

# Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



March, 2021

Volume 41  
number 9

# Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 41 NUMBER 9

In waterbugged basements  
in velvet attics  
in teenage dating bars

I listen to people  
talking  
to themselves

Enid Dame

excerpt from  
The Poetry Critic Complains

# WATERWAYS

## Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 41 Number 9

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*Cover needlepoint by Barbara Fisher*

*Frontispiece by Wayne Hogan*

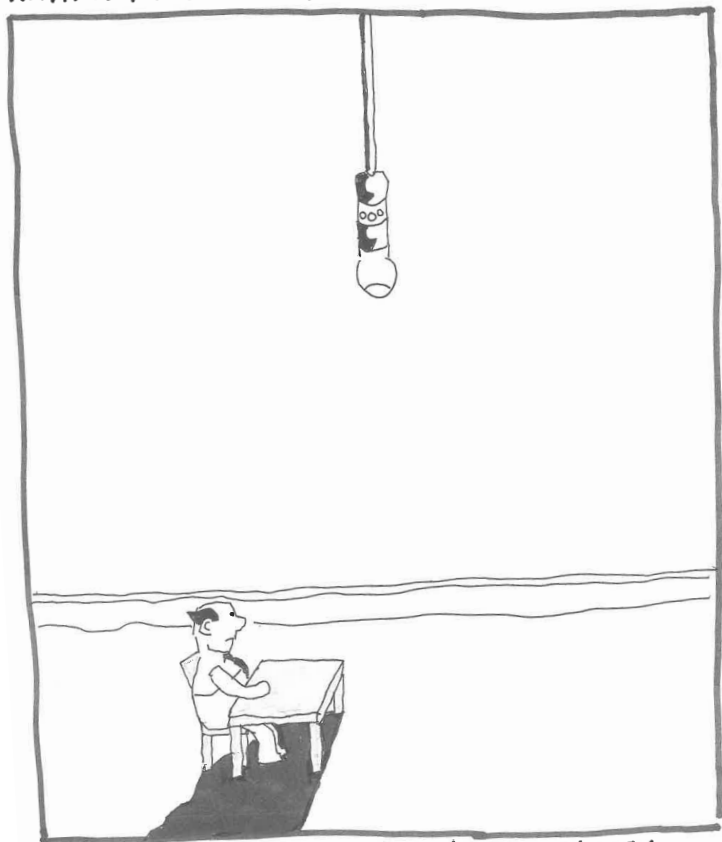
Sample issues — \$5.00 Subscriptions -- \$45.00

Waterways is published 11 times a year by  
Ten Penny Players Inc., 393 St. Pauls Avenue,  
Staten Island, New York 10304-2127

***Waterways is published monthly except for August.***

Submissions will be returned only if  
accompanied by a stamped, self addressed envelope.

WAITING FOR ESCARGOT.



Wayne Hogan

*Ellaraine Lockie*

## **In the Privacy of Public**

Two women sit silent  
surrounded by the clamor of the coffee shop  
Matching shades of sandy blonde hair  
The same sea-green eyes  
Except the younger pair  
stare through rims red as coral  
into some far-off horizon  
The light in them drowned

Beacons in the older set  
Her hand stretched  
across the table stroking the other woman's  
folded arm that holds up her chin  
Only one blink when saltwater eyes  
are dabbed with a napkin

The ice in one glass has melted  
Coffee across from it would be cold  
Yet the rubbing does not ebb  
Something horrible here that can be alluded to  
only through an umbilical cord  
And perhaps only in the privacy of public

*Deborah H. Doolittle*

## **Bogwoman at the Public Exhibition**

First this sense of sunlight flooding  
the corners of the room.

Darkness recedes like a memory.  
No moon, no night.

In every corner, white cobwebs,  
urgent whispers

rise like the tide  
sifting through the bog.

A cough, a suppressed exclamation,  
a chirp of fright?

Something is running through the hall  
like the wind in the willows,

the breeze teasing the leaves,  
flitting like little birds.

Lying here, I miss their soft voices,  
the slurry of their wings,

the bloom of heather on the hillsides,  
the constant rocking

of the bog and me,  
the baby in the cradle.

Deborah H. Doolittle

Dear Bogwoman,

How else can I explain it?  
In the Poetry Workshop,  
the leader said, *You're not through yet.*

Meanwhile, the class turned thoughtful,  
and I, doubtful. You turned your head,  
looked right at me.

*There's a gold vein of poems  
lying here*, she added, tapping the paper,  
my poem, on her desk.

*A veritable gold mine.*  
Of course, she'd say that—being from  
Montana—*you just need to tap into it.*

And all the faces in the class broke  
into smiles, some smirked, some grinned.  
They knew that can of worms

I'd be opening. Research, museums,  
exhibits of your kind, trips to  
the far western reaches of Ireland,

Boned up on the flora, fauna,  
collecting samples—sprigs, blossoms,  
swabs of bog cotton—pressed between

the pages of my field guide and travel  
books, just did not think it would take  
me so long.

