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SHORT AND THE LONG OF IT

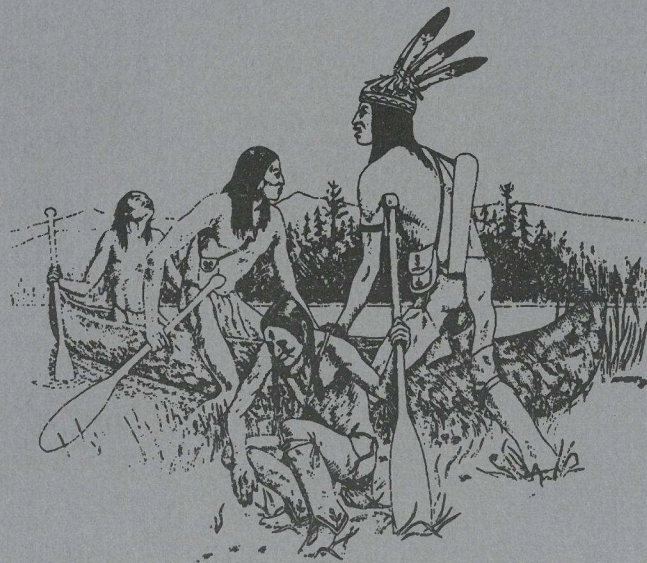
*New Poems*

*By*

MAURICE KENNY

NATIVE AMERICAN CHAPBOOK SERIES

NUMBER 2







## CREDITS

*Abraxas*  
*Adirondack Life*  
*Akwesasne Notes*  
*Calapooya Collage*  
*The Phoenix*  
*Renegade*  
*Summer Arts* (Essex County Arts Council)  
*The Signal*  
*Chrysanthemum*

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## THE SHORT AND THE LONG OF IT

*New Poems*

*By*

**MAURICE KENNY**

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NUMBER 2

PUBLISHED BY  
AMERICAN NATIVE PRESS ARCHIVES  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

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PS  
3561  
E49  
S46  
1990

For Peg Roy  
and the kids of Tamarack, Cedar  
and Hemlock Houses of NCCC

DATE DUE			
SEP 1 2017			
SEP 1 2018			

THIS BOOK MAY BE  
RECALLED BEFORE ITS  
DUE DATE

MAR 10 1992

PART ONE  
IN THE VINES

IN THE VINES  
For Oakley in Wisconsin  
At Oneida Nation

voices/  
he heard voices  
painted on the belly of the bridge  
over Duck Creek  
he knew they were a people/  
nation

voices talking of the vines  
of wild strawberries  
crawling along the creek edge  
of the white/pink trilliums  
spattering the wood's floor. . .  
snows of spring

a voice urging him to tramp  
the ferns and mosquitos of the woods  
looking for dinosaur eggs  
large as Olmec head sculptures

he knew their haunts/  
voices/ writings  
and we sat below the bridge listening/  
listening  
and all I heard were the scrawls. . .  
"I love Kim" and "B.I.A. go home"

he asked what they said  
he knew they were a people/ nation  
stranger amongst strangers  
perhaps lost/ hungry/ wounded

how could I explain. . .



his hands were so fragile  
how could I tell him who they were. . .  
he was a spring blossom himself  
how could I bring heart-break  
to his fantasy/ his boy smile  
his six years as he sat anxious  
believing and listening  
as the berry vines curled  
around his ankles and wrists

INDIAN RIVER  
PHILADELPHIA, N.Y.

Between rivers and vermillion sumac  
three white crosses at the road

after Al and I have talked the night  
halloween released spirits and poetry

riding down to the American Airlines  
teaching job in Oklahoma

I said good-bye again  
(so many times)  
to mountains and to men  
(Ernie and Florence  
discovered  
in the university motel  
her "strawberries"  
his "greeting")

three white crosses  
at the edge  
of a broken road  
between sumac bushes  
and Indian River

where is the oak

the tree of my father's dreams  
(or does he dream  
or wander still  
this rolling country)

north here, north  
of sumac  
and, now, morning

sun strikes  
the crosses  
I pass this November day  
on Greyhound  
sumac berries paint  
sky/boy  
Indian River moves to the sea

what will it be  
it be  
when I come here again

"CITATION"  
At St. Lawrence University  
(Thinking of Al Glover)

burial  
old ghosts  
whining from the past  
hands reaching out  
to greet  
cautious smiles  
remembering, often,  
terrible things  
boy-hood pain growing  
reticence  
blood on the lip and heart

black night on the jaw

my father standing there  
grinning  
a tooth missing in front  
his tongue trying to cover up the gap  
hands deep in his trouser pockets  
later,  
no, earlier,  
Mama leading his Chevy  
through winter and blizzard  
gripping a kerosene lantern  
to show the dead road  
(my father gripping the wheel)  
home to grandma's coffin

whiteness of day  
pall on the brilliant shine  
sun touching Louie's cheek  
Al's chin  
university chapel ringing bells  
as black robed professors  
priest-chant across the green

