

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
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SPECIAL NOTICE

On the following 21 pages, we present an excerpt—one entire section—from a long, autobiographical poem by George Vukelich entitled **Memoirs of a Young Man**. Though it is generally not the policy of this magazine to present only part of a work, we feel that this excerpt is capable of being judged as an independent entity, however much it may be an integral part of a larger whole.

The Editors

SONG OF THE OUISCONSING

the sounds of the strongnames range over this land
 like the winds

Oconto

Oneida

Oconomowoc

these are the moccasin words: moving like duckdeer into
 the big marshes: the silent and the speechless and the
 instincts of the snowcap country are heritage here
 you must keep downwind
 the shadows holding their heads high and flowing
 in rivers through the bottomlands
 shifting from bank to bank they go quietly
 as the sandbars

you must listen hard for certain splashings or wholeherds
 will slip past you and be lost in mudtangles of muskeg
 and tamarack

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Lac du Flambeau

Lac Vieux Desert

Manitowish

these branches breaking: the brushings
the musk of skunk to the highheads
they will bolt the flatcreekbeds in longleaps
you must standstill as the trees
and be listening

Manitowoc

Minocqua

Matengo

the bullmoose with the bodies like boulders
they left this land in the swishing of summerwind
they crossed on into Canada with scarcely a sound

Manawa

Ojibwa

Chippewa

the untamed words: the bigwild words moving through
these woods like the whitetail deer:

the courer de bois came hurrying here from the upnorth
land the singingmen: with the chanson of home on the
Indiancarries the paddled west to the Grand Portage
from the freight canoes: the small lands offshore
all looked to be like St. Marie
the Frenchmen driving deeply into the sun and squinting
their eyes at Manitou

The bigland is off to the left, bebe:

Ouisconsing waits for our bodies like a sleeping woman
they shouldered into the paddles and drove past the

Apostles: the last of the Great Lakes clawing at the
fat gunwhales and it could not cling: the foam track
falling behind there is nothing that can run with the
Canadian

only bubbles on the empty lake surface going the
otherway long long after the voyageur had gained
Siskowit Bay for a dinnermeal, bebe, and a potfire
cookingup the new coffee down on the beach:

the one who is called Viggo looks into the wind
he sleeps and there are the women from Ouisconsing

the river St. Croix runs the sunset shore of Ouisconsing:
there is council held with its brother on the lean
beaches:

Chicog Totogatic
and
Namekagon of the clan of rivers

the blood of the watertribe is intermingled:
common spring veins are lanced to reveal the line of
Ouisconsing: from the seed: the strong sons hunt
with the eagle heart of the father:

St. Croix leads the hunters southward

others of the same blood track out of the home country
and stand in the shoreflats
awaiting their brother: the hunt is downstream

Yellow

Clam

and the one called Squaw

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their clans can be traced like loosened bow strips
to Chequamegon

Marengo

Tomahawk

Brule

Ontonagon

Eau Claire

and Wapogasset: brave warrior chiefs who pushed a
wild country back into the Great Lakes

at a sharp bend in the stream bend:
the hunters are met by a young bear muscled warrior from
the West: his strength is greater even than the arms
of the crying St. Croix: St. Croix falls:
he will lead them now and it will be a warparty to the
south: his broodhardened back throws them down in turn
when they fight for St. Croix as leader
his name he tells them in a tone that should be used
only in talking to squaws about stone pounding the
cornmeal: his name is

Mississippi

I am the people of a proud land:
I am the spirit of a tallpine state that started in
1848 and considerably before

I am the words from the quiet firwoods of the slow
north country

I am the Indian words that stood spreadlegged on the
wickiup shores of Lake Superior: guarding the land of the

Grand Portage

I am the Frenchman's furtrapper words: the courer de bois carrying in the crucifixes of Pere Marquette to the medicine men:

I am the whitewater words from all the veinways of the Great Lakes Drainage Basin pumping like blood through this ground:

I am the rawhide words of the packrat lumber robbers stealing out the big woods and the little people and leaving only the stumps:

I am the words of the railroads laying down the law and the rightofways along the waterways and dynamiting the dams of beavers:

I am the words of the lografts and the logrivers and of the manbreed as strong as axehandles:

I am the words of the Winnebago watching the white man harnessing the hunting grounds to the plough horses:

I am the words of the Sioux watching the crawlings of snakefences:

I am the words of stormwaters swept hard into the fishermen's beach

I am the words of pioneers

I am the words of a people called: Wisconsin

I have left the woods and come away from them and yet these words are of the woods and the people of the tall pines: the bonehandle breed of men

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brash: with the big wrists and the legs like cedar
roots cutting down a country in the clear mornings:
riding a millionfeet of logmiles to the millponds
riding the horsewhip currents of the Wisconsin and
the Chippewa in the cold mornings before the big
freezeup:

stream bends: braced and balanced in the midcurrents:
the men are faraway in the mists of riverstream:
their voices ring like axebites across the channel
mouths from shore: you can see them clearing the

marking the miles by the shorescud and endless tobacco
chews: they are bearded and anklebooted: rivermen
without riverboats running the waters like driftwood:
downhill to the big mills

It may be that they are anxious for the shore towns
and the cleanshaves: the bar whiskey from new bottles
and the warm legs of the norsk girls:

it goes lonely with the lografts:
there is the drift of dreams down these wooden rivers:
an empire is on the way here:

the riverways are trafficked with the legions of
Rome: the spoils outpour from the slaveland like
the wealth of Carthage:

Alexander stands on the booms of white pine and cries
for the unconquered worlds.

the water is all woodentopped: it is a rooftop nailed
tight from shore to shore in the narrows:

the front logs jam: the boom piles up behind: the pilot

yells for the pikes and all the men go skipping to the
stuck logs and slam at them with the hooks: the trouble
is a sandbar: shallowly and ugly:
the leadlogs are nosed in solidly with the boom hung
up the bigsticks grind against each other like animals
caught in a stuffedup slaughter chute: the pikepoles
are useless: the pilot comes up fast: there is deep
water beyond the sandbar: a few feet further and the
channel is free again: but the boom will not budge:

the pressure bangs the bark from the locked in logs:
the pilot shouts for dynamite: certain men make for
the rafthouse and come forward carrying fuses: they
are fixed at the front above the sandbar: the pilot is
the last man to run

there is a moment for running and the wind and the
silent shore: and then the bar flows straight up
in the sky: the geyserstream is dirty with sand and mud
and the slabs of exploded wood
the logboom slides forward like a ship from drydock
the bow is blasted out but it will be seaworthy nonetheless
the channel will be deep enough from here the rest of the
way: and it will take awhile for the sand to pile up
in the mainstream again

this will be a cooperative river until then

the pilot goes back to watching the fresh coffee cooking:
keeping one eye on the hunched up shoulders of the
balanced pike men picking at the loosened logs where
the front blew out

a few small dead perch bob up in front of the logs
and are held there as the current catches the boom
once more.

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I will walk slowly from this place
my steppings are part of a masterplan, I think
and have been measured out for me much before me
anyway: it is better to be on the move and not hanging
like beefsides in the cold lockers

I should like to stay and scan the silage skies in
the spring mornings

there will be signs of summer: grazing on the fringes
and munching in green grasses like the milch cows
Winter is a badtime in the pasturelands: the frost
drives deeply: the dirt is hardpan

Summer stands in a steel stanchion with its head
locked in at a dented feed bucket dreaming cow
dreams in the month of December

I should like to leave for the Florida keys and
count the days like conch shells and not come back at
all even when the homefarm is green again and the snows
are running like barnrats back through the deepcut culverts

I must walk slowly in this place
my boats are stiff in this season
I pass the nailed up pump in back of the sunporch and
stamp out my feet

Christmas has come and it has left:
a new feed bucket
Also: many many conch shells:

and some coral bits and pieces

**the woman is a stranger on this shore
she must walk softly in alien sand
is the wind a woman do you suppose**

my husband walked here with rolled down boots
 in the fouroclock dawns, he went down to the
 fishboats: he carried fishing gear and oilskin
 slickers: he walked with his brothers side along
 side

the mornings lay moored to the rivermouth
 the wooden fish boxes were put aboard
 the lines were loosened from the bow
 my husband took his place in the right pilothouse
 the gas engine awoke with the cold morning hack

