

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

29



## Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 29, #2

Hoping to fly like birds,  
But utterly exhausted,  
One can only watch the twilight pass away.

Phan Thuan

excerpted from *American Moon*

(translated by Ai-Jen Lin Chao)

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# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 29

Number 2\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## New York City Prayer, June 2003 — Madeline Tiger

*How do I thank-----*

*How do I pray to -----*

*—to "source that gives us what we need", "alternative concept"*

*—Alicia Ostriker's suggestion, Midrash group, 6/03*

**"If you want the bamboo, go to the bamboo"** (saying of the Japanese haiku poets)

If I see the pigeon, I see

the pigeon feeding the pigeon.

If I am here, I am here

nor the oversleeping nor the tunnel

nor the river itself

but the being here

nor the highway nor gridlock and

ambulance, nor

sirens and the crazy and the

avenues, but the Here.

If I found parking, I found  
a place and I am here. If  
here is humus and bread  
fresh melon and vegetable crisp,  
here is tea, I go to the  
teapot and pour.

If I wear bangles, I do.  
If you speak,  
if you allow me to speak,  
if one finds a word and a word  
we go to those words deep there.  
There is the word and sky.

And if there were great blossoms of  
clematis this morning billowing violet  
blue in waves flowing over  
the lamppost, I look. I say  
Look! At the clematis!

And if I have slept  
past trouble, sleep has  
taken me past trouble to  
this day, silver, blue, here.

If I want to be thankful  
No—if I AM thankful, this  
day: the opening, the bamboo  
and the opening through bamboo.

## Even in Sleep — David Michael Nixon

I am waiting to be lost,  
but so far, I am always  
right where I left me.

Even in sleep, I know the way,  
And swim through dreams to daylight.

## In the Dim Back Garden — David Michael Nixon

No strange failure appears  
in the dim back garden.  
We remain there for now,  
as hollyhock and pansy,  
tulip and glad bloom and wither  
and we sip hand-squeezed lemonade  
under the catalpa,  
whose giant bean pods shake  
in the warm goddess breath.

## Harbinger Ellaraine Lockie

How could I know  
you'd be so upset  
about the dead bird  
on the dining table  
Just a teenager  
Probably out imbibing  
Slugging down  
pyracantha berries

Then drunk diving  
the window  
I kept its carcass  
to share the sadness  
and the beauty  
Close, you could see  
the red breast  
bookended in black  
Still, you could feel  
the oil slicked feathers  
Steal a sensuous stroke  
Silent, you could hear  
the harmony of death

But you didn't  
See the sadness  
or observe the beauty  
You felt the fear  
of a drive home  
after eight  
bottles of beer  
Of hands shaking  
In a sales meeting  
Of the plastic bag  
that held the bird

## From the Garden — Noel Sloboda

Broken god, every summer, you come. The same rock, a fragment of one of your ancient alters, all that remains, a settee now, as you bask under the warm sun. The same sun you came close to touching in millennia past, before your wings were shorn, before you shrank. So many skins past. You soak up the warmth, hoping it might restore you, making you swell and soar and sing again. Yet what the sun wants is blood, and you take your victims whole, spilling not a drop. You remain shackled to the ground, silent, barred from your throne in the sky. Sometimes, though, worshippers come, mostly little boys, who take a step to speed you toward your destiny. Shadowing the old rituals, they take your head with a rock or spade, spraying the hot stone with blood. One day—a bad day for little boys—the rough bed grown incarnadine will become a platform for launch. Your wings will bloom and you, unbroken god, will swell and sing and soar again.

## A Few Words — Ida Fasel

With God,  
every breath is  
an angel. With angels,  
their every word is *hineni* —  
"Send me."

Father,  
may I serve you  
all my life, flying a  
little lower than angels, a  
blue bird.

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An interpretation of this poem is posted on  
[www.pointandcircumference.com/deronda/main.htm](http://www.pointandcircumference.com/deronda/main.htm)

## In the One Space that Wasn't Frozen - Lyn Lifshin

The heron, deep  
in pond water,  
still as sticks

and then, a sudden  
swoop like the  
last fruit falling

off a tree into snow  
I happened to see it,  
standing near the

window, that flash  
of tangerine and  
golden in its beak like

a barb of sun, a slice  
of guava in colorless  
air. It's been so long

I don't remember  
something I looked for  
and wanted to come

came so fast

## Fields Smolder with Light — Lyn Lifshin

Temperatures falling.

Moon slivers on the  
rolling skin of water.

Geese in half light,  
armada of feathers.

Wind blows them closer.

One silver band glows.

Their onyx, black flame  
in a night fire.

