mottled brown and spotted with eyes, the flesh is white and damp. The taste is neither here nor there, like its colour, it complements everything you serve. Cut the largest in half or three to avoid stony pits enduring after everything else is ready to eat. Serve individually, or mashed with butter and a spoonful of fresh milk.

Carrots

Carrots are the middle child, no one's particular favourite, but well-enough liked by all. A good rule of thumb is to cook more than you think you need. Never worry about leftovers: a carrot holds its flavour like no other vegetable, it tries so hard to please.

Turnip and Parsnip

Flesh of the turnip turning like a lobster shell when boiled, washed-out yellow to something darker, something just short of orange. The parsnip is white but not as pale as a spud. They're predictable vegetables, sturdy and uncomplicated, tasting of the winter root cellar, the warmth of darkness smouldering beneath snow. Turnip is served mashed with a tablespoon of butter and a pinch of fresh pepper. Parsnip served like carrot, the beautifully tapered torso laid naked on the plate.

Greens

Leaf and stalk of the turnip, boiled until tender. The dark green of deep water shoals. As tart as spinach and better for you, the limp stalk wrapped around your fork like a spaghetti string, a spill of green liquor on your lips with every mouthful.

Cabbage

Similar to lettuce, but heavier and more densely rounded: the quieter and more secretive of two siblings. Too firm and fibrous to be eaten raw, boil the cabbage whole until the inner leaves have paled almost to white and the rippled outer layers part before a fork like the Red Sea before the staff of Moses.

Onions

Slip the pocket of tears from its papery shell. Do not bring the knife near the flesh. Drop two or three whole onions into the pot to cook the tang from the core. Eat them by the forkful, the translucent layers soft and sweet as orange sections, every bit of bitterness boiled away.

When the church bell peals, place all vegetables to boil with the salt meat. The peas pudding is wrapped separately in cheesecloth or a piece of rag and placed last in the pot, before leaving for church at a quarter to eleven.

By twelve-thirty everything is ready. Take up the vegetables in separate dishes and people will serve themselves as they please. Ladle a spoonful of the salty liquor from the pot over your food, or dip up a mugful to drink with your meal. Protect your Sunday clothes with a linen or cotton napkin. Bow your heads before you eat.

Be thankful.

RE:
OFFENSIVE TO SOME

EDITOR'S NOTE

Berni Stapleton's *Offensive To Some* premiered at the National Arts Centre Atelier in January 1996 featuring Wanda Graham and was directed by Kent Stetson. Janice Kennedy of *The Ottawa Citizen* praised Stetson's "taut direction" and wrote that "Stapleton has written a smart, tight, tough-mouthed script about a difficult issue, and Graham delivers it with energy and smartassed grittiness. It is a potent combination."

What follows is an excerpt from the play, preceded by statements from the playwright, director, and actor about the process of bringing the work to stage. *Offensive to Some* deals in an explicit way with domestic violence and its effects.

Berni Stapleton / THE PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

I have a play called *Woman In A Monkey Cage* which got sent to somebody who sent it to somebody else who sent it to Gil Osbourn at the NAC. She called me up and asked me if I had anything new that hadn't been produced yet. The answer to that question is always yes! I mailed her off *Offensive To Some*. That first draft was only twelve pages long but Gil liked it enough to invite me to 'Page To Stage' in June of 95.

Kent Stetson, Wanda Graham and I have worked together on several plays over the years, including *Woman In A Monkey Cage*. From the beginning we have instinctively assumed our positions at the points of some sort of triangle. When the three of us sit down for the first time with a new work, Kent will see the glass half full, Wanda will see the glass just out of reach, and I will see the glass half empty. Between the three of us we manage to fill the glass up until it spills over. People ask me how do I write plays. People ask me why do I write about the things I do. They might just as well ask me how do I breathe. I like Kent and Wanda because they don't ask me questions like that.

On the first day of 'Page To Stage' in Ottawa the three of us were so happy to see each other we went out to lunch to catch up on all the things good buddies like to catch up on. Kent and I thought it would be fun to make Wanda read the first draft to us while we ate our Greek salads so we tormented the life out of her until she gave in. Until then I thought those first twelve pages were a really good beginning but when Wanda began to read I started to cringe and sweat and fret. Wanda was reading and Kent was listening and I was half insane. It is *always* this way for me. The first time I hear my work read out loud I die a little. I die a lot. It has nothing to do with who is reading it. It has everything to do with my own insecurity. So while Wanda is reading I'm sitting there picking my own work apart with vicious little silent darts. Kent is deeply curious about the character in the play and intrigued by her story. Wanda is already sniffing out those little truths that actors look for in text and sub-text. I let them talk and gradually

I'm talking too and I forget that I'm the centre of the universe and remember that I love my script.

The first few sessions were very much like that. Wanda reads, Kent and I listen, then I listen to them, then they listen to me, sometimes no one listens to me, sometimes there's nothing to listen to because no one's talking. Kent knows how to ask all the right questions. He asks me questions about the character and her tragedy. Where did she come from? What made her laugh? How does she make other people laugh? I never have to answer these questions out loud and there is never one right answer. Wanda approaches each reading from a different tack. She test drives the script like it's a car, at different paces and levels and emotions. If something isn't working in the script I have the chance to hear if it's an acting problem or a writing problem. I am always secretly amazed by the respect and faith with which they treat my work. Surely someday they will figure out that I don't know what I'm doing.

Then I have two days to rewrite. This is my favourite time. I write for hours and hours. I forget to eat. I eat junk. I won't answer the phone. I watch trash t.v. I dream about the script when I sleep and then I wake up and put the dreams into the script. I don't *have* to talk to anybody so I *don't*. The script more than doubles in length. This entire experience is one of those too infrequent luxuries for a performer. Usually I steal time to write, eke out a script between this and that, then never know if anyone will like it because I'm too shitbaked to show it to anyone.

The final sessions of 'Page To Stage' are spent once again listening to Wanda read, but it's different now. I'm not listening with the intention of doing any immediate rewriting. I'm listening to her work the material in preparation for a public reading. It's necessary for me to step back and see how my play works without me around to babysit. I make notes. Kent is always gently pushing me toward taking more risks with the piece. The toughest, roughest contents of the play don't scare him and he never second guesses anything. He never worries if it will be too hard for people to listen to. He never asks me to defend anything. All he wants is for me to go my full limit on whatever I write and he knows I'm not there yet. He doesn't tell me anything. Instead he guides me into knowledge so I can tell myself anything.