there stood Stewart and Alex  
Angus' aura  
river moving  
boats chopping cold waters

dream me back to ghost arms  
dream me back to open fields  
autumn smoke lifting off bare branches  
dream me back to hickory nuts  
bare-back riding the blind horse  
gathered in childhood hands  
Aunt Ruth laughing at our giggles  
dream me back, dream me back

into ghost arms

Mama angry in blizzard and storm  
winter as cold as these new-born ghosts

## PRAYER FOR PHILIP DEERE

In The Sierras

four directions  
four winds

we sat  
huddled near corn-grinding holes  
four heads bowed below the sun  
in prayer

sun burnt faces browned  
winds blew loose hair  
to the four directions  
in the four winds

sun was there  
moon  
stars waited for darkness  
waters shimmered blue in the lake  
the great granite rock held  
four figures

to the east  
to the south  
to the west  
to the north

winds blew  
yellow, red, blue, black  
green mountains towered behind us  
bluejays danced  
ground-squirrels and swift black lizards  
darted in and out of holes in the earth  
in the distance children were playing  
a rowboat plied the metallic waters



(two women sat drinking beer on the path)

to the east

she spread the red blanket

to the south

she drew out the pipe

to the west

she gave the pipe tobacco

to the north

she lit and raised the pipe

passed

again, and once more

passed once more again

to the winds, waters, sun and the moon

to stars, clouds, night and to day

to fish, birds, deer hiding in brush

to laughter of the children

(to the two women squatting on the path)

to blackberry bush ripening in blossom

to the great oak fastened to golden hills

to earth tightly gripped in the fist

to Mother Earth

four burnt faces, burnt brown by sun

brown by blood of ancestry

four winds

which had long ago

scooped out

corn-grinding holes in the rock

leaving them to cup sun or rain,

for pounding acorn or green corn

fresh from harvested fields

she raised the pipe

bluejay sang

she raised the pipe

lizard flicked his tail

she raised the pipe

to the winds

four bowed heads burning brown

beneath the sun

jimson opened to flower

bees gathered

verbena stretched to the lake

birds gathered clouds passed overhead

sun passed through

lake water sparkled

fish swam free

she raised the pipe

prayers ascended into the sky

in all directions

to four winds

east, south, west, north

to sun, moon, water, earth

she raised the pipe

silence

fell upon the afternoon

bluejay ceased singing

lizard held tight his raised tail

ground-squirrel's eyes peeped across the entrance

oak did not waver in the stilled breeze

light fallen upon the lake water

mirrored the great flow of rock

as sun watched moon rise in the sky

green mountains stood in beauty

quiet

datura closed petals

silver harden on the lake water

magpie stopped chattering

as hawk wheeled across the endless sky

shot with the burst of scarlet sunset

as thunder rolled

in the far, far

distance

## HEARD POEM\*

Wisely,  
I  
did not  
eat  
the  
crackers.

\*M. Kenny to Maureen Owen  
in a Lake Placid, N.Y.  
restaurant. Spring '88.

## POSTCARD

Framed  
    (Currier & Ives)  
    it stands the rigors  
of winter  
dressed in jackets of snow  
settled within the bosom  
of the mountains  
at the side of a lake  
  
pine aroma  
    ageing flesh  
and ageing buildings  
one blue and balconied  
historic on the hill-side street  
    (for sale)  
caught my eye  
    and pause  
and I'd coffee at Alice's Restaurant  
where I could see the blue  
building better  
and smell bear and fox

not far beyond  
in the mountain wood  
in green winter woods  
carved out by wind and snow  
green as any dream

but the postcard  
with many greetings  
the emergency hoot  
at all hours  
sounding fog  
(or ship horns of fog)  
far from any sea  
and the ancient  
J. J. Newberry Co.

    the only one  
left in the world  
probably  
dressed holiday  
sold funny things  
you can't buy in big cities,  
or Yum Yum Tree  
with chocolate truffles  
    windowed  
filling the street  
with o those smells  
sweet and tempting and fattening  
with Mary's smile and Peg's  
candy tease  
and the ladies come for tea  
to peck at gossip  
Norine to smoke  
Cathy to coffee  
get a look at me  
pony-tailed stranger  
in a strange country

postcards  
I mailed off



hundreds  
to friends and family  
of bears  
at Onchiota  
and hawks  
lakes  
and burning mountains  
leaves like lemon-drops  
and limes and dollops of blood  
(Dierdre said)  
licked  
hundreds of 14 cent stamps  
as now I mail off this card

but you can't know  
Yum Yum  
nor Dewdrop  
nor Pendragon  
nor the Java Jive  
until you've seen them framed  
in their setting,  
or the

