

San Jose State University

SJSU ScholarWorks

Faculty Publications, English and Comparative
Literature

English and Comparative Literature

July 2004

Flood and In Character

Alan Soldofsky

San Jose State University, alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/eng_complit_pub



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alan Soldofsky. "Flood and In Character" *The Fiddlehead* (2004).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English and Comparative Literature at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, English and Comparative Literature by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

Flood

There are children in the trees.
We see them from our boat
as the waters rise. They signal us
to try to reach them. But
walking on water can be a problem.
And even if there was room,
to what shore would we bring them?
Anyway, we are poorly provisioned.
We won't last two weeks. So,
what's the point? The fins of TV antennas
scrape the hull. We leave a wake of hieroglyphics,
an iridescence spreading outward.
Codices tangled in the reeds. Incomplete
sentences, alibis for our species.
Aureoles of verbena in the air.
A bright garment floats
on the tea-coloured surface, stems of light
sinking through the silt. An opaque layer
of brownish-yellow a few inches down,
through which we can almost make out
the topography. The smell of humidity
hanging over everything. Weeks of rain,
then the sun beats down. From somewhere
the whine of cicadas. A scum of algae
ripples between rows of cornstalks,
and a heron launches itself
from atop a drowned barn, circling us
before it dives into the syrupy current,
then emerges from its emersion,
bowing its neck, a fish's slippery,
metallic comma dangling from its mouth.
The bird is not intended as a symbol.

In Character

The actor on the *Today* show said what
he was most afraid of was being seen.
Meaning as some one other than Miss Daisy's
chauffeur or indignant detective, soldier,
cowhand, prisoner, or thug — that there
might be inside him a puppeteer,
some useless utility of self with
no business on the screen. His light deflected
like so many of us, modest in our skins,
his claim to fame a personhood patented
out of looks, gruff-voiced, belonging to the
very bricks we see him walking on.
Late night, the pavement slick, windows reflecting
darkly the bleakness of the street, taking
us with him into the emptiness of
the building next door, extinction looming
in the corridors, in the trashed stairwell,
where we want him not to go. We, content
to be visible — lonely witnesses
who strive to live only within our names.

The
FIDDLEHEAD

Atlantic Canada's International Literary Journal



... a fiddlehead, that small plant
that grows in the Saint John River valley
in the spring, and which is said to be
symbolic of the sun.

Alfred Bailey

February 1945

(first issue of *The Fiddlehead*)

No. 220
Summer 2004