

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
30



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 30, #8

it is too expensive for you
to live in your own home

— Robert R. Fox

(Your Friendly Local Watchdog Has Found)
On the occasion of a poetry reading
held in front of the Museum Of Modern Art
at the first New York Is Book Country.
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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 30

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Form NS4U2D.gov — Greta Bolger

Define "too expensive." Why are you here?

Scarce greenbacks smoothed into pile
too thin for rent on a room too small
for both a bed and a table?

Define "live." What do you plan to do
in your assigned home? Raise children?

Deal drugs? Watch TV 24/7? Pray ceaselessly
for somewhere safer to sleep at night?

Define "your own." Are you a renter or a squatter
or a flopper or a hopper? We have a place
for every kind, but you know already
it won't be the same kind of place.

Define "home." Is it shelter from dark streets,
shelter from the Man, a semi-safe place
where you can breathe, where you can heat
a can of soup, listen to bad news on the radio,
cover a sleeping grandchild and rest your feet
a minute before you head back out to punch
the clock, punch the thug who keeps hitting
on your 12-year old daughter?
I'm sorry, these are the questions I have to ask,
the answers we require before granting you assistance.
I feel your pain, have felt my own, see this scar here?
I work for the government. Besides that, I'm same as you.

Feed Me — H. Edgar Hix

waisting
away
on milk
and honey
her hand
out "feed
me feed
me" I
offer her a
cardboard
sign "will
work for
food" she
ate it

Leaving Home — Scott Owens

Leave your houses, your square walls,
your sound-proofed rooms. Close the doors
behind you. Forget your dictionaries, thesauruses,
judsonjerome books on how to become
a writer. Turn off the blue lights
of the great god, Television. Silence the screens,
the million maggots of the flickering set.

Find a place to say here
I can hear again, no longer surrounded
by my own noise. Find a place
where sentences don't wait for commas, stop
for periods, where words ignore the margins.

Then listen to the sounds of trees, limbs
pulsing with sap, stretching to the sky.
Listen to the annunciations of trumpet-woodbine,
Queen-Anne's lace curling like birds' nests.
Listen to water words, the traffic
of streams, clouds rolling spitballs
of rain on their tongues, seeds popping
with life, your own skin multiplying
shamelessly. Listen to the 10,000 years
of mountain breathing in this one moment.

Then let the words drip from your mouth
like pink saliva and know it is too expensive
to live in your own home. Such comfort
comes at a cost you can't imagine.

LOST — William Corner Clarke

The town is forgetting everything
That it used to know
Streets are being mislaid
In the middle of the week
The entrance to the park
Disappeared one winter's night
Brambles are covering
The market place

The river which ran
Through the centre of town
Has gone underground
And can't be found
Bits of the old neighbourhoods

Are turning up in museums
And suburbs are crumbling away
Broken off by frost and decay

Needless to say
The buses no longer run on time
And the destinations change
Before the journeys end

Some blame the foreigners
Who have come to settle here
From the unseen lands
But it just seems to me
That the stuff the place is made from
Is much weaker than we thought

How Winds Shift — Steve Shilling

I do not sleep as well
as I once did.

The lasting image today
may be fire, or implosion,
blocks and bodies
and steel.

There is no sound at night
but for the F-15 fighter jet
that is quietly patrolling
my neighborhood.

My mother always left the
front door unlocked,
the drugstore always sold
ten cent candies, and I always

spent summers legging out
triples and squeezing wet
beach sand between my toes.

Yesterday I awoke,
six days since losing and
saw four boys playing football
on the lawn of a church,
while men sat at a long
oval table and plotted
points of war.

I no longer am teacher
nor poet, brother, husband
or man.

Yesterday is too late,
as I am just out of reach.

Water View — Lee Evans

A glance from a side window or the porch
Assured me that the bay was still close by,
Toward the east, upon the morning side
Of every dawn's fresh promise, where the rush
Of currents followed the magnetic touch
Of moons not chronicled in history.

No more can I look out through glass or screen
To this, but only to a house that lurched,
One day, between me and my heart's delight—
As once no doubt my own walls blocked the view
For him who dwelt behind me.