"good morning, stranger"  
as you pay for the *Times*  
to get the world news  
which you don't need  
anymore

you have become a figure  
in the tourist postcard  
see, see

there you are!  
leaning against the old hotel  
see, see

the one in blue wool hat  
and the blue tennis shoes  
you have melted  
like wax  
blown into the scene  
blown glass

from the artist's flute  
yes,  
"nice to see you"  
nice to see that you are  
a minute color beneath the gloss  
yes, that's you, you  
the lady is speaking to you  
"have a nice day"  
"I'm so happy to see  
you in the paper"  
Ms. Dudley was wont to say

a line drawn into  
the scene  
framed in holiday, festival  
and snow  
can't you hear bells ringing  
the old man standing  
before the downtown library  
why, he's ringing bells  
bells, bells, bells  
before the empty lot  
where the movie house was destroyed in fire  
(and now rebuilt)

and snow  
falls on his bells  
and the ringing ceases  
muffled  
is carried off by the winds  
or the night descending  
thick and dark  
on the village  
moving slowly onto the lights  
as if some great animal  
an enormous bear, perhaps  
moved out from the winter woods  
to enfold you  
in dreams

(a dog barks in the town hills  
a taxi moves through swirls  
    of wind  
a lone student ambles down the street  
muffler tossed about the throat  
its redness brightening the sky  
towards laughter throbbing Main Street  
the fog horn and a babe wail. . .  
"nice to see you"  
the dog barks once more)

    in dreams  
is that what it was  
a dream, nothing  
more than a dream  
interlude  
(tamarack, cedar, hemlock  
dipped in chocolate  
    a truffle)  
flute notes of wind  
blowing through birch boughs  
and cedar  
    cedar sing over my mother's grave  
will it sing to me  
over mine  
    stranger stalking  
    then, now, forever, maybe  
the village streets  
    winter wind and snow  
aroma of pine and bear  
chilled to the bone  
will cedar sing over mine  
  
as I drop this in the post box  
I'm in hopes you will  
receive it by Thursday

P.S.

I forgot  
to mention  
Robert Louis Stevenson  
wrote fiction  
    (and poems)  
here

A VILLAGE IN THE HIGH PEAKS OF THE ADIRONDACKS

### WINTER'S END

mush

### WALKING WOODS WITH DOGS AFTER A SNOW FALL

A green pristine only a miracle could devise  
green color of lake water  
billowed in foam  
    foam of snow  
And, odd, high on a naked tamarack  
a banana peel dangles in forest light  
some bird will supper

English setters pounce through the banks  
noses rutting the fluff  
    tails snapping  
against a sapling birch  
    barks echoing

Spruce sags and white pine under snow  
    your  
shoulders deep in mystery of thought  
end of the year soon to replace holiday

You cannot see the mountains. . . Marcy or Whiteface



through the green needles, yet they are collecting  
winter on shoulders, too  
You cannot hear loons

                  lakes and ponds frozen to flight  
Yet they are there with bear snoring into spring  
raccoon plotting the dangling banana peel  
deer quietly waiting the setters

                  leave  
and the crunch of your heavy boots  
skunks trailing the scent of dog meat on your hands

Have you dropped bread on the snow for swallows  
                  or

your own return  
Setters, too, can lose the way in blizzards  
as snow covers track and scent while conifers bend  
disfiguring the scene you remember these years  
of challenging wood and mountain

You have known your way  
                  always through winter  
whatever corridor you stalked  
but now in the broad light of this green afternoon  
among these green trees, snow covering thin creeks  
which yapped like puppies in summer, covering  
the dead housecat fox took down months ago

                  there  
there, hear it, do you hear it?  
the howl? is it wind in the trees, pine  
or some spirit of the woods attempting

                  seeking  
or, is it merely wolf searching its den and young  
You shake your head in total disbelief  
shake snow off your shoulders  
stomp your boots, whistle for the dogs

                  time  
time to go home in the green light  
as it darkens on your face  
                  green

wind bites your green cheek and smile as you stop  
listen to the silence now that the dogs  
                  stand  
erect tails to the wind as if frozen in frost

You look up  
                  the banana skin still hangs too high  
for raccoon

                  a bluejay wings off knocking  
snow puffs to a fallen log crumbling in age  
you must go back to the house  
wood to chop for the stove, reports to make  
your wife has a plate of cold chicken for a snack  
and wild grape jam for a slice of hot toast

                  coffee  
so black it will stand your hair on end  
You start the return  
                  think a moment before calling  
the dogs, your stance perfectly still  
and realize the setters have already reached the backyard  
You listen

                  the howling has faded into the approaching  
                  gloom  
pause to catch the scratching of raccoon on bark  
fox crunching bones of a bird  
or the late flight of summer mallards

Smiles break open  
                  you drop a glove on the purple snow  
sniff, rub the back of your hand against your cold nose  
and know there is time  
again tomorrow you will walk woods  
                  with dogs  
touch snowflakes with a warm tongue  
                  listen  
fall of light and the hush of darkness  
swallowing these green woods  
                  green  
as new spring fermenting in the earth

## CROSSINGS

For Manny

Path  
and it must be trekked  
from wood to wood.  
*Neither fence nor storm*  
can be an obstacle  
in reaching. . .

Light is so great. . .  
it must be morning burst.  
Pause.  
No, paw must follow paw  
now.  
Wait.

