

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
31



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #6

We live at peace in a house of war.
We get along not getting along.

Ida Fasel

RUCKUS

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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 31

Number 6

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c o n t e n t s

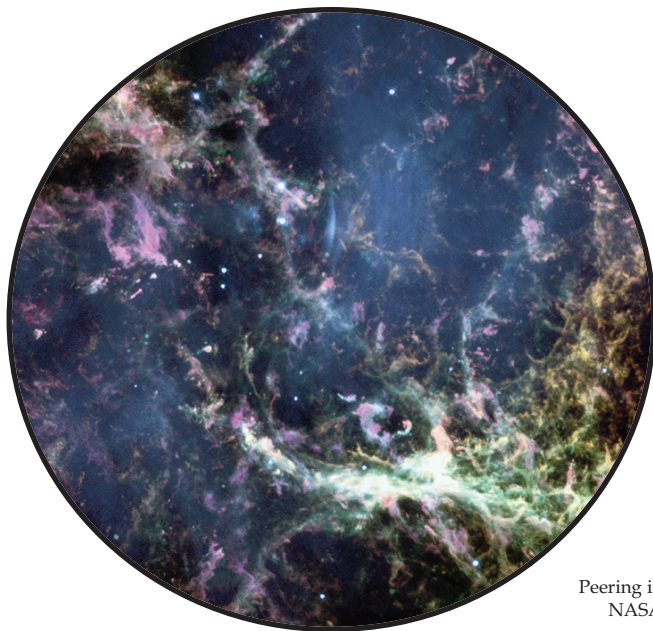
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Peering into the Heart of the Crab Nebula
NASA, The Hubble Heritage Team

The Meander Cycle – Arlene Mandell

“Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” Noam Chomsky

Her talent is a meander cycle, water flowing,
some parts coursing swiftly, others eddying,
slowed by debris, this lotus-eater imprisoned
in a lifelong learning institute, squirting
cobalt and fuchsia straight from tubes,
lacking the gravitas of Pollock, no Mars black –
too gloomy – instead, stick-on gold stars
like she used to get in third grade.
She paints continuously, without reference
to meaning, wears hats collaged with feathers,
so creative, so clever say the other residents,
sipping herbal tea and smiling.

Postcards From the Next Life – Bill Roberts

Dear Son – Bet you won't like it here.
We can't have tobacco products, so I'm
forced to chew on the rope I was led in
by. Also, they confiscated my choppers.
When you come, sneak in a sealed pouch
of those rum-soaked cigars. Love, Mom

Son – Brace yourself for what's coming.
There's a vast library here, but it contains
only children's books, nothing but fiction.
Remember when I read you Mother Goose?
That's all you'll have pretty soon, so OD
on pornography while you're able. Dad

Brother Bill – I wonder if I can ask another favor before you join us . . . would you mind bringing me a pair of those Crocs, size 13? We go barefoot – and often bareassed, too – and my poor dogs ache all the time. We never seem to stop marching. Bro Maxie

Billy Boy – Remember me, your girlfriend from high school (the one with the big yumyums)!? Ha! Can't wait to see you again, little man. It's boring as h-e-l-l up here, so hurry to my rescue. Don't worry about protection – sex is a no-no. XXX, Viv

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My Idea – Wayne Hogan

My idea of a grizzled old man sitting sipping bourbon is not *The New Yorker* photo of him with a Ben Hogan-visor cap on, a paisley scarf tucked full-purposed around a still pretty-smooth neck, a cowhide-tan cardigan sweater that buttons down the front covering a fashionably-checked shirt with a collar that's brand-new looking, a GQ-stylish pair of corduroy pants whose legs are tucked into the tops of a properly-weathered pair of sheep-herder boots, a Rolex watch of diminutive proportions tied with a slender alligator-leather band to his left wrist at what looks like precisely one inch above the wrist-bone, and, in his manicured right hand, a sloping one-fourth-full decanter of a shape like you'd see a lot in southern France, him sitting there on a carefully crafted slab of pure Italian granite, peering through squinted green eyes off beyond the edge of the picture.

