

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

32

#11



# *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*

VOLUME 32, #11

**At the bird market  
we sang our songs and saw who harmonized**

**James Penha**

BECAUSE FEW MORNING GALES FLY THROUGH  
Waterways, Volume 22, Number 7

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 32

Number 11

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## **The Bird Parliament**

at the edge of Chinatown  
held every Sunday  
caged birds are given respite  
from their solitary existence  
two dozen birdcages  
hooked high up on racks  
a zebra dove  
a small and slender bird  
speaks in birdspeak  
before the Bird Parliament  
he speaks for Liu Xiaobo  
whose keepers detain him

a bird sings  
because it has a song  
all sing in harmony  
endless possibilities  
curiously familiar  
no enemies no hatred

*Neal Whitman*

## It Is Pleasant Here

It is pleasant here.  
Here it is pleasant.  
It cannot be  
nearly any pleasanter nearly anywhere  
than the pleasantness it is here.  
It is pleasant here, indeed.  
Then of course there's by contrast  
how large the world is  
and how small we are.  
This by comparison only, of course.  
What is *not* being said here,  
no, not by a long shot,

is that we are all that small  
when judged by some absolute standard,  
for by that measure alone  
we'd be even smaller  
than we already are by comparison  
with how large the world is already.  
No, what *is* being said here instead  
is that, yes,  
it is pleasant, here, that  
it is nearly pleasanter here  
than nearly anywhere else  
it could be pleasant

*Wayne Hogan*



## **Black Birds**

Heading back  
From walking  
In frozen fields,

We look up  
To see trees again  
Filled with leaves

Rustling in wind,  
Sharing fevered,  
Joyful conversation.

How tiresome  
To lie on the ground  
Throughout winter.

To rest underfoot  
And beneath snow  
When none yet have

The urge to sleep,  
When veins still pulse  
With (though diminished)

The urge to dance.  
We watch as in groups  
They drift to the creek,  
  
Swirling above snow  
At the foot of large elms,  
And then in defiance  
  
Of the measure of time,  
Filling them up in one  
Swift surge of memory.

*Thomas Reynolds*

## Lover's Leap

Birdcage soul full of questions

you arrive at the edge,

toes extended, knees bent,

just in time to see your heart

fly away, the only thing of color

in a black and white day.

The solitary moon puts on a wicked grin.

jagged teeth of mountains await you.

Clutching your umbrella,  
you ponder the possibility  
of pursuit, wonder  
what you have left to lose,  
stripped bare, almost faceless,  
mouth refusing to move.

*Scott Owens*

**A cardinal came around**

surely looking for you.

I put out a few seeds, a handful.

Your hello, these black seeds

in a blue metal cup.

**a passing**

bird wounded  
narrow concrete  
then asphalt  
needed only tree  
and grass, other side  
of concrete wall, to die  
on green not gray.  
“It doesn’t matter,”  
Ellen judged (she  
whose pronouncements  
are quick)

but to me it did.  
and perhaps to him or her,  
exquisite little bird,  
black and white,  
*pic à dos rayé*  
leaving this world  
from soft soil, grassed,  
from shade beneath tree

*Sylvia Manning*



## **Red River Valley**

after we  
were  
in bed  
at night  
Dad played  
his harmonicas  
while the sad  
lonesome  
music  
drifted  
thru the house  
on the fan breeze

## Frog Talk

at sunset

I walk

the beaver dam

to the deer trail

it leads me

into green cattails

and the ooze

of black

mud

sets off

a splatter

of frogs

jumping

and croaking

that echoes

into night

**Into Honeysuckle**

a spidered  
yellow bloom  
nipped  
at the sweet tip  
leaves me  
buzzing

*Sheryl L. Nelms*

## Driver

Where are you going  
so fast, so fast?

“Going to dread land  
Going to dead land

It’s all in your head man

Going to instead land”

so fast, so fast

(Undertaker  
take me under  
under the grass, under the  
stone

take me to bone land  
to prone land)

“Leave me alone man?

so fast, so fast  
boneman

## Co-authorship with Myself

They're always talking about ships  
passing in the night poignant  
the missed opportunity lives  
loves fates passed by with only  
the ocean to wave

Actually  
when ships don't pass in the night  
they go bump

That's where the trouble begins

But when I think of those other ships  
I mean the ships sailing on the ends of words

Bipartisanship colliding  
Leaderships ramming into each other  
Partnerships going down for the third time

It seems the same. It seems the same.  
They are ships that should pass in the night.

But when it comes to  
Companionships  
Friendships  
Relationships

I think sometimes a little bump in the  
middle of the night  
is all right  
is all right

*Frank Murphy*



## Of Songbirds & Birdsong

*There is a finer way of studying ornithology than [shooting birds] . . .  
I have been willing to omit the gun. — Thoreau, “Higher Laws”*

When Adam named songbirds  
And birdsong, he classified  
And clarified them for posterity,

And so we say, That’s a robin  
Or That’s a thrush or oriole,  
Glorious singers all.

Then Adam of the New World  
Set sight on birds, his musket  
Sounding louder than birdsong,

Diminishing their numbers  
Till many were extinct; even  
Audubon shot to paint them.

But Thoreau's epiphany  
Led him to store his fowling piece  
On future sojourns – Henry,

The new-born conservationist,  
Reprising old Adam at Walden Pond,  
Though fallen Concord was home.

We are all new Adams today,  
Hunting duck and wild turkey  
Or taking Thoreau's cue,

Saving habitat and species,  
Wetlands, grasslands, sanctuaries  
For migrating and nesting fowl.

And still we thrill to songbirds'  
Trills and whistles and calls,  
Their singing and song.

*George Held*

## Roman

My wife and I would  
hire Roman  
to rake the leaves  
each fall or to  
wash the car  
during the summer.  
Sometimes we couldn't  
get him because  
he'd be in jail  
for getting drunk  
and disorderly.  
He said he'd been  
a gangster in East L.A.  
but had moved

to the small town  
where Kit and I live  
in northern Nevada  
to get away  
from that life.  
He was 45  
and had never  
met anyone like us.  
He told his friends,  
proudly, we were  
published writers.  
He'd tell us, "I'm nobody."  
He was wrong.

*Arthur Winfield Knight*

## **The Sparrow**

*(a dreamku)*

she draws my gaze to  
a tiny dusty brown sparrow  
watch its easy way,  
she says, how it simply lets  
nourishment into its roundness

the ground the source – its feet the gateways

*Patricia Kelly*

*(first published online at Roswila's Dream & Poetry Realm)*

## Birdville, UT 84777

Gaze up at the cliff face as you walk through Capitol Gorge. There it is: Birdville! Vertical potholes (ventricles -no, auricles) dot the variegated stone: black, brown, gold, white, coral, gray, even some stripes, like fancy suits.

Residents include – just the tip of the bird-berg – the Northern oriole, canyon sparrow, rufous towhee (as in “His *toe*, *he* stubbed”), black-headed, and evening, grosbeak, the shy catbird (as in “catbird seat”), and even shyer, often-heard-but-seldom-seen, yellow-breasted chatbird.

In Birdville, there are many mansions. In ascending order: Bird’s Eye Flats, The Bird Arms (no, Wings), Birdcliff Manor, Avian Heights, and, finally, Eagle’s Aerie Luxury Condos.

Waiting lists are long, for this, they say, is a district to die for, or at least to crow about (though, we, ourselves, could never live here). Would-be occupants hover, tweet, caw impatiently, swooping in as soon as others leave.

Ample turnover, there certainly is: mountain and western bluebirds headed for the high country; snowbirds, sunbirds riding the ribbons of skyway and celestial cloverleaf.

But, leaving Birdville to the birds, did you know that the Yurok Indians used to live on cliffs above the Klamath River, the richest and most respected houses (whose great baskets brimmed with feathers, shells, blankets, fish) ensconced along the top-most ledges, right beneath the sky? Yes, the sky!

*Ron Singer*



## **Visions**

*(for Seamus Heaney)*

The Poet tells us: Seek out magic –  
Secrets beneath the every day world  
Hold a sense of myth and Power.  
Find their embodiment in the real.

My eyes touch the dull hairs on your arm  
Or stroke the cactus's sharp spines –  
I don't have that sense of magic,  
Don't feel the secrets buried in things

For me surface bodies the depths —  
What's there is there for all to see.  
If I look close enough and truly,  
That seeing will shimmer with poetry.

*R. Yurman*

## Crows Seen From My Hospital Window

Behind the hospital,  
a multi-generation  
family of crows  
feeds voraciously,  
swooping eagle-like  
from powerlines,  
claws honed finely.

They ripclaw into  
old biopsy bags,  
slices of frozen tissue  
thawing in the sun.

They feed on outdated  
organic residues, chopped, cut,  
aspirated, wedged and  
stained with chromalin,  
fixed in paraffin or  
bathed in an alcohol vial,  
studied once under bright  
lights then forgotten, like a child  
protégé whose talent  
failed in adolescence.

Those crows, squabbling  
among themselves, are  
fat, sleek and healthy.

## Juncos

breakfast  
at the foot of my feeder,  
with a jaded air of  
dissolution

like small-town  
playboys  
wandering into a diner  
at dawn

dressed in seedy  
elegance  
rumped tuxedos and  
white shirts

open at the collars  
black ties  
dangling unbowed or stuffed  
in pockets  
  
sleazy black socks  
drooped  
around their ankles--hungry,  
happy.

*Gilbert Honigfeld*

## Boys

a time so picture  
spent when dreaming boys  
hold robin eggs  
and a horde of hero men  
come at night,  
hugging ponies,  
hugging promise.

a time so shaped  
in becoming pants and feet on fire  
when dreaming boys catch fear  
and blush  
and taste anvil  
freshly molded, freshly wrung.

a time so loud as roar  
makes boys of friday nights  
and finger paints  
and first cup breasts.

of boys in motion  
boys in flight  
boys so cherished  
to breathe on sight.

and in that spindled  
shadow  
by glare  
and sixpence,

a republic of men happen...



ever so daring  
ever so dreaming  
holding sweetly,  
sight.

*Michael D. Sullivan*

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