Snow drifts down.  
Morning burst disappears  
quickly  
as appears.  
Snow clogs sense  
and paws.

Once again morning bursts.  
Snow takes vision.  
Blood dulls view.  
Darkness in the brilliance.

There  
is no  
pain  
*no pain. . .*  
only tracks  
on the cold night.

## GRAVE

(For Manny)

Nose, head, neck . . .  
He waited the snow  
Back, ribs, legs. . .  
snow fell in heavy drifts  
Paw after paw receded below  
the falling flakes

He stood in the car's yellow light  
Darkness sucking the hours away  
Not an owl hoot, or coyote song  
Only the soft whishing sound  
Of wind gently propelling snow

An anonymous mound  
Innocent snow smoothing the ground  
Not a single drop of blood  
Could be seen by any eye  
Or smelled, scented in the saplings  
In the yellow of the headlights

He, himself, stood now a snowman  
Tuke crowned, shoulders heavy  
With snow and concern  
He thought of baby seals  
He thought of western coyotes. . .  
with ears pinned on Oklahoma fences,  
Mice stapled to eastern elm trees.  
As darkness became darker

Wind whipped around the pine  
At the edge of the road  
Tamarack, clean and naked,  
Swayed ghostly over the night



He turned and opened the door  
Belted up and drove away  
Knowing  
    the dead had been  
    buried in an ancient manner

### TAMARACK

It was a house  
a real house  
with kitchen and beds,  
living-room and bath

It wasn't really a tree  
and yet it was made  
of raw wood  
smelling a forest  
green and ripely logged

It wasn't really a tree  
though odd birds lived there...  
cats and poets,  
basketball players,  
a guitarist whose music twang  
was never heard,  
bear hunters  
who couldn't shoot straight nor home game

It was a tamarack  
but it wasn't a tree  
it wasn't a tree...  
I'm quite sure  
it wasn't a tree

### ADIRONDACK FISHER

(A carnivorous arboreal of the weasel  
family of Eastern North America)

It has taken  
nearly three months  
to jot down the fact  
of the auto trip  
to Long Lake  
when the black splash  
streaked  
across  
the lonely highway

The night before  
I found him  
in Palmer's  
mammal guide

Both  
were surprised

### ON THE SUN PORCH... PRE-DAWN

For Joe

First heavy clouds.  
Dispersed.  
Wind rushes the hill,  
strikes brick and glass;  
rattles panes of sight.

Snow enters the noise.  
First, falls slovenly.  
Whirls of white flames  
dash against glass  
as if it would slap the cheek

exposed above blankets  
sliding off the cot-bed.

Suddenly ears are assaulted  
by the storm heaving  
against survival  
of weak senses.  
All passions of nature  
explode. Ears panic.

Push through the imaginary  
and the real  
of first dawn when light  
is so frail.

Ah! mountain move  
Allow the sun this morning.  
Or day. . . retreat.

### ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON COTTAGE

Saranac Lake, N.Y.

"I've had enough  
writers here,"  
the owner said.  
"They can tear up  
your mind,"  
he cautioned  
when I inquired  
for summer occupancy.

He closed  
the conversation  
and so I moved into  
a house  
of chocolate truffles,  
instead.

### MYSTERIES

For Tehanetorens

#### I

I watched him take down the chicken-wire fence.  
His white mane brighter than sun,  
His face blue/twilight chicory  
as the morning light careened above spruce and pine.  
He carried lightness and yet his shoulders drooped;  
His hands empty except for a hammer  
to pull the mesh away from the garage walls.  
He stepped about holding mountains in his hands.

#### II

There was nothing left on the shadowed floor  
but shadows and a single feather.  
Neither a smear or speck of blood  
showed either death or war.  
He had cleaned the mess;  
brown feathers scattered here and there,  
two stuck in the mesh of the wire;  
one embedded in the cement wall.  
He washed away the blood  
except for a stain on his own chin.

#### III

His account was brief.  
There was no need to garnish that event.  
"I came out yesterday morning as the sun  
struck the tops of that white pine  
traveling east to southward  
with a handful of corn.  
He'd been a friend. . . two years.  
Two years past we met on the forest floor—

he, drowsy from pain of a broken wing.  
Two years I fetched feed and water.  
Felt the wing grow in strength,  
told him stories and listened as he told stories  
to me. . . his flights across the skies,  
the mountain trees, his hours waiting prey  
on a lone and naked bough of an elm long dead,  
of flights into sky, distant sky of aires and lands  
we can't know ourselves. He'd speak  
of many mysteries men might need to know  
but find them difficult to understand.

"I came out here this morning  
glad to know sun would shine today  
and no rain fall. A tanager whistled  
on that new wood fence across the road  
and chipmunks squeaked in the low branches  
of these cedars. I think I whistled with the bird.  
It was a new day. I'd passed the darkness  
of the night once again. A hot cup of coffee  
in my hand: my wife put a good breakfast on her table.  
I was thinking Jesus had been a real man, and good.  
The garage door was open a crack.  
Blood smeared the jamb low down  
close to the ground. I threw the door open.  
The floor was littered with feathers.  
A hole torn in the mesh; more blood on the cage floor.  
I knew his spirit was in flight  
to those mysteries I spoke before. I knew  
this raccoon. . . well, it's natural.

