



# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 2

# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 32, #2

Wasps thrive on the porch  
of my parents. They are  
allowed to be  
who they are:  
to nest;  
to fly.

**James Penha**

WASPS

Waterways, Volume 16, Number 11

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 32

Number 2

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

## **c o n t e n t s**

Sylvia Manning	4	Arthur Winfield Knight	16
Scott Owens	8	Bill Roberts	18
Noel Sloboda	9	Arlene Mandell	20
Mary Clark & PJ	10	Gilbert Honigfeld	21
Charles Rammelkamp	12	R. Yurman	28
Wayne Hogan	14	George Held	30

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Caricature of  
Sir John Lubbock, M.P. F.R.S D.C.L. LL.D.  
from Punch, 1882

author of  
Ants, Bees, and Wasps:  
A Record of Observations  
on the Habits of the Social Hymenoptera.  
(1883)

“...a thoughtful popularizer of natural history and  
philosophy he had few rivals in his day.”  
Encyclopædia Britannica (1911)

source: Virginia Museum of Natural History



## **note about wasps on the porch**

painted royal blue, the porch,  
proving itself a color that does not repel them  
as a kind of aquamarine from old days did

so that they thrive in their so-green cells,  
their post-structuralist, post-modern,  
masterly-made collective living spaces

high on our porch ceilings painted  
in my brother's favorite color —  
he and his saviour, my husband, gone

but they the wasps that Tony liked,  
whom he even respected – as builders –  
roam randomly in summer air and  
perhaps remember him.

– *Sylvia Manning*

## **When all is said and done**

and we've come to the end of an age,  
whatever that means, and this planet  
we did not love enough tells us to go  
to wherever we may

for having not loved our sweet home  
enough

I hope that the insect world will know  
to respect the wasps, fig pollinators  
or not.

I hope there's due respect for  
this creature that refrains from  
paranoia as soon as it knows  
you live here, too.

When all is said and done.  
Whatever that means.

— *Sylvia Manning*



visited by wasps  
fallen pears turn brown  
sweet hum of decay

– *Scott Owens*

## Wasp Nest

beneath the great oak  
still shaking with wrath  
long after the storm

– *Noel Sloboda*

## The Old Man of the Island

Body tilted to the breeze, arms lifted  
to full sail the crisp fluttering of waves  
the old man feels the jostling winds:  
Angel of Death, I long for your kiss.  
I can feel your feathery touch on my face.

His skeleton is sharpened, bones  
heightened through the skin  
an ancient coastline formed  
by nature's remains: I will be yours  
without end. I await your embrace.

He laughs with all the humor left, all  
the human wreckage of years  
jangling together like bones:  
I am no longer the seaman I used to be.  
I wear no masks of youth or virility.

Half blind, stoop-shouldered  
a life laid down in strata of tears  
the old man wanders:  
Let the tide go out and mourning recede.  
I have lived past my destiny.

– *Mary Clark and PJ*

## Animal Reactions

“Reggie!”

Only after his name  
ripped from my throat  
in unexpected recognition,  
as unpremeditated as a bird call,  
in the thronging anonymity  
of the shopping mall,  
did I realize Reggie  
had seen me first,  
scurrying past like a rodent,  
eyes averted,  
trying to avoid me:  
the sham look of surprise  
so painfully fake.

We chatted a few minutes  
about our children –  
fathers of high school classmates –  
before parting company.

Animal instinct told me  
Reggie just didn't like me.  
Up until then  
I hadn't thought of him  
one way or the other.  
Now I hated him.

– *Charles Rammelkamp*

## On Naming Bees

What's  
in a name what's with these  
bees why do we not name  
bees who says  
a bee shouldn't have  
a name if you

had a bee who followed  
you around all day on a string  
what if you called  
that bee George or what  
if you called that bee Mary  
how would that sound

would somebody complain or  
call you nutsky would  
somebody?

– *Wayne Hogan*

“do bee”

“don’t bee”



## The Way Things Were

The house was where it had always been, but not the way he remembered it. He remembered when his grandparents had built it for his father, who'd had a nervous breakdown in his twenties, remembered a carpenter falling off the roof, catching his ring on a nail so his finger had been ripped off. He remembered the girl his age, Nadine, who'd lived across the street, and the procession of soldiers and sailors going in and out of the house during World War II because her mother and grandmother were prostitutes. He remembered the Goldbergs, who ran a laundry but moved to Healdsburg from Petaluma for reasons he could no longer recall. He remembered Doris taking her panties off, peeing on the dirt floor beneath the front steps, remembered her singing "April Showers Will

Bring May Flowers,” remembered her taking her panties off again in an abandoned garage near the alley where an old couple lived and ran a small grocery store. He remembered riding his bicycle to his grandparents’ house in the country. He was probably ten then. He remembered shimmying up a rope that hung from the catalpa tree in the front yard so he could get a Scouting medal, but the tree was gone now. He remembered sitting in the loges at the California Theater, holding hands with Kathleen, whose parents ran a radio station with initials that stood for Krowing Always for Petaluma, before her parents moved to Visalia. And he remembered his father loaning a saw to someone who wouldn’t return it until he was paid for sharpening it, but his father had always been a fool. Nothing was the same.

– *Arthur Winfield Knight*

## Mary Knew

Mary didn't tell Hugh about her heart.  
She told only her neighbor, my wife.

