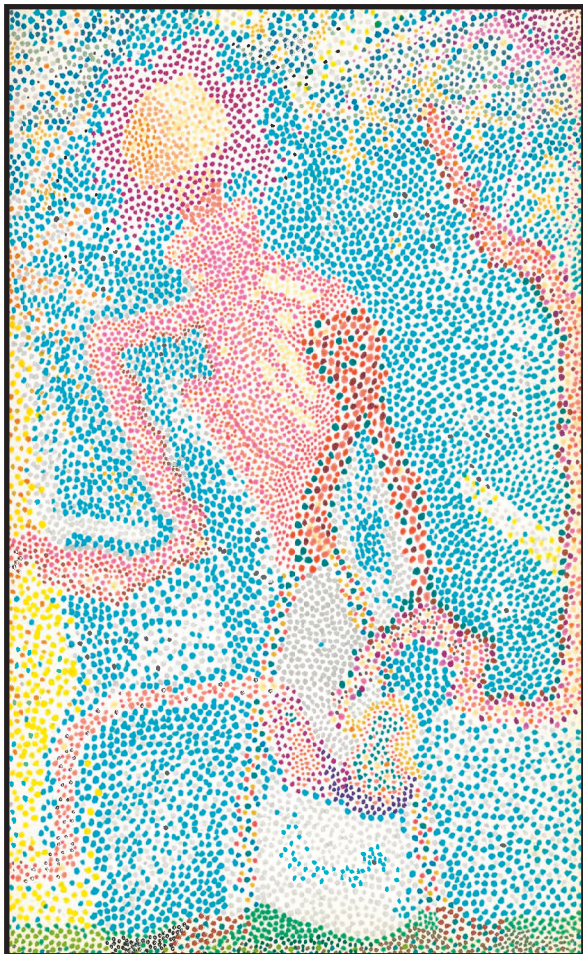


# Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



January, 2023    Volume 43    No. 7

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Volume 43

Number 7

A heron  
shifts its stance to glance  
at us then glides away.

excerpt from

“Donald Justice Dreams of Water Lilies”

by Deborah H. Doolittle

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Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 43 Number 7

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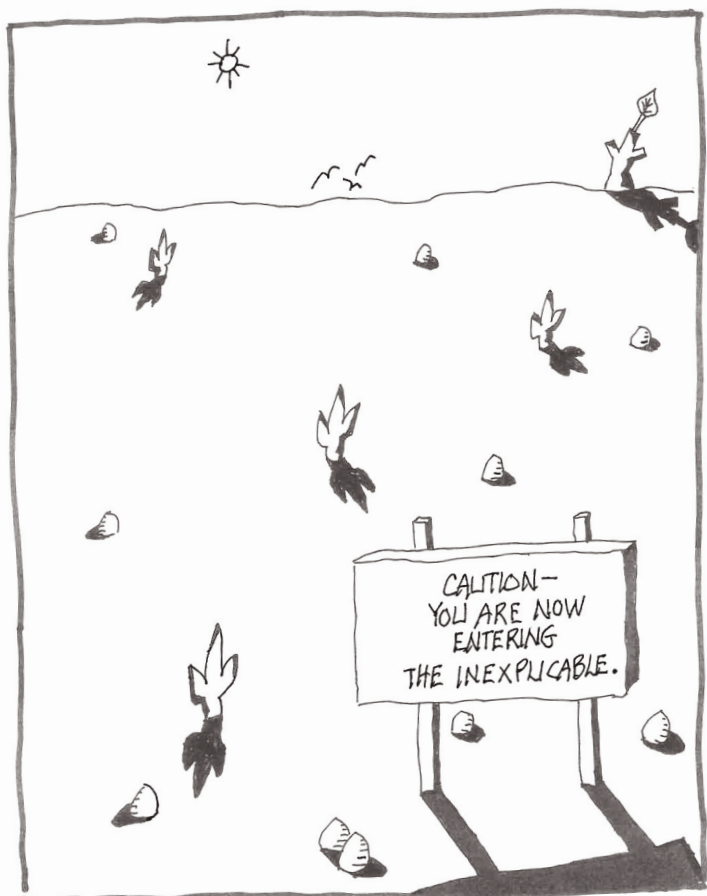
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Wayne Hegan

*Pat Anthony*

## Great Blue

Sky slides together in their wake  
pulsing wings lifting off from  
the borrow pit beside the river  
still holding the image of stiletto bill  
stilt legs disappearing in still swirling silt  
where silvery fishes swing away  
beneath passing shadow

along the creek to the west  
only the empty heronry remains  
in the ancient sycamore  
stick nests grouped like condominiums  
blue eggshells crushed beneath  
passing deer and beaver  
young herons winging south

with their parents to Mexico  
and beyond to winter in warm waters  
until March when they will return  
perhaps to rebuild winter ravaged nests

my brother's totem animal  
we miss reading its scalloped runes  
strain to hear hoarse calls for attention  
as they pass overhead leaving  
the day's peculiar message  
a contrail across the sky.