#### IV

"Tooth and claw the Christian Bible says,  
Somehow I'd suppose it's probably right.  
I won't hate the raccoon nor cherish my bird  
the less. He struggled to live. More my fault than his.  
I put him to death; I signed the paper and paid  
the claw and tooth to execute.

What makes me feel bad is that we didn't have  
a chance to have a last chat."

#### V

Lightness in his hands he carried mountains.  
Sun on his mane, his face was dark.  
He rolled the wire and dragged it outside  
as though it were a heavy stone.  
He stacked the 2x4's that formed the cage,  
saying they'd make a good fire.  
He looked up into the sky.  
"I'm mean today. Gotta lot of work to do."



***PART TWO***

**DUG-OUT**

## *DUG-OUT*

### A Mohawk Speaks to a Salvaged Past

In 1984, when workers drained one of the ponds at a private estate near Malone, N.Y., to repair a dam, two dug-out canoes were discovered preserved in the mud. Before they were excavated, leaders at the nearby Akwesasne Reservation were contacted and invited to be present. It is rare for wooden artifacts to survive long in such excellent condition, and carbon dating has revealed them to be between 400 and 500 years old. Though it has not yet been firmly established which of the Indian peoples then using the region may have built them, the find has distinct archaeological significance for anyone living in the North Country, and especially for the Mohawks of Akwesasne.

The poet Maurice Kenny was one of the Mohawks present at the excavation. The poem that follows grew out of the discovery and the feelings it engendered in Kenny and other members of the Akwesasne community. Kenny, currently Poet-In-Residence at North Country Community College in Saranac Lake, has called "Dug-Out" one of his most important works.

—Chris Shaw

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## DUG-OUT

Ancient hollowed canoe discovered in the mud bottoms of  
Twin Ponds near Malone, New York, in the summer of  
1984—For Salli and Lloyd:

rainbows clean the sky  
end in the leaves of a pitcher  
which collects bows and rain  
and the plants bloody flowers  
trumpet the morning and storm finishes  
clearing the sky, the forest floor  
the pond etched by fern and pine

holding a chip of wood no thicker than a fat sliver  
pond water slurping against tiered banks  
and floating logs under the slow flight of coots  
July broke crows' raucous warning woods opened  
to swamp rose, to tamarack, black willow and oak  
a rough path through brambles, eryngo, blue flag  
and arrowhead; earth wet, bog, rich and dark mystery  
... a mere sliver, fat but crumbly in fingers  
capable of picking pitcher plant  
to heal burnings in the chest. . . the common cold

silver water ripples decades pass to shore

not really but sounds of stone hammers  
pounding thick log drums woods, echo down time  
quivering in this silver, this sliver, now

voice: frightening intonation, warning as crow cawed

what is this hair embedded in the gray grain  
of this wood/ shingle  
perhaps hundreds of years  
near 19 feet long, 2 feet wide

egret tells time in the flap of a wing

sweaty labor digging

brown feather floats down from over-head branches  
rests upon water turning golden  
in this our afternoon, this summer day  
eons away, an afternoon which can't hear  
egrets or the fall of feathers tipped black  
for victory or death. . . anymore

rearing over the water in wind-swell

tuning the tine music of consciousness  
awake though dreaming  
men rap about trout, fresh water for thirst  
cool, delicious

o, of the sky, the woods  
strain as hammers drum hollow the log  
chant but wordless  
to the beat of sweat slipping into earth  
wordless sounds beginning to float  
air made warm by sun and grebe breast  
ruffled by turtle rising to surface  
frog caught by a foot in the snap

rainbows have cleaned the sky  
of storm  
for a while, once again

\* \* \*

Salli shall negotiate  
but not the woods, not the ponds  
certainly not the boundaries left  
between home and Florida  
... as Molly charged the French  
Salli will charge in smiles, painted  
as if war were inevitable; her vision



has no thought of French or boundaries  
having heard her father's prayer, watched  
and learned, her mother weave a black-ash basket,  
having braided Jaz and Lucy's hair  
her negotiation, creation  
gives breath to stuffed owls, plaqued bear heads  
rainbows painted double over her long hair  
and her young daughters'

