

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Volume 43

Number 11

I once stood at the base of a glacier. Listened
to its ancient mass groan and snap.

Marilyn Braendeholm

excerpted from

“You Can’t Outrun Squally Rain”

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Volume 43 Number 11

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James Penba

Ice Age

I fear
the frost I feel
exhaled, the brittle words heard uttered,
the roughness of your skin to my touch,
creeps like a glacier to my own crizzled mood.

Mary Clark

TriPride Parade and Festival

Kingsport and Johnson City, TN and Bristol TN/VA

In the style of the Song of Amergin*

We came holding rainbow flags
We came with 22 floats
We came with 1000 marchers
We're 10,000 strong and peaceful
We're the flood of humanity
We're mothers, sisters, brothers
We're cousins, and friends
We know love can be lost
We know the rush to judgment
We know our song comes from the mountains
We sing and our music flows over town
We know our song is heard 'round the mountains
We're the fire and flood of humanity
We see a few mutter and turn away
We know we belong
We're here with rainbow-striped socks
We're here to dispel hate and promote care
We're here with love as our companion
We're here

*"English poetic education should, really, begin not with Canterbury Tales, not with the Odyssey, not even with Genesis, but with the Song of Amergin."

— Robert Graves)

The Latin Mass

The afflicted woman
on the examining table
pointed to the swollen
area, an area care-
fully palpated by the
specialist, a man in
wire-rim glasses, a
vested suit under his
white lab coat and
a precise way of speaking
as though English were not
his childhood tongue,

when he told her in nine per-
fect Latin syllables ex-
actly what her mass was
named and how it will
develop and how much
time she has left, plus
or minus a few months,
suggesting as gently as possible
that she refocus her attentions
from clinic to confessional.

Ellaraine Lockie

Holidays After My Husband Dies

Holidays will never recover from his suicide
Our anniversary the first to fall ill
It became incurable after he died

Valentine's Day suffers from a heart denied
Thanksgiving swallows Adderall or Ritalin pills
Holidays will never recover from his suicide

July Fourth explosions spread like smaller suicides
that shoot their poisons into free will
The condition became incurable after he died

Easter baskets we hid for one another
no longer bona fide
Hunger pains for his homemade chocolate rabbits
linger still
Holidays will never recover from his suicide

Halloween dressed us as groom and bride
Beggars with empty glasses held out for wine's swill
The craving incurable after he died

December succumbs under the weight of Yuletide
But New Year's brings a puppy to fill
holidays that could recover
from my husband's suicide
Perhaps a curable condition after he died

Just the Start of Now

But night was clear as the moon
and the wind blew snow on our feet.
Sounds from yesterday warned us
of huge movement under waves
pushing them further and further away
with the rain on a toe-tapping day,
with a primordial scream
that rocked whatever clock was there
— slow beginning of time
or just the start of now
from the bottom of a hole
that can't be dug any deeper —
cold, broken days for listening to the sea
taunt a glacier until it crumbled and cracked.
I saw it rise to the stars
and stick in the sky — heard the wind snap —
it whispered a last goodbye
to earth, cold earth, a white mass of earth
blowing around and around.

Outsiders

I didn't ask to be
But I fear I'm living in
The mad wolf skin
Of those too close
To the edge of Fate
In love with chance
And mystery
I am the old drunk
The acidhead
Just one of those
Who burned wild
In the sunlight
Of their youth
Now deep
In the black night days
Of the dying time
I may be too late
For anything
Of consequence
To change my ways
Yet I'm still here
For grace or worse
Alive and kicking
In the God damned
Lovely thick of it

William Corner Clarke

Rain in Athens

A sudden downpour
 In Exarchia
A violent thunderstorm
 On a bright clear
 Autumn morning
 Battering the roofs
Dancing hail on the cobbles
 Flooding the drains
 Of the square
 I was surprised
 By its wild urgency
But then I swear I heard
 Three simple words
 “I am Here!”
Come from somewhere
 Deep within me
 And in an instant
 The drunken excess
 Of the night before
 And all the heavy
Weight of bygone years
 Seemed washed away
Into the gutters of the city
 And a sense of beauty
 I thought I'd never
 Feel again

Came breaking through
My age-old wall
Of gathered pain
A sparkling, crystallized joy
Shining
In the million billion
Mirrors
Of the rain

Mary K. Lindberg

Music of War

Sounds of falling debris, siren whines,
random explosions, gun shots. Shouts.
Screams. Silence taut as barbed wire.

Wind sucks curtains out of broken windows
like loose sails. Shattered buildings moan.
Every breath may be the last. Drums of war.

In the rubble of Karkhiv's former city square,
a young cellist on a broken chair plays Schubert.
The notes smother grief, call forth inner peace.

Melodies rise, fall everywhere, like soft
cut hair. Pleasing sounds in acrid air open
damaged doors, resonate to order, beauty.

An elderly woman in blood-stained overalls halts,
hands full of trash. Struck by the music's purity,
begins to sway, a broken statue come to life.

Church bells toll. She smiles, enjoys lightness
War's dissonance intrudes, incessant clatter,
cacophony, blasts. Everyone runs.

Next day the musician returns to his stony
stage, cello, life, intact. As his bow touches
strings, Schubert's mellow, haunting melodies
explode into life and peace.