The public reading was hard and good. I'm a performer and I

almost always perform my own work. So I have to let go and understand that Wanda is not going to do it the way I would. She delivers a stunning reading. She's good. I sit in the audience and feel what they feel. I'm thinking, 'I wrote this. Yes. I can live with this. I'm proud.' The thing about Wanda is, if she can't make a section of the text work then probably no one else can. As a performer she is fearless. I mean, she will leap off a cliff. Sometimes I am tempted to make my work idiot proof. I think, well, not everyone has the talent Wanda has. Then I think, no friggin way. And then I make the text even harder. I lay in booby traps and mysteries cause I know it's like a Rubik cube.

I leave Ottawa with an agreement from the NAC Atelier to give *Offensive To Some* its first professional production in Jan/96.

The second workshop happened in St. John's in Oct of 95. Since Ottawa I have tinkered with the script, but nothing serious. For the first few days the sessions focus on the really really hard stuff. What happened to this woman's kids? What exactly did she do to her husband? We're talking the kind of minute details that I've been avoiding. I like to listen to Kent and Wanda talk about what the current script leads them to believe about the woman. I like the way they disagree about certain things. This is how I learn that the only thing that is important right now is what I know inside. The play will be interpreted in a hundred different ways. During this week I have a chat with Wanda about nudity on stage: how does she feel about that, will she be able to do that? I have to, *have* to give the woman in the play a chance to validate her experiences, to share the marks that years of beatings have left on her. So, that particular scene goes in the play. Sometimes Wanda asks me questions about the play for which I have no answers. She is evolving out of workshop mode now and starting to work the play as an actor. This is good. It means the play is ready. This is bad. What happens to *me* now? Kent is calm and gentle and he has a soul of steel. This is good. It means he's just what he is: honest and forthright and challenging and incredibly supportive. He's now talking a lot about the structure of the play, the way I've decided to make it a two act for now. We spend a lot of time talking about that. He is very very organized. This is good. I'm juggling my twelve year old son, two cats, a dozen other work commitments going on at the same time, and Kent just keeps me from sliding off the path. There is another public reading to conclude this workshop phase and Kent is very good at sifting

through the barrage of comments and stories that people want to share afterwards. He knows when someone has a valid question or point about the script and when someone has been so stirred by the material that they just need to talk, but he never patronizes, and he manages to make everyone feel like they've made a contribution. This is good, because I am usually incapable of talking about my work. If someone asks me what *Offensive To Some* is about, I can't answer. If I do manage to answer I have a gift for making the play sound stupid and boring.

The Ottawa production of *Offensive To Some* in Jan/96 was very difficult for me. The reviews were phenomenal, Wanda was breathtaking, Kent was visionary. I was lost. It's the first time I've ever been in such close proximity to a play of mine that *I wasn't in*! I don't know what other writers do when a play gets up on its feet, but I'd sure like to know. I spent a year nurturing every syllable on every page and suddenly I wasn't essential anymore! I think this is called 'empty nest' syndrome. Same thing. Post-partum depression. Of course I was always welcome in rehearsal, and always included and briefed on production decisions. Of course I knew my work was in good and talented hands, and I trusted Kent to fly it to the moon. Of course I knew I could not keep this play home on the shelf for the next twenty years until I felt it was *really* ready. Of course of course of course!

I've done a lot of workshops in my twenty years as an actor/writer/comic. Sometimes I'm the writer, sometimes I'm working on someone else's script. I've been at too many workshops where the session begins with everyone tearing the work apart. I've been at too many workshops where everyone thinks they have the right to tell the writer what to write. I've been at too many workshops where people become preoccupied by what *they* think the script should be instead of helping the *writer* find what the script should be. Workshopping is a sensitive, finely-balanced, excruciating process — and that's if it's done properly. In clumsy hands it can be the ruination of a blossoming work and author. In cruel hands it can do psychological damage.

After each performance of *Offensive To Some* in Ottawa there was a talk-back. Audience members who wished could stay behind and give me their comments or questions. Many people longed to believe that this was *my* story. They wanted to feel that I had given them myself. It wasn't enough for me to describe the work as a fiction. They needed

to know where it had come from. This was hard for me because *I* don't always know where it all comes from. Here's what I told people in Ottawa:

The turtle is real. One time a big old gigantic dead turtle washed up on a beach near my home in NFLD. It was humungous. It had perished because something had taken a big bite right out of its guts. People came from miles around to look at that turtle. Camera crews filmed it, newspapers did articles on it, and everybody had their snap taken with it. That was one famous turtle. Everybody was ooohing and aaahing over the size of it but all I could think about was 'what took the bite out of its guts? Now *that* I'd like to see.'

Sylvie is based on a historical figure in NFLD. The last woman hanged in NFLD met the noose sometime early in the last century. She's not famous or even infamous, so I decided to give her a really good juicy story. As a matter of fact, Sylvie is so vivid for me now that I know I will certainly give her a play of her own in the future.

There was a woman on trial in St. John's a few years ago for murdering her abusive husband. He had been beating her up and she picked up a kitchen knife to try to scare him off. He was in such a rage that the momentum of his blows on her took him off balance and he fell onto the knife. She was put on trial and I can't remember if it was for manslaughter or what but I remember the prosecution just torturing this woman. It was completely understood by all that she had been horrifically abused for years, that she was as timid as a church mouse and that she was horrified by what had happened. So, no one could understand why the prosecution was determined to make an example of her. I watched all this on the news every night and I thought, 'Well. If she had her time back she should have really done a job on him. Just went right to work on that bastard with that knife. She's taken such a shit-knockin from the court, she could at least have got some satisfaction from her crime.'

So all of these things and more got knitted up into *Offensive To Some*.

Kent Stetson / OFFENSIVE TO EVERYONE

There's a post-performance question and answer session as part of the NAC Atelier's new work format. A well-heeled patron from The Big House (the Atelier people's nick-name for the main-stage theatres) wanted to know why I had directed *Wanda* to puke and piss on stage. She thought it gratuitous and highly offensive. I told her despite the title, I thought it was my job to make the play offensive to everyone. I supported Berni's stated intention, to open people's eyes to cruelty, especially as exacted by the strong and privileged on the dispossessed.