\* \* \*

Lloyd heaves, and Steve and Barry  
the dug-out is photographed, tethered  
now to shore; and Mike holds up freshly caught trout

breathing is heavy, the tramp along the rim  
of the twin ponds and down wooded hills in the forest  
old men should sit in the shade  
contemplating grandchildren and songs, what's on the stove  
for his supper

breathing is heavy, history enticed  
blood to surge and lungs expand, old  
men should be content with rainbows doubling  
Akwasasne, rivers with ocean liners, tankers  
mountain ponds stand deep in the memory  
collective and single... voices shuddered  
through egret feathers, bear growls  
o, yes, o, remember  
(the Eagle will buzz tonight, Deb dance,  
Barry and Lloyd, Salli will raise "sprite"  
Diane laugh at the virgin)

in the mud:  
bodies forgotten  
fingers toes jaw spine

formless words, says the voice

rainbows doubled the afternoon

in Lucy's smile, Jaz's laughter  
double the sky... "right over the Credit Union"  
Salli exclaimed while dodging raindrops

osprey dive, and deep deep in the woods  
bear, fat on summer honey, stands straight  
elm could not be taller touching sky  
lean to tip a mountain peak, bear stands straight  
as an arrow piercing lowering clouds  
and a bird-cry brushes leaves of oak  
perhaps bluejay or raven  
as wolf trots through green shadows  
burrowing rabbit as raccoon stands erect knowing  
summer can be fatal as arrow rips  
progeny, tear of breath and guts left for ants  
maggots while tail turns in the wind, high or poled  
or the cap of a child testing winter

\* \* \*

"Get to the story"

I am the voice  
surely there is a story about all this

wordless, formless windless but sounds  
winter and snow is falling  
wood is chopped, corn and venison dried  
muskmelon stored away in coolness  
bear snores in some den (Ray lights his pipe):  
(tehanetorens)

the children have commenced to nod  
full of dreams and rainbows  
cocacola and fudge popsicles

"get to the story"

four men  
not those who came to take the boat

return the canoe home

warm lodge sealed at the cracks  
pot-belly stove stoked by Elmer  
ol' rabbit dog, paws hiding his nose  
Francis steps into the room  
holds a pot of corn soup his mother cooked

four men

warrior and prophet; poet and singer  
Francis takes a seat on the floor, smiles  
handsome new grey shoes resting beside him  
Salli's two rainbows, a flower and a light, giggle  
dressing and un-dressing corn dolls  
Kaherawaks munching currants, testing mama  
with a wry smile, grins; Stacy and Ash  
licking stamps for an album  
Francis clears his throat; Ernie clears *his* throat

four men

"get to the story"  
"too much description"

Francis clears his throat, again  
Ernie clears his throat, again  
Louie starts another record as Jake takes  
a place by the closed door near Tom, now  
Kahionhes illustrates the scene as smoke  
curls through the chimney into darkness  
night, story-teller is ready, now  
winter

\* \* \*

four men  
not those who brought home the dug-out

clans, drawn lines between  
corn, bean, squash  
charcoaled into vision, photographed  
(and she smiles knowing she brought them home)  
the men,  
warriors or seekers, ambassadors or merchants  
defenders, fathers and lovers, lawyers and  
hunters hollow log, dug-out ghost returned  
again corgoing a parfleche of stories  
for winter nights when owl sleeps and snow  
decorates pine lifting gently in winds  
song over fire in the house

absolved;  
resolved

air/ drum/ water

voice: get to the story

\* \* \*

we believe there might have been four men  
the dug-out is large enough to safely  
comfortably accommodate four men  
(and four men brought it home)

Peter tells a better story  
coyote howls on the hill  
voice: "get to it"

morning is something you cannot squander  
cap in a little sweetgrass basket  
however red with strawberry

it is a long story  
taking many winter nights  
maybe four hundred years  
maybe five hundred

and  
there were coots and grebes, mallards and loons  
the loon sang the loveliest  
geese v in precision  
and titmice and woodmice  
remember muskrat, turtle  
wolf howled, dropping pups on mountain sides  
there were coots and grebes  
salmon and trout in each river  
pitcher plant for the common cold  
and her shadow against the sky  
falling, falling

four men

"tell the story"

afternoon is something you cannot squander,  
*may I have a drink of water*  
*may I smoke a pipe*  
*first*

the wind blew open the door, Jake closed it again  
a hush fell heavily upon the room

*I knew the great eagle should perch*  
*upon the highest pine. . . his sight is best*

a woman entered and passed a plate of corn bread

*may I have a drink of water*

*I knew the eagle should perch*  
*upon the white pine. . . it stands the tallest*

Kahinohes frantically illustrating, and Donald

*may I have a drink of water*

leaves have turned golden now, birch maple oak beech  
russet, burgundy. . . marsh hawk hunts  
bobcat sleeps on the stout limb of the bending sycamore  
pitcher has been picked and stored for winter use  
night not yet a threat  
sun wanders through oak branches  
as though looking for the early moon to rise  
take watch over the darkening woods

Eva and Nancy pass the water bottle  
Eva has carved it a turtle  
Nancy, hands clenching chicken feathers.  
moves in words clothed in ancient tongue  
silent music threads the night from Nancy's lips  
Francis clears his throat; Ernie clears his throat  
Danny lights a pipe. . . his wolf robe thrown  
about his husky shoulders, he lights a pipe  
(Rokwaho) (Karoniaktatie) (Tehanathle)  
(Aroniawenrate)  
(Kawennotakie) (Tekanwatonti) (Kaharawaks)  
(Kawennatakie)

