

Michael Hood

Paddling My Kayak
(Comer, Georgia)

for Kristen and Dan

Paddling my kayak upstream in Maine
on straight and snake-like stretches
of the sun-glittered, sleepy-moving river
in the town of Bristol: the river Pemaquid
where wild brush hosts invisible sounds and sights,
where water lilies are both bare and bloom in color,
where protruding rocks afford frogs time for sunbathing,
where it is quiet enough for me to hear sharply
my two-in-one paddle dip-kissing softly
enough to excite my mind and imagination.

Paddling my kayak upstream in New Hampshire
on the sun-glittered, sleepy-moving river
in the town of Campton: the Pemigewasset, the Pemi.
From Blair Bridge toward the White Mountains:
straightaway stretches and then bearing left and right,
straightaway stretches and then bearing right and left,
underwater mica shine and sandbars smooth and rocky,
barked and boned felled birches and mini whirlpools
and bridges to hold civilization up and away from me.

Paddling my kayak upstream in Rhode Island
on the sun-glittered, sleepy-moving river
in the town of Richmond: the river Wood
where up after the Skunk Hill Road bridge,
father's ghost in me sees the shape of the river

as a deep water eel catch off Montauk Point.
 So unlike old Hamlet, father's ghost in me:
 inside me, like the river Wood, he is nourishing.

Paddling my kayak upstream in Massachusetts
 on short and long straight and narrow stretches
 of the sun-glittered, sleepy-moving river,
 the river Blackstone
 in the towns of Uxbridge and Millville
 where summer mind craves peace,
 but never so long enough to be without desire
 for fall roar and foliage and a dry suit paddle.

And now, paddling my kayak upstream in Georgia
 in the town of Comer at the south fork of the Broad River
 at a point nearby the Watson Mill covered wooden bridge.
 Paddling, slow-dipping my two-in-one paddle
 into the shallow and the deep of the gray and the dark
 of the river, and smoothly and firmly pull-drawing,
 the river's slow current moving toward me,
 its slowness causing me to mind-drift, pursue
 the source behind the long suffering position I hold:
Passibility in its tug-of-war against *Impassibility*:

*My heart is heavy, dear uncreated Pure Spirit.
 Angina and nitrostat and stents are nothing to my
 holding on,
 holding on in my mind to the music of my seasoned
 heart
 that beats and flutters in the name of belief
 beyond reason.
 Ohhhh, a suffering history: this life thus far,*

*all and more of what is clearly implied in that
ohhhh.*

*And more and more and more to come of it:
suffering and ohhhh
during the course of this seeming misdirected
evolution we live.*

But I was saying before mind-drifting: paddling upstream in Comer,
though now it is later on in the paddle and there is beginning rain:
light-pinching beginning rain, and a still-not-yet somber sky
that sometimes gives off breeze and wind gust: nice, real nice.
And my tongue tonguing lukewarm body salt and rain
above and on and below my lips. Again, real nice: a yes.

And later, granddaughter Mary Alice Miller
from out of Winterville, Georgia,
where marigolds in May are whirl-twirl public
in their loving it up with gray-day springtime
breeze:
she too: a yes. A passenger in her parents'
canoe,
she leans out over and drags a child-size fish
net in hope
of a school of fish to support her claim as a
four-year-old:
her hand has felt nibbles from unseen fishes
in pursuit of her
to be their minnow or sunfish friend.

And too, in two-in-one Kristen and Dan, yet another yes:
their smiles of delight in listening to tree frog voices,
their noting of tree types and age, and of red maple leaf stems,
their paddle pauses and brief dreaming in nearing river bends,
their silent noting of sacredness when passing under

and viewing arresting tree trunks leaning over the river

to allow leaves of bowed branches light, tongue-tip kissing,
 their noting of horses peeking through the leaves of trees
 high on the bankside, and perhaps their imagining
 what I imagine the horses see: paddlers oneing with rain and river.

Paddling upstream:
 the south fork of the Broad River in Comer,
 Georgia,
 where there is no *Passibility* in tug-of-war
 with *Impassibility*.
 Here on the river Broad there is only the good
 hurts
 that rise out of the pleasures of paddling in
 the *now*,
 as in my emotional *ahhhh* from river tree
 leaves,
 their raindrop sheen from the light of the sky
 a grace and a sign from a presence
 during these late years of my life of pursuit.

Michael Hood has published poems in *The Tulane Review*, *So To Speak*, *The Litchfield Review*, and *14* (UK).