

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
30



# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 30, #5

it is the business  
of the poet to take risks.

"the absence of intuition" — Richard Spiegel  
North River Bulkhead, Greenwich Village, August 19, 1979

# WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 30

Number 5\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel  
Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## Tools of the Trade — James Penha

A pencil is a cool stone  
to lead a beacon  
to this paper,  
as if it bears a flash  
of wisdom  
from a hand,  
a heart,  
but it shines  
less like a gem  
than a pair of scissors  
that cuts out this poem  
for a moment  
in pain.

## Under the Calico Bush — Hugo DeSarro

Under the calico bush  
beneath the window,  
they did their casting:  
You must be . . . I must be . . .

Great dramas were enacted:  
kings, queens, witches and villains,  
and always a beautiful princess  
and a handsome prince.

It was cool under the calico bush;  
an enchanted fairyland of  
You must be. . . I must be . . .

With life stretched out  
long and rosy before them,  
the adversities and sad times  
would come later when  
You must be. . . I must be. . .  
was forgotten and the castle  
under the calico bush abandoned.

## The Beginning of Taking Risks — Scott Owens

Somewhere in the past there will always be  
a creek too wide to jump without losing  
a shoe in the far side bog, even  
for Felicia Jackson, though knowledge of that  
won't keep you from trying amidst  
the promise of touching her scarlet hair  
and the radiant beginning of cleavage,  
and so, every time you go back  
to that place, you'll do it again,  
the rush, the leap, the fear, the dread  
of going home shoeless in a time  
when shoes were hard to come by,  
the irrepressible joy that makes  
even greater sacrifice as good as nothing.

## Galatea Bridge — William Corner Clarke

On my way across Galatea bridge  
I met a beggar  
Who said to me  
That he could look into the sun  
Without a shield  
Of any kind  
That he had conquered light  
And now could see  
Into the deepest reaches  
Of the universe

I put a coin into his cup  
He thanked me and said  
That anyone could share  
    His secret  
If they could only stand the pain  
    For a few seconds  
    Of their lives  
    But no one dared

Now he's always on that bridge  
    But I never speak to him  
    I keep my eyes  
    Fixed firmly on the ground  
Till I am safely on the other side  
    I just cannot bear  
    To see  
    The brightness  
    Of his smile

originally published in *Fire*, No. 26, U.K.

## Aujourd'hui — Sylvia Manning

Il y a quelque chose  
que les écureuils  
et les oiseaux  
savent, parce qu'ils  
jouent dans les rameaux  
sur la ruelle comme si  
c'est la première jour  
de quelque chose,  
aujourd'hui.

There's something  
that the squirrels  
and the birds  
know, because they're  
playing in the branches  
above the alley as if  
it were the first day  
of something,  
today.

From *Des Recettes de Quittance*: little Quebec City poems on the backs of receipts.  
This on Feb. 11, 09 on receipt from **Intermarche St-Jean**, 850 rue St-Jean, dated 2009/01/31 - my first day back  
— for a dozen eggs (*oeufs gros*) \$2.63. *Vous servir est notre plaisir/MERCI.*

## Faithless Words — Michelle Chen

Maybe I don't read enough poetry,  
don't borrow enough  
against the credit of those  
who said it better before.

I can only lean on flimsy slats of light  
standing in for souls in the empty pews.  
I only feel the hush snug beside my lap,  
and the distant sermon can't carry me the way  
the dust rafts off  
on a stained glass hue.