No, my idea of a grizzled old man sitting sipping bourbon is of him actually in some sway-backed barn on some ramshackle farm up in Kentucky about forty miles southwest of Lexington, him with a weathered white Stetson full of finger-smudged creases, pulled tight down to the tops of his floppy ears topping out just above his soft-blue eyes, a turned-yellow undershirt like the one Clark Gable wore in “It Happened One Night” barely visible beneath a faded-brown Dickey work-shirt buttoned high at the neck, with galluses draped over sloping-boned shoulders holding up an amply-filled pair of blue-and-white striped overalls whose full frayed legs fall over the tops of a pair of steel-toed brogans that’re well-worn, a huge rubbed-shiny pocket watch tied to a worn-thin chain fastened to the little brass button there on the left side of his ‘alls, and, in his gnarled, slab-of-beef right hand a nearly-empty white crockery cup (like they’re a lot of in east Tennessee), him just sitting there on a moldy bale of wild-grass hay, looking tired-eyed off just past the slope of the field to see where Rosie, his ‘coon hound’s gone.

Born to Lose – Rex Sexton

Like a death rattle of wind chimes
playing the desperate cries of hard
times, through dark, despairing notes
across the shivering rhythms of their
hearts and souls, the lost generation
wanders the recession, searching for
salvation from life's regression, hoping
too little, too late won't come from
whatever can change their fate.

It's the music sensation that's sweeping
the nation – the beat of a dream's retreat.
You can hear it in Chicago, in the Motor
City, in Philadelphia, PA, Kansas City,
down in New Orleans, all across the
country

Senescence – Scott Owens

Like wooden soldiers,
cracked and aging,
the kind you played with
in first attempts at power,
or Arlington crosses
kept in tight formation
but still always inadequate,
or birch trees peeling
in bad weather in a forest in
Germany,
these pillars lack

as all do (trunkless legs
in a desert, marble or gilded
monuments, even lines)
the ability to persist beyond
disuse, disregard, or
anything
that smells of
mortality.

Urbane Renewal – Catherine McGuire

Meier and Frank is Macy's now – they sold
out, preserving one green tiled stall.
Baloney Joe's will morph into a Wal-
Mart or Target; the homeless in the cold
look on; their under-freeway's now patrolled
and fenced – cheap housing vanishes as all
the SRO's are gutted. Towers rise tall
and sleek with glass, disdainful of the old
brownstones, the three-up quaint Victorians
with arching doorways, pink and black-tiled baths
and canted, sloping plaster walls – their Grail
is Progress. So mourn antiquarians
as we tear down the graceful brick and lathe,
and blind greed over entropy prevails.

Morning Requests – William Corner Clarke

A portable radio
Slammed under
The grill
A disembodied voice
Screaming above
A melting plastic
Exploding heart
Moonlight and roses
And pools
Of solder
Shining like
Fairytale tears

On the bottom of the pan
Cooking
A love song
Until it's burnt
To a cinder

Nymphs – William Corner-Clarke

Women gathered
Round the well
Women drawing
Water from the well
Women, Water
Vital force
Take for granted
Any one
And you will die
Of thirst

The Bone Fragment – William Corner-Clarke

The bone fragment
Just won't let me rest
It has slowly worked its way
Through my layers
Of protecting skin
To poke its jagged edge
Into the place of safety
I thought I'd hidden in

There's a sense of savage
Ritual - feathers, rags,
Dust and blood and smoke
About its shape
Some rough design -
Scrimshaw of some kind
Is grooved along its length
But I have no idea
What it might mean

I've tried to dig it, spit it out
But it seems that it has
Gone far too deep for that
And all attempts
To medicate the pain
Have come to naught
And so it stays and aches
And aches against the nerve
Impacted in its mystery

our sacred strife – Jennifer Jayne Scobie

between the surging bouts
of heated yelling

between the welling tears
within our eyes

lies a song
nearly silent
that slowly edges its way
toward being so softly sung

a melody of cold
a rhythm of warmth
that blend together
in symbiotic bliss

Speaking Italian – Frank Murphy

In the dream her sisters spoke Italian
She grew old and went from one
situation to another, one lover to
another, each worse than the one
before.

There was a silo, in the dream,
seen from a train

 window but
 where

the train was taking her
she didn't
know. She speaks Italian,
almost
 fluently

but in the dream she didn't
understand a word. Her mother
was there as well, her language
soft, incoherent, the language
the dead use when they need
to speak to us.

