

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream

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VOLUME 42 NUMBER 3



Barbara Fisher

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Fresh

Tony, the guy behind the lineup of overflowing vegetable bins at the once-a-week Farmer's Market in the empty parking lot near the rusty train tracks, has a running line of patter he rolls out to entice and educate potential buyers, an entertaining sideshow, a carnival barker hawking the virtues of homegrown vegetables like his Roma tomatoes "plump and smooth as a baby's butt" and corn "so crunchy your husband's gonna want another piece" and his closer as the woman walks on down the line, "Hey lady, you wanna treat? Eat my zucchini, sweet as sugar every time, guaranteed you'll come again next week."

Marilyn Braendeholm

Saturday Morning Market

The paved carpark with its white lines and pay & display boxes is transformed into noise and nose of a farmers' market.

Tables hinged upright. Awnings, tents, and crates. The farmer's daughter sells everything the farm's soil produces.

And ask a farmer's wife a question, and she'll know the answer. The courgettes and aubergines look good, I said.
Ratatouille, replies the farmer's wife.



Charles Rammelkamp

Punk Rock Warlord

The last time I saw Mark alive
he stood at the pickle stand
in the throng of the farmers market
that brisk September Sunday morning,
wearing his Punk Rock Warlord t-shirt.

The gentlest man I knew,
my every Wednesday evening yoga teacher
at the Yoga Village, leading us
through downward dogs and cat-cows, leaving us
invigorated, restored, hopeful, meditative.

I caught Mark's eye; we waved.
"See you in class!" I called,
Mark fifteen feet ahead of me.

He smiled. "Maybe. Hope so."
I later found out Mark had just been diagnosed
with a rare neurological disease,
Creutzfeldt-Jakob, like Mad Cow,
eating swiftly through the brain.

"Gotta check out the peppers and cucumbers!"
He left with his container of pickles,
wobbling, a little off-balance,
the punk rock warlord weaving his way
through the crowd, soon disappearing from sight.

Robert Cooperman

Food Shopping with Beth

It's like shopping
with an adorable puppy
wandering aisles aromatic
with Madras, Vera Cruz, and Hunan;
Beth delights in fruits and veggies
colorful as Picassos,
boxes promising taste treats
we can't live without.

Afterwards, she'll track me down,
arms overflowing with delicacies;
hearing my off-key singing
of something by the Grateful Dead,
like my favorite, apt lines:

“If I knew the way,
I would take you home”:
our signal of, “Here I am!”
when one of us is lost,
and luckily within earshot.

Shopping solo, I'm in and out
in twenty minutes; with Beth
it's a leisurely dinner date,
with maybe a glass too many
of seductive white wine.

Robert Cooperman

The Best Thing I Ever Ate

After a week on a BRAT diet for food poisoning—bananas, rice, applesauce, and Sahara-dry toast—I could finally eat “real food,” but something bland. So I made myself eggs over-easy, with a pinch of salt and pepper and an oven-warm onion bagel.

Even better than my first bite of moo shu pork, the Indian meal I shared with another hitchhiker through England, the Sunday-treat pastrami on rye from Aaron’s deli that still makes my eyes water with regret, for having to forgo meat.

It was Bach Brandenburgs, Van Gogh’s Starry Night, Shakespeare penning a tragedy to make King Lear or Macbeth read like hackwork. It was...oh, forget it:

I’m embarrassed to rhapsodize, with all the starving children everywhere, not just in India, when I was a spoiled brat more finicky an eater than a Russian prince, my mother guiltling me into opening my mouth, chewing, and swallowing, so those kids wouldn’t starve in vain.

Wayne Hogan

Potato Philosopny

I love potato philosophy.
I eat, sleep, and retch
potato philosophy.
There's just something
about potato philosophy that
gets to me. My best days
are when my thoughts turn
to potato philosophy. I'm
sorry, but that's just the way
I feel about it. Night and day
potato philosophy. I was out
walking the other day and
met a woman wearing
a pair of black patent-leather
shoes with pointed toes.
As we neared, our eyes met
and as in one voice we
each said, "Hello. I love
potato philosophy," and,
without further adieu,
continued on our separate
ways. The power of potato
philosophy is just that strong.

Wayne Hogan

I've Had It With Cows

Cows. I've had it with cows.
All that mooing, all that
tail-swinging-fly-swatting,
all that kneeling-and-folding down
in the middle of a field and
falling asleep without so much
as a moment's notice, all that
cud-jawing, all that big
eye-ball-rolling, all that milk
that has to be refrigerated and
churned into butter, all that
never-ending grass-nibbling,
all that calf-birthing, all that
ascending into the heavens in
the performance of cows'
annual Great Bovine Rapture,
all that getting together and
telling "cow jokes," all that and
all that other stuff about cows
that annoys me so.

And cats named Tom. I've
had it with cats named Tom, too.

Monique Laforce

Fragments of a Garden

You have forgiven the dead angel
who spoke to you about the promised land.

Ile d'Orléans — Chez Jean Désy 19 mai 2003

Between murder and sacrifice, you stand
deserted and shivering. What is the ordeal?
No one answers.

You refused to dance on music.
You said dance is something blank and crude.
A white hurricane in a raw landscape.

Your wings are soaked in ink.
They leave wild traces in the sky.

The eagle mourned the sparrow.
Troops gathered in the doorway,
waiting for the end of the show.

The crow faded softly into the night.
Morning picks up its shadow
and spreads it on stones.

The sculptor struggled with the myth.
Nobody won.
They drank together to authenticity.

