

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream

March, 2022

Volume 42

Number 9



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Designed, Edited and Published by
Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel
A. Thomas Perry, Outreach Consultant

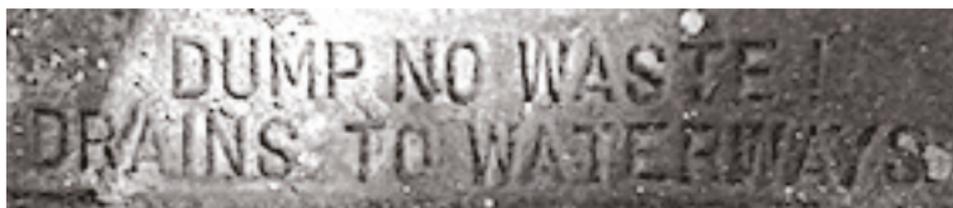
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photographs by
Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel
Drawing by Wayne Hogan

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James Penha

Fish

a found poem*

Ukrainian psychologist Andriy Kozinchuk spoke while his militia unit was under attack. He said the savagery of the invasion had led to soul-searching among adults and children — a comrade's nine-year-old daughter asked him

Why do people want to kill me? —

and so he prepared to kill to protect his homeland. "It's not good for a human to want to kill somebody. It's not normal. It's normal for me to say that I love people, but today, no, sorry... I want to smash a tank or shoot them. We are not killers but we have feelings.

And if I survive? I hope to go to the UK

sometime, maybe have your famous food there: fish & chips. Yes, nice. I'd like the opportunity to try some.

* "Ukrainian volunteer in Kyiv says 'If I live, I'll try fish and chips' as Russians close in."

—Metro (UK), February 27, 2022.

Marilyn Braendeholm

Fish Moon

a bit of prose poetry

New Year's Eve means cod. Always has.
Always will. So we head for the harbour.
The whole family, and a few who aren't,
squeezing into the old Volvo, always bits of
Grandpa's job in the back. Trowels rough with
mortar, buckets, crusty boots, white overalls.
Grandpa's a bricky. A bricklayer. We race
down the lane to catch Marc's fishing boat just
as he ties up. Marc's a wave of a man, broad,
well fed by the looks, he laughs like a sudden
crack of thunder, and crashes about like a fish
outta water. Grandpa hands him a large bottle
of homemade cider. Marc hands Grandpa a
package nearly as long as his arm. Cod for
booze is the trade.

At home, Grandpa unwraps our cod.
A high-gloss shine, silvery and smelling of sea.
And I'm thinking it's a moon wrapped in
brown paper.

Marilyn Braendeholm

Catch of the Day

That fish on crushed ice
doesn't know
its beauty.
Doesn't know
its silver-plated shine.
It thinks there's no glory

in a tail's slow sway,
or lazing through
sea grass and ropey kelp.
Where's the glory
for a fish on crushed ice
when you're
the catch of the day.

Charles Rammelkamp

Fisherman, Drowning

I fell overboard before
I could call out to my companions,
water choking the cry in my throat
like a baby strangled by its mother.

True how your life flashes past,
unrolls like a carpet
across the floorboards of memory.

I watched myself kissing my wife goodbye
after I put my fishing gear into the van,
my buddies anxious to get on the road.
I lingered over the kiss wishing
it could have been more intense,
less perfunctory,

but as I sank to the bottom,
tied up in my fisherman's straitjacket,
lungs filled with cold lake water,
I could not get past the memory
coming upon a former girlfriend
and another man unawares,

in a franchise breakfast restaurant,
eating pancakes and holding hands,
her eyes shining a love she'd never
shown me, the two of them laughing;
she looking up and meeting my eyes,
guilt and defiance hardening her features
even as I looked at her, like a mask.

Over and over again,
she looking up and meeting my eyes,
she looking up and meeting my eyes,
she looking up and meeting my eyes...

Deborah H. Doolittle

The Poem that Took the Shape of a Fountain

There it was, word after word after word spurting,
the poem that took the shape of a fountain.

Jets of loquacious propulsion, hurtling
into space, as if in a race to the top, just stopped,
in Sisyphean defeat, tumbling in retreat,
splashing down with a crash of droplets
like thoughts.

(Cue the drumroll, please.) The mother on
her knees
restrains her child who looks into its watery depths
for meaning and sees flashes of silver like fish
swimming in a pond he remembers seeing before

and tosses his penny into the mix affixing
a wish like a worm to a hook that his father used
to fish with. If only, if only, if only, he could reel
it back in like a line of poetry to try again.

