

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

29



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 29, #5

Then who is digging on my grave?
Say—Since I have not guessed.
—“O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?”

Thomas Hardy excerpted from
Ah, Are you Digging on My Grave

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 29

Number 5*

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Our Ancestor From the Alamo — Thomas D. Reynolds

Among us who lead with their hearts,
perhaps you were the first.

In a quiet moment before daybreak,
perhaps you looked over the crumbling wall
and felt the surge of ancient blood
rising to the surface of your skin.

Perhaps you lifted your hand to face
and felt the heat of your mother's touch.

Rubbing away from smoke from eyes,
perhaps you looked onto charred ground

with the breadth of your father's vision,
reminded of the heavy price of dreams.
In the dove singing atop the battlements,
perhaps you recognized the comfort of joy
even as your comrades gathered muskets,
clearing smoke and dust from throats.
In the sweeping plains covered in fog,
perhaps you saw the land of your fathers
while lines of encroaching soldiers
were there to lead you home.

Perspectives — Barry W. North

On the flight home,
I saw that at a certain altitude
the houses,
even the elaborate mansions with pools,
looked like toys,
much too small to build a life around.
I swiveled to share my thought.
But my neighbor,
in the adjoining seat,
with his corporate jowls,
and head buried deep inside his paper,
looked like an old hound dog guarding his food.
I turned back,
deciding not to speak.

Short Scene With Dog and Fish — Alison Koffler

The fish had been an impressive corpse—
stiff and curved as a driftwood boomerang,
ribcage full of sand, stubbed aground,
as if some final plunge had stranded it.

But this morning, it was almost gone,
a rag of flabby skin awash in the shallows,
anchored to what was left of the skull.
No eyes. Only its gothic armature of jaws,
chiseled spinal rosary, and a rayed fragment
of dorsal fin. In the far distance, under the sky's
exacting glare, the bathers gather around
the lifeguard's throne, their thin bird-voices

scattered by the wind. But here, as the tide
rolls clattering pebbles, I'm standing on some bleak,
definitive edge—even my dog's deserted me,
behind a dune eating plover's eggs, no doubt—
the continent crumbling beneath my feet
into the chill oblivious ocean.
Only the dead wash up here;
broken crabs and clams, strings of sea wrack,
all that damp flesh drying, pungent.
Rusted ship's iron, unrecognizable glass shards.
One could almost, squinting out at colorless
sea and sky and wandering to no destination exactly,

begin to construct a philosophy
around such scraps and tailings,
slip into icy water, picture the whole
grim globe swept away into howling zero...

when my errant dog scoots by, a flash of black fur,
a wilding eye, and a dangle of something long and white
trailing from her jaws.

She bows, her rump in the air,
wriggling in foolish delight, flops on her belly,
rapidly thumping her tail, eyeing me,
daring me to take it.

Consider then, the poet, shambling and lunging

with queasy fingers, and the dog skittering away,
fish bones swinging, the great skull bumping
in the sand. Oh, to dance teasingly close,
then dodge sideways, gleefully evading
the clumsy human, to gallop in circles
of sleek-muscled, idiot joy!
With a fortunate lunge, I grab her collar
and prize her teeth from the slimy vertebrae.
I hold the fish bones up, a half-chewed
barbaric necklace dangling from my fingers,
graceful and ill-smelling. I fling the white arc of it
out into the surf. The dog looks at me,

wagging her tail in amusement or submission,
then trots off, turning her attention
to the next interesting thing.
I follow her willingly—
it's our short attention span that saves us.

Wellfleet, Massachusetts

“Fixed on the Scent of Light” Hafiz — R. Yurman

painters speak of how
it creates
not just color
but substance
shape

this morning
after weeks of rain
a light
I cannot smell
or taste
struggles through
the bedroom window

young and squalling
it flashes
leaf shadow
on the opposite wall

not yet fully awake
and no painter
I close my eyes
to listen

the growing cries
just loud enough
to rouse me
shape the day

Geoff Stevens

Do you want a dog
which licks your face
when you are dead
and bites you
when you are alive?

Tennis, Anyone? — Ruth Moon Kempher

Bopped a daisy
with my racquet
and thin sweat
ran in my eyes
and down my
thighs

twonk.

The ball skids
hitting sand
and here's a dog
ambling by
tongue lolling
out; his eyes
say

O, my Lord
how can they?

Snoopyesque – Joanne Seltzer

Forgive me, God,
for I have coveted
my neighbor's dog,

fed her word-pap,
coaxed into my bed
of whimsical dreams.

She's a cartoon
that barks and licks faces
and sits on command

and floats thought-balloons
filled with puppy talk
in translation

as if she will stay
nine weeks old forever
never to know pain

or self-induced
anxiety, never
to be put to sleep.

Do I praise false gods
by stroking a beagle's
black-patched white back?

Isn't love precious
Wherever it blossoms?
Isn't life comic?

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Choosing the Right Dog — John Foxell

Choosing the right dog
can be a Cerberusean task.
They're all so cute and cuddly
bichon, bedminsters or wheatons
how could you not love them
and that Siberian husky just so wonderful,
he acted like I was already his owner,
so gentle yet so big.
A merry little dachhund
A quiet besenji, the barkless dog

Even a snappy beagle.
sells, ok, maybe not the beagle.
But who am I kidding?

I have no love to give,
Even to an animal.
When I visited the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan
I saw there a skeletal dog
Living with its skeleton owners.
Now maybe that's the perfect dog
For a man of my sensibilities
I think I'll call him Bones.