## After Walking the Dogs — Ruth Moon Kempher

damp air

and a darkness of birds

veiling the horizon

## A Poem for Michael Jordan — Paul Kareem Tayyar

They say you could fly,  
That you could have eaten a meal  
In the time between take-off and landing,  
The rim like a buffet table you returned to again and again,  
Forever hungry.

As a boy I hung a poster of you on my wall,  
The one where you cradled the moon in your hand,  
Leapt towards the basket that hung like Heaven itself,  
Your grace seemingly capable of pulling it down to earth  
For the rest of us, letting us run our hands through its hair.

## Four Blackbirds — Sherry Weaver Smith

Four red-winged blackbirds  
take crimson west  
under fog.

Bird-throat call ends.  
Bent from the heaviness  
of the day's last gold,  
rye grass heads rustle.

After fog pushes light  
into tree roots,  
into cracks in mud,  
dark comes out to spin  
around in a slow wind.

## **sunset in The Sunset — R. Yurman**

three birds sail  
across pale orange  
    blacken with each sweep of wing

the undersides of clouds  
    catch pink fire  
wires strung house to house  
    cut the sky

when I look back  
    toward the hills  
it is already night

## Patricia Kelly

my friend's beloved

deceased cat purrs

fading thunderstorm

## Geoff Stevens

Afraid to land in case I fossilize  
I fly around on my pterodactyl wings  
I'm millions of years old  
and a little deaf  
can't hear myself creaking along  
didn't hear the news that I was extinct

**It Might Be Funny If they Didn't Need One So Bad**  
**Michael Hathaway**

There's this old black hen -  
we'll call her Mary -  
dedicated & belligerent,  
she sets on a cluster of seven eggs  
on my back porch.

It is an effort in futility  
since we have no rooster  
& there is no fertility . . .  
unless, of course,  
she's trying to hatch  
the Chicken Messiah . . .

(dedicated to [kentuckyfriedcruelty.com](http://kentuckyfriedcruelty.com))

## They Will Probably End Up In Museums — Michael Hathaway

while changing eight cat litter boxes  
with a Discovery Channel show about dinosaur dung  
playing in the background,  
it occurred to me that  
a million years from now  
anthropologists who discover the landfill  
at what was known as central Kansas,  
in the center of the North American continent,  
may be infinitely more fascinated and enamored  
by the petrified contents of these reeking black garbage bags,  
as well as the little petrified nuggets I scoop daily  
& tie & discard so diligently in plastic grocery bags  
than anyone ever was with my poems.

## Sandcastle — William Corner Clarke

And the warrior's castle  
Pride of the summer morning  
Is about to be destroyed  
As the white winged watchers  
Wheel and screech  
High above the encircling tide

The massive walls of sand  
Built to tempt the waves  
Are breached and foamed away  
The noble paper flags  
Are stolen by the wind  
The dizzying towers melt  
Into the rush of spray

And the ocean takes possession  
Of the bucket and the spade  
And the watchers  
Read the roar of light  
On the toss of the green sea weed  
And dip and soar and celebrate  
The victory in sight

But then a whisper  
From the hidden moon  
Reminds the water of its role  
And sighing by the grey sea wall  
It drags its spoils of war  
Back to the counting  
Houses of the deep

And all the while  
Across the battle lines  
The coiled blue listeners listen  
Within the echo of their shells  
To the rise and fall of empires  
To the ticking  
Of the sands

## Gardening — Gerald Bosacker

A long dead tin can,  
robbed of its sheltering luster,  
bereft of identity and content  
rises from the topsoil grave,  
shaking off its new armor of muck  
while impaled upon my spading fork.  
It drips mystery of origin and content  
now halfway converted to rust.  
What did it shelter and hide before?  
It now unfolds a slimy conclave of worms.  
This cluster of marauding Annelida,  
voraciously seeking new worlds  
to proselytize into productive loam,  
converting all subterranean Earth.

Blind worms that fought off oxidation,  
now digest the reddening rust.  
They sing, Spring is here,  
so stop digging and lets go fishing.

## Richard The Third's Hump — Lee Evans

You can step off the train at Penrith,  
And the first thing that you see might be  
The ruins of Strickland's Tower—  
Or the McDonalds' golden arches besieging  
The hungry ghosts in the castle's keep,  
Urging them to lay down their shields,  
And get in line for a Happy Meal  
Of flesh they need not see dismembered

O Stalwart bastion against the Scottish raids!  
The roots of bracken, feckless feet of tourists  
Disintegrate the sandstone into red dust  
That swirls about the advertising campaign  
Squatting heavily upon our shoulders,  
Like the hump of Richard the Third—  
Leaving us to rehearse that role,  
And exit the scene tragically.

