



*Seawall – W. H. Ballard, photographer
W. H. Ballard Collection, MDI Historical Society*



Island
Poets
&
Poems



Lucy Bell Sellers
Louisa Newlin
Meredith Hutchins
Carl Little
Philip Heckscher

Lucy Bell Sellers

On Listening to a Scholarly Lecture in Spring

He speaks, my sweet, of Merovingian kings
Which he, since but a youngster, here, has tracked
Around the labyrinth of doubtful truths
In that dark wood of controversial fact.

What are his kings to me that I should sit
And copy down the dates he thinks they died,
When I smell lilacs blooming in the sun
And all spring's robins call me to your side?

But what were they to him?
When he smelled lilacs, why did he not stray
Unless some vision which he thought he saw
Seemed sweet and bright and beautiful as they?

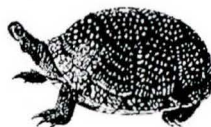
Can I presume to call his vision false,
A scholar's fantasy that I need not pursue?
I might, if I could manage to forget
Those kings heard robins too,
And having heard them died.

So I will sit and struggle toward that sun
That can turn kings, springs, and you and me to one.



The Turtle Rebuffed

"That's obvious," he said,
So she pulled back
And eyed him sadly from her painted shell.
However dull, it was a turtle's thought.
A fellow turtle might, for love, have listened well.



The Crabs

The waves are big today
But my small son,
Clinging with his toes like any monkey child
Hangs for dear life against my back and laughs
To find the sea so wild.

He fears the sea, all right,
Knows that it can
Batter you down until you're choking on the beach,
With half the seashore up your pants and in your eyes
And you too weak to clamber out of reach.

And then there are the crabs...
But they don't matter now,
And neither does the surf, for all my son could care,
High, warm and handsome on my back.
Such is his trust in me, when I am there.

Why I should have this trust, God only knows.
Don't drop me, God.
The waves are big.
The crabs nibble at my toes.

Noah

Did Noah navigate,
Charts spread about,
Heaving the lead on deck,
In dripping oilskins, scanning for stars?
Or did he stroll the bobbing ark
Beneath a striped umbrella,
Scratching the elephants' ears
And looking for the rainbow?

Louisa Newlin

Elegy for Lost Time

Where are the summers of yesteryear?
The voyage north in the family car,
The stop at my Aunt Anita's farm,
The sureness of being safe from harm?

Where are the flounder caught from the dock?
The glorious picnics out on the rocks?
My youthful parents laughing together?
The fireside reading in foggy weather?

The shingle cottage has long since sold
For dazzling bags of ill-got gold,
And then torn down to clear the grass
For a showy monster of stone and glass.

Huge new palaces loom on the shore,
A bank in the movie theater's place,
Instead of a barber, a sleek toy store,
Antiques in the former drugstore's space.

And what of the skinny girl in shorts,
Happily helmetless, pedaling fast –
What became of the me that was?
Everything changes and nothing can last.

The gulls still swoop through the morning sky,
The white-winged sailboats still fly by –
Transient, lovely, and seeming free –
And the hills descend right down to the sea.

But no matter how much I wish or yearn,
The summers that were can never return.

October 2005

Two Poems for a Friend

Cry, loon, cry.
We share the night,
And your lone wailing over an empty lake
Speaks for us all.

You did love heights,
So I, who feared them,
Followed you on to Brooklyn roofs
And mountainsides in Maine
To see you in your element of edges and of air.
Now you are dead,
And I, though still afraid, seek out the heights alone
To huddle by the drop
Remembering you.



Louisa Newlin and Lucy Bell Sellers have spent summers on MDI since childhood, although Lucy Bell has migrated from Northeast Harbor to Long Pond. They both grew up in Philadelphia and went to Radcliffe College.

Louisa went on to a Ph.D. in English, became an English teacher, and promoted an appreciation of Shakespeare through a number of imaginative programs in the D.C. area. She also taught Shakespeare at College of the Atlantic for four terms.

Lucy Bell was drawn into drama teaching, thanks to a two-year stay at an African secondary school where her husband, Peter, was the senior mathematics master. After many years at Philadelphia's Germantown Friends School, she now leads a fall theatre workshop at College of the Atlantic.

