

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
31



# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #1

And I stare back,  
one eye straight into clarity,  
one transfixed on chaos.

**Ida Fasel**

COVERING THE DISTANCES

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# WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 31

Number 1\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel  
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*Tree Down*  
photo  
by  
Barbara  
Fisher

## Archaeology of Vanity – William Corner-Clarke

This room  
In the stillness of morning  
Is like a museum  
Of your vanity  
The dressing table mirror  
Still tilts to the level  
Of your face  
The cut glass casket  
Has not been touched  
No jewelry  
Has been removed  
A hairbrush poised

Like a dragonfly  
On a pond of glass  
Is gathering  
A summer's dust  
Another mirror  
Lies without an image  
Its reflection dull  
As an empty spotlight  
In the shadows  
Of the ceiling  
And the whole is silent  
Embedded in a lava  
Of hardening time

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## Georgia O'Keeffe's "Lawrence Tree" – Alan Catlin

*D. H. Lawrence's  
sulphurous glow on the horizon  
approaches. Stan Rice*

Black shadow branches  
are varicose veins on  
Vincent's Starry Night,  
are broken blood blisters,  
supernova suns disappearing  
as puffs of rheumy smoke  
turning dark as exhumations  
from miner's black lungs  
on a blue canvas sky.

## Now I Lay Me – Rex Sexton

Dreams float without soul, each night a new death.

Each day a postmortem on dreams abandoned.

“Do you think we’re going to make it through this?”

My wife asks.

“Sure, we can raise some cash.”

If we can sell all our trash – furniture, bungalow, used car, nick knacks, clothes. Factor in my unemployment checks for as long as they last. Add whatever handyman gigs I can put into that. Government food stamps?

“I’m afraid.”

“No need to be. We’ll be OK. Take care of our needs – housing, heat, food for the kids.:

I stare at the darkened ceiling of our bedroom.



*Fire sale! Fire sale! Flames leap. The night stands ignite.  
The bed burns, dressers, tables, chairs, drapes, the whole  
bungalow swirling in flames, boy scout, girl scout, little  
League pictures erased as plumes sweep each the room.  
“Try to get some sleep.”*

## **Rosy Cheeked Children – Donald Lev**

Hundreds of rosy cheeked children  
crowded in with their resumes.

Old Frank Morgan, with his sad, humorous  
gaze, came himself from behind the screen  
to collect them. He had just had to  
let go his girl Friday. The world wide recession  
had even reached Oz.

He knew he had only three openings  
for the roulette tables he had installed  
before the bad news hit—  
and he didn't know how he would handle this.  
Like all the rest of the wizards of finance,  
he wished he could find a place to hide.

## **chaos takes your pockets – Jennifer Jayne Scobie**

beneath the mountains, creeping slowly out  
is anarchy that lives in depths unknown  
its chaos wreaks such havoc through the night  
in more ways than we see; some are surreal

the fire built by clarity burns strong  
perhaps the two shall never cross their paths  
stand high enough and you can see them both  
the nameless ruined vistas to behold

be careful where you take your sleep tonight  
and do not venture too far from the fire  
or chaos takes your pockets for a ride  
and you will lose your vision and your peace

## **melting and melding – Jennifer Jayne Scobie**

one eye captures just the light

the sun rays peeking through the trees

the other, only darkness

shadows that creep through the unseen

one ear hears the birds

happily chirping in the trees

the other hears the thunder

the whirling of tornadoes

one nostril smells the freshly cut lawn

the blossoms on the lilac tree

the other smells the garbage

the sewers beneath the streets

on my tongue, all is joined together  
the juicy and dry  
the zesty and bland  
the sweet and sour  
the delicious and foul  
melting and melding into just one form  
and I call this form  
“alive”

## The Other Side – Bill Freedman

I just received  
a packet of old photographs I'd never seen.  
My brother and myself as children  
more than sixty years ago.  
Our father, mother, theirs.  
long wool overcoats, print dresses  
and silver pins that held the heart in, there.

Grandma, whom I remember  
as a vivacious, jovial woman,  
despite her always menaced heart,  
in image after image does not smile.  
Dour and leather-creased as old Cochise,  
she stares expressionless,  
as though across another ghost-pocked plain.  
The look of nothing she has seen.  
It's 1944, but the look is time's, lent freely.  
I wear it now, hooked and reeled behind it,  
dragged away.

