

IOWA – A Very Far Country Indeed

A traveler reports on his sojourn in a different state of mind: Iowa, the place that's just not home, by Philip Roth

Iowa is just west of Illinois. This answers the first question put to me by New York acquaintances, some of whom, having heard where I've been for two years, ask, "Exactly where is that again?" A few of the people who inquire are all originally from Indiana, and are not kidding anyone; it is always easy to be a snob about the Midwest, but somehow easiest of all if you happen to have once been born out there. For the record, I was myself born in a large industrial city in New Jersey the same year that Franklin Roosevelt came into office; I have as much trouble naming Western states as naming birds and flowers.

I came out to Iowa to make a living, teaching at the State University of Iowa, which is in Iowa City, and not to be confused, as it often is, with the agriculture school, Iowa State University, at Ames. The University at Iowa City (student pop.: 12,000) is perhaps best placed in the minds of Americans by pointing out that it is the home of the football team coached for the nine years preceding these last two by Forest Evashevski. According to a national newspaper poll, the team was number two in the country in 1960; according to all local polls, number one. For the most part, I believe that it is Evashevski and the "Hawkeyes" that place the University for residents of Iowa too, though, of course, for many of those in the state who hold college degrees, it happens also to be where they went to be educated.

I set off for Iowa City expecting it to be Kansas. Not that I had been to Kansas: I had only a simple vision of an America without cities, trees, or hills, which I called Kansas. I was, of course, wrong. There are hills, there are thicknesses, there is color. The hills rolled gently, and the color, by the late spring, is fierce; as a friend says, things get so green it is as though the ground has eaten something that didn't agree with it. The red barns, the pigs, the cows, and corn creep right up to the tract houses at the edge of town, and the town itself is not an ugly one. In fact, it is a pleasant experience to enter Iowa City at night, from the West, and to look across the Iowa River at what is called the Old Capitol building, upon whose columns and dome spotlights play from the surrounding University buildings. Four Doric columns stand at the entrance portico on the East and West, and on the river side there is a low, graceful balustrade; from its landscaped base a long lawn slopes down toward the water. Entering Iowa City, or, better, standing in the evening on the foot bridge that crosses the river and divides the town and campus in two, you have the feeling that you are in an environment in which men I agree that one of the sources of pleasure is beauty.

Not so in the daylight. Neither town nor University has a style that dominates; this is not so much architectural diversity, deliberate, energetic anarchy, as blindness, the vacancy of imagination. There are some grand houses in town, certainly, houses of grace and proportion, whole streets of them, in fact; and on each street there seems always to be at least one house truly remarkable for its Victorian inventiveness; and there are big trees, and there is, away from the commercial center, a pleasant, small town quiet. There is even a feel in the place of its once having been a town of some beauty. However, what appeal it has now is not in the fact that it is beautiful, but that at least, is I say, it is not yet particularly ugly. The new, however, is pouring in, and what is new is hideous: the new girls' dormitory,

like watered-down Reno, the new police station, like cutout cardboard, the tract houses, like more cardboard. ... To the *idea* of tradition, most of the citizens of the state, I am sure, would stand up and salute; what they believe is that the decorum and restraint are virtues. But as decorum and restraint give color, size, shape to the objects with which the people live, these findings are barely apparent. What the eye takes in—I speak now particularly of the downtown section—is the visual equivalent of a businessman’s luncheon speech: all that muddle-headed talk about “progress and conservatism,” identification to a past so brief that it was a legend before it hardened as fact, and to a future whose appeal is almost totally in the fuzziness and factlessness of the word itself, “the future.”

- Where?
- West of Illinois.
- And what does one do there?
- What do you mean, what does one do there? What do you do here?
- Well – at night? What is there to do?

At night, what my wife and I discovered you could do in Iowa City, is you could go to the movies. On a night out, it was often this short, hedonistic journey that we undertook: 1) to George's Gourmet Pizza to dine; 2) next door to George's, to the candy shop, to buy a quarter pound of butternut crunch; 3) next door to the art theater, to lean back in the dark and gorge ourselves. After the movie we would walk around to that bar on one of the main shopping streets and have a beer, perhaps stopping on the way at The Paper Place, a paperback bookshop run by several graduate students. The store also sells full records, and one is usually playing from ten in the morning, when it opens, until midnight when, along with the bars in town, it stops dispensing pleasure. Photographs of famous writers are pinned to the wall just inside the front door, among them Thomas Mann and Jack Kerouac. In a loft upstairs there is what has now metamorphosed—almost inevitably, it seems—into a student art gallery. In the past it had been a coffeehouse (“The Renaissance Two”), a theater, a place for poetry readings, and even a home to several down-and-out graduate students, some bearded, some not. If ever there is to be a Turkish bath in Iowa City, or a dueling academy, or a dairy restaurant, the odds are heavy that it will be upstairs from The Paper Place.