Centuries ago, pioneers, settlers,
 see North American landscape vistas
loom from Thomas Moran's mists of rugged
 grandeur. He weaves
bands of color, light; conjoins sky, riverbed
 in a vortex of light as
purples, blues, scooped from sky, fall back
 into valleys of infinite depth.

Today Grand Canyon lectures us in an airy
 classroom. Hanging bridges
connect rocks 1.7 billion years old. We walk in
 a place before time began.

As we tread dregs of ancient seas, purple
lupine grace a silent keyboard as
infinity looms, unfathomable as the night's
newly-viewed galactic spread.

We lean toward light we cannot see —
the meaning of earth's carving
endless towers and clefts —
a mural of time, measure of mortality.

Ron Singer

When the Mountains Disappear (1)

An old woman I know told me that the place where we stay, up on Center Hill two miles from the hamlet of Weld, Maine, used to be farmland. “You could see every mountain, from top to bottom, right across the fields. It was like ‘The Sound of Music.’ ”

Now that the farm is history, the woods, which start fifty or sixty yards down the slope from our house, leading to a hidden pond and on for miles, have blocked out most of the mountains, or at least their lower halves. You’d have to climb up on the roof for the complete, unimpeded view.

In not too many more years, assuming no lumber company acquires the land, the work of the trees will be complete: no more mountains, no more view. (Not to mention the “view” that clear-cutting leaves behind.) Of course, by then, we may ourselves be gone or, at least, too blind to mind.

That’s easy for me to say, I’m only seventy-two, and poets can be cavalier about death. I suppose poetry is a form of superstition, conjuring with words instead of knocking wood. But the woman I spoke to, who must be in her late eighties, knows better. For her, once the mountains are gone, they’re gone.

—Futures Trading, Nov. 2013

Ron Singer

When the Mountains Disappear (2)

Just as trees encroach upon mountain views, buildings swallow cityscapes. In the 1950's, through the west-facing windows of my wife's cousin's apartment, you could see a fat slice of the Hudson River. Meanwhile, the windows facing north framed a generous chunk — perhaps the top third — of the Empire State Building. (My wife and her cousin did the math.)

Since then, the city has suffered wave upon wave of construction, or, you might say, never-ending ripples. Up sprang brick apartment-monsters, followed by glass-bodied giants, commercial and residential. Put all that together, and, abracadabra, the river is a sliver, the ESB, a gleaming needle.

Essential to clichés about urban canyons are the mountains that frame them. Does anything really change? More mountains? More canyons? Real change will arrive when some visionary fills in the canyons with new buildings, chock-a-block, by then made of who-knows-what. When that day comes, cars, taxis, buses, trucks will have to learn to fly, or else, like moles, take to the subways, underground.

Robert Cooperman

Leonard Backus, a Passerby

on the Night of the Anti-Yiddish Riot
at the Mograbi Theatre: Tel Aviv, 1930

Talkies, schmalkies: I've no interest,
though Tel Aviv's gone mad for them.
Give me a good book, a live concert,
real theatre, or a radio recital or opera.
The silver screen's filled with actors
even less realistic than silent picture players,
who at least had to show some emotion,
not rely on words — and nothing to rival
the Torah, I.L Peretz, or Sholem Aleichem.
Me an intellectual? Hardly, a cobbler.

In the evening cool, I decided to go for a walk,
but when I reached Mograbi Square,
a mob's buzzing was growing: from a bee
swarm into a howling wolf pack.

“Join us!” one fellow beckoned,
“to preserve the purity of Hebrew!”

I kept walking, having learned Yiddish
at Mama's breast, though I'm fluent
in Hebrew, German, and English:
you have to talk to your customers,
though I find shoes far more eloquent,
about the suffering they've endured
at their masters' hands, and feet.

I confess sympathy for the Hebraists,
trying to create a new country,
or resurrect an old one, with the holy
tongue of Moses and King David,
though who knows if those stories are true.
But when the crowd started to mass
toward the Mograbi, I decided it was time
to continue my stroll in a quieter precinct.

Irene T. Winslow

Polar Continent

A thousand stars are shining down on us;
The sun is absent from the winter sky;
The dismal winds are fiercely blowing by;
The frigid air is making me a wuss
And an intolerable Gloomy Gus.
But I am in Antarctica in July;
The major question that I ask is, Why?
As down the crusty hills of snow I schluss.
All of this continent is cold and dark;
This southern world is shades of black and
white.
The pristine landscape is grim and stark.
I do not know if it is day or night.
I hear no sound of bird song or dog bark.
I wish for some of summer's endless light.
But the future looks bright-
Studying here are many scientists,
Including me, a glaciologist.

Marilyn Braendeholm

An Eddy

It's those clouds in forked streaks,
like shades on blue. A contemplation.
How long has it been between kisses?

She was once bright as a flute.
She was once more than taffeta.
Her cheeks rosy as morning.

Life is an eddying swirl, and one day
her heart will forget to beat, but for now
she wonders, Who am I to feel so well?

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

California

Ellaraine Lockie

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Kentucky

Jane Stuart

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

New York

Mary K. Lindberg

Ron Singer

Ohio

Irene T. Winslow

Virginia

Mary Clark

William Corner Clarke

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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