*teionkwahontasen*

sweetgrass grows around us

Alex chops cannibals for a boiling pot  
Donald writes lines on the sky  
Mary braids a sweetgrass basket

wind as though from an eagle's wing fans the room  
fire lips in the pot-belly stove, ol'  
rabbit dog sniffs, mumbles and sleeps  
Elmer stokes the fire  
Susie teases the poet to write a poem  
as Jake and Ron and Tom Julius again  
close the door that wind has opened  
Danny lights his pipe. . . smoke rises  
from the bowl. Carved head of a bear



*may I have a drink of water*

here are fish for supper  
words for your mind  
blood for your fire

*may I have a drink of water*

a face stares through the window, long  
hair hangs down the skull, lifts in wind  
its cold eyes  
stare at the woman,  
huddled in a bear robe, her hands clutching greens

tell the story:

twisted, tongue hanging on the chin  
splashed in blood  
owl awakens though snow still falls  
burdens the light

\* \* \*

it was a beautiful afternoon  
bronzed and reddened  
dark clay darkened in the kiln  
roped in circles by strong hands  
that could slit open the belly of a deer  
praised and thanked  
with one tug of the knife  
it was a beautiful afternoon  
coots and grebes, salmon and wood anemones  
trembling in the colors, the brilliant colors of the winds  
day shimmering like the first day  
rainbows sparkling on every drop of dew, prisms  
canoe readied we stocked with provisions and furs  
and extra moccasins, beaded and resplendent

no sign of thunder, no sign of rain  
corn up, we knew it was safe to travel  
rivers even now. . . no more spring floods  
past time for strawberries yet too  
early for blueberries it was time  
four men

father two brothers and an uncle  
weapons ready for defense or revenge  
presents for any foreigner  
skins of water for whatever march, parched corn  
dried meat, maple hunks, pheasant feathers  
no one knew how long the journey might take  
prayer sticks, beaded belts  
winds were calm, water smooth  
as weathered bone antler rubbed by winter winds  
we were prepared

ah men *onen*  
one trillium bloody red, guards  
one vine trails off into the unknowable distance  
one jay peeps as eagle ascends to the pine

\* \* \*

the story begins

story has long ago begun  
it's continuous  
in the bear robe warming the old woman's shoulder  
in the wolf robe on his husky shoulders  
in the turtle rattle held in the other's hand  
in the pencil held by Tahonathle  
the currants Kaherawaks munches  
the eagle's eye, hawk's scat  
story has never stopped

it streams down the handle of the war club  
it is caught in the grip of the Great Law

it murmurs in the song of the singer  
the pounding of the drum, the arch of the carver  
the cry of every child, the poet's pen  
the raised foot of each dancer who touches earth  
and moves as the squash vine moves, as wind  
it is the ever-widening circle of the village  
and the fire in the house  
its narrative is the string of fish caught  
the tongues of elk, the belly of moose  
flight of northern geese  
the color of the meadows and the meadow flowers  
the sweet berries and the bitter of sumac  
it is the greeting of morning  
it is the hope for a good mind

story are clouds, grebes and coots  
partridge drumming the earth, loons singing,  
and where humans heard partridges drum  
it is the flow of the rivers, crystal of lakes  
it is this canoe, hollowed and safe for journey  
it is the mind of humans, the joy of the child  
the journey

story has never stopped  
a chain of days, night  
following night on bat wings, or moons  
it is the eastern dawn, the grave on the mountain  
it is the mountain. it is time itself whatever time  
may be, it is the budding of the beech  
and the falling of the leaf, whistle of the wind  
it is toothless old men, or old women  
who no longer hear, spittle of the sick  
it is the fisher at kill, hawk  
the birth of groundhog  
it is the fire, this fire flaming  
in the pot-belly stove stoked  
and the ol' rabbit dog asleep beside it  
it is the narrative of nations, nation  
and history and circles of the trees

circles

four men

voice: winter and story moves in the ripple  
in Salli's braids; Ernie clearing his throat  
Francis' new grey shoes  
the ragged wolf robe tossed about Dan's shoulders  
Peter's coyotes  
yes, I see, I understand  
I will listen, I will listen

*now, first, may I have a drink of water*

\* \* \*

my mother is a turtle  
my mother is a fish  
my mother is a muskrat  
my mother is a beaver  
my mother is a boat  
my mother is a reed  
my mother is my mother  
and all her parts are me

my mother is a fish  
my mother is a reed  
my mother is corn and bean and squash  
my mother is sumac and smoke  
my mother is honey  
my mother is a berry on the bramble  
my mother is the sap of the maple  
my mother is a boat  
my mother is the rapid in the stream  
my mother is the wind  
my mother is a coot  
my mother is a bear  
my mother is this house  
my mother is the fire  
I am my mother and my mother is me (1)  
my mother is a fish

my mother is a bone  
my mother is yarrow  
my mother is hawk-weed  
my mother is a deer  
my mother is a snipe  
my mother is a blue heron  
my mother is a yellow rose  
my mother is a sprig of mint  
my mother is a birch  
my mother is a cedar

that sings in the wind

my mother is a cloud  
my mother is a star  
my mother is a dream  
my mother is a grave  
my mother is a wolf  
my mother is water  
my mother is loam  
my mother is fire  
my mother is wind  
my mother is a fish