Diagonally across the street is Kenney's, the bar we frequented after the movies, or sometimes, at 10:30 or 11, after an evening at home. These two establishments, bookstore and bar, make of Clinton Street, in the short business block between College and Washington (where one also finds Woolworth’s and the Moose), Iowa City’s left bank. About half of the students who hang out at Kenney's, and can be considered the regulars, are enrolled in one or another of the excellent fine arts programs that the graduate school offers, and few of them, I think, are natives of the state. Some were among those students who two years ago began to work at establishing a local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union—this, following what many consider to have been the police harassment of an ex-college student in town, a poor fellow who was arrested one morning in a downtown laundry for sitting there at 3 am without his shirt, which happened that moment to be in the drier. Others of the students frequenting Kenney's are connected with *The Iowa Defender*, a weekly newspaper published partly in opposition to, partly out of exasperation with, the pedestrian student daily. *The Defender* is doubtless considered by the staff of the *Daily Iowan*, the administration of the University, and the athletic department—at all of

whom it takes regular whacks, not always in the purest prose imaginable—to be the work of malcontents, just as Kenney's, I think, is dismissed in fraternity circles, as a center for "effetes" and intellectuals, when and if that distinction is made.

And the truth is that the bar, a dark place with booths, tables, and a jukebox full of jazz records, is frequented by certain marginal groups. It is the only place in town where one sees Negroes in a group outside, that is, of the football field on a Saturday. Though there are some white people I know who would tell you that it is no town to be white in, surely it is not a pleasant place to be a black in either. It is difficult for Negroes to find decent housing, or any housing off the complex, and not all the barbershops in town will cut their hair. When this became a public issue some years back (as it seems to in small college towns), some of the Iowa City barbers, choosing humility as a defense, maintained that it wasn't that they didn't want to cut what is known as Negro hair, but that they didn't know how to.

About two years ago, one of the more promising members of the freshman basketball team was pledged to the Delta Chi fraternity – the first Negro to be pledged to an Iowa fraternity, and still months later the first Negro to be depledged from one. Within days of the depledging, a petition signed by 150 faculty members was presented to the President of the University, Virgil Hancher, urging "immediate action withdrawing University approval of... any fraternity or sorority which discriminates in the selection of members on the basis of race or religion." An investigation of the affair was initiated: members of the fraternity were interviewed, and certain letters and documents pertaining to the case were handed over to the Dean of Students, who, President Hancher was reported as saying, was well-qualified to conduct the investigation, in view of his employment with the FBI during the war years.

At a Board of Regents meeting six weeks later, the President asserted that "color was not a major factor" in the depledging. When asked about the faculty petition, he replied: "Their thinking was that we kick everybody involved off campus."

A year later another faculty petition was circulated, this one challenging that the decision of the Delta Chis had not really been the chapter's decision: that there had been a gentleman's agreement made at a national fraternity convention in Mississippi not to pledge a Negro, and furthermore that the chapter had even been threatened with loss of its charter, should the Negro pledge become a full-fledged Delta Chi. The evidence cited—letters to the chapter president, who had quit the fraternity over the depledging issue—had been among the documents that had been placed in the hands of the FBI-trained Dean the previous spring. The flavor of many of the letters is perhaps captured in an extract from one, this from the president of the Oregon State chapter to his radical colleague in Iowa: "Your mistake was not in supporting integration, but in trying to bring it into the fraternity. Truly, the world needs more leaders in the field of integration; but integration must start at the bottom, so to speak, not at the top." In a public statement, the President of the University refused the petitioners' request to reopen the investigation, still convinced, it seemed, that "color was not a major factor."

In response to this new environment, and in response to old environments as well, the Negro students stay mostly to themselves. In the Student Union they do not usually sit at the tables in the popular, collegiate Gold Feather Room, where the bridge playing and flirting and coffee klatching go on; instead,

they seem to have located themselves down the corridor, in a barny, unused room to the north, where there is a separate jukebox and, occasionally in the afternoon, a couple or two twisting. Those very few white girls on the campus who would date Negroes visit them in this room, rather than the Negroes visiting with the white girls in the Gold Feather Room.

