

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

29



# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 29, #3

i  
am watching  
the moon  
dance  
to the  
chanting  
of the  
frogs  
& the  
rhythm  
of the  
crickets

Rokwaho  
excerpted from *Moon Dance Music*  
published in *On Turtle's Back* (White Pine)

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 29

Number 3\*

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from *A Book of Natural History* (1902)

## Patricia Kelly

spell bound

a large gold serpent of light

spirals at the center

## Geoff Stevens

crickets jitterbugging in their grassy beds  
frogs line-dancing in their river creek ones  
gnats waltzing in the air  
all stop when the moonbeam shines on them  
wait for god to give a prize

**The Northwoods Inn**  
**Joanne Seltzer**

It was vintage roadhouse  
that offered frogs' legs  
fried to a greasy crisp  
and vaudevillians  
leftover from  
nostalgic bootleg days.

In my fat girl stage  
I ordered adult fare, ate  
undaintily, licked  
my fingers clean,  
paid no attention to  
the comic in blackface  
kneeling, singing Swanee  
as in a minstrel show.

At the Northwoods Inn  
my mother cut meat  
from tiny bones, announcing  
frog tastes like chicken  
only sweeter, juicier,  
more flavorsome . . .

but bitter the memory  
of an interminable ride  
in our gas-guzzling Buick  
to hear crude racial jokes  
and feast on God's creatures  
who sweeten the night  
with cacophonous  
grunts, whistles, trills, croaks.



## **A View from the Window — Dave Church**

The skunk in the middle of the road  
going around in circles  
with its face stuck  
in what looked like  
a plastic yogurt cup,  
or something like it,  
wrinkles my brow  
in the early morning light.

The lady next door leaving for work  
sees and approaches the muddled skunk  
like it was nothing out of the ordinary.  
She bends down, grabs,  
and pulls at the cup  
setting the skunk free.

The skunk looks up at her  
as if to say  
thank you,  
and leaves the scene

like it was nothing out of the ordinary.

## A Yearning — R. Yurman

*I want to believe in an ardor as keen  
as the homing pigeon's, who reconnoiters, banks,  
lands, and coos like a fool in the dark.*

—Robert Wrigley

I didn't expect, for example,  
that you would walk up  
lay a hand along my sleeve  
and say "Sit next to me"  
though I watched just now  
from across the room  
and saw you do exactly that

I'm not sure, in fact,  
what I did expect  
except that your hand  
might reach toward *me*  
and you would say  
something at once  
sensuous and correct

## 8:00 P.M. on the Plains — Ellaraine Lockie

Sundown performs its striptease  
in circadian rhythm over the *Great Plains*  
as each degree of heat slow-drops  
And streams of sunshine shimmy  
into cool layers of sheer watercolors

Afterglow flush of crimson and fuchsia  
overflows the horizon from *Sweet Grass Hills*  
to *Bighorn Mountain*  
Before breathing below stops  
in honor of the still moment  
When the last layer of day peels away  
And night curls naked in the sky

**This Bear Dances Only to Old, Slow Music, Piaf or Sinatra**  
**Ruth Moon Kempher**

Rue's the scent of dreams, cold nights. Rue's  
a peculiar herb — not for robots or dancing bears  
or clowns even. Too bitter for juleps, too coarse  
for gin, rue's an herb too daintily astringent to eclipse  
your lovely American Beauty as national bloom  
and God forbid it menace the panting orchid's pace  
on gowns; but it sticks around, stubbornly —  
rue, the herb of grace.

The bear dances glob-lumpy in his skin; and orchids  
open, hairy and loose. Touch loves the bear  
pelt and bone, and the sensual bloom, but rue grows  
almost underground, working away, thin spike roots  
and dun, small leaf — pricking into earthy clods —  
a vein of grace, a tinge of grief. Not for robots  
nor dancing bears, my dear, rue lies uneasy  
on my sleeve.

And O, I know it, taste and scent  
when clown, I dance; when stone, I see.

## Heavenly Shades of Night — Rex Sexton

*The Big Dream Score*

*The Top Bop Jackpot,*

*dead as road kill,*

*as a rigged roulette wheel . . .*

No guardian angels in these dark grottos,

crypts, caverns, night world catacombs,

no mojo, ace in the hole, as the winter

winds wail like junkshop violins and winos

rummage through the streets and sanitation

trash bins, while gunfire crackles across the

Dead Zone's labyrinths.

"So, life beat you down lad?"

Says the alley cat to the sewer rat.

"What's in that? Have another drink  
pal, you'll get back."

Time in a bottle — night town's broken  
clock measuring planetary motion  
by the shadows that prowl.

*"Round, like a circle in a spiral,"*

Another blind alley bar stool, another dead  
end dive, where midnight angels watch  
from the shadows through ocelot eyes.

*"All you need is love."*

Day labor dollars watching back from my  
wallet like a craps shoot of snake eyes.



Candlelight flickers in the open doorway at the top of the stairs. A veil of smoke, drifts down the landing and shifts, ghostlike, amidst the hallway's shadows. I can smell her perfume. The smoke holds the dense aroma of incense burning. Incense always made me dizzy — its heady fumes hypnotic. "*Death's perfume.*" I remember an old priest's cryptic comment when I was an altar boy. Nuns and priests and devils and holy ghosts whirl with my intoxication as I stagger to the top. I grip the banister to keep from swaying.

