Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream

June, 2020

Volume 41
number 1

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People beat
the music of the spheres
on homemade instruments.

Enid Dame
excerpt from
“Tone Deaf in Flatbush”

WATERWAYS
Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 41 Number 1
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Pat Anthony

Cello

She goes at odd hours to the fence
cocks her head, waits impatiently
for first trill first bass
tree frog peepers, bull frogs
unseen in sun warmed swale

her body is vibrato
after winter's ice
that sealed her soul
she breathes damp loam
absorbs their unceasing harmonies

mistakenly asks at the Speedy Shop
Have you heard the frogs, yet?
sees eyes slide as they shake
heads above their mochas

drives with windows down
to park on a back road
above the swollen creek
the trill a crescendo here
her body a throbbing cello
plucked by warbling tree frogs.

Gilbert Honigfeld

Celebration

The dance floor is filled with people
not yet old but no longer young
their greenest years decades behind them
a few lucky ones with decades still
unspooling.

Old, old people, a few of them men,
watch the dancers from back-row tables
speech or thought impossible in the
drumming din.

On the floor unpaired dancers
replay their overlearned teenage moves
in waves of stereotypy, on-cue shouting
at high volume they will regret tomorrow.

Behind the sweat and smiles
I try to blank out the music to read
mass desperation to freeze the clock hands.

Gilbert Honigfeld

Dreams

In the old days hotel lobbies
were home to well-tuned Steinways
near the area marked LOUNGE
usually etched on glass in Deco font.

An army of anonymous recruits
worked those keys sometimes just for tips
exploring the possibilities of American songs.

While drinkers sought simplification
in occasional swirls of Jack Daniels on
the rocks
the pianist sought perfection in chord
progressions.

When it worked, the combination was perfect,
drinkers dreamily deconstructing their
memories
while safe in anonymity the piano player
works bluesily in majors and minors,
exploring.

Sylvia Manning

Old Pecan Tree with Wound Wood

a terza rima

We need to find a cure for our illness.
Thich Naht Hahn

This tree that grew along the shaded ground
because it had to grow that way for light
for eighty years or so, this tree was found
Unsightly, so said alpha male, a handsome white,
whose church had bought the lot where it
branched out,
who said, besides, "That way to grow's not right."
And furthermore, it grew wound wood about
what might have been its death, but it survived
by that, by trusting roots, by ignoring doubt.

Seguin, Texas June 2, 2020

De Rana and

Frogs are singing tonight
    as last night they did not
    just neighbor dogs barking
before that storm, around midnight.

More rain predicted
    yet even so they sing
    tonight, this last
in my 75th year.
(On the morrow I turn 75.)

Like the frogs,
    I am so glad to be alive
and for mockingbird mornings
    signed with musical circles
around the sweetly simple mourning doves.

I love this place, this life,
however poorly I have lived it.
How to apologize, when frogs sing?

the Rain

(Later)

Rain begins. Thunder resounds.
I hope the frogs
sought higher ground.

(And later still)

They sing their heart song
    loudly and proud.
Downpour subsided,
their chorus decided,
all is well.

(And long ago)

Sana, sana,
Cola de rana.
Si no sanas hoy,
Sanarás mañana

Heal, heal, Froggy tail.
If you do not heal today
You will heal tomorrow.
[rub the baby's belly
as you sing]

May 25, 2020, Seguin, Texas

Sylvia Manning

Sestina for a Father and Son

Ángel (AHN hell, really)
pushing his son whose name
is Máximo, his middle child,
still only two years old,
past a Black Lives Matter sign
across the street, then into the shade

over the play car, ready for shade
after all those police cars — really
more than needed, a glaring sign
funds are to the max (to play on a name) —
so many of them in their old
parking lot — they've another now, new child

of only two even older than it, boy child
born brown, not black, but shade
protects him from being darker, old
hope of Mexican parents, really
not a hope of his own he would name,
Angel, but the times are a sign

or his neighbor wouldn't have that sign
in yard across from him and his brown child,
brother to Katia and Belén by name,
one older, one a baby, inside now in shade
of their mother Miranda's love, really
their grand protection, even until they're old.