Gertrude Morris

Greenmarket

Somewhere out there the earth still waits
to turn the roots of apple trees
just so for such epiphanies,
and bees still groom the apple blossom
spreading the word from flower to flower
that out of their small death: these fruits,
that rain falls upward in the branch
to bring forth rosy miracles,
and revelation will come in a red pickup
from the Rondout to the faithful at Gan-
sevoort:

rosy apostle dusted with bloom
fair cheeked virgins piled in boxes,
small and delicate scarlet ladies.
Praise apples for they are risen.

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Richard Spiegel

Gansevoort Street Farmer's Market 1981

We merged our books on shelves,
lost our place, bookmarked our days,
and read poetry along the waterways.

Barbara managed Saturdays' Gansevoort
Street Farmer's Market. Friday nights we
opened hydrants to wash the meat market's
blood from the cobble stones.
Saturday mornings we dragged
blue wooden barricades to cordon the area.

By 7 a.m. farm trucks began arriving.
I worked with John, unloading crates of
lettuce, kale, arugula, kohlrabi,
bokchoy, daikon, escarole and eggs.
Bill farmed on leased Jersey land.
Jake brought his home grown melons.
Vintners came from Ithaca; bakers, and
cheese mongers from Pennsylvania.

A Long Island farmer presented us
with a pet box turtle. Anton, who sold
flowers, brought a box of kittens and gave
us one, whom Tom named Tiffany.
McClaren, the meat farmer
from Connecticut, said if
he named a piglet, lamb or calf,
he never sends it to slaughter.

Richard Spiegel

Autumn Author

She wrote the moment
the world left her.

Alone, she could fold
darkness from memory.

Her fingers touched
the characters.

Her words
reaped the consequence:

a plausible accusation,
an inevitable harvest.

Chiasmata

Phrase the easy agony of funky talk,
Walk the walk and slip away with eyes ablaze,

Slice pretention into equal parts:
Arts mark our seasoned days of fire and ice.

Inner voices divide poems from prose.
An author dives under fallen leaves.

George Freek

The Long Road

(After Li Po)

I have traveled many years
to find nothingness.

The sky is an empty sea.

Does the moon see things?

I don't think she sees me.

There are stars hidden

in this bottomless sky

still searching for a home.

My roses grow

through a bed of stones.

Haphazardly, leaves

drift in the wind

when it blows.

I see nothing, but

I can feel its sudden breeze.

George Freek

Memento Mori

(After Tu Fu)

It is peaceful to rest in my garden.
To sit among the lilies,
the hollyhocks and hibiscus.
But their leaves have already hardened,
as shadows drift over the roses
as soft as the purest incense,
as dead as an old man's wishes.
The robins' nest is empty.
They're seeking kinder weather.
Winter will soon arrive.
One maple leaf clings to the branches,
but it will eventually go,
smothered in ice and snow.
Death swiftly changes things.
The leaves don't know it.
Is it better to know?

Sylvia Manning

Papo with Nabo (Turnip)

Black and white photograph (I don't need to find) has my mother's dad (it's safe in my mind) in front of his Red & White store in sunshine too bright from across the river (actually, the store wasn't his anymore but the son's now)

Too bright to let him smile, even if he was given to. He looks so thin, so much older than his years. He wears a soiled work apron and a sadness unto tears but certainly no inclination or ability to smile.

In his gnarled hands he holds a giant turnip. It may have come in with produce delivery — probably an anomaly, possibly a rutabaga.

Textile mill din from just behind photographer mocks the idea of any garden thereabouts in that gray expanse of asphalt all around him, mill parking lots that took over, over the years.

The store not his anymore.

His to man a big broom, sweep red sawdust across the floor.

I wonder if my mother took this shot. I wonder if she knew he'd had a dream, young share-cropper, that didn't quite come true... if she knew her father's life — like the store and that rutabaga-turnip, huge — wasn't his.

Irene Mitchell

Taste and See

Taste and see, as fancy dictates.
The appetite is greatest
when punctuated by beauty
at its most imperfect.

The past and present imperfect
have been seen.
Future glories wait to be tasted
by one rising early in anticipation.

The hope is to enter morning's market
with clever planning and direction.
Such plans may be called strategems,
little gems
of strategy,
bits of hard thinking, each jeweled vegetable
scrutinized
until the most delicious variety has been found.



Mary Belardi Erickson

Sewing with Emma

It was peaceful in Emma's
old small farmhouse.
She didn't talk much,
but her words came
from many years of work and play.
It was a good place
to accomplish a 4-H project:
a red and white checked pillow
with four birds cross-stitched
with black embroidery thread.
I had bought a pattern to follow
after I made the pillowcase
on Emma's treadle sewing machine.

On these old-fashioned days
time moved sweetly slow.
Emma's own embroidery was
of intricate design and lovely colors
on handkerchiefs with crocheted edging.
For me, I pulled the threaded needle
through the checkered cloth
diagonally across a white square
and then down underneath
and up again to complete the X.
Like a soft breeze, I threaded myself
through trees, where birds perched.

I would wear the pillow out over the years
I rested my head on it, remembering
the bliss experienced visiting my old friend.
Somehow, she's still with me
even after I flew away
into the cross-stitch of time.



Our Geography of Poets

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Illinois

George Freek

Maryland

Charles Rammelkamp

Minnesota

Mary Belardi Erickson

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

New York

Irene Mitchell

Gertrude Morris

Richard Spiegel

Quebec

Monique Laforce

Tennessee

Wayne Hogan

Vermont

Sylvia Manning

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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