Meredith Hutchins

Bearings

Police Beat. The Times. Chronicle of straying wallets,
Stolen pets, summer cottage removals, noises in the night,
And the occasional odd item peculiar to our remarkable geography.
For instance: Apprehended on a Saturday afternoon,
Two middle-aged ladies found trespassing on Seal Harbor estate.
Claimed they'd been to tea at Jordan Pond and missed their turning,
Climbed a hill to have a look around and were intercepted,
Caught on the bricked terrace by the second assistant gardener.

“They said they'd lost their bearings. They didn't act perturbed,
Resting there on the stone bench, comfortable as you please.
Like those roly-poly Buddhas that Taj Mahal the gardens,
Staring at the Atlantic, the Cranberries,
Swans Island, Southwest Harbor and the Sound.
Best view on the island, right before their eyes.

“They were trying, they said, to find their way back.
(If you ask me, they were in no hurry.)
One, the taller, maybe younger by a bit,
She had blue eyes you couldn't help but notice,
Regretted that their footprints had disturbed the graveled walks.
The other thought the prospect the finest on the coast,
And did I see it often? If so, I was the privileged one.
(Well, I know that, but I don't have to tell.)”

Subjects driven in pickup to where they'd left their car
Beside the public road and cautioned not to deviate
Hereafter, but keep to the clearly marked paths.

Winner of *The Bar Harbor Times'* poetry contest,
published February 9, 1989

Inheritance

This chest of drawers I'm painting
Must be nearly fifty years old.
Father built it from scraps of wood
And painted it green, his favorite color.
For years it stood beside the kitchen door,
Top drawer stuffed with mittens. Then,
Re-painted brown, it was moved to a
Bedroom to hold underwear and socks.
Age has assigned it a seasonal
Patronage, here in the summer cottage,
Where annually I do a bout of
Unskilled maintenance and repair.

I have no bent for building and painting,
Unlike the rest of my family.
They shingled roofs, varnished trim,
Fixed cars, built boats. A practical
People, none of them wrote poetry.
Except... there was some distant cousin,
Too peripheral to have a name,
Who'd sometimes join the men
Around the stove in grandfather's shop.
They always spoke of him with a laugh,
And could only recall the preface
That attended his recitations,
How every time he'd begin by saying
He'd found this poem in the road.

First published in *The Bar Harbor Times*, January 4, 1990



Meredith Hutchins is a native of Mount Desert Island where her family has lived for over 200 years. A former director of the Southwest Harbor Public Library, she lives with her husband in Southwest Harbor. She is interested in local history and currently volunteers as curator of the library's old photograph collection. She has published essays, short stories and poetry in *Down East*, *The Maine Times*, *Food Arts*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *The Bar Harbor Times* and *The Islander*.

Carl Little

Somesville Invitation

The gently sloping Japanese bridge
is hard to resist, from any angle.
Today the arc and its reflection

in slightly filmy water
form a long oval of invitation,
like an odd-shaped mirror glimpsed

through piled furniture at an auction –
an opening to another world.

Leaning over the rail my daughter and I

can see what we'd find: a brown streambed
with weeds bent by the flow; no fish;
ducks pursuing their food search

in the reeds. It's true we're all looking
for something, in the woods, in water,
under sofa cushions; call it

the glint of good fortune. Meanwhile
bridges help us get over things
or simply provide a shortcut to school.

Emily wants to traverse the ice-creaky planks
again and again, hoping for magic,
trolls and the like, but I tell her,

wisely I think, that we've got to get
to know this stream-leaper a lot better
before we can expect such wonders.

Yet this temptation in the landscape
already has us where it wants:
helpless and heartened in its narrow hold.