I've known Berni since 1981. She was young and magnificent. She was and is shy and exquisite. She has a steel-trap mind and a heart of gold. She's tough and smart and courageous. She started out as an actress. I have photos of her from back then and bits and pieces of Tee Vee images, from CBC Tee Vee shows I had directed. Whether acting or writing, where others smoulder, Berni burns. I was delighted to be asked to dramaturge and direct her *Woman in a Monkey Cage*, the companion piece to *Offensive* a few years back. Donna Butt at Rising Tide Theatre in St. John's brought *Wanda* and me over to work on *Monkey Cage*. It was Gil Osbourne's love for *Monkey Cage* that brought the three of us together to work *Offensive* at The NAC.

Berni works toward drama from a comedic point of departure, and recognized that the stand up routine that gave rise to *Offensive* had great dramatic potential. Someone said, 'Comedy happens to someone else. Tragedy happens to you.' In this way, comedy is the flip-side of tragedy. If comedy erects a wall, then tragedy tears it down. In life, we generally seek circumstances that comfort, protect and unite us. Tragedy seeks the dangerous moment, where the ordinary, even the comic, is transformed and greater personal truths at once beautiful and horrendous emerge.

Offensive To Some evolved significantly from comedy to tragedy during the NAC sponsored October 1995 workshop at the LSPU Hall in St. John's. I was still dramaturge on the project at this point. Not yet

the director. So we set about examining the work's potential from a radically different point of view, continuing, in fact, the work that had begun that spring at the NAC's Page to Stage Festival where the transformation from stand up to tragedy began.

My notes from that period are sparse. We just put it on its feet and watched Wanda struggle with fluid, unformed text. When an artist of Wanda's calibre gets bogged down with dramatic non-action, I listen very closely indeed. I often tell Wanda that she has been and remains my greatest teacher, the person who has most contributed to my sense of craft, vision and wisdom in the theatre. Wanda is quite simply a great theatre artist. We don't collaborate. We elevate. We don't collude. We extrude — we force the text through our sensibilities. It is an intensely private and personal act for each of us. We work silently, often. I watch. Wanda turns herself inside out. She sandblasts her soul — and I — in the harsh light of the newly exposed personae.

Writers are the first to see a play. They watch it as they write it. Actors and directors escort it to the real world. We are not writers. The writer is the writer. We have no ownership. Only the playwright owns a play. I dramaturge and direct. A dramaturge's job is to ask questions, not provide answers. Wanda, Berni and I know our roles. We work extremely well together. We do not annoy each other overly. We alternate restraint and abandon, and move with power and respect through the mystery that is a new piece of theatre. Like a good marriage, faith, respect and admiration rule. Sometimes none of what I just wrote is true. Sometimes we get lost. Sometimes we get confused. Then we sit and wait, or leave the room. Or re-do something we already know works, just to keep working. Sometimes we are smart enough to say fuck it and go home.

Sometimes the writer's and actor's creative take on a subject are at absolute odds. When this happens, I try to translate to Berni or Wanda my vision, which is only speculative until one or the other confirms it. Misunderstanding on specific, minute details produces the few truly collaborative moments. The rest of the work is highly individual, separate artists practising distinct arts in territories clearly marked. When we know what it is, we work to make it real. More often than not, the disputed zone lies in the dual nature of heavily text-based theatre.

The literary element of theatre can mask performance. Berni's *Offensive* is part of an emerging body of Newfoundland neo-gothic work. I think in particular of elements of Bernice Morgan's novels *Random Passage* and *Waiting for Time*, and Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*. Berni's work is rich in image, symbol, metaphor and myth. Her dramatic scope is extraordinary. Her work is dense and deeply felt, her observations as potent as her ability to characterize.

Literature is inspired speculation and hard craft. Theatre is story telling, the spoken word, hard craft and drama. The essence of drama is action — physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual action. My job was to bring all of this to the stage, with minimal interference and maximum, minute inclusion of all the elements that comprise that greatest of mysteries, the writer's literary and dramatic vision — poetry in motion.

I learned a couple of important things, from Berni's text and Wanda's struggle with it. This work moves like a dream through the real and the nightmare worlds of the socially disconnected, spiritually intense Woman. I began to ponder the geography of the play, that is where do things real and imagined happen to this character? There were no stage directions to speak of, beyond the idea of a jail cell, a toilet and a bed. But still, an abundance of geographic information lies buried at various levels in the text.

The woman's mind was formed by Newfoundland culture. To a significant degree, her imaginative and emotive landscapes were formed by American television talk shows — maybe to an even larger magnitude than by her immediate surroundings, the bays, coves and beaches of Newfoundland. How do we realize this split? Do we stay in the jail cell? Is this too limiting? I felt so, especially since we'd play the NAC. The technical facilities and craft support are of the highest quality — a director's dream. I wanted to use it to full advantage.

I presented multiple dilemmas to Gil and the technical staff. How do we evoke the natural world in this doubly unnatural setting — a jail cell on a theatrical stage? Do we want Tee Vee images on stage? A camera trained on the Woman for the audiences' benefit and her self-glorification? How pitiful to aspire to talk show stardom, until the fact is absorbed that talk show reality shaped her escape and confirmed her survival strategy. Is she really a guest on an American talk show?

No. Well, yes. So, what are the physical parameters implicit in the text? How should these be made manifest in a real (ie, physical) theatre?

First and foremost, the jail cell: this woman is incarcerated, physically restricted. Is this real or imagined? Both. We were inventing a form, crossing from an actor in tights and one light to a world to a fully realized non-realistic set — which was very real indeed. I decided to suspend judgement. Learn more. She talks about the beach, had fun on the beach, experienced the pull on her young consciousness of the beach's open mysteries. So in production, the play needed open space.

In the text, elevated spaces hold great power: Sylvie's gallows, the turtle/rock, and the attic where she locked the kids when physical violence threatened. And the bed where she and David slept, recovered from their brutalities and made love — where was it? Upstairs?

Enclosed, elevated, interior, expansive — the geographical territory of the play.