*Mary Belardi Erickson*

## **Sweet Serenity**

With her halo of yellow white hair,  
she reclines by winter's window  
while cloved apple butter simmers  
back of the tan cast iron stove.

Even the chilly wind settles down  
to rest. From the end of the driveway,  
car noise appears muffled by distance  
and her woods. All remains quiet  
sweetening the sputter of spicy butter.

She has electricity but that is all.  
Her refrigerator might kick in  
but no loud water softener or furnace.  
As it burns in the stove, wood crackles,  
the heat deeply warming a body's marrow.

She always says that she is snug  
as a bug in a rug and, indeed,  
a braided round rug supports table.  
As she serenely gazes out the window,  
she inhales the aroma of apple butter ready.

**Swift**

One late summer evening  
In the meadows beyond  
The outskirts of the town  
I killed a flying swift  
With a single stone

Twelve years old  
I was with some friends  
Watching a flight of them  
Graceful, circling  
Round a shallow pond  
I threw the stone  
Not thinking for one moment  
That I would score a hit  
But the aim was true  
And in horror  
I watched one fall  
Lifeless to the ground

I could not help  
But own the moment  
That left the others  
Struck with awe  
But beyond the death  
Of that small, joyful thing  
The killing stone  
Had one more target  
To strike that day

And found it  
In the centre of my heart  
And still it remains  
A toxic darkness  
Still shadowing my veins  
Though sixty years  
Have passed away

*Ruth Moon Kempher*

### **Hérons**

flower, by the ditch —  
white lotus buds laid long.



## Shore Lines

A lifetime back I recall  
talking with a salty codger  
on a rotting old pier, one of  
many along the eastern shore  
of the Bay, speaking in the lo-  
cal dialect he'd been born into  
a story I couldn't pin down at  
first 'cause the one-syllable  
noun central to his story  
sounded to my city ears like the  
long-legged water bird local  
to the Bay, the great blue  
heron, pronounced by the old  
man without the second vowel,  
kind of like hern, a word drawn  
out at the local walking pace  
but it turned out not to be a  
bird story at all, his was a  
fish tale about schools of mi-  
grating hern, what slickers like  
me called herring, the point  
of his narrative, whatever it was,  
lost long ago, but not his music.

**Eyed**

Along the creek path  
I eyed a heron, not  
yet full-grown, eyeing me

and we both kept on  
with our business, but  
kinda extra quiet, so's  
not to bother one another.

*Marilyn Braendeholm*

**That In-between Time**

It's early morning,  
a half-light dark,  
those minutes before dawn rises,  
when the sky hangs low  
and shortsighted.

It's a blue heron colour.  
Starless.  
Washed entirely empty  
by a shock  
of overnight rain.

Perfection, how rain cleans.  
Clears drought  
from your last  
still pervasive thought.

*James Penha*

## **Proscenium in Bali**

This singular tropical rain  
sounds like one great curtain  
falling from the fly loft high  
above this stage of paradise

*////////////////////////////////////*

Millions of drops, aqueous  
strings, showering from clouds  
I really do know all right but I  
will not draw open the bedroom  
drapes to reveal the truth in pale  
lights of a thunderous morning  
because I wake to live in theater

## Phoebe

“That’s the first one we’ve seen all summer,” said May.

“You can tell this bird by its call: *fee-bee, fee-bee.*”

We were sitting in our yard behind the farmhouse.

They’d brought us a basket of crabapples.

“A bumper crop,” said Caspar.

A month before, we’d eaten peach pie on the porch,  
made from what was also *a bumper crop*,  
fifty or sixty from a small tree, picked by me,  
pie courtesy of Liz. It had rained that day.

Caspar and May are small-scale farmers:

a big garden, chickens (for eggs, not meat).

They are activists, as well,

donating what they do not eat to local food banks.

Decades ago, Caspar trained as an architect.

May is the Humboldt County Treasurer,

elected when the Republicans screwed up,

by running a civil servant for the post.

“You can tell a Phoebe,” continued May, “by its call

(as I said), and by the way it lifts and

lowers its tail feathers, sort of flapping them.

You can tell a phoebe from similar birds

because it’s often plump.”

“The name means *bright*,” Caspar chimed in.

“Phoebe was a Titan and a prophet.”

Caspar is on the pedantic side. They both are what the locals call *tree-buggers*. Instead of TV (they don't own one), they scrutinize birds and mountain landscapes.

“Haven't we been seeing,” I finally said, “lots of them this summer, in the dead elm and the smaller dead tree next to it, to the left of the lawn, in front of the house?” I gestured with my head. The point was taken.

They soon left our place to return to work —always work to do on a farm! Today, it was moving bricks so they could store apples (from the bumper crop) in a small fridge Caspar had bought from a friend, secondhand. As usual, he'd told us all about that.