She stands across the room with her back to me, dressed in black — gossamer black with lavish jet trimmings and lush midnight lace. Her long raven hair fans like wings across her shoulders and back. Candles, candelabrams flutter on bureaus, bed stands. Incense is burning everywhere. She is singing to herself in a mirror — some sweet sad street song reminiscent of that long ago chanteuse they called “the little sparrow” — and applying red lipstick. Her lost lament sounds like nothing so much as a lullaby.

I cross myself and stagger in.

## **The World as Beauty — Ida Fasel**

by turning and turning we come around right.

— Shaker hymn, "Simple Gifts"

Almost

hidden from the

road, a little canyon

to be explored. Warned of rattlers,

I bring

no stick  
but burden of  
perplexities, nature's  
part to turn me from rock to the  
valley

of love  
and delight in  
an apple tree's full white  
blossoming, a serpent nowhere  
in sight.

## Lesser-Celandine\* — Madeline Tiger

Yes, a miracle appeared from under  
broken bottles and cans, flotsam  
of plastic bags, crushed reeds  
where mallards paddle through muck  
and the flocks of bold *Canadian Geese*  
wreak their messy havoc  
shitting and honking. What a natural  
disaster the town had allowed to grow  
like squalor, not far from the new condos  
allegedly protected by cemented dams  
against flood from the river's overflow.

The banks of Clark's Pond are undefined,  
purple loose-strife spreads with brambles  
and thistles over the litter, mud gluts the field.  
Whatever debris we cleaned we cleaned  
again and loaded trucks with green plastic bags  
we'd filled by hand. One year it rained all day  
the Sunday assigned in early spring for detail  
by the "Friends" of the Pond. Soaked but still  
determined volunteers, we crowded around  
our table of work gloves, lemonade and donuts.  
We sloshed in our muddy boots and complained.

Then in the shadowed afternoon  
someone said quietly *Look,*  
*do you want to see something*  
*amazing?* There,  
under the frazzled remains  
of beech woods, maples, and pines  
a dazzling yellow carpet covered  
the shadowy ground. Lit in streams  
of slanting rays, suddenly, it seemed  
to have spread, resolving  
our campaign; it held in our eyes for  
days as we continued clean-up.  
The creeping flourish of little flowers  
had outgrown stampedes of careless

"paint-war" fighters' feet, and lit the woods  
from within, way past the trash we kept on clearing.  
Butter gold, *Ranunculus ficaria* broke  
through waste places, spread its clusters  
across the woodland floor  
making the bleak space bright.

\*Author's notes on Lesser-Celandine: family: Ranunculus: The buttercups are a large group of north temperate herbs, some fibrous rooted...etc. perennial, propagated by seed or division. Species: *Ranunculus ficaria*: 6" or less Zone 5 Lesser-celandine A European plant which has escaped in the northeastern U.S. in waste places and open woodlands. Flowers yellow, an inch wide, with up to a dozen petals during April and early May. The stems are decumbent and it usually grows flat on the surface of the ground. Leaves are cordate-ovate, about 2 in. long and glossy. The only disadvantage of this as a ground cover is that the foliage entirely disappears during early summer."

*Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia* p. 913



**Marc Chagall, *Time is a River Without Banks*, 1930-39**  
**Paul Kareem Tayyar**

Even the fish play music  
In his ever wondrous  
World, the floating  
Clock that keeps time  
For this virtuoso  
Of the sea and sky  
Is the drummer for  
The tightest band  
This side of St.  
Petersburg.

See Chagall serenade  
His Bella on the banks  
Beneath the group's  
Concerto, see the  
Houses across the  
River start to dance  
As the second verse  
Begins.

## The Tropical Fish — David Michael Nixon

swim in and out  
of their reef.  
Their bright colors wish  
to assuage doubt  
and purge grief,  
but this is not sea  
and I am not  
Marianne  
Moore. No fish is free  
here. Who knows what  
the tank stands

for in this waiting  
room beyond beds  
of the sick?  
Hope may be mating  
with shining heads  
to make quick  
all who struggle here,  
so they may rise  
and walk free,  
those who must view fear  
and those whose eyes  
cannot see.

The tropical fish  
swim in and out  
of their reef.  
Their bright colors wish  
to assuage doubt  
and purge grief.

## Messenger — Michael Hathaway

in late March,  
i was changing eight litter boxes  
groaning & gagging & coughing ...  
how i'd dreaded it all day.

it was a fairly decent day,  
though a bit cool.  
being long sick of winter,  
i'd flung all the windows open anyway.

as i worked  
an oversized, fluorescent green bug  
buzzed past—  
the first insect i'd seen of the season—  
clumsy and quite doomed  
to fly into a house full of cats,  
yet ever-hopeful.

But how fortunate i felt  
to look up just in time  
to witness Lady Spring  
bumble in the kitchen window

On the Film *The Diving Bell and The Butterfly* — Donald Lev

Couldn't move.  
Could only blink.  
But had a story to tell.  
I can dig that.  
200,000 blinks it took  
but he told it.  
Then he died.  
"Dreamlike, brave, and  
breathtaking," the blurb says.  
Perhaps it was.  
I slept through a lot of it.  
Sometimes my philistinism  
embarrasses me.

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