Berni knew about all this, of course, because she wrote it. Wanda and I had to discover it. And when we did, we took it back to Berni and together sought to discover how to render it dramatically and physically. Wanda, with the actor's facility to demonstrate concepts immediately, imbued her reading with wind and sea, cramped impatience, and the view from high places. Berni kept working the threads of the text, weaving elements of plot and story to natural and unnatural, expected and surprising ends. How did the Woman relate to her children? We knew she didn't like to be touched, and recoiled from her children's normal physical needs to be close to her as her mother had recoiled from her. She was often wounded, afraid her children would open more than the fresh wounds inflicted by David. Was he the only monster in the piece? How did she relate to her mother, another kind of monster who would rather send her back to her abuser than protect her? And when she killed, who exactly was she killing? Only David? Her mother? Her childhood self? The adult victim she had become? The fetus in her womb? David's child? Could this blind little turtle grow to be a monster?

How, exactly did she kill David? We knew early on she had a queer full feeling in her stomach. So we could guess. Clearly slicing and dicing was involved. Several murder methods came and went. Berni

settled on a straight razor finally, because we knew there was a lot of blood and she did say she carved him up. In retrospect, I wish we'd gone a step further and discovered what a Newfoundland audience member at the NAC Atelier suggested: a gutting and filleting fish knife. Perfect. Next time, eh Berni?

So, the demands of text and dramatic action became clear. A confined woman must make an extraordinary journey. In consultation with the NAC technical director David Ship and set designer David Vivian, the play was set on and under a fish stage in a coastal town out around the bay. The posts that hold these flimsy looking structures, which are tough beyond belief, formed a loose kind of prison, the floor of which is washed twice daily by the tide. All kinds of trash washes in and out with the sea. Man made junk. And natural sea stuff. Primal stuff. Dead things, like big old turtles. And people throw stuff over the side of fish stages like they do over wharfs in the rest of the world. Society's detritus, life's ebb and flow.

With this extraordinarily freeing concept, Wanda went wild, and I went with her. We bashed and thumped, wept and hollered, danced sung and cursed our way toward what we experienced as the Woman's truth. And Berni seemed to like what we were doing. So we did more of the same. We made the show beautiful and offensive to look at; we made it a pain and a pleasure to listen to; we made it a gift unrepentant, a slap in the face, a kiss on the lips and a nose breaking punch, and the loveliest coitus imaginable. It was tender and offensive. I really liked it. Wanda was having a field day. Berni said she liked it. I thought, as Wanda spoke it, we are making art.

We had what we needed — self imposed isolation, contact with an outside world devoid of other people (it is a one woman show) and a naturally imposed dynamic and rhythm set by the coming and going of the tide. Like the tides in the woman. The tides from which she draws her strength. The spiritual thrust of the no-holds-barred play rode geography, emotional landscape, performance and the elation and despair of flat out performance.

The Woman wrapped herself in things cast up by the sea and in the roles society and the playwright demanded of her — wife, mother, daughter, murderer, victim. At the very back of the set was the out-flow of a derelict sewer system, a kind of grim wet cave with swinging bars

to which the woman in her worst moments of horror remembered and imagined retreated. There were hanging pipes with running water, left over from the days when fish were cleaned above. Here she cleansed herself. Fish boxes and a stained, discarded mattress made her bed.

A ladder scaled the twelve foot structure, on top of which she carved up the monstrous David. Here too she was arrested, brutalized by the society with images lifted from the women's prison riots at Kingston a year or so back. This was Sylvie's gallows, in sight of a downstage right structure which served as the turtle/rock and her own personal Golgotha. The play began to work in this visual world. Everything the woman needed was there. What was not evoked was suggested. What could (or should) not be made manifest — ie, TeeVee appearances with Oprah *et al* were left where such mysteries reside naturally in the theatre.

Theatre, finally, takes place in the imagination of the individual audience member. The best we can do is lay ground-work, provide rhythm and context, wind up the drama 'till the springs and coils are tight, tight, tight then set it loose in front of complete strangers with whom we have at least one thing in common — our frail, determined, unrepentant humanity. I like text-based theatre because so much has to happen in the mind, first for the playwright, then the production team, then the contemporary audience member. The audience or reader somewhere in the future can look on the page or at some stage and imagine what happened — in the premiere of Berni's lovely, offensive play — between the opening and closing lines: 'Bunch of Cocksuckers' and 'Kiss me arse.'

Wanda Graham / EXCERPTS FROM AN ACTOR'S JOURNAL

OTTAWA December 27, 1995, National Arts Centre

Began rehearsals on *OFFENSIVE TO SOME*. The first place I am led is the turtle. Inside the cycle of life-death-life — the turtle and woman hand in hand — hand in flipper? My friend. Not just the shell that hides the vulnerability, but a place in the process of life. I need the turtle.

Struggle to remember a time before. Why this happened to me. A moment of lucidity. Looking for the truth about me. To society I look. You made me, I throw it back to you. Waiting. And the struggle to know. If I lived in a society where I could confess to these visions would it have been different?

December 28

I want a doll.

Kent has allowed for line work everyday. I love him for that. He has assured me I will get whatever I need. Just his saying that has taken so much pressure off. He recognizes the responsibility.

I had a vision today: touching every chair in the house repeating "Love me. I am the way." This woman has the soul/spirit of a goddess.

ACCUMULATE. Building. The story winds all over time, the dramatic action coils like a breaker. Lifting this thing off the stage. Thank God there is an intermission. To fly off that rock, and then fly off that rock.

Understanding my "totem" image: in the play, in my art and my life. It is a gift. Why can't I accept that. It is taboo.

December 30

Avoiding, in a semi-conscious way, doing the prelude. Where I start, where I go from there.

Sylvie. We part ways. Wonder why? Is it a rejection? A cultural thing. Groping here. Sylvie's legacy vs My legacy . . . why will my story inspire? Are we doomed to repeat this story forever? There is a rhythm in rehearsing a one person show. The lines. The blocking. The lines, the life. The lines. The pace.

Mention a place where I stick. It is the only one in the play. I have tried things to slide over it but the character stops here for me. Same thing every time. There is a joke here.

January 2

There are a lot of props. I am constantly moving and touching props. Building an environment and then taking it apart. Somehow this begins to reveal the through line of her thoughts, her sense of plot for the story she is telling. I don't remember conscious decisions being made. They happen. They are instinct. When I take off the pants and shirt in Act Two I am the bad girl released, the goddess out of her shell, not the pain of Act One but the victory of Act Two. I don't remember the STEPS.