And I find no coined phrases  
to bank  
on the corner  
where my embattled neighbor  
hinges on the glass door.  
Fingers cupped around change,  
a story on bruised cardboard  
hung around a tattooed neck.  
The street's rich testimony  
lost on passersby  
preoccupied with their reflections.  
And I think maybe I read too much  
out of nothing

**After Finding Out He Had Weeks To Live,  
The Poet Wrote Only Titles to Poems  
And Placed Them Around Town for  
Other People To Find and Finish — Steve Shilling**

Scandinavian Days, Saskatchewan Nights

Blind Faith

In The Pocket of an Old Jacket

The Glamour Queen Diagrams Sentences at the Blackboard

My Dog Has Built an Empire

What Lighthouses Do All Day

We All Have To Write One Elegy

Reaching Point B from Point A

I Had A Dream About Naomi Shihab Nye

Scenes From A Small Town Barbershop

Exurbia, circa 1989

A Coffee Cup in One Hand, A Snowstorm in the Other

*It Has Made All The Difference*

Seismographic Symmetry

## Change of Address Karen Douglass

Stony peaks of the Sangré de Cristos  
rise like teeth over the valley;  
snow, fog, fire, rain, wind, hooves of deer,  
big-horn sheep, elk, pads of puma and coyote,  
rabbit teeth, vole, bear claw scrape,  
wear, dislodge; ice and roots  
eat at the rock—fox, snake, lightning.  
This is the theater of the real world.

Year by year the numbers fade,  
the mailbox a long walk from the house,  
no child to tell, Go down and  
see if there's mail. Don't drop it.  
The wooden post leans, trembles  
at a touch, plows pummel it,  
baseball bats lambaste it. Run,  
quick, get the mail. Don't dawdle.

## The Beauty Out There — H. Edgar Hix

The beauty out there  
is naked as a rainbow,  
a saw-edged thing aflame  
with raindrops on innocent grass.

The beauty out there has crosshairs  
accurate as lightning in a spring field,  
as a tornado in a trailer park.

That beauty is out there  
surely as thunder raging  
at a deaf man.

## Never Finished - Michael S. Glaser

*"a poem is never finished, it is merely abandoned"*

*variously attributed to Mallarme, Valery, Pound, William Carlos Williams, C.S. Lewis and as "an old saying among poets."*

And what is ever finished, really? Until the end,  
isn't it all a kind of process, an exploration  
of those small corners of curiosity that bring us  
ever closer to that final leap?

Each beginning embraces its own tension,  
the pulls and confusions that define one's unfolding—  
like a flower, say, letting go of a seed,  
or a leaf being pushed from its limb.

I'm not so sure *abandoned* is what I'd call it—

at least not until afterwards,  
when the seed has failed to find the soil,  
the leaf has fallen, or the body returned to dust.  
When it's over, it's over, but until then  
I want to embrace the unstoppable invitations  
that call to us in every moment,

I want to explore the great hollow of our failures  
and the contours of our human longings. I want to  
know courage, the passions that stir deep within,  
the storied intimacy of those who chase rainbows.  
I want to know each of us as artists  
stalking, as we do, the incorrigible dark.

## Ars Poetica, 2009 — George Held

I read a poem, a Pulitzer winner's,  
Because it was there in *The New Yorker*  
Begging to be read, like a dog for a pat.  
A poem might tell us where we're at -  
What's up, what down, what's noble,  
What we might do in the face of trouble.  
It might sing a song, just entertain;  
It might hunch down in the uncertain.  
The poem I read looks like a poem,  
With three-line stanzas and no ho-hum  
Language but words weighted like thread,  
And the net result is art left for dead.

**Monet Painting on the Edge of a Wood by John Singer Sargent**  
**John Grey**

A painter for a subject, his own ekphrasis.  
A crack of clearing in a dappled wood.  
Monet seated in gray smock,  
head covered by quiet hat,  
paused mid-brushstroke,  
hands still upon the pallet rim  
while his mind makes choices.  
In Monet's long shadow,  
his daughter-in-law  
spreads white and blooming  
in brown grass.

Art mirrors art.  
A canvas within canvas.  
One scene seeks its symmetry,  
another dapples gray and green,  
a friendship in dark oils.