I used to watch them leave this shore
 I used to walk the wet beachsand after they
 were pointed outward for the fishgrounds
 and the fencelike spiles poking up like strings
 of matchsticks a mile out

he has left this shore

he has not left his son

this is empty beach hereabouts: clear back to the dunes

I shall stand upon the stairs
 I shall reach out for one star
 the moon will fit into my hand: it is no larger
 then a bird heart. It is true my hands are wings
 these things are familiar with the high winds and I
 will burst free like a quail from weeds

the hawks will drop to hunt you down

they come hard hunting and hungry at dawn

I shall sweep above their wings
 I shall go steeply into the high winds
 I shall be beyond them

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I shall be beyond time

at first: the being alone will be like a tomb
my hands will become familiar to me again:
after a waiting

and the hawks

**an old tincan and nothing more
breaks up the flow of flattened shore
the current comes cold against this sand
the current comes crawling without a sound**

the boat gear shack drops its paint like leaves
the winter is harsh with paint and fisherman's laughs
the blackrats stumble forward to feed
in the stubblewhite of summer field
they squat sucking in the bare birch groves
their mouths are cold with the mould of graves

June and July lie buried here
August too and the sandflies hum
they are not beyond the reach of rats
they fill the beachlands with their rot
they are trapped: they crippled fast
the rats will reach them first

a summer man once searched these dunes
a fly once crawled cathedral domes
the water watched and washed in crosswood
the duckgrass stood dumb in the wind

the summer storm formed up in the west
August scattered for its life in behind
the seawall

In another summer:

this will be a clean and flowflat shore
 the old turtles will sleep:
 and the sandworms will bore

today is the burning of the brush
 the summer debris where the rabbits bunch
 the gasoline is spilled on the sticks of snow
 the fire catches with a cry: it is a scavenger
 nosing the dead things

there is a stench of September here also
 suicide leaves floating like ash from the soft
 wood trees: the big pines stand proud and not abandoned
 the poplars are cleanstripped: all like crosses
 the wind watches the dumb woodpeckers on Calvary
 the flames climb like crows
 two rabbits explode from the far side and crowd back
 into the ground under another pile
 they are quick like shotgun blasts
 the snows have made them stringy: and fast

also: the deer at this time of year are bagbellied
 and thinly: high snows will moor them to the marshes
 and the cedar swamps
 the starvations will hunt them hard like high
 powered rifles: and the wolves

the flames bite back into the snow
 water runs upon this ground and cannot enter
 a little bit of spring is seen
 Summer is foetus in this sun

the ground is charred stuff and hot from this burning
 this is a strange and hostile season
 the sky is clear: and yet reveals nothing

this fire will die out

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and tonight the weasels will come crossing
the snowshoe trail from the cabin
and they will poke in the ashes of ice cold
pine branches:

and old rabbit houses

there is a loghouse by the lake
its ribs are stoved and it is lank
the winds breach the windows and the walls
the dam is pressurebusted by hammering heads
of winter: it is deathveined like concrete
in the teeth of raw water

Once: it was more
yet: it is mine

the fieldmice nest down the stove
the floursack is hard like stone
the noises of summer are all stilled
the fireplace is full of silences
this emptiness is in me like stiletto
like a fishhead nailed to a beam
I shiver my arms and watch my breath

I would like to bake five loaves of bread
if the stove still served
and I still starved

this menu must be stark
there is no hunger after dark in me
and yet there was more
and it was mine

You are only a mile from her now

she sleeps a mile from here in the snow

the lake is silent with her sleep
 you will be able to see her from here
 when spring comes:
 and the crows

the graves of grandfathers dug into these
 Wisconsin woods: the bloodlines of the
 fishermen's boys stretch like purse seines
 to the Frenchman's shores:

the sun of Brittany burns like creosote:
 the spring eels swirl like blacksnakes into
 the creek mouths: Father La Fave the parish priest
 walks the beach in his leather coat:

the nets lay like fences: the tarring will make
 them stiff like cable
 the priest will bless them for the summers catch:
 from the east: the wind is bad

we will walk along this watershed:
 by the old beaches we must stand
 watching into the sorrowing winds:

the wood is in this sand from all the old hulls
 quietly they slip in among the fishheads
 the spray blows above the beach like rain
 we stand wetted with our remembering

the golden gulls have the heights and are gone
 at the sandbars: every spring the water gains
 like dogfish the dunes lay in among the duckgrass

the fishermen's beach sleeps in the open grave
 from here they watched the fat full fishing grounds