January 4

The doll is here. She becomes my witness She is broken too.

January 5

When I stop to take a breath Kent gives me something to do. I breathe secretly. Places he hasn't noticed. The breathing in this piece, gusts of air from the belly. Whole paragraphs of love and hate and anger and hurt. That turn into waves that weave . . .

I imagine the play in fast forward. I think my running around, up and down, would exhaust a basketball player. I like the second act because

I get to sit on the toilet and smoke for a few minutes.

It is the waiting that bugs her. Her love for this guy is formidable. A woman's love. Kent and I keep thinking Medea. The landscape, inside and out. The responsibility this woman takes for her children. It is ghastly to think she killed her children. We don't want to deal with it at the table. I feel like she has, and the secret lies locked away somewhere, too difficult for her to deal with. For me it is the clue to her suicide. She is a woman, thrown out of society, reverting to ancient understanding — mothers had the responsibility to decide when something should live and should die. Woman pivoting between domestication and savagery.

I wish we had the time to explore, improvise. I don't want her to hide this as a secret. I want to investigate, (to my own horror) the replay of the events that morning. I feel the truth would come out of her, not in words maybe, in her hands. Her power. How would the audience react. In St. John's it was not taken that seriously, dismissed by some. "She left them in the attic." It is a moving story now, but could they understand and love her for her sacrifice, her sense of responsibility? Could they be outraged, shocked and then love? She is extraordinary? Medea yes! Conjuring philosophy and redemption from the horizon and beach detritus.

January 12

Berni reminds people this interpretation comes from Kent and I. She has watched/let us take over her play. We are certainly living in it. I want to think about how she would do it, but not now.

January 15

We still have not rehearsed the shower scene. There are three different takes on it. When it comes up Berni gets a dry tight look around the eyes and Kent's shoulders sag a little. I feel like I've been play acting through it waiting for a decision. What are we doing? We go for lunch. Each talks. I feel it is the most private moment in the play. She has shut the outside dream off. The only reason she would look as she

does at herself is if she could control the moment. She actually slips out of her shell, puts her magic down. Either Berni likes what I have said, or we're too exhausted, but the decision is made. By the cash register we have a group hug, and are given a dirty look by the waitress. I don't care. It is the first hug I have had in a long time. It's a great warm hug because we all have heavy coats and hats on.

January 16

DRESS REHEARSAL: No audience. The fifth run in a row into an empty room.

The designer showed up backstage after. Sat in the chair beside where I was slumped. Assumed my body position, and without a word let me know how the show had affected him. For at least ten minutes we sat together in silent draining.

A PRESS INTERVIEW: Berni and I face the press. I am shit-baked and can't think. We are into working 10 hours of 12 and I am trying to remember something. They want a piece from the show. I get the script. I talk about this play as a revolution. I like talking about it that way. I know there won't be a revolution. That the change will happen quietly and slowly. But the theatre is powerful. Berni demands attention. We could start a revolution. I feel it.

OPENING NIGHT: Felt like I was preparing for the battle of my life last night. Checked myself out for courage, knowledge and fear. I was scared. Terrified. It is terrifying. I wanted to lie on the floor and cry. I felt so, empty and stupid. And that's what I am in the real world right now. I am empty and stupid. I don't know where "I" am. It's hard being away from the theatre like this. In spite of the loneliness, I need to be there. Its familiar spaces. And through rehearsal I have made an effort to keep the play in the theatre, to not bring it across the threshold of my apartment. But last night the only thing to do, to get any sleep, was to fill myself with her and the words and let my mind go.

Very excited all day. Bought presents, saw the poster all over town.

POST-SHOW: The audience loved the show — of course it was a lot of

friends, NAC types, and other theatre artists. But they laughed. It was wonderful. When they laughed I knew it would be easier to kill him. And more fun to shock them. Three Newfoundlanders in the audience. Ray Penton said the most amazing thing: "You were like the ocean. Just when I thought you had ebbed you would come at me again. Relentless. Sometimes you reached right inside and I thought you were going to pull my heart out."

I feel like the ocean. But didn't realize it. It's on such a primordial level this piece.

Forgot to touch the audience seats. Don't feel jinxed. It's something I need to do though. As if I can make the "exchange" of theatre happen, set it up off the top.

At the party the designer showed me his present to Kent — a bag of fresh mackerel. He wondered whether Kent would like it. I told him to put it away, to wait for an appropriate moment. (The moment never came. The bag of fish stayed in the fridge for days.)

January 26

What a run! I could actually relax into this and have fun. The end in place, I now know where I am going, the journey is mapped out.

I finally got a laugh tonight on what, for me, is the king-pin line of the play: "David used to come into Port de Grave to put the coke in the coke machines." Well it wasn't actually a laugh, a snort more — like, but it told me one woman out there understood.

After all the pressure I have put on me . . . I can't take what I do to me . . . I have this vision of what it is and I don't stop until I get there. I am exhausted. The crates. I am in good shape but they get heavier!

LAST SHOW: Kent is here. I would've liked to think that I could have delivered a special performance for him, one with all the elements and delights we'd talked about but I was so emotionally exhausted from this after 5 weeks the thought of "Make it a good one tonight"

makes me "hork." I have callouses on my calloused rage.

I am sick of the sound of my voice ringing in my ears. I need a night's sleep. I need a good roll in the hay. I wonder about a longer run. There is so much still too raw and unsettled. Thoughts.

Talked about the St. John's production. It hit Kent and I that it should be simple. As simple as Berni sets it up. But with all our work supporting that simplicity. Together we are "potent."

Offensive To Some was developed by the National Arts Centre English Theatre as part of the NAC Playwrights' Circle Programme. It was workshopped in Ottawa and St. John's NFLD with Berni Stapleton, Kent Stetson and Wanda Graham. Assistance in St. John's was provided by the R.C.A. Theatre Company.

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In the following excerpt from *Offensive To Some*, the character is known simply as The Woman.

Berni Stapleton / OFFENSIVE TO SOME

SCENE THREE. CONFINED SPACE. THE SHACKLES ARE OFF.