## Boy With No Past — N. A'Yara Stein

you think i never saw myself as they saw me?

a short and balding man  
an innocent carrier of messages  
always reading the papers  
with horn-rimmed glasses  
working at an ape's job  
married to white trash  
with my hopeless intellectual  
mind  
which got me nothing

but  
pancreatic cancer  
liver spots  
nicotine-stained nails  
the headlines saying  
*intimacy*  
*whale migration*  
*the apocalypse*

## **"Any day above ground is a good day" — Richard Yurman**

(James Reyne song)

*The eye never has enough of seeing nor the ear its fill of hearing*  
Ecclesiastes

the blank white wall I wake to  
begins my day  
the fog outside my window  
dulling the green of a next-door tree  
fills me like smoke  
the shake and grind  
of garbage trucks in the early light  
makes the blood beat behind my eyes

another day above ground  
another day still inside  
this body and this mind  
despite the gray chill  
a good day  
to go on seeing  
to go on hearing  
the blooming  
buzzing world

## Writing on Ice — Mary Belardi Erickson

You skate a creaking surface  
of words  
above soft sands of  
consciousness,  
where green reeds  
enticingly wave  
their lines.

You peer inward  
as if through a lens of clear ice,  
would rather not fall in,  
drowned  
by a deadline.

You don steel blades,  
bump across an ice-sheet—  
the challenge of a theme.  
You're jolted by frozen orbs  
strewn like polished marbles,  
tossed by editors' playful minds.  
Make a run, bend the knees  
of your thinking, hug curves  
and let loose—  
smooth and cool this stanza.

You listen for hidden bubbling—  
oxygenated ideas with fizz.  
Drill some soul-ice, hook tales  
from Id's murky waters.  
Pause, contemplating  
syntax hid up your sleeve  
as you glide and gyrate.  
Keep your notions warm  
inside your coat  
while choice words  
play crack the whip—  
entire phrases sliding  
off the page.

# The First Poem of the Morning Awaits You, Somewhere

J. J. Steinfeld

You woke this morning  
from one of those  
nasty little sleeps  
where mortality  
is questioned  
in the same way  
a swindler is confronted  
questioned and then  
kicked hard  
but all you get

is the air  
so you decide  
to write a poem  
either about the beginning  
or the end of the world  
you're not sure, again  
so you down a glass  
of orange juice,  
a single piece of  
toast and half finish  
an instant coffee  
that the gods  
consider a cruel joke  
then you begin to run

around the block  
a poor substitute  
for beginning or  
end of the world poems  
or any cheap or cunning  
metaphors you might find  
at a synapse flea market  
it was that bad of a sleep  
that disappointing of a morning  
but your legs are working  
and there's a coffee shop  
ten tempting minutes away  
if you pick up speed.

## White Night — David Michael Nixon

It's been twenty years since I saw the rabbit,  
white against the snowy pasture.  
Only when the wolf's pale howl  
startled the rabbit into motion,  
did I make it out, a blur  
against the still and scattering snow.

I remember how it zigzagged into  
the laden pines at the pasture's edge,  
leaving the snow static as before,  
and how the wolf called again  
then the white night held its breath.

It's been twenty years since I left that country  
and entered the tall buildings,  
but I can still feel the rabbit trembling  
in that pale wilderness of snow.

## Surreptitious Dreaming — Alan Catlin

covert as the burying  
beast mounding snow  
into storms, tunnels of ice  
light reflects, hiding what lies  
within, a hunter's blind,  
a decoy's duck, night  
vision goggles illuminate  
all, but nothing is seen.

## Astride Strella's Brooklyn Bridge, a self portrait — Alan Catlin

I have seen this bridge in  
another country of my mind,  
seen how it spans a virtual  
Atlantic of seeing, an Ellis  
Island of trying to escape,  
an ancestral longing for a  
place that can never be called  
home. Once the poet recognizes  
he will always be an exile,  
freedom is the grossest inequity,  
the ultimate abstraction.  
Look closely inside each geometric  
form, consider the colors and the history  
they represent; all those forbidden  
boroughs securely locked against  
intruders from outside.

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