When I Think of Elvers

I think of the self,
of the eel in me,
the glass eels in all of us,
and I think of Presley
at Graceland, his hips
wriggling into the hearts
women opened to him, fragile,
like the fyke nets that lead
tiny elvers into ice boxes
marked "Japan" where raw fish
slips down eager throats,
salty stuff from the Maine Gulf,
forty bucks a pound for eels
that otherwise would end up
in Somes Pond's muddy bottom,
food for something bigger, 'cause
there's a chain, at the top of which
we stand, skin shiny with sweat,
the effort of the harvest,
making our elver living,
our lives tied to muslin nets
drying in the spring sun
along the banks by the library
where books are free for the taking,
like these transparencies called elvers,
"a variant of *eelfare*, 'the passage
of young eels up a river,'"
or a stream as silver as this one,
filling pockets on the tides,
in the moonlight, slipping
through my fingers in the bad dream
I sometimes have of eels,
of Elvis and of selfish, selfish me.

When I think about my life

- From *Dreams and Destinies* by Marguerite Yourcenar

I behold again a few strolls
Beside the sea, a nude little girl
In front of a mirror, some
Scattered gusts of pitiful music
In a hotel corridor, a bed, a few trains
Whose speed crushed the countryside,

Venice at dawn, Amsterdam
Beneath the rain, Constantinople
At sunset, the lilacs of the Rue
De la Varenne, someone dying,
Roaming the halls of a clinic
In a fur-lined cloak, the red box
Of a theater, a young woman

Whose face turned all mauve
Because she was standing under
A violet-colored lamp,
The calcined hills of Greece,
A field of daffodils in the countryside
Near Salzburg, a few dismal streets

In the old northern towns
Where my sadness paced at set times
Before the shop fronts
Of corn chandlers or dealers
In bootblackening, the grand basin
At Versailles beneath a weighted sky
Of November, a camel stall

Filled with animals munching
Blood red melon, a parting
Near a subway entrance, a hand
Holding an anemone,
The sweet sound of the blood
In beloved arteries, and

These few dozen lightning flashes
Are what I call my memories.



*Marguerite Yourcenar – LaRue Spiker,
photographer. Spiker Collection, MDI
Historical Society*

“When I Think of Elvers” and “Somesville Invitation” appear in Carl Little’s latest book, *Ocean Drinker: New & Selected Poems* (Deerbrook Editions, 2006). “When I Think of Elvers” originally was published in *Puckerbrush Review*; “Somesville Invitation” first appeared in *The Bar Harbor Times*.

The passage from *Dreams and Destinies* by Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-87) was translated by Donald Flanell Friedman. Carl Little has restyled the passage as a “found poem.” Yourcenar, author of historical novels, essays, poetry, and short stories, was born in Belgium and lived for many years on Mount Desert Island.



Philip Heckscher

At Madam Yourcenar's

The lawn is still in twilight,
But in front the house is deeply shaded and
Lowers beneath its eaves.
Nancy gives the bell a pull
And steps neatly,
Not looking back,
Into another world.

Madam draws a shawl around her head,
Feeds the dog from her plate,
And chats of village life before retiring.
Innocent of history, Nancy sees
Books, letters on the desk, a testament –
And looks away.
The street outside seems curiously remote.
No one will call.
She too goes to bed.

Dusk has settled on the house, and
Time. It darkens and contracts.
The past gathers more densely here
 than on adjacent lots.
Now sleepless Hadrian grieves,
And highroads of the Old World, wild and rutted,
Converge upon this spot.

Philip Heckscher sometimes dropped off his friend Nancy McCormick at Madam Yourcenar's home in Northeast Harbor in the evening, where she would stay overnight to look after Yourcenar. The third to last line is a reference to Yourcenar's masterpiece *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951), which she completed while living on Mount Desert Island. This poem first appeared in *Mr. Armstrong and Other Poems*, High Loft, Seal Harbor, Maine, 1986, edition of 100.

Pine Dance
Mount Desert Island

Only the sleeper who'd watch and wake
Will see the pines on a moonlit night
In silhouette on the scintillant sea,
Dance for the whole Earth's sake.

Extending their boughs ecstatically,
They circle and turn like shamans
 in trance,
Making a sound like silk in the air,
Dancing their dervish dance.

Turning and turning
In the moon's slow burning,
They tap a force from the rock at
 their roots
And send it up in the night –

Not for the poet, his grief or delight,
Nor for the watcher awake;
They dance for the whole Earth's sake.



*Fog at wharf, Southwest Harbor – W. H. Ballard
W. H. Ballard Collection, MDI Historical Society*