In reply, we'd made jokes about the crowds in New York, inviting them to visit. (They gave up on cities decades ago.) “Actually,” I now remarked to Liz, “I think the Phoebe's call is more like *Turr-whoee*. She agreed.

We were back behind the house, savoring the aftermath of *company*. Caspar and May were our third set of visitors, in the six weeks we'd spent here this summer.

I thought of the few Phoebes we had known.  
Most notable was Liz's art teacher (now dead),  
with whom we'd spent time in Maine, years before.  
Energetic and generous, she was nothing like a bird  
— more like an exuberant old puppy.  
Her daughter had named her own daughter after  
her mother. This girl — a young woman, now  
— is among her generation's gender-shifters.  
Could Phoebe, the Titan, also have been a blend?

## **The Winking Heron**

This morning's sky is full of silver clouds  
unless that is a lake with fluffy boats  
pink in the sunlight, shadowed by a bird  
that looks and leaves — not interested, he says,  
that bird that shakes out his own majesty  
and little finches caught up in the clouds  
to tell the story of a gloomy day  
once full of sea grass and then mystery —  
black clouds or fluffy boats then purple stars  
an hourglass that mixed sand and thoughtful hope —  
his shining black foot wrapped in misty wind,  
his wings tipped by white feathers, snowy wings  
suitable for an end-of-winter bird  
that flies fast into spring! Remembering song  
is sorrow and it's such a windy day.



### **Artist Dream**

The stately heron stands across the lake.  
The pines and maples shade the pristine shore.  
The osprey dives; returns with silver hake.  
The red-tailed hawks are circling as they soar.  
A damselfly skims over the break.

### **After the Flood**

Blue herons nest within a cypress tree  
I slowly walk the muddied path;  
look on plants, meadow flowers,  
bumblebees and ants.

### **Eventide**

Blue herons gliding  
above the calm silver lake  
create dark ripples.

Bullfrogs burst upward,  
settle on jade lily pads,  
sing to darkening sky.

Doe and fawn linger  
at the cool water edges  
waiting for the night.

Leaves rustle above  
the bevy of partridges  
resting in their nests.

## Odobenidae

We stood in the aquarium at the zoo,  
humid as an indoor swimming pool,  
looking at the walrus, those long tusks,  
propped up on its fins as if in a yoga pose.

“Walruses originally lived in the tropics,”  
Suzanne said. She knew all about animals,  
had a couple of cats, a dog, a parakeet.  
“They followed their food sources north,  
wound up in the North Pacific and North Atlantic.”

I grunted in acknowledgment, marveling  
at those incredible tusks;  
no wonder the poachers went after them,  
the poor things nearly extinct  
before governments banned commercial hunting.  
They’d developed the ivory tusks over generations  
to protect themselves from polar bears,  
Suzanne had mentioned.

“They’re like mythological creatures,” she gushed,  
her admiration making her all the more fetching,  
eyes a-glimmer like jewels.

“Separated by almost twenty million years  
from their closest relative, last remaining species  
in their family – a name from a Greek word  
meaning *those who walk with their teeth.*”

“I need to make a dentist appointment,”  
I murmured, remembering the reminder  
that came in the morning mail.

Suzanne thought this a witty remark,  
squeezed my arm. “Come on,” she said,  
“I need to get back home to walk Jenny.”  
Suzanne was one of a kind.

Wayne Hogan

**Fine Madness of a Consistent Sort**

(selectively cribbed and altered titles of  
Bukowsky poems in the Contents section  
of his *Continual Condition*)

Having some fun of conditional condition  
as an art form, was a tough cob with no  
theory and a soul tha'd lost its last race  
but was feeling good here in its new  
neighborhood. Rejected at first; now,  
like an old movie star, a legend tha'd  
seen the mirror on the wrong side  
and come full circle to a good place.  
Those were its dog times. The times  
of strange nights and sweaty days  
in August and tragic mannequins on  
next-door barstools and Budweiser  
smiles and mornings after and bent  
bayonets caressing long red hair and  
rapid movements toward old age.

**In a World**

I am everywhere in  
a world adjusted for  
the times. I am everywhere  
in a world crushed by its  
weight, struggling to be  
alive, to bear the sights  
distorted by the times.

I am everywhere in  
a world where oceans are  
the size of its windows  
and everybody sleeps  
except the one bald man  
who climbs upon the roof  
that's been calibrated  
by the times.

# Our Geography of Poets

## **Bali**

James Penha

## **Florida**

Ruth Moon Kempher

## **Kansas**

Pat Anthony

## **Kentucky**

Jane Stuart

## **Maryland**

Charles Rammelkamp

## **Minnesota**

Mary Belardi Erickson

## **New Jersey**

Gilbert Honigfeld

## **New York**

Ron Singer

## **Ohio**

Irene T. Winslow

## **Tennessee**

Wayne Hogan

## **Virginia**

William Corner Clarke

## **West Sussex**

Marilyn Braendeholm

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