At any rate, much of the gloom over the state in the Fall of 1961 was a result not of this housing mess, but of a bad football season, itself largely a result of injuries sustained in the first two games of the year by the two backfield stars, both Negroes, Wilburn Hollis and Larry Ferguson. The two were finally out for the season, though for weeks on end the newspapers carried clinical reports dealing with their conditions. Sports fans worried about Ferguson's knee and Hollis' wrist in a way that the physical welfare of a colored man had probably not been awarded over in those parts since the middle of the 19th century, when certain of the Quakers living in the state served as links in the Underground Railroad, helping to move escaped slaves north to freedom.

Most of the undergraduates in town do their drinking not at Kenney's but at 'The Airliner' and "Joe's Place," and, of course, at the fraternity houses. The townspeople congregate elsewhere, at taverns in the city that cater to a variety of social classes, and in the lodges, which are private clubs and permitted to serve whiskey by the glass. For in Iowa, white or black, businessman or faculty member, beer is what you drink; in Iowa, beer (3.2) is all that you can drink over the counter. This is a state, which has never in its history really been on good terms with firewater, temperance, if not prohibition, having been advocated as far back as 1848 by the first territorial governor, Robert Lucas. Pictures I've seen of this gentleman show a razor-lipped, hollow-cheeked, fierce-eyed man, with nothing in his face to lead you to imagine that mortal men, every once in a while, have lascivious thoughts passing through their minds. The current governor, Norman Erbe, is a fleshier fellow, more jocular in appearance, and yet, while serving as state attorney general, he gained considerable prominence locally by virtue of having gotten several of the girlie magazines off the newsstands. Some of the stands continue to be stocked with magazines picturing adolescent boys flexing in their jock straps, all greased up and ready to go, and as soon as some bright young fella in Iowa figures out what that's all about, a new political star is sure to rise.

It was in 1855 that the state went dry for the first time. Prohibition came and went from that time until the early part of the 20th century, and then, of course, the whole country got it in 1919. In 1934 the current system went into effect in Iowa, whereby bars could serve 3.2 beer in the state-run liquor stores, under a State Liquor Control Commission, could dispense spirits by the bottle to those who paid a dollar each year for a license, and attempted not really to control the amount of bottled liquor consumed in the state (one can buy as much as one wants) as to earn a little cash. There are occasional temperance letters printed in the columns of the *Des Moines Register*, but I don't believe they represent any widespread feeling, popular or governmental. The letters are probably written by old ladies somewhat like the one my wife saw at the auction in Waterloo, Iowa one day. The elderly lady, in a long black dress and high black shoes, had pinned to her bosom a large red, white, and blue button that said REPEAL INCOME TAX.

The fact is that state officials don't seem to care how much liquor its citizens poured down their throats, so long as they are the ones who are sending it to them. There is a name for that kind of thing and it is creeping socialism. For folks who don't have much trouble summoning those two words to their lips on a wide variety of inappropriate occasions—for instance, at the suggestion that the University construct a building in which to house its overnight guests—it is amazing how I never heard it used to describe the state-controlled liquor system. Nevertheless, it is from waiting in the line in one of these establishments—there is only one in Iowa city, a town of 34,000 people – that I happened to get my idea of what much of public life must be like under atheistic totalitarian communism, another phrase I believe I heard used thereabouts.

The liquor store, appropriately enough, is down on a street that contains the post office and the municipal library. It is the very place whose only color comes from the labels on the bottles and the vast American flag that hangs from the wall at the far end of the counter. Never did I find myself able to buy anything in this place in under ten minutes. Even when I went in at the end of last year to see if they had some empty cartons I could use in packing, I wound up leaning across the counter with a pencil in hand to sign a form. Only then was I allowed to carry away the cartons, for each of which I had to deposit five cents into the state's coffers.