It runs in the family. There's a whole string of us, right? The first one we knows of was in eighteen-thirty somethin or other. Sylvie, her name was. She lived in Port-De-Grave too, if you wants to call it livin. Livin on the bay in that stink of salt fish and smoke. I should know. I grew up there too, right? So. Sylvie, she's fourteen and her husband's sixty. His first wife died havin, like, their thirteenth kid or somethin, so he went and got Sylvie. Men did that then, right? They could get two or three wives cause wives was always dyin from havin youngsters. So. This old geezer, he wants Sylvie cause she's right cute and young and she got this long pretty hair. But then once he gets her, he won't let her do nothin! Like, he won't let her play on the rocks, or run through the foam on the beach. It's not fittin, he says. He won't let her go out with her friends. It's not fittin. He won't let her wear no nice dresses and he won't let her braid no red ribbons into her long hair. It's not fittin. It's fittin for him to climb on top of her every night and stick his his thing into her, and her cryin and holdin on to her dolly until it's over. Then, one night, she goes and clocks him over the head with a big old geezly pipe iron. Now that, is fittin. She pitched his body over the wharf. Gave him to the sea.

OPEN SPACE

I knows all that cause I learned from the best. That's all mudder gets on with sometimes. 'Be good or ye'll end up like Sylvie! Be good or Sylvie will come and strangle ye with her noose!'

Yup. Sylvie got hanged, right? Oh yes my dear. They went and took her into St. John's and sentenced her to swing from the rope until she was dead. Sylvie fucked em up though. Turns out she was pregnant. So.

They lets her have the baby before they strings her up! Big hairy deal right? They keeps her locked up for the nine months, into a big grey stone place. The only company she got is her dolly and her red ribbons. She spends all of her days playin and braidin them red ribbons into her hair. Finally she haves the youngster. A girl. One hour after she haves the baby, in they comes to get her. 'Time Sylvie! It's time! Say goodbye to that youngster!' Sylvie picks up her daughter, and she puts this blessin onto her, and then she puts this curse onto her. Into one ear she whispers 'Listen to yer heart.' And into the other ear she says 'But don't go doin what it tells ya to do or ye're fucked!' And nobody knows which was the blessin and which was the curse! Way to go Sylvie!!

ELEVATED SPACE

Then they marches her off to the gallows. She's crippin along cause the afterbirth is still runnin right out of her, right? And there's this priest waitin for her at the very top of the steps. He says 'Does ye repent Sylvie? Does ye repent afore ye goes to burn fer all eternity into the steamin scaldin flames of hell?!' The crowd is all lookin up at the gallows, waitin and waitin to hear what that young girl says. She got red ribbons streamin down her back and red blood runnin down her legs. And the priest says 'Ask fer God's mercy child, on ye and yeres, repent afore ye swings!!' The crowd gets right quiet and Sylvie draws herself up right proud and she smiles right sweet-like. And she says, 'Kiss me arse.' She had a noose around her neck but she had them red ribbons in her hair.

OPEN SPACE

I always wanted a daughter. I was right disappointed when I had the boys. It's a queer thing too. Nobody says what happened to Sylvie's daughter. Now my boys is . . . they're great . . . just great. I likes to walk on the beach and dream about Sylvie. I'm like her. Born in me own grave. Port-De-Grave. Our beaches is not nice. Not like you sees on t.v. and stuff, on that-there Baywatch with sand and fucken life-guards runnin around. Our beaches is fulla kelp, Jesus that stuff stinks, and

dried up old jellyfish and stuff. I can't wait to get back on the beach. That's the first thing I'm gonna do when I blows this pop stand. I got this game I likes. The tide is comin in, here comes the waves b'ys . . . here comes one, here comes a big motherfucker, jump! Wicked! Yeah!! That's the first thing I'm gonna do. Fuck this for a game of cowboys.

David. That's me husband, David, he's not no ugly old geezer or nothin. Not like Sylvie's husband. David's really really handsome. He's dead too. Sylvie had the right idea. Givin her old man to the sea. I woulda give my old man to the sea too, only the sea woulda spit him right back out.

Dead stuff washes outta the sea all the time. Man. There's strange stuff under the water, right?

That's how come I don't know how to swim. I'm not goin swimmin around with no dead stuff. There's weird things in there, I'm tellin you! Like, one time, this giant turtle washes up on our beach! It's dead, right? It got a big bite taken out of its guts. It must weigh, like, three hundred pounds. I cried, right? I fucken bawled like a baby when I seen that big old dead turtle. There's stuff in the water we don't know nothin about. Secret stuff. Pretty stuff. Dead stuff. Dead pretty stuff. I loves pretty stuff cause I ain't pretty meself. Mudder says, 'Ye're a hard lookin old skeet ye are!'

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR. CONFINED SPACE.

I'm not no slut. I'm not no slut. I'm not no slut no slut no slut.

O.K. I'm a slut. When David seen me wearin me brand new spandex pants, he goes 'Only sluts goes around dressed like that!' That old slut in me was always poppin out, and I'd stuff it back down and then it

would pop out again and I'd stuff it back down and stuff it back down and stuff it back down. Hey! Oprah! That's how come I am the inspiration I am today! I let out me inner slut. I wants to inspire people to let out their inner slut!

I'm after learnin so much from you Oprah. I feels like I knows you all to pieces. I learned about how you lost all that weight. I mean, that's how come I'm educated so good, right? Cause I watches t.v. I'm, what-you-calls, self-educated, right? I wanted to go back to school and get me grade ten, but David said no good wife should be out goin around where men can look at her and stuff. He wouldn't let me do no home courses neither. Jesus, the kids is smarter at books than me. So I says, frig that! I watches you, and Phil and Regis and Kathy-Lee, don't *she* get on me nerves, and I watches Ricki and Gerry and all the rest. Sure ye talks about everythin. Ye are way better than books. I learns from the best! The way I figures it is, watchin Ricki Lake and Jenny Jones and that crowd is like goin to high school, and watchin you and Phil is like goin to college. And I'm some good student too. I watches t.v. every day from nine to three. David never found out.