## Two Voices in Winter — Thomas D. Reynolds

My dad's niece drove from Wyoming  
On the Christmas after he got cancer.

As soon as she stepped from the white van,  
We could see the resemblance to her deceased father.

Suddenly the house rang again with my uncle's laughter,  
A bit higher and stuttering than remembered.

His voice drifted through the rooms of the house,  
With the warmth and music of a rain shower.

His eyes still sparkled with optimism,  
Saying that things would be all right.

Somehow.  
And made us all believe it.

How the fire within us can endure  
Long after our world has grown dark.

And yet within my father is another voice,  
That rose within me as I walked in the snow,

Born of the frozen ground,  
That says that life is hard and unrelenting,

That watched as the snow picked up,  
Swirling now in the north wind,

That caused even the dark mare to lower  
her head and head for the barn.

**Where Eternity Meets the Sea — Joanne Seltzer**  
Lands End, Cornwall

Beyond attractions  
built on cash  
gulls fly overhead,  
butterflies  
unbutter Celtic  
late summer flowers  
that burst magically  
from rock,  
the tour guide points  
across the water  
at Deadeye Dick  
and other local blokes  
gone from tin mines  
to the American  
gunpowder frontier.

This western edge  
of what was known  
remains a testament  
to what is dreamt.

## One time, one forest — Sylvia Manning

When I leave  
(quand je pars)  
the forest deck  
(le salon de la forêt)  
I may never be here again.

I'd like to record forever, then,  
should such be true:

a mother speaks  
French here, as  
gently as the breeze,  
more gently;  
a child twirls slowly,  
her "dance as if leaf"  
in the dapple of light  
through poplars  
and pine, high,  
trop haute,  
above us.

Soon she runs —  
because her energy  
is without limit,  
she is very young.

And another mother  
speaks, as gently  
as the breeze.  
And another child says, like a bird's  
tentative query in new territory,  
a few notes.

This is one time,  
one forest,  
several people,  
all female,  
in the perfect light  
and shade of light,  
today.

## Bitter Harvest — Donna Barkman

From the top of the gorge, I see them:  
two deer galloping upstream,  
then pounding back, panicked by gun shots,  
running for their lives.  
I can smell their desperation,  
see their dark winter coats stained red,  
hear their wild silent call before they drop.  
Each is bound atop a car, their taxi to the  
taxidermist and the butcher, eyes still startled  
in death, bullet holes still stinging.

My neighbors use the stealth of bow and arrow,  
the forest secrecy of platforms nailed up high.  
Their hunter presence unannounced, they pierce  
their unsuspecting prey with sharpened steel.  
A doe hangs from a tree, split from gullet to gut,  
life juices running out,  
as I wonder if this trusting venison *au jus*  
is more delectable to harvesters  
than deer steak carved from terror?

## Continent — Davide Trame

Low tide on a winter morning,  
the sandbars thicker, higher, large,  
spread over with bald patches of brown mud  
where egrets land, loiter, linger, their stares  
at one with the infinitesimal nods of the air,  
on a horizon of bare trees and reeds  
where sunlight trickles and whispers in between.  
And the lagoon water still like a gaze  
left behind that waits, in the lustrous  
eternity of mirroring veins.  
I arrived early for the boat after the walk  
and knew I was early  
before looking at my watch and checking the timetable  
on the pontoon, lulled by lappings, moorings whining,  
my fingers following the numbers on the chart

breathing blue silence.

It was one of those moments when you feel  
you are early anyway and you are glad  
of any empty extra-time.

Time for throwing sticks for my dog  
on a just discovered grass patch  
and sit then on a bench on the bank,  
a high bench, like a throne.

Time to know it was a time

I would later want to remember  
when it surfaced slow and quiet  
like mud in low tide

on which breath should be like the egrets' legs  
scarce but vast in its loitering,  
a naked continent and ages to linger  
away from the routine web of hurried days.

## On the Film 'Dixie Chicks: Shut up and sing' — Donald Lev

I am proud of the Dixie Chicks.

I happen to be, strangely enough, a devotee of country music since the age of 11.

I will not discuss how this came to be as it would take many more lines of verse than I feel like expending now.

Country music is a music of the working class (yes, America, it exists and is called for some reason the "middle class"). This is the muddy, oh so slow moving, very conservative arena where real things political take place.

Marx himself observes this, which is why he trusts this Class to bring in socialism. You can't win them all.

But then, "it ain't over till it's over."

Quite a look into the music industry too.

Not as bad as say the meat industry, but

An industry.

Any way, let's have one more round of applause for the Dixie Chicks.

& one more Bronx cheer for our unbeloved President.

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