To be fair, it must be said that it is certainly less arduous buying in empty carton than getting your hands on a full bottle. First off, to purchase whiskey, you must locate yourself before a large wooden board and find upon it the number and price of the particular item you're after. You then record these facts on the white slip of paper that is provided (free) for the purpose. Your record also the number of your legal liquor permit booklet and sign your name. Next you step into the line that runs up to the counter, often there are no more than three or four people before you, unless it happens to be a football weekend, when the line can twist twice around the store. Sales stop promptly at eight in the evening—they begin at ten in the morning—and between six and eight there is usually a nice flurry of business. (I'm taking the government's point of view here, of course, not the temperance ladies'.) One at a time those in line approach the counter and hand the white slip to the first attendant. He checks what you have written, then carefully transfers the information from your white slip into your liquor booklet. Having initiated the entry, he hands both the slip and the booklet back to you. You move a foot to the left and hand the white slip to a second attendant. At this point you may slip you a booklet back into your wallet or you may, as I forgetfully have done, slip the booklet across the counter to the second attendant. The second attendant immediately slips it back to you; he is used to this, I imagine, particularly with out-of-staters. Apparently it is one of those things that either you grow up with, or you just never get the hang of. The second attendant has before him a machine into which he inserts a little square piece of yellow paper (one for each bottle to be purchased), and the machine marks the paper with the price of the item and, I believe, its numerical classification. You now pass over to him the money at which time it is often convenient to sleep the liquor booklet back into your wallet, unless, of course, you have already done so. The second attendant hands you your change along with both the original white slip and the yellow slips that he has prepared. You move on to a third attendant, who takes all the papers from your hand, including the liquor booklet—if, like me, you are so idiotized by the whole procedure as still to be clutching the thing. Like the second attendant, however, he will always return it to you, on occasion

chancing a remark, such as, "S'pose that belongs to you," or perhaps, "No good to me." With your order in hand, he moves to the high metal shelves in the back of the store, which look something like the open stacks in the University library, and where The Bottles are kept.

The question, then, as to what one does at night is partially answered: you can at least spend the early hours intermeshed in the liquor distribution system. The rest of a social life you must make yourself. Most of my own good times in Iowa City came in the homes of friends. The dinner party is the backbone of the social life, at least for people I knew who were in the employ of the University. It has to be; there is really no place else to go. Fortunately, the best food in the county, maybe in the state, is prepared by the wives of certain of my ex-colleagues, and, to be sure, by my own wife. They have it all over the local chefs, whose inventiveness and daring go just about as far as the baked potato with sour cream and chives, and no further. If you want a restaurant worth anything, you must really drive the five hours to Chicago to find. There is one about ten miles out of town where you can get a pretty good steak. But then you can get a pretty good steak mostly anywhere, providing the cook isn't an Englishman or a child. Fried catfish is served, too, the only fresh fish I saw on a local menu; but it arrives, if you choose to have it arrive, in what appears to be a little zippered case of batter, the site of which pretty much takes the heart out of you. What makes this particular restaurant popular with townspeople is that if you bring your own bottle, the bartender will pour a drink for you, using the establishment's cubes and the establishment's water. This apparently is not too much against the law, though many of those sitting at the bar, or wandering around the lobby, glass in hand, have the kind of look upon their faces that leads you to believe that they think it's sort of scandalous.

Many Iowa Citizens, when they want to dine out, drive about twenty miles west of Iowa city, to the Amana villages, which, strung out over some twelve miles, are called Amana, Middle Amana, High Amana, and so on. The villages, it should be made clear, were not established to provide eateries for the local citizens, nor were they begun so that people could have a place to drive the kids to on a Sunday. They were established in the second half of the 19th century by a group of German refugees who had revolted against the dogmatism and the ritualism of the Lutheran church, and who called themselves the Amana Society. To America they came to live life as they felt it should be lived, piously, earnestly, and without the frills. After camping a while near Buffalo, New York (whose environs were found to be venal and corrupting), they pushed on to Iowa in 1855, where they proceeded to establish a communistic society that flourished and prospered. In 1932 the communistic structure dissolved into a corporate structure, with each member becoming a stockholder, but the hard-working, peaceful, fundamentalist atmosphere of the place is apparently still much what it was years ago. The houses in the Amana villages are mostly two stories high, with bare walls and gabled roofs; many are long and large, attesting to a time when the emphasis was more upon communal activities than individual family ones. A Germanic solidity and intractability hangs about the villages, a no-nonsense air that is not softened particularly by the flowers that grow in the gardens in the spring, or the grapevines that cling to the trellises along the walls of the simple brick and sandstone buildings. Most of the trees you see yield either pears or apples; until very recently shade trees were thought to be an indulgence, and were not planted.