Ah, the sight

One must have had before the plat was new
That framed the old plantation to be owned
Piecemeal, and mar the vision of the whole!

the homeless again prayer — Lynn Hoffman

we were homeless for such long times
some times we sing and some times we lament
we were homeless for so long
and because our language doesn't really show
what's past or future
we are homeless still and always will
and then is now and history
is the big will-be
for us

and if you forget that you were and will be
homeless, then for those amnesiac minutes
we have lost you and we pray pray
that you will return
with bread and salt and a flask of wine
and a joke to make us laugh.

be gracious unto us
our father, our king
the thing that we need
isn't really a thing

because i will be homeless again some day
i am homeless now, just like before
and will be and are for all to come
and we and i have been homeless for so long
that this homeless place is worth calling
as we always did we call it 'home'
so where i stop and used to stop
i say to you: come in, it's ours
and i'll be here soon.

Light From Across the Street — David Jordan

Seven years we have lived across the street
from the Wilsons,
an accomplished couple, he a retired bank president,
she a retired
attorney. When we moved here, they hosted
a Sunday brunch
so we could meet neighbors. When the boarder
next door killed
herself (a hanging), Eleanor called to explain
why police cars, fire
trucks and rescue wagons had erupted all up and down
the block. Ed even
invited me to join his Rotary Club, but
I declined. Through

the years, my wife and I have appreciated
the Wilsons, their cordial
kindness, their meticulously tended small lawn, their tidy
red brick home,
and especially the white porcelain lamp burning
day and night
in the window of their second-floor bedroom. We took
comfort
from that always-shining lamp. Whatever else
might happen,
morning storm or night-sick child or mid-day
marital spat,
a beacon of civil stability seemed to beam
across 29th Avenue.

This is the second marriage for Ed and Eleanor, both
widowed in their fifties,
wed to each other twenty years, their separate batches
of kids long grown
and gone. Ed has been the strong one, the household
organizer and motivator,
despite the plastic hip doctors gave him
five years ago. Eleanor
beat breast cancer, but began a slow slide
into Alzheimer's.
Ed kept them busy. He split season tickets
to Blazer basketball
with friends, helped Eleanor grow red rhododendrons
in the yard.

A month ago Ed had a stroke, left my wife and I
to witness
stability dwindling. First came the ambulance
and the paramedics
who carried Ed out into the night. Then came
the dark car
and the middle-aged relatives who escorted Eleanor
to a new apartment
near the nursing home. Then came the two pickup trucks
and the young relatives
who carried off a table, four chairs, a television set.
This morning
a moving van rolled up and a uniformed driver
jumped out.

The lamp in the second-floor window
has been dark
for days. My wife and I stand in our family room
and watch
for it to disappear entirely. We brace for life without
light from across the street.

Departing Grace — Michelle M. Mead

Fumbling with the cushion on her wheel chair
she watches from her porch door the children playing
if hopscotch or jump rope she cannot tell
but the joy of life apparent in the words they're saying

Tucked away in dusty corners of long-closed drawers
this other self in photographs, earrings and tickets torn
when the silence of money yet told stories in numbers
not expecting the shock of its great length now shorn

It had become too expensive for her to live in her own home
this never explained in the book of growing old and poor
that what one worked for in future counts for nothing
and long forgotten is the vibrant thing you were before

A car pulls into the driveway and someone gets out quick
efficient in both drudgery's tasks as with a painted smile
broker's clipboard ready for jotting down her aged name
but nothing on there to explain to her this newest trial
"Time to go," the words danced out from tight dry lips
so she rolled herself out of her own favorite place
the one where she had coaxed her life to sing aloud
but none here now to see her humble departing grace

Poem on a Nice Sunny Afternoon — Donald Lev

We all have or pretend, like me, we have
a friend or neighbor like this:
who invited me next door to his
parents' and forbears' stately mansion,
where the swimming pool was just
filled with vodka!

I said yes indeed I will come along, just
let me get my bathing suit and . . .
I'm not at all sure of what I added, but
I cut through the jungle underbrush to
reach his place from mine, and
dived into a pool of vodka!

(excuse the exclamation points, but really!)
I swam around in it, it was so nice and cool and
refreshing, and some of the more
athletic bathers were tossing olives and
onions around in it. I want
to go somewhere with this . . .
to make it, you know, worthwhile . . .
I believe I became a poet for the most
worthy reasons . . . but now . . . I just don't know . . .

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Arthur Chinchilla at home