Poisons — R. Yurman

I had it all arranged to kill my grandmother... — Frank O'Connor, FIRST CONFESSION

if I close my door
the walls and fierce-eyed
locomotives papered over them
race at me through the dark—
to breathe my way into sleep
I must keep the door ajar

I slide beneath the covers
settle in
she flicks the hall light on—
when she reaches her room
I call, “Grandma,
I can’t sleep
turn the light out.”

she never hears
closes her door
I drag myself from the cozy warmth
stagger down the hall
snap it off
trudge back, settle in again

she heads to the bathroom
flicks it on
does her business
returns to her room
leaves the light to fall across my face

each evening before bed
I plead, "Grandma, please
turn off the light when you're done."
"Yes, yes. Tonight
I won't forget."

of course she does
and I lie in the half light
plotting her death

Reasonable Insanity – H. Edgar Hix

I will return to the reasonable insanity of home.

I will put on my old clothes and provide Fancy Feast to my cats.

I will put the dog out after he has done his business on the kitchen floor.

Here is the sanity of work.

Here is the accumulation of money by the expenditure of time and effort.

I will return to the reasonable insanity of home

with walls covered by bookcases and windows with drapes.

I will even answer calls without my caller ID on.

I will put the dog out after he has done his business on the living room carpet.

The cats will shed black hair on my white shirt
and I will bless them for their potty boxes
that give smell and purpose to the reasonable insanity of home.

Here is order and orders.

Here is the accumulation of age for the purpose of paying off youth.

Here everyone is doing their business on every floor.

The cats believe in pleasure and abuse home.

They assume food and consume cans thinking they caught them themselves.

I will thank them for the reasonable insanity of home

and let the dog in to do his business wherever he pleases.

Planting Wheat Among Skyscrapers – H. Edgar Hix

In the city, nature is concrete holding bricks and glass.
In the city, we make believe highways and city streets
Are trails, are the source of direction and going.
In the city, we believe apartments are houses and houses
Are for those who can afford them. We believe
In homelessness and unemployment.

But I grew up where the sun set over crops
And the sun rose over a silver-tone barn.
I grew up where trails are made by paws and hooves
And even human roads retain their birth in dirt.

I grew up in a place where home was not just a belief
And employment meant living, not death by toil.

Now, I grow in the city. My heart plants wheat among skyscrapers.
My hands can be a roof. A barn. A place for the birth of God.

Career – Donald Lev

My cache of stolen court jewels
is somewhere in this
accursed house.
I will find them.
There is this goofy couple sent by
the director to interfere with my designs
but I will thwart them.
This is my
final film and my
last chance to star.
& I have come so far....



Line of Duty – Joseph Murphy

When the first shot was fired,
Blood fell from desk tops and beach rose;
From a jar's lid.

Sea-rounded stones and spines of books
Ignited; a lark's nest frayed.

Another death in the line of duty.

Great decisions made, the lofty walked on.

Some said their bones have the grit
Of a stone wall; of a palisade
That can't be breached;

Others spoke of blood
Running from the nibs of their pens.

But we fit the yoke to our shoulders, not to theirs.

Blood has begun to ooze from glass cases;
Cover the feet of mannequins;
Wires short.

A robin, tearing at these words, draws back, startled.

We wait for what might crawl forward,
Hoping lives will be spared;
Our tethers shortened.

Another disfigured in the line of duty.

After the House Burned – Ruth Moon Kempher

Another in the long line of loss.
I had not thought summer
could be so involved with death –
succotash time, the salad days –
 like love, our house
we built high in dunes was meant
to last forever, yet fell, forfeit to flame.

I've forgotten when I first dreamed —
obsessive — of a storm coming, surf
surge battering in, wave on wave
breaking the windows. Now
those actual flames, fallen timbers
unforeseen, illuminate our failure
hurt worse
than that lost myth: we understood
so well there'd be no need for words.

Traces – David Chorlton

To the lamp that burns all night
beside the door to a house
comes a moth
with the moon's taste on its mouth
and dust
on each wing. It settles in the light
until a dark muse calls it back.
We can see
where she walked down the path
to whisper that it's time
to be a secret again
before she turned away
and silence left its footprints in her wake.

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