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Jim had started sawing. In the safety of the piercing scream, the sweet sudden scent of fresh resin, I asked, "What was yourself and Jim arguing about?"

"O that," he shook with laughter. "He took in some contract timber."

"What's that?"

"We don't do it any more except we know the people. A fella might have a few trees he'd want sawed, to save him buying timber, and we used to give him a price. A lot of that stuff came from trees they used to plant round houses, beech mostly, and you'd never know what you'd run into, nails by the no time, handles of buckets, links of chains."

"They could be dangerous," I said.

"They'd go through you like fucking bullets except they're mostly rotten. They've been hammered in years ago and the wood has grown over them. I saw them ruin more saws than you can name," he was relaxed, holding forth.

"What's this got to do with the argument between Jim and yourself?"

"He took in a few big oaks for this fella that he knows. And I was going to use the big saws."

"Are the oaks all right?"

"Of course they are. But you have to make a stand sometime round here or you'd wind up taking orders. There's no giving of orders as it is."

"I can't see you taking orders," I said.

"You can never be too sure of that," he shook with the laughter of pure pleasure as he wiped his eyes with the enormous scarred hands. "To make sure of that, you have to keep sitting upon the other fella every chance you get."

I hung about until they closed the mill, and after that it gradually grew plain that he was loathe to go into the house in case he'd meet Cyril or even possibly my aunt.

From *The Pornographer* by John McGahern, published by Faber and Faber, 1979. Reprinted by kind permission of the author.

John McGahern was born in Dublin in 1934 and grew up in the Shannonside village of Cootehall, Co Roscommon, where his father was the local Garda sergeant. His first novel, *The Barracks*, was published to great acclaim in 1963. His second novel, *The Dark*, (1965) was banned in the Republic of Ireland by the Censorship of Publications Board, and that, and his marriage to a divorcée, led to his departure from the teaching post he held in Dublin in the archdiocese of John Charles McQuaid.

His books have won many prizes, and McGahern is as famous internationally as he is at home. He now lives and writes in Co Leitrim.

It may be mentioned that the execrable practice of nailing fences to living trees is often to be met with in rural parts of Ireland.

(Selection and note by Wood Kerne)

This contribution from Wood Kerne is, regrettably, his final *Trees, Woods and Literature* column in *Irish Forestry*. Many well known Irish and international writers have appeared over an extended period, their work sometimes used to illustrate a particular aspect of forestry or wood use.

While *Trees, Woods and Literature* will continue to appear the Wood Kerne sobriquet will remain firmly with the author (Ed.).