I wished to say, my father,  
who in memory almost never smiled,  
can't stop.

Whoever he stands or sits beside,  
in yards or alleyways, on porches,  
sofas, or in parks I can't identify,  
he touches, rests an easy arm upon  
or pulls a little closer at the waist.

I feel that arm, that weight, for the first time now. Heavier,  
as every distance runner knows,  
than it appears.



## **Cook Until Done – Katie Vagnino**

*For my parents, who met in an adult class called “Cooking for Singles.”*

On the first day, they made consommé.  
The way his hands cracked the eggs,  
Whipped their whites into a frenzy  
Stirred something forgotten inside her.

The way his hands cracked the eggs  
Made her wonder how he'd handle her—  
Something forgotten stirred inside  
When he finally asked her out on a date.

He wondered how she'd handle herself  
When he ordered Chianti at dinner.  
On the date, he asked all the usual things,  
Noticed her eyes were hazel like his.

He ordered more Chianti at dinner when  
She said their matching initials were a sign.  
She noticed his eyes were hazel like hers;  
He stroked her hand, offered to drive her home.

Matching initials must be a sign, she said,  
Picturing pairs of monogrammed towels.  
He stroked her hand, invited her to his home.  
Eight months later she was still there,

Picturing pairs of monogrammed towels.  
Watching him was like waiting for water to boil.  
Eight months later she was still there  
Without a ring, not getting any younger:

Was she waiting for water that never would boil?  
At last she delivered an ultimatum:  
“I need a ring. I’m not getting any younger.”  
The following September, he caved in,

Delivered a proposal to her ultimatum  
To legally consummate their love. One day  
Eighteen Septembers later, it all caved in;  
Both were whipped, but the frenzy was gone.

## Preferred Rental – Joanne Seltzer

Not in the lease, a bat hides in the rafters  
of this vacation home. It's terrified  
of us. And we of any winged creature  
who tolerates our pesticide-rich blood.  
How can the bat see without being seen?  
By interpreting invisible waves  
on an archetypal radar screen  
it carried from the closet to the eaves.  
From where the bat sits we are Visigoths  
transplanted from another continent—  
and we at first thought it a giant moth.

Rabid perhaps, darkly uninnocent,  
the bat pays homage to the vampire myth,  
is an invasive guest we put up with.

## **Bay Ridge – Russell Jaffe**

When we first came here, everything was many years behind, and we liked being thrown off. We left Chicago in my car right after breakfast. After dinner, we wandered around as we got fuller, our eyes gleaned garbage bag street corners and our stomachs ached. I will say the drive back through New Jersey was like the glass of water before bedtime, which was dry and then ineffable, spiraling from the sink to my gullet and back to the toilet, and the process was like the way the city itself came pouring out like a multi-course meal and slammed to the table, only to be drawn back again. We were going to move to Bay Ridge. When I first saw it, I knew, my mouth and teeth hurt. I used every limbic portion of sense memory to lick what remained of the bowl;

you only remember the good, which is why the dessert portion comes at the end. I would have pulled off the highway if it hadn't been for the expansive density of the city, like a carrot cake behind a shop window. The moist air blew in sweet notes from the sea, Staten Island's best gathered around the docks near an ice cream truck to watch the barges pass the Statue of Liberty. Old Russians with their fishing poles in the water slept next to buckets of dead worms, their fingers beery and oily, their hats dangled off their heads as the surf dusted the planks beneath their thousand year old shoes. The guide book said the culture here is rich, little notes of languages quicker and jauntier, thicker and more mixed in. Little men with poppy seed mustaches, women with crinkled wrapper headscarves.



These are berries in the center, mixed, a fruit salad which adorns the table as much as it adds a validation to something that isn't good for you, but something – love, a dream of a career, being young, or bored, or just not thinking, or thinking way too much – tells you to keep eating and keep ingesting, and if you do, you will get a stomach ache before bedtime quiet time and you'll need a glass of water, the regulation of your own patterns, and out my kitchen window you can see the Statue of Liberty.

Beyond that, on a clearer day, the walls of Manhattan's exterior are syrupy on their reflective glass faces, and crunchy on the inside. Their tied and shirted workers are building their own miniature identities in frosted comb. On most other days, smog's like window panes.

