

Norbert Krapf

A HOOSIER SONG OF WALT WHITMAN

It was like the pounding,
recurring roar of the sea
I had never seen or heard
deep in my Midwestern youth,
but could remember from
some other life. That slow,
rhythmic song of a boy who
stepped forth on a fish-
shaped island and watched
lamb fetuses push forth
from the womb, lilac leaves
sway in salt breeze,
and the town drunkard stagger
past the schoolmistress
on his way home from a binge.
That spiralling song carried
all the way to my inland
island in the hills
of southern Indiana
and hummed in my ears
like the sea in a shell
mysteriously deposited
a thousand miles away.
And when I went forth from
my Indiana island and landed
by accident on that child's
Paumanok, I listened to
the surf pounding on the shore,
turned inland, and caught
the voice of the boy
who stepped forth to sing
for the man who now looks back
the songs of the people
whose breath fills his lungs.