From the Caged Canary — Ellaraine Lockie

No matter the season
Light dims
Air is still
without flap of wings
The aria you hear
is my cry
The sky metal gray

Best Friends — James Penha

He leaps with the opening of a door
to land on the lawn and sniff a turd
as if messiah dropped it;
rims a pal from down the block
and wags in jazz
though she's been muted;
swells with a dead pigeon in his chops;
flings the fur atop his spine
and hoists his flag up every pole.

So how to start with the ricochet?
He drops a branch to kiss my lips. Shall I be wise?
Do I listen to all the tales
of all the spots he's pissed? Can I
move myself to let him gyre into sleep
to yip and mime
and dream his world upon my lap?

Change of Heart — Dave Church

My friend Edward had a good laugh
When I told him that people
Should treat others
As they likely would a dog —
Paw to paw with a pat on the head
And a slap on the back.

When he was ready to leave
He shook my hand,
Gave me a pat on the head
And a slap on the back.

Now, every time he sees me
He shakes my hand,
Gives me a pat on the head
And a slap on the back.

The next time we meet,
I have to take back everything I said
About people and dogs,
I hate those touchy feely types.

King Toby — Colin Gilbert

He stands tall. Looks predator confident
as if to say, "I am Toby, King of everything."
For some, smiling — like bravery — seems natural,
grows from within, skeletal extensions, chords
broken of birth anthems. "I am Toby, King
of everything. This world, my kingdom. I vanquish
knights, flying wonders and the undiscovered."
Like a flesh and bone poem of life, "I am Toby,
King of everything."

He then pounces upon his prey. Wrestles it to flat. Backs up and stands. Repeats his attack until this ten-week old puppy, 'King Toby,' reaches beyond his balance and falls backward, front paws flailing to the floor. King no more. He rolls over, stunned. Addresses his foe, my foot, with a look that questions telekinesis, gravity and the nutritional content of puppy food. He then musters courage to rise again. One paw. Then back down. Both paws immediately up and down. Hesitation. He looks behind him, floor. Floor that not-so-softly caught his fall.

Then energetically up, paws higher in air than ever before and...

We all fall. Some backward. Some over inanimate objects. Some upside-down for lovers that never realize themselves, but I marvel at Toby. His memory and strength despite. A grain of sand in a world of mountains, he stands. Knows nothing of gravity but remembers the uncertainty of falling. He steps forward. Where logic would suggest safety in withdrawing, he jumps upward toward flight, an ability he cannot even fathom. He risks falling.

We all hang ourselves in suspense — expect
this time will be different. It will last.

Like skydiving without parachutes,
we begin by throwing ourselves into life.

We land on hearts like grenades, exploding
with unknowing, protecting nothing, experiencing
everything until “the one.” First bump. Rough landing.
Mother of doubt finds us unsuspecting. Teaches us
to look back for floor. No floor? Create safe landings.
Certainties. Manufacture logic. Protect hearts
in numbers, distances, ages, incomes. Falling hurts.
Laying down does not. So, we stop.

We plant our pasts in bars and friends, and memories
and comfort and parties and dinners and laughs
and comfort and doubt and comfort and noise
and comfort and silence. Ghosts of our hopes
remain. Then we stand, often unaware. And fall
again. Step, as if compelled to push by a force
of and not of ourselves. And fall again. Then jump
into a familiar unknown the size of disappointment.
We fall. And Stand. Fall. And step. Fall. And jump.
Fall. Stand. Step. Jump.
And sometimes, we fly.

April — Noel Sloboda

Our old dog worries
about the storms passing
underneath the bed.

Consciousness — Davide Trame

You sit in front of the sea on this crystal clear day
and gaze straight into the straight
dark turquoise horizon line,
air and sunlight carrying that deep scent
of pure, naked space,
cold and saltiness heightening
the well known sense of bright nothing,
the slashing conscience of no barrier now
between you and there.
So you look in front, in the freezing breeze,
eyes watering.

You look and breathe, and catch
a glimpse of how everything passes
flashing by, light, unsubstantial,
absorbed by the strength of space.

Yes, it's what you are fully conscious of
for half a second,
then a whimper from your impatient dog
grabs you back with no second thought
and tells you that all this is maybe not at all so true,
he is determinedly asking you to move on
and leave air, its vast bustle and your nothing
in the blue.

safe way – will inman

human tides

surge into rages clashes calamities

serene islands

postulate with panic

individual closenesses

mock confidence

tearing away from safe hope

wolves are set loose in forests;

insecure shepherds try to make safe

by killing wolves

who will make safe against hunters

time crawls in sheeps' wool

but wool

covets safe hours

kill the terrorist wolves

make fields safe for sheep

climb inside woolen robes

be wolves on wolves

see who fosters calm

if sheep prevail

long enough

Lemurs at the Bronx Zoo — George Held

Unlike thousands of horses “thundering
Across the prairie” to make us feel free,
The handful of lemurs at the zoo,
Newly installed in small arboreal habitat
Meant to mimic their Madagascar home,
Seem like the spirits of primitive human
Beings, eerily complacent in captivity.

Unlike the thoroughly equine horse,
The mystical lemur has hands and feet
And mournful eyes that make us feel
Like cousins — if we discount
That prehensile tail, so deft as balance,
Hook, and rudder. Wouldn't people be better
Off with one of those?

O horse, with mane flung back
As you race the wind across the prairie,
Do not let yourself be locked
In paddock or pasture. O lemur,
Enclosed in cage, do not let the gawkers
Distract you as you receive signals
From a place beyond our ken.

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On the Film Night of the Living Dead — Donald Lev

for Will Nixon - 1/08

All I can say about it is
it is probably the most
unappetizing display
I have ever seen.
Maybe an extra-strength
alkaseltzer
will get it off my mind.
I can't believe I watched
the whole thing!

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