The meals one eats, however, in any of the several early American-type restaurants in the Amana towns are hardly austere, unless one associates austerity with the ingestion of large quantities of starch. The food is served country style, in communal bowls, with everything tasting as it is supposed to: fried chicken, in short, like fried chicken. The restaurants also offer Danish and German beer, and it is possible to buy rhubarb wine, a product of the local winery (unless it is Sunday, and state law forbids the sale of alcoholic beverages; from 3.2 to 0.0). The winery is open to visitors, as are the community operated endeavors, such as the Amana Woolen Mill and the Amana Furniture Shop. No one in our family is particularly a photography hound, and yet, whenever we drove out to the Amana villages, it seemed that our camera was always with us in the car. Though the villagers go on about their work, the towns nevertheless produced in me what, I imagine, Williamsburg, Virginia, would, were I to visit there, which I am not right now planning to do.

Because of their proximity to Iowa City, the Amana restaurants are sometimes the hosts of University functions. Several years back the Writers' Workshop of the University sponsored a program to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Following an afternoon of talks on the French poet, and a presentation of a song cycle based on a group of his poems, a banquet was held out at Bill Zuber's, a restaurant in Homestead, one of the Amana villages. Zuber, a native of this region, was at one time a pitcher for the New York Yankees, and his dining room combines a certain big league flavor with the usual Amana décor. The weather was warm and the members of the Romance Languages and English departments met on the restaurant back lawn, along with guests from the worlds of letters and scholarship. Also on Zuber's lawn was a glee club. To this day no one seems to know what the glee club was doing there, and there is one school of opinion that maintains they weren't really a glee club in the formal sense, but some of the boys from the local firehouse. The fellows, wherever they were, very shortly broke into song, rolling out, to the delight of several friends of mine and the amazement of some of the visiting Gaulists, such old Baudelairian favorites as *Silver Threads Among the Gold*, and *On the Banks of the Wabash*. About the same time, a blonde young lady in the spangled garb of a drum majorette also burst forth into the grass, and began, with much ardor, or élan, to twirl her baton, and intermittently perform a series of cartwheels. She turned out to be limbering up for a photographer, who appeared later to snap pictures of her in a variety of classic poses. I have been told that she was a local girl who was considered to have made good, though in what area of human endeavor my informant forgot to say. Dinner was eventually served to those celebrating the centennial, amidst the photos of ballplayers—mostly of Zuber himself—which look down from the walls of the old hurler's inn onto the plates of his guests.

In my two years at Iowa, I lived mostly at the periphery of Iowa life; that is to say, I was in Iowa because of my affiliation with the University, and it seems to me peripheral to Iowa life. Only a few months before I left, I heard on the radio the President's State of the University address, given, surprisingly (and revealingly, I thought) not to the assembled faculties, but to the assembled men's service organizations of Iowa City neighboring Coralville. though the President reported in detail on conditions during the last year, and outlined what he wanted for the future, it seemed to me that he spends more time than he might have liked, convincing his audiences that a university is a valuable thing, as, say, President Kennedy hasn't to convince Congress that a nation is a valuable thing.

What I am trying to say is that I am not the best source around for information on Iowa: there is another side to all this—the square mileage, etc.—which can be had, I suppose, by sending a postcard to the Chamber of Commerce, Des Moines. It would be ill-advised of me to make large general statements about the people, other than that a majority of them vote Republican and use with staggering frequency the descriptive phrase, "real good." I can say, I think, that I never found my position at the University opening any special doors for me. It may even have closed some. For instance, last winter our daughter was sent home two days in a row from school, where she had come to feel mildly ill late in the afternoon; the principle, on the second day, called to tell me to drive *immediately* over to pick up the child: "And this time," I was informed, in a voice not lacking for volume, "keep her home until she's well!" Whereupon she would have slammed down the phone, had I not requested she hold it to her ear a moment longer so as to hear my considered reply.

And another anecdote: One ten-below day last winter, I came upon a campus policeman giving me a ticket for parking in the wrong campus lot. Freezing and chagrined, I explained that the lot I was supposed to park my car in had been full, and, damn it, it was ten below. He suggested I go park in the lot back of the library then, at least half a mile from my office. I didn't intend to, I said, and if I met similar conditions on another ten-below day, I would do just as I had today—parked in a lot that was half empty and close by. "Well," he said, "next ticket's gonna cost you four dollars more than this one." That was okay with me; I did not intend to pay the one he had given me, I said, waving the thing in his face, and wouldn't the next one either. "Well," he said, lookin' down, "they just let two professors go today for that." "For *what*?" "Not payin' their parkin' tickets. Fired'em," he said, lips curling a little. Surely I was being baited. Yet the cop seemed so tickled by what he just told me that it occurred to me that perhaps he really was reporting fact. The word "impossible" clicked off inside me; followed instantly by "who knows?" I tried curling my own lips "Yeah?" I said. "Who was it?" and promptly and lamely suggested the University's celebrated physicist: "Who was it—Van Allen?" I asked. "Might a' been," said he. "Didn't catch the fellers' names," and rolling up his window drove off.

