

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

32



# Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 32, #3

And when behind me  
the door closes

**James Penha**

A JANUARY FUN HOUSE

*Waterways*, Volume 16, Number 1

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 32

Number 3

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## In The Tangled Woods – H. Edgar Hix

Often,  
in the dark,  
in the distance,  
I heard growling,  
saw red eyes,  
and cried,  
“Mother! Father!  
Help me!  
There are bears!”

Until,  
in the dark,  
in the distance,  
I hear my parents'  
tiny voices crying,  
"Mother! Father!  
Help me!  
There are bears!"

## Summer Will Fall – H. Edgar Hix

Summer will fall slowly, like a big tree  
full of its inability to fall. Summer  
will never strike the ground  
so much as acknowledge its presence  
as it uses it to make one last, profound sound,  
using the earth as a drum to strike a one beat rhythm.

A single dance statement. A shaking of leaves.  
Summer will fall an atheist, learning  
it did not create the universe. Learning  
it is only an effect, not a cause.  
It is a combination of whirling, wind, water;  
an act of physics, not a metaphysical actor.

Summer will fall, authoring Autumn,  
daughter of the summer goddess who will learn  
that