Leaving you hanging out to dry  
like laundry bleaching in the sun,  
adding decades to those centuries

before I'd even begun. Forgive me.  
Now that I can,  
will you agree to let me?

*James Penha*

### **The Jazz Instruments Explain**

We've always been trying  
To sound like Lady Day  
Sounding just like us.



*Marilyn Braendeholm*

## **Staring at the Wall**

We write to each other every week.

Yesterday he wrote:

Mom gave me back my tablet.

I finished my homework. Anyway,

I hate 2020 because everything  
we planned was not good at all.

He thinks in remote episodes.

I do, too. Pictorials. Words are

colours: 'eventually' is green.

Anyway, he continues, and says,

I have a problem. When I'm working,

I stare at the wall when I'm stuck.

I don't ask for help cause I think I

got it but I don't so I can't finish it,

and Mom takes away my tablet again.

His words are perhaps as old as religion.

We think we know, so we don't ask

because we think we know, but we don't.

So we stare at the wall.

This boy flourishes in the moment,

safe within his reasonable doubt.

He quarrels with toys, and finds

himself in the wallpaper.

We're a tapestry, he and I.  
He's the thread, I'm the needle.  
We'll weave ourselves into a new age.

And he finishes by saying:  
Anyway, can you tell me how to take  
a picture and how to send it to you.  
That would be great to know.  
I'll send a picture when I figure out  
how to send it. Bye, love you, Nana.

To my mind, this boy is legend, his  
mismatched voice is an angel's song.  
He is my oculus. He is my Left Bank.

*D.R. James*

## Ugly Duckling

If he could think—scarcely  
sensation circuits so far—

this would make no sense.  
Only hours old

he has had anesthesia  
then unmitigated pain,

days of crying alone.  
What about that amniotic

promise: new skin on skin,  
new mouth on breast,

tiniest brain bombarded  
in the formative moments

by a mother and a father,  
their soft faces circling like clouds?

Instead, this duplicity,  
amygdala overloaded.

If he could he'd predict  
this will happen again,

a second surgery  
to improve the nose and lip line.

He will be two,  
new faces circling

below a bright ceiling  
before the black mask, the gas,

before he doesn't remember.  
Big people with big hands

will do this to him and  
he will forever after imagine ether.

Days later, alone again  
in a sandbox, not yet allowed

to bend his splinted arms, over  
and over he will want to touch

where it intermittently throbs,  
where it stitches two little pillows,

the swollen flesh shining.  
The imprinting complete.

*D.R. James*

## Swimming

Apparently it has been said  
that two lions guard  
the door to enlightenment. But  
paradox and confusion, two  
of the best friends a guy could hope  
to leave behind,  
seem more like two winos  
blocking the door  
to your apartment, trying  
to avoid enlightenment,  
though they don't know it.  
You could step over them  
but you'd risk their awakening.  
I wish I were an abstraction  
in the form of a non-cognizant  
but ferocious mammal. Not only  
would I be warm-blooded  
and highly respected  
and sporting a non-thinning mane  
but I could save all the time  
I now spend attempting consciousness.  
It has also been said  
that I tend more toward  
the cold-blooded (possibly  
reaching luke-warm when sunshine

heats up the lagoon) and not  
regularly regarded, since I'm off  
swimming around, looking  
for the world I swim in.  
Which is funny if I think about it.  
Which I can't. I'm like  
Prufrock in his flannel pants,  
pushed around by a Symbolist,  
three teeth cracked on peach pits,  
love life always aground  
around tea-time, sleeping  
just out of earshot  
so as not to drown.

*Mary Lindberg*

## Everyone Has Secrets

Everyone has secrets.  
You know what I mean.  
Do you think yours will die  
when you are done?

You can unlock your hidden gate  
to magic moments under the porch  
(I was only six) or on the back seat  
(we were just necking).

Or you can die with your life a sealed book.  
After all, no one saw you that day,  
or heard you laugh that way,  
jangled nerves of an furtive flirt

with an old friend from decades ago.  
No one felt the tingling knot of dread  
tied with hope in that smelly taxi,  
an unbelted rodeo on a bumpy street to

unbound frontiers of an unseen tableau —  
nor the jumpy fear of a no-show in a deserted  
baggage claim, sticky backs of faded plastic  
chairs, on the verge of vertigo

until a still handsome man strides toward you —  
upholds an ordinary oven mitt,  
and, in a grand baritone you thought  
you'd never hear again, asks "Need a hand?"

*John Grey*

## **The Wallflowers in the Play**

She has a small non-speaking role  
in a party on the third floor  
of her apartment building.

All that's required  
is to stand with her back to the wall  
sip wine, nibble on cheese and crackers.

The star parts are already cast.

The most attractive, most admired,  
converge on the center of the room.