But generally, as they say, the folks are folksy. Maybe that was what the principal and the cop were being with me; going out of their way, in fact, to treat me as though I were anyone else, which is, unfortunately, to be treated like less than anyone else. The hard part of all that folksiness, all that "Hi! How are you!" business on the streets, is that, in assuming an intimacy in excess of the facts, it cannot help, often, but break down into either obsequiousness on the one hand, or arrogance on the other. And the hard part too, with being asked how you were doing by total strangers, is that you come to find yourself *answering* them. I have never been so talkative in my life while doing something so simple as buying a package of razor blades or a quart of milk.

Hesitant as I am to conclude with a flurry of culture observations, I will chance this one: since fifty to sixty thousand people gather in the stadium each football weekend we can assume that in Iowa that sport is popular. During the season, grown men whom I recognize as merchants and professional people, I'd see in public places wearing diamond-shaped tags on their lapels, saying BEAT MINNESOTA, or GO GET'EM HAWKES. Demure housewives—ladies who bake cakes, make fudge, who speak at PTA meetings in little tiny girly voices that don't carry ten feet—rise like gushers and absolutely shriek as each Iowa first down is rolled up. In a stadium I have seen businessmen, bankers, and optometrists

become beasts – “Pour it on, Iowa! *Pour it on!*” Two years ago, when Evashevski resigned as football coach to devote his full-time to being University athletic director, the editorials and columns in the local papers paying tribute to his reign were written in a prose style openly, unblushingly eulogistic. “There is a man in Iowa city...” “On a chill November afternoon not too many years ago...” I do not know that I have exactly the words, but I am willing to vouch for the tone, the spirit, for those old, evocative rhythms.

A lot of what I cannot say about Iowa, I *cannot* because, while living there, I did not keep in contact with those same local papers from which I quote, or paraphrase, above. My name appeared on that short list of those in town for whom a local drugstore orders *The New York Sunday Times* at fifty cents a throw. The paper does not arrive in Iowa City until Tuesday afternoon, and its not appearing until the middle of the week did much to upset my sense of time and place. But even more upsetting was that on Sunday I received no paper at all. For a while, when we first got to Iowa, I had the state's largest daily, the *Des Moines Register*, delivered to the door each morning. The presidential campaign of 1960 was on at the time, and almost instantly I couldn't bear the paper for its politics. I stuck it out, however, though finally, after the election, when much bad feeling began to be apparent (particularly about Mr. Kennedy's staying up late at parties, front-page news), I canceled my subscription, telling them not to send the thing on weekdays or Sundays.

The daily *Times* seemed the answer. The way it works, I sometimes got the papers published on Monday through Thursday the day after publication, though usually they seemed to arrive in groups of two on alternate days. The Friday and Saturday papers (and occasionally Thursday's too), wouldn't arrive until Monday, and generally, because of some mail slowdown over the weekend, didn't actually come until Tuesday. This meant that on Tuesday, aside from the *Sunday Times*, anywhere from two to four editions of the daily *Times* might appear. The middle of the week would become a hopeless muddle, and the problem was whether to line up the papers and read them in order, or just to skim the past issues so as to catch up, and then start really with Monday. Or to begin with Sunday as though it had come before last Friday. Or, simply, as I had done on occasion, say the hell with it, and wait until Thursday, by which time most of the papers would have disappeared into the basement, or the garbage, or the fireplace and I could begin with the one daily *Times* that would arrive that morning in the mailbox. Unless, of course, two happened to arrive.

The problem was further complicated by taking trips every few months or so. Once last year, when my wife and I went off for a week, we unhappily failed to tell the druggist to cancel that week's *Sunday Times*. The Tuesday following our return, I found I had not only all those dailies to do with but two numbers of the Sunday edition. Adrift in this sea of news, of so much happening and happening and happening, one's awareness, all at once, is not simply of Iowa's smallness in the face of the vast, disordered world—about which one can carp and crab endlessly. The smallness that is blinding is one's own. But then that is not the subject here.