Yeah, I seen how you lost all that weight. Maybe you could get me one of them-there make-overs? I'd love to look nice now that I'm famous. I went to aerobics one time, like you said, right? I didn't like it. I went in to me first aerobics class and I couldn't find the friggin ashtray! Hey Oprah! I believes in smokers rights. I got rights. When I feels the burn, I wants it to be from havin a smoke stuck in me face, not from havin to do nine hundred friggin sit-ups with me legs stuck up in the air. Them positions they makes you do ain't very lady-like. You know what I thinks? Aerobics is a lot like sex! Well, you looks a lot better goin in than you does comin out. And all that-there sweatin and rollin around and tryin to suck your gut in, wonderin if it's over yet. But at least after aerobics you haven't got to pretend it was the best class you ever had in your life! Right Oprah?! Anyway, I goes and drops five pounds just for to go on t.v. and Alma goes and tells me the camera adds fifteen pounds. Lord dyin frig!

Alma's next door. Don't look, she's lookin! O.K. now look. Ain't she

cute? She don't like nobody lookin at her. Alma says skinny people should be shot. She's after shootin up a whole buncha people but she never killed nobody or nothin, so she's not famous like me. She got it easy. She's one of them-there, what-you-calls, paranoid schizophrenics. What a fucken mouth full, right? Alma likes to talk, but the thing is, when Alma talks the fucken furniture talks back to her. Go figure. She's fucken nuts, right? That's the best way to be if you asks me. I don't hold it against her. She got a good excuse, right? Now me, they can't find nothin wrong with me. Man, they're tryin so hard to find somethin wrong with me they're goin cross-eyed with the strain.

They says I killed in cold blood Oprah.

Yeah, well . . .

Yeah. I killed in cold blood. I didn't even work up a sweat.

END SCENE FOUR.

SCENE FIVE. OPEN SPACE.

I'm a turtle.

Ye can't see me.

That big old dead turtle is lyin all big and dead and rotten and smelly and squishy on our beach. I climbs right up on top of his shell. I lies right down across it. The smell don't bother me none. We had to use the outhouse til I was twelve so I learned how to breathe through me mouth, right?

I'm lyin on top of that turtle. I'm thinkin, how grand to have a big mother-fucken thick shell. People is comin in from miles around to look at that turtle! Did you ever hear tell of a famous turtle? I'm lyin on top of that turtle thinkin, how friggin excellent to be famous. Hi! Hi! Hi! Oh yeah, I'm up on top of that turtle wavin at everybody and mudder is screamin at me to get down.

Now I am a turtle. Now I'm famous too! Except the turtle was dead.

And Sylvie is dead. What's the point of bein famous if you're dead?! I ain't dead. Am I?

David was a werewolf. Honest.

When he gets mad, he looks at me like I'm lunch. I locks the kids in the attic but I don't got no silver bullets. Oprah? A werewolf bit him and that's how come he turned out to be one too. I puts the kids in the attic. 'Be right good, like quiet little turtles.' Cause David says 'Make them youngsters shut-up or I'll fucken kill em!'

He hates me when I'm on me period. He thinks I has a period on purpose just so he can't have sex. No, he won't come near me when I'm on me period. He finds it offensive. I mean, it is offensive to some. I mean, you can pound in your wife's face til you drives her teeth right through her lips. You can stub out your cigar on her nipples. But you don't want to have to stick your thing into her when she's on her period.

My period is over. He starts howlin and I'm the moon. He's takin what he wants and he don't ask. He's sproutin hair and growin fangs and the kids is in the attic but I'm not, I'm not, I'm not I'm not I'm not-

'Please-God-just-let-him-hurry-up-and-finish-this-let-him-hurry-up-god-I-don't-feel-nothin-got-a-thick-mother-fucken-shell-don't-this-ain't-happenin-to-me-God-the-kids-is-in-the-attic-the-kids-is-in-the-attic-'

'I knows. I knows you didn't mean it. I knows. I'll get the kids and we can all go out for ice cream or somethin. Honey can I please get dressed now?'

One time he peeled off three of me fingernails cause I was wearin red nail polish.

'I knows! I knows I ain't allowed to wear no red nail polish! I won't do it no more! It's not fittin, right? Oh-God-don't-be-hittin me in the face! It, don't-don't-don't, it leaves marks! It's not fittin. It's not fittin

not fittin not fittin.'

It's O.K. Oprah. Look, see? Fingernails grows back. Sure, that wasn't nothin! You should see the nipples on me. I'd show em to you, only I knows this is a high class show. Probably I might show me nipples on Gerry Springer. It was me own fault. I bought him the wrong kind of cigars by mistake. Stunned see, that's me. I could get skin grafts, I knows, I seen it on rescue 911. But I don't want none. What do a big old turtle want with skin grafts? I never feels nothin. I got a big thick shell on me.

One time, oh ye'll get a kick outta this, right? One time I couldn't eat or breathe or sleep, the fear was stranglin me like a big noose, the fear in me while I waited for him to beat me up.

'I can't take this no more! Have a bit of pity! Come on! Come on come on come on! You wants to smack me, friggin smack me! I don't feel nothin! What, you wants a good reason today, do ya? Here! I'll give you a good reason. Here's your cuppa tea, all over the floor! You like that?! I was out to the mall today, trottin me fat arse around in me spandex pants, and men was lookin too! C'mon, take your best shot! Afraid you'll spoil me good looks are you?!'

Jesus. I couldn't walk for a week. I laughs now, when I thinks on it. That was the bravest I ever was in me whole entire life, and look what I wasted it on. You know Oprah, sometimes I'm me own worst enemy.

END SCENE FIVE.

SCENE SIX. CONFINED SPACE.

SHUT-UP! SHUT-UP! SHUT-UP!

I told you, I ain't talkin about that. I gotta right to keep me mouth shut, right? I gotta right to be silent, ain't that a fucken joke. Sure,

you're sittin in a house all day long watchin t.v., you forgets how to talk to real people, cause that t.v. don't talk back. If that t.v. talks back, well, then I guess you're Alma!

What, you wants to know all about me lousy childhood or what?

When I was born, I couldn't hold down milk, right? Mudder would feed me and me stomach and bowels would swell right up and I'd go into fits and throw up all over the place. So they gets the nurse to come in and she says I'm allergic to cow's milk, right? She says 'Don't give that infant no more cow's milk!' So, Fadder says 'Go on! That youngster is pure obstinate, that's all is wrong with her. She was born solid stubborn!' Fadder says 'We got no money for goin out gettin special milk! If she gets special treatment now, that's all she's gonna expect her whole life.' So. Cow's milk is what I got. It didn't matter how sick it made me, right? And I swear to God, by the time I was a year old I could hold it down! Did you ever hear tell of a child who could be so good as that! Mudder and Fadder was right proud of me.