What then?

Frank De Canio

Narcissistic Fish

I wish the woman had unwonted sass,
or ogled me when I sat in my seat.
But she just seemed provocative and crass.
And though I proved a bit too shrewd to eat
the bait she dangled on the subway line,
she'd smugly cast, from where she sat,
a skewed
demeanor meant to disassemble mine.
She reeled me in with angling fortitude.
I flapped about the car like landed fish
maneuvering to get the hook removed
and swim back in the sea. Oh! How I wish
that she, like an ecologist, approved
at leaving fish to sea, or flanked by glass,
would get me buttered up like seasoned bass.

Jack D. Harvey

Exuma 1967

Powdery blue fish
your intricate
leavening describes
the ocean in meditation.

You hang like
tin crescents
in a forest,
pointing
every which way
to the absolute.

The coral fan spreads
her dandy branches,
the anemone gulps
with longing
for sun and rain,
steady providers
of other climes;
for change, too,
the rose sighs
in her
cut-out garden.

Such blooms, such creatures
find their way,
their blind will
moving like the wind;
wild geese
home to roost,
oracles
marooned and mute
in the vast
the magnificent room
of countless things.

Ron Singer

Cold-Water Swimming

(short form)

My wife, Liz, and I, in long-gone days,
would immerse ourselves, dull our senses,
in frigid waters. We must have been crazy.

These acts, foolhardy or daring,
were committed at a tender age,
back in the pre-infarction phase.

Our first venue was Barrachois Grande,
on the Gulf of St. Lawrence,
near a campground where we stayed.

This trip to eastern Canada
was serendipitous, occasioned
by family illness, a change of plans.

On a sunny day, heaven- (or hell-) sent,
we essayed a plunge into the bay.
It was “most refreshing,” shall I say?

In 1969, this plunge took place,
the summer before Liz and I were wed,
(She proposed on a mountain one day.)

We lived in Chicago. Lake Michigan,
warm and beset with alewives, all dead,
did not tempt. Summers, we travelled, instead.

Our second, very-cold-water venue
was Montana's Kootenai River Dam,
built by the Army Corps, U.S. of A.
It met our cold-water expectations
--yea, surpassed them! Pieces of ice
may have floated alongside our heads.

Baby Birds

Two baby birds in a bowl
without fish, breathing heavy,
looking at a skiff trolling by,
its passengers waving
at the water, wondering if
they're getting there. Two
baby birds in a bowl without
fish, breathing heavy, wondering
about the stock market, the price
of tea in China, about the world
as a field filled with licentious
carvings of Dante in every
Wal-Mart where there is a Wal-Mart.
Two baby birds in a bowl
without fish, breathing heavy,
taking turns wondering how they
ever got here and if they'll
ever get here again.

AN ANSWER FOR MONIQUE.



Wayne Higgins

In *Waterways* (volume 41 number 10)
Monique Laforce posed the question:
"Is Aesop the winner of the slow race?"

Wayne Hogan

The Farmers' Ways

are many, but not so many
you can't count 'em. Farmers
have ways of making things
you can eat and get fat from;
make you heavier down where
the toes on your feet are than
up where your nose is.

What farmers do is duck soup easy—
bury things in the ground, pour
water on 'em then go home
and smoke a pipe and read the
paper, go and dig the things
back out of the ground, wash 'em
off, load 'em on a wagon and
take 'em straight to the
Farmer's Market downtown
and sell 'em. That's it.

Duck soup easy,
the farmers' ways.

Sylvia Manning

Nature Morte?

Curious way to say
still life, n'est-ce pas?

Dead pheasant or empty crockery,
a big fish on some bright blue platter.

Cut flowers brought in for décor
but ready to carry to a grave site.

Dead nature, still lifes —
meant to please, naturally,
those of us still alive.

Richard Spiegel

Accept the Now I Know

Scribblers fish for words

that taste of truth

and artifice.

Schools swim past.

Waters flow.

The fish monger

comes to market.

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

Maryland

Charles Rammelkamp

New Jersey

Jack D. Harvey

New York

Frank DeCanio

Ron Singer

Richard Spiegel

North Carolina

Deborah H. Doolittle

Tennessee

Wayne Hogan

Texas

Sylvia Manning

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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