I am my mother and my mother is me (1)

and this is the story of four men  
who boarded a boat so many years ago  
fog has covered footsteps / wind drowned voices

\* \* \*

voice: a fingerprint rests upon the wood  
etched, a hair still clings  
a speck of blood remains a vibration  
stirs the pond, reverberation brushes  
the softness of the forest

we're pretty sure it could hold four men

I could feel the sliver quiver on my palm  
will I dream tonight

Don't speak of dreams and presences  
I just get nervous when someone brings them up  
Can't we change the conversation

O, he died  
I knew, he'd die  
as though, I, willed it

I hold it firmly on the palm of my hand  
and watch it quiver almost turning  
Louie can record the dream  
and Lloyd d. j. it on the air  
Can we tape the voice, voices, I hear  
the sounds of the paddles, water, which as wood  
slits through the calm as geese spring

Francis clears his throat; Ernie clears his throat  
Keherawaks munches currants  
Lucy and Jaz giggle  
as Florence places a bowl of frozen  
strawberries on the morning table

*I suggested the eagle*

yes, leaves have turned golden and russet  
marsh hawk hunts as bobcat sleeps on the stout beech  
the hollowed log, ghost canoe of men  
slithers down water  
silent under wings and sweet gale, silent  
as it passes over grayfish, sleek bass, scuds  
slinking off from the canoe's wake, silent men  
as a dragonfly browses the corners of morning  
paddle the swift and quick waters dedicated to motion  
directed by need and falling light  
to harbor before dark and a meal of parched corn  
spirited by necessity to seek home



approval of the elders, of the women  
warmth of spouse, laughter of children, bed for exhaustion

is their cargo news or merely pelts  
or deer meat from the hunt  
is the cargo scalps and victory songs or  
the decomposing corpse of a son, friend  
bones

Don't ask me what I dream  
Salli and I both light cigarettes  
Lloyd lights one, too  
Barry puts his camera away  
Steve stands, quiet and deep  
Don't ask me what I dream  
Everytime I dream

(he died)

I won't remember  
Don't forget the pitcher plant  
it's growing all over the woods  
my mother picks it for the winter

my mother is a fish  
my mother is the sky  
my mother is a brook  
my mother is a rainbow

my mother is a dream  
my mother is a drum

bones and shells rattle in the dream  
blood splattered on the kitchen floor  
a car smashed-up on the highway  
Don't ask me what I dream  
Salli and I light cigarettes  
smoke trails out the open window  
as her car speeds towards Malone, the rezz

Danny stands above the river, his daughter

chases butterflies and picks fistfulls of asters  
Alex stands above the river on the opposite side  
painting a man standing above the river on the same side:  
Francis clears his throat  
Peter tells another story  
Diane smiles at the Virgin, the lie he told her  
Priscilla reads her newspaper  
an European, Greek, tanker moves down the St. Lawrence  
Cornwall Island is smogged in pollution  
Alcoa is getting richer, and Reynolds, and Chevrolet, too  
someone plants poplars that won't grow along the river banks  
and trees die in the pollution

Salli and I light another cigarette  
Danny stands above the river  
behind him his mother braids a sweetgrass basket  
for spring strawberries  
*teionkwahontasen*  
Ernie clears his throat holding a fan of prayer feathers  
Francis clears his throat to give the greeting

my mother is a cedar

Alex paints the river  
Peter tells a story  
Lloyd builds another tower  
Donald writes upon the sky  
as his father holds it straight for him  
Ray lights his pipe  
a bear munches suet in the woods  
goldenrod is flowering

Four men  
reaching home, reaching  
their secret

*I suggested the eagle because it has the best eye  
I suggested the white pine because it stands the tallest*



*may I have a drink of water*

their secret, message

Wind rises, river darkens  
Alex paints the man  
Danny lifts his wolf robe  
opens it for all  
Salli smiles as we drive into Malone  
she'll negotiate  
I'll try to tell this story

Later,  
they found a smaller canoe

"To Be Continued. . ."

Maurice Kenny, who is well-known to readers of contemporary poetry, is currently a member of the faculty at North Country Community College, Saranac Lake, New York. He has recently been, as well, a Visiting Professor at the University of Oklahoma. A co-editor of *Contact II* and publisher of Strawberry Press, he has also been affiliated for many years with *Akwesasne Notes* and *Studies in American Indian Literatures*. A prolific writer, his collections in recent years include *Is Summer This Bear* (1985), *Rain and Other Fictions* (1985), *Between Two Rivers* (1987), *Humors and/or Not So Humorous* (1988), and *Greyhounding This America* (1989). A new, expanded edition of *Between Two Rivers* is being published by White Pine Press in spring, 1990. His works have also appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Harper's Book of 20th Century Native American Poetry* (1988), *Earth Power Coming* (1983), and *Living the Spirit* (1989).