But just today, past police cars in the old
parking lot – as if it were a sign
that all is well, and beautiful, really —
Angel's pushing son Máximo, their child,
past the glare of the day into shade
now, into green space without a name

in his little car, little son whose name
resembles Maximilian's, that kindly old
French ruler who died in Chapultepec shade
because he couldn't read the sign —
assuming he was fine, like a child —
that he would be permitted to escape, really.

No, there's shade for a son whose name
is Máximo, really, not that old
Emperor's. A good sign, this passage with
his child.

June 8, 2020

Robert Cooperman

Cedar Block

At summer camp, for arts and crafts
we were given cedar blocks—
about twice the size of filet mignons—
to carve into ashtrays, bookends,
or whatever our imaginations could make
of the wood, like Michelangelo, who saw
in the block of marble what the finished
sculpting should be.

I remember the gouge scooping
out cedar slices streaked like geodes,
and the aroma: even better than chocolate,
a navel orange, or that medium-rare steak.
Alas, what I carved only my mother could love.

Now, my memory scents that evergreen
pungency again, when a friend writes
she and her husband spent the weekend
pulling cedar saplings from their pastures
so their cattle can graze, the fast-growing
trees introduced to battle erosion—during
the Dust Bowl in Kansas—now threatening
to take over even native grasses.

Still, I'd like to work on a cedar block,
feel that gouging tool make clean slices,
and this time, get it right.

Robert Cooperman

Our Downstairs Neighbor

Our downstairs neighbor hated me:
noisily trying to emulate
the great Elgin Baylor's b-ball moves
when I shot at our clothes-hanger basket,
my brother and me playing sock basketball,
the room quaking like a garbage truck.

Mr. Moskowitz—who lived alone
and never rolled down his shirt sleeves—
would smack his ceiling with a broom handle,
our parents somehow oblivious to the mayhem
Finally, he pounded on our front door,
as the Gestapo might've smashed his,
not so long before.

"Your sons," he sputtered to our dad,
my brother and me peeking as if terrified,
enthralled, by a monster movie.
"Please control your sons," he begged,
our father apologizing, a look of murderous
warning after he stepped inside.

But when he and Mom went out for dinner,
after ordering us to be quiet, to be good,
he knew, with the fatalism of the defeated,
that I'd be Baylor and Jeff was Wilt,
the instant our door closed behind them.

Robert Cooperman

Basketball Among the Maples:

Upstate New York, Late September, Early October: 1970

One fall Sunday,
Dave and I drove upstate
to see the changing leaves,
a religious pilgrimage
for New Yorkers: city
autumns the drab
brown of tiny bats.

The leaves were gone,
but we found a basketball court
in the middle of nowhere—
Dave always keeping a ball
in his trunk—and went one-on-one.
After an hour or so,
the first flakes of the season
sent us back to the city.

When he dropped me off,
I called my mother, to tell her
I'd driven up to see the leaves.

"Were they beautiful?" she asked.

"Very," I lied, and described
the kaleidoscopes, heard her sigh,
missing the leaves she and Dad
used to drive up to see,
never thinking those lovely
autumn days would ever end.

Robert Cooperman

An Autumn Visit

While visiting an Upper Midwest university
that had invited my wife to teach there,
we ambled through the nearby state forest,
air crisp as Granny Smith apples,
and failed to notice the warning sign,

"First Day of Deer Season."

We heard the thud of rifles, though, jumped
when a shell popped right behind our ears,
and saw, for the first time, all the hunters,
armed more heavily than the Taliban.

We sped back to town as if chased by wolves,
and I recalled the autumn I visited a cousin
and her husband who lived in rural New York State:
a hunter was shooting on his land without
asking permission, and almost hit Alan's wife,
returning with me from town, with groceries.

With a nod, Alan set his shepherd on the guy,
and took his time ordering the dog to heel,
the taste of bloody wrist, I imagined,
almost irresistible, after he'd taken the guy's rifle
and told him to shut up his whining,

while I thought, "He might let Shep kill him."

As if reading my mind, Lois smiled,
"No, Alan would've used that bastard's gun."


I'VE NEVER SHARED THIS BEFORE, BUT I WAS NEVER REALLY ALL THAT BIG A POE FAN.
Wayne Hogan

Our Geography of Poets

Colorado
Robert Cooperman

Kansas
Pat Anthony

New Jersey
Gilbert Honigfeld

Tennessee
Wayne Hogan

Texas
Sylvia Manning

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