Mudder and Fadder done what they knew how to do. They reared up me and me eight brudders and sisters. We all got a big filthy mouth on us. When you got eleven people in the one house you got to figure out some way to get your voice up above the crowd. Our house was always fulla cursin and swearin and laughin and shoutin and jokin and lotsa . . . you know, lotsa huggin and lovin and stuff. None of us kids never had to go in no attic.

END SCENE SIX.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

HILARY CLARK lives in Saskatoon and teaches English and Women's Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. She has published most recently in *Grain* and *The Capilano Review*, and has work forthcoming in *The Fiddlehead*.

SUSAN CREAN is a Vancouver writer. New Star recently published her latest book *Grace Hartman: A Woman for Her Time*, a union activist who supported the arts and whom Ms. Crean first met as a supporter of the now defunct SCM Book Room in Toronto.

MICHAEL CRUMMEY's first book of poetry is *Arguments With Gravity*, due out from Quarry Press in the summer of 1996. In 1994 he won the inaugural Bronwen Wallace Award for Poetry. Born and raised in Newfoundland, he lives in Kingston, Ontario.

WANDA GRAHAM is the founder of Playwrights' Atlantic Resource Centre and last year was Playwright in Association at Neptune Theatre, Halifax. She has an MFA from York University and teaches at Dalhousie University. In the spring of 1996 she attends the Banff Playwrights Colony, then performs with the Blyth Festival for the summer. In February 1997, her new play *BRAT* will receive its premiere by Neptune Theatre. She lives in Sambro, a tiny fishing village in Nova Scotia, with her husband and two sons.

SALLY ITO lives in Edmonton and teaches part-time at The Kings University College. She recently published her first book of poetry, *Frogs in the Rain Barrel*, with Nightwood Editions.

SYLVIA LEGRIS lives and writes in Saskatoon. Her poem "maternal: ma(e)ternal" is from her first book of poems, *circuitry of veins*, newly out with Turnstone Press. "bones almost discernible" is from her

chapbook, *ash petals*, forthcoming in Fall/96 with {m}Other Tongue Press (Salt Spring Island, BC).

PHILIP RUSSELL is a father and dentist living in Wells, Vermont. He studied writing at Brown University and received his MFA from Vermont College of Norwich University. Recent fiction is presented in *Blueline*, *Thema* and *The Wascana Review*. More work is upcoming in *Robin's Nest*, *Blueline*, *Wind* and *CrazyQuilt*. His stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, 1995, and his collection *Body and Blood* has been accepted as a semi-finalist in the Fiction Writing Fellowships Program by the Heekin Group Foundation.

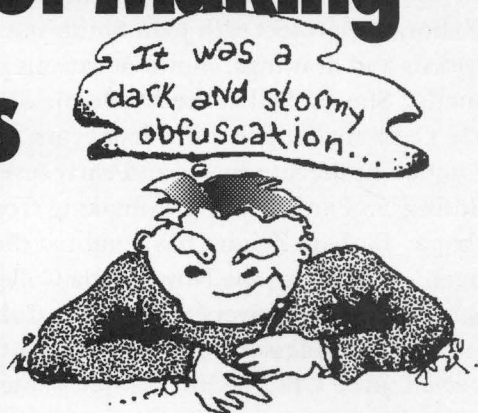
JOAN SMITH's work has been shown extensively in the metropolitan Vancouver area and has been featured in seven solo exhibitions since 1986. Her print, collage and three-dimensional paperworks have been included in numerous juried local and national exhibitions in Canada and international group exhibitions in Japan, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Peru, England, Finland, and the United States. Joan studied at the Vancouver School of Art, Capilano College, and the Banff School of Fine Arts, and received a B.F.A. degree from the University of British Columbia. Currently Joan is working in the Capilano College Printmaking Institute.

BERNI STAPLETON is a playwright/actor/comedienne who lives in Newfoundland. Her comedy has been heard on *Vicki Gabereux* and *Madly Off in All Directions* on CBC Radio. Her plays have been seen all over Eastern Canada, Ottawa, Toronto, New York and Ireland. Several have been adapted for television and radio.

KENT STETSON, a Prince Edward Island native, recently completed his tenure as Playwright in Residence at The National Theatre School in Montreal where he now resides. The author of seven plays, numerous radio dramas, film and television scripts, Mr. Stetson has amassed extensive directing and dramaturgy credits.

BARBARA ZEIGLER has been exhibiting prints and drawings nationally and internationally since the early 70s, with her prints having been in over 85 group exhibitions in Canada, the United States and abroad. The last major project completed before beginning work on the collaborative project with Joan Smith was the *Precarious Balances* series of prints and drawings, shown at various public galleries across Canada. She studied at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Munich, Germany for two and a half years, and at the Universität München in the late sixties and early seventies, and received a BFA in painting, and an MFA in printmaking from the University of Illinois, Urbana. Barbara Zeigler has taught at the University of Alberta, Queen's University, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and since 1979 at the University of British Columbia, where she is presently an Associate Professor in the Department of Fine Arts. Barbara has received three UBC/SSHRC grants related to the development of *Earthmakers*.

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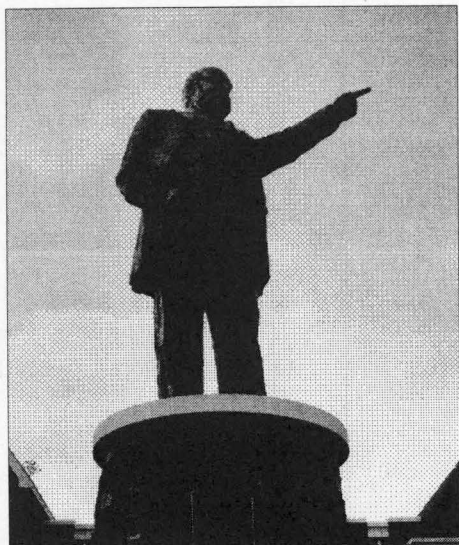
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