

Matthew W. Miller, a native of Long Beach, Calif., has lived in Lincoln for six years. He is a junior English major with plans to "teach creative writing classes at a university in Amsterdam or starve to death writing in a gloomy basement."

The Fall of 1989

For X, who knows

I was nineteen. No job,
and grateful — living on grants and loans.
Was I happy? Yes,
and anything but fulfilled.
I was taking a writing class
on recommendation by a friend, an English student
older than myself, whom I admired.
— and I quote —

You want to write poetry, take it with this guy.
He's the best. He's a special human being.
He's the only poet worth his salt at the U.
Books published all over the place. Trust me.

And I did. I took the class, showed up
the first day ready for anything, thinking about
those words: special human being. I had never
heard him call anyone that. It was always cool,
hip, or for the kind but bland: nice guy.

And this professor was special

and strange. He seemed to complete
what the rest of the school was missing: wisdom,
earthy wisdom; and a tolerance, at times an
embrace, of the mystical.
He wore the same T-shirt for days on end
and a Dekalb baseball cap; — sure, his casualness
impressed me, probably more than it should have.
He was a tough critic. The heartbroken scribblers
and connoisseurs of the grandiose hated him.

The poems began to come.
Easily.
Most of them terrible.

And was I proud of them?
You bet I was.
Then the night came when I made love
with a girl who I had been after for weeks,
and I wrote about it,
celebrated it, maybe gloated over it.

I was shaky about this one. The class talked down
to it because of its excesses, and our teacher
defended it, praised it. Highly.

I was redeemed! My God,
I could write! I bought an anthology
filled with astonishing poets
and began to fall behind in my other classes.
I had no time for poetry, but poetry
made time for me. Something
was happening. I could feel it.
And when I searched the eyes of the silent
corners of the class, looking for fire
or presence, my suspicion was confirmed.
This was something magical, and mine alone
I wanted to believe.

Towards the end
of fall, in what was for me an amazing
assertion of purpose, I went to the professor's office
and asked him if he wanted to "hang out" sometime.
You mean you want to have coffee, he said, sure!
And we did. Later that night, reviewing the event,
everything I said betrayed bad judgment, but that
was another beginning for me. I can see now that
the thing I had needed most in life was given
to me that fall. Slowly the world turned to me
and began to exude words.

Season Harper Dowell, a senior English major, was chosen as the 1991 John H. Vreeland undergraduate recipient for literary composition.

Dowell said part of her inspiration comes from family, and she remembers sitting on the bed in the morning while listening to these elaborate Japanese folk tales told by her mother. Dowell said she also made up stories to keep her younger brother entertained.

Dowell is a Bellevue native and currently lives in Lincoln with her husband and daughter.

In China there is a waterfall
called the Dragon Gate. Its waters
plunge a hundred feet, swifter
than an arrow shot by a strong archer.
It is said that thousands of carp
gather in the basin below, hoping
to climb the falls, and that any which succeeds
will turn into a dragon.

— The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin
(Gosho Zenshu)

Remember . . . no matter where you go
there you are.
— Buckaroo Banzai
(Across the 8th Dimension)

Fine Blue Silk

He does not bend or cringe. The air about him
wavers gold and sings us to silence.
When he enters our village, God-fearing people
bolt their doors, peer keenly through cracks
in the shutters.
Still, we are drawn to sit, unblinking,
as he tells us of ways to shed our skins, ways
to exist on a higher plane. Somewhere, he says,
in the steep blue myth of a Buddhist teaching,
water surges forth: a long, translucent shudder
down a mountain's spine. And there the carp
pitch themselves upward in a frenzied bid
to become dragons.

Bernard, you were striking in blue —
the way your eyes greyed-up
dark as a rain-soaked pigeon. Now

we are all this same soft
anonymous shade . . . the smoke-grey
of wolves we've sensed more than seen.

Once we wandered these cobblestone streets
gathering dry chunks of wood, torn cloth.
Bonfires were tended like sickly children.
How we stoked those fires, fed that fever.
When the change came we slid cleanly
from our bodies, left them smoldering
among the dimming embers. Our bones
no longer weigh us down. Instead,
they fill these crumbling walkways, or reach up
like reeds at the edge of a drying river.

We must forget these simple things:
the sweet crunch of apples
between teeth, the soft slap
of bare feet against warm pavement,
the softly padded plunge
of sleep-heavy bodies
into cool cotton sheets.
This sensation I miss:
the quiet pull
of sharp scissors repeating
the one syllable they know:
saying, "carp" between each silence
across a sturdy cloth.

Our children, translucent
as blue-stained glass, play
among abandoned bones. They ask us
about toes. They ask about teeth. They
fill skulls with dusk, watching it settle
like fine blue silk.

The Sign of a Great Summer



Head in the right direction and be part of the NYU Summer. Choose from over 1,000 courses taught by leaders in their fields — day or night. Live in the heart of Greenwich Village for as little as **\$100 per six-week session**. You can cover a lot of ground during two six-week sessions. Make the NYU Summer part of your year-round plan.

For a free 1991 Summer Sessions Bulletin, call us today toll free at **1-800-228-4NYU, ext. 614**, or mail the coupon below.

Session I: May 20-June 28
Session II: July 1-August 9

Open House

Sunday, March 10
10:30 a.m.
Loeb Student Center
566 La Guardia Place
New York City



New York University
25 West Fourth Street
Room 633
New York, N.Y. 10012

Please send me a free 1991 Summer Sessions Bulletin.
My area of interest is: Undergraduate Graduate

NAME _____ SOCIAL SECURITY NO. _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

() Day Evening

TELEPHONE _____

SCHOOL CURRENTLY ATTENDING X88 _____

New York University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.