## A Sestina Dedicated to that Marvel, Ida Fasel – Patricia Brooks

And I stare  
back  
one eye straight  
into clarity  
one transfixed  
on chaos.

Chaos  
is perhaps only that which we don't know. We stare  
at it, analyze it, transfixed  
by oversimplifications, born back  
when we confused clarity  
with straight

laced religious truths, sure that straight  
paths would never lead us back to chaos.  
Or is it that clarity  
is only simplicity carried by the stare  
of one fool at another, back  
when certainty was something that transfixed

us all — sages, fools — transfixed  
us right down the line, straight  
to the most evolved of us, and way back  
to that Adam and Eve duo, chaos  
just a snake away from the back  
door to Eden, clarity

embodied in a simple apple. But clarity,  
we now say, can be achieved if one is not transfixed  
by other, lesser minds. Simply stare  
straight  
ahead, imagining chaos  
as an equation learned back

when we were simple folk, back  
when we were certain of that clarity  
preached from every pulpit: eschew chaos  
born of disbelief and we will be transfixed  
by miracles of straight  
perception. Do not stare

back again to that deity of our childhoods, only straight ahead, transfixed with the certainty that clarity topples chaos with a single stare.

## Say, Uncle! – Mary Belardi Erickson

So Brother,  
across our fields, his gall  
grew into a crooked shadow  
as from a malformed branch.  
Today, if at the wood bridge  
we threw a low-down twig  
into the stream, we would  
view it superficial like a hat's frill  
or call it only a bit of bamboo.

We should cast off his silhouette  
of rancorous lines, let it flow

away, a stick shadow  
under the barb wires  
at the neighbor's property line —  
their vacant barn and house,  
dusty windows,  
closed eyes all these years.

Along our own banks,  
we inhaled mint-leaf breeze  
and sought waxy buttercups.  
Count how many leaves and petals  
still murmur when in spades,  
we've had enough of bent reason  
and feel certain of ourselves.

## Anger Management – John Grey

You're angry, angry to the point of throwing things,  
so pity whatever is in hand, like glasses, once a wedding present,  
or dishes, heirlooms every one.

And for every sorry missile, there's a target,  
a favorite mirror, a photograph of lovers at a beach,  
or even a wall, a wall whose unmarked surface must mean something  
but not as much as the hole a hurled steam iron, of all things,  
could smash into it.

You're so angry it's as if all the angers you've felt up to this moment  
are piling on top of each other to be the anger that bursts out of you first.  
There's anger at teething, anger at brothers, sisters, parents,  
anger at school and teachers and the kids that called you names.



And what about the anger at the expectations you never met,  
at college, on the job, in that rough and raw dating gauntlet  
that those women made you run.

And now there's that ultimate anger, anger at the course  
in life that brooks no other, no exit, no turning back.

Anger at the house, anger at the car, the street where  
you live, the neighbors, what's on television, what's playing on the radio.  
And your wife, the one who didn't so much tip your balance  
as turn it upside down.

You're angry at the woman you love.

So once again, the glasses, dishes, mirror, photograph,  
even the wall, are saved.

You throw yourself on the couch.  
angry that you love her.

## Happy Endings – David Gershator

Happy Endings  
knocked on my door  
and left a message  
while I was out of town  
sorry I missed Happy Endings  
everything could have turned out  
differently  
I could have met the girl  
hit the jackpot  
made the cover of Time  
now it's back to normal  
it's the same old story

I'm back to not knowing  
how anything ends  
maybe it's better this way

At night the moon's  
a shining witness  
to the fact  
that there might be  
an advantage  
to being kept in the dark

## Let Me Know If You're Dead – Bill Roberts

The last of five messages on the phone  
is a real beaut, a classic.  
I play it a second, then a third time.

“Roberts, I heard you died.  
I hope not but you never know at our age.  
Call me if you're really dead, okay?”

I play it a fourth time,  
Then decide to call my old friend  
Who I haven't spoken to for months.

No answer, then his message  
thingamajig kicks in:  
“Make it brief – I’m getting too impatient.”

“Norris, hi,” I say. “You heard right  
I died when I heard your voice.  
Please send flowers but don’t call back.”

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