The play is both comedy and tragedy,  
bouts of loud laughter  
interspersed with shouts of anger and disbelief.

Romantic leads drape all over one another.

Character actors drift toward  
whoever else is in character.

A guy who's taken on  
a similar mute cameo  
stands beside her,  
nervously fingers his glass  
like he's been told  
that the secret to acting  
is to have something in your hand  
at all times.

They don't speak  
because the script does not include them.

They'd share a glance  
but the director is watching.  
He's the only one who is.



*Monique Laforce*

## **Autoportrait**

Demain je m'appartiendrai. J'enlèverai  
les housses sur les meubles. J'habiterai  
les chambres. Je serai porteuse d'enfants  
et d'espoir. J'écouterai le chuchotement  
des murs et des fontaines. Je pleurerai.  
Je saurai pleuvoir. Je découperai des ombres  
dans le tissu de l'absence. J'habillerai  
l'espace de cris heureux, de chants d'oiseaux.  
Je neigerai dans la mémoire. J'écrirai  
comme on souffle des musiques  
dans les images. Je porterai  
un sourire que vous m'aurez donné.  
Je saurai des portes à ouvrir,  
des étoiles à décrocher,  
des hivers à fondre. J'aurai des visages  
troublants à renverser dans la parole.  
Demain m'endormira dans le lit du fleuve.  
Me ramènera dans une barque en dérive.

Demain, je me ferai face  
et vous vous reconnaîtrez.  
Je serai multiple et seule.  
Une bouche apparaîtra dans le secret  
du miroir. L'avenir se souviendra  
du présent et bercera le passé.

Des lilas à ciel ouvert, publié aux éditions  
Le Loup de Gouttière, Québec 2000

*Moniquie Laforce*

## **Self-Portrait**

Tomorrow I will own myself. I'll remove  
the covers from the furniture. I will inhabit  
the rooms. I will be a carrier of children  
and hope. I will listen to the whispering  
of the walls and the fountains. I will cry.  
I will know how to rain. I will cut shadows  
in the fabric of absence. I will dress  
the space with happy cries, birdsongs.  
I will snow in the memory. I will write  
like we blow music into pictures. I will wear  
the smile that you give me.  
I will know how to open doors,  
how to unhook stars,  
how to melt winters. I will have disturbing  
faces to spill in my speech. Tomorrow  
will fall asleep in the river bed.  
Will bring me back in a drifting boat.

Tomorrow I will face myself  
and you will recognize yourselves.  
I will be multiple and alone.  
A mouth will appear in the secret  
of the mirror. The future will remember  
the present and cradle the past.

*Charles Rammelkamp*

## Off the Schneid

I had to look it up.  
When I suggested a poetry journal  
to my friend Levinson —  
I'd sent them three, I told him,  
and they took two the next day —  
he thanked me for the tip.  
"I'm on a schneid of late,"  
Avi summed up.

Originally card game slang —  
short for "schneider,"  
when, in gin, you prevent  
an opponent from scoring points.  
From German via Yiddish,  
Middle High German *sniden* —  
"to cut" — similar to Old English and Old  
Norse.  
"Schneider" means "tailor,"  
plays on the stereotype of the tailor —  
poor, timid, unlucky.  
A losing streak.

But I already knew  
what he meant anyway,  
rejection the normal response  
for poetry submissions.

"Good luck," I encouraged.

*Wayne Hogan*

## **My Vision Thing**

Here's my vision:

A young nude woman perched  
astride the neck of a great white elephant  
riding away pulling a motorcycle  
on a log sled through a rice paddy,  
the sun setting over the multicolored  
Sonoran peaks ahead, where sits waiting  
a bearded old man with a green beret  
and a gray sweater on, holding  
a startled-looking blue terrier  
in one arm while the elbow of the  
other arm rests on a distressed  
mahogany table propping his aged chin up.

You ask if I see these things and, yes,  
I do see these things.

*Wayne Hogan*

## **In This Issue**

there will be things.

There will be names

(maybe some you've heard of)

but no faces.

There will be dates

(but none you've heard of).

There will be scores of games

that haven't been played yet.

There will be waitresses

at little country cafés

who call you "Honey."

There will be no centuries

in this issue

just 'before's and 'right now's

and 'after's.

In this issue there will be

'restling and running

and roiling around on the bare ground

after a hard rain.

There will be a House Dick

like the one at the Algonquin

in this issue who misses you,

who looks for you,

in this issue.

# Our Geography of Poets

## California

Ellaraine Lockie

## Maryland

Charles Rammelkamp

## Michigan

D.R. James

## New York

Mary Lindberg

## North Carolina

Deborah H. Doolittle

## Quebec

Monique Laforce

## Rhode Island

John Grey

## Tangerang-Banten

James Penha

## Tennessee

Wayne Hogan

## West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

ISSN 0197-4777

Very limited printing

Subscriptions -- \$45 for 11 issues.

Sample issues — \$5.00 (includes postage)

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