Mary had been a practical nurse,  
knew the implications of heart disease  
and, in her case, of its final outcome.

She chose not to tell Hugh, her husband,  
because he'd only drink more heavily,  
be of no value to her whatever.

So, she suffered silently, alone except  
for occasional neighborly visits  
with my wife, who listened patiently.

At a dark hour one spring morning,  
we heard an ambulance arrive and  
a wailing of gathered family emotions.

We knew it was Mary – the end for her.  
We adopted Hugh for the next six  
lonely months before he too died.

He drank himself to death,  
as Mary knew he would.

– *Bill Roberts*

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## Wings in the Night

“Don’t worry,” Patricia, the wildlife expert, assures us. “There are no vampire bats in California. Never were any in Transylvania, either.”

Bats love to hang upside down, she says, are not rodents but mammals, with hearts that beat eight hundred times a minute, wings that feel like rose petals.

She strokes the tiny creature in her palm. a voracious insect eater who morphs into a fearsome monster swooping low at dusk, seeking my blood.

– *Arlene Mandell*

## **Pit-Bull and the Wasp**

A pit-bull terrier was introduced  
into my neighborhood,  
not far from the deserted garage  
where there lived one old wasp,  
the king of a hollow apiary.

It wasn't long before bull-dog  
wandered off his turf,  
nosing his way crinkle-faced  
and ugly into the sanctum of the garage,  
disturbing the king-wasp's peace.

Pit-bull broad-shouldered his way,  
snuffing and chuffing  
up to the rice-paper wasp-hive,  
oozing saliva down his underslung canines,  
a thin glaze of snot on his upper lip.

Wasp, long, black, canny, graceful,  
was perched on a rafter,  
the central 2x10 supporting the roof,  
just perched there, watching invisible,  
two black eyes locked on pit-bull's wattles.

Pit-bull huffed and puffed  
in that feisty way of his,  
like a light-heavy weight taking off his silks,  
then started yapping and yammering  
at the vacant apiary, shadow-boxing with his head.

Old wasp, safe in the rafter's permanight,  
watched and watched and watched,  
blue-black thorax barely moving,  
his sleek body in the relaxed but ready posture  
of a trained killer, a professional, ready for work.



Pit-bull, a little stupid, (he had taken  
his share of heavy blows to the head),  
and very smelly, (he never liked water),  
edged his nose under the perfect paper-hive  
crisp as origami, and began barking in the alto range.

Wasp had seen and heard enough unsheathed  
his stinger, samurai-slick and sharp,  
stepped out of hiding and struck once,  
poison pouring up the bull's carotids  
heading straight for the brain, a knockout punch.

As the terrier's nose began to wobble  
under their top-heavy deadweight,  
wasp struck again and again,  
cool shafts of venom, each aimed  
infallibly for one of six vital organs.

Wasp emptied his clip,  
unscrewed the long silencer from its barrel,  
and resumed his roof-top position, watching,  
reloading in well-practiced moves,  
bull's assassin, the only guest at his funeral.

— Gilbert Honigfeld

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## A Visit

My first house,  
the two-family on Leslie St.,  
rose again last night, reglued  
just like that, from an old pile  
of neuronal debris presumed cold  
as old fire ash. But never under-  
estimate the dust of old houses;  
I've learned that cold ash  
harbors regenerative hotspots,  
the kind wearied firemen search  
for long after the passion of flame  
has chilled into invisibility.

It is possible, it is inevitable,  
that every child's home will resurrect  
itself, instantly, even if apparently  
buried under the gravel underside  
of Route 78. Last night my  
first house, complete to the smallest  
detail was simply there, its reemergence  
as natural as breathing, the kind  
of magic you take for granted at the time,  
the air in that house as filled with  
doom and promise, fear and fulfillment,  
as every kid's house.

– *Gilbert Honigfeld*

## **you fall and fall**

arms flailing  
pudgy legs kicking  
fingers and toes  
clutching air  
grasping  
for branches and vines

until  
warm updrafts  
suspend you  
above a mass of faces  
staring  
open-mouthed

the crowd groans  
the chilling plunge  
resumes

no matter how far  
you drop  
or for how long  
the freefall  
does not end

a dream  
of primal warmth  
gone terribly wrong

– *Richard Yurman*

## Summer Carpenters

Those buzzing bees boring holes in the arbor  
Aren't bumble bees, though they look alike  
And sound alike. A bumble's body is fuzzy  
While a borer's is slick black and the male lacks  
A stinger; the female's less likely to use hers  
Than a bumble female. The bumble will let you  
Kneel inches away as you both work the garden,  
But the borer will dive bomb anyone  
Who enters its territory, even bounce  
Off your head, buzzing all the while like an angry  
Letter carrier with a heavy package to deliver.

Once inside an arbor beam, the borer hollows out  
A chamber for eggs to hatch into larvae.  
Hungry woodpeckers will excavate for a meal,  
Their powerful beaks beating a tattoo  
On your arbor and splintering its beams.  
A dive-bombing borer bee or a drilling wood—  
Pecker will test your love of nature  
Like a bad case of poison ivy. Smoke  
Out the borers at dusk and seal their holes.  
Mark these words: No borers, no pecker birds.

— *George Held*



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And when behind me  
the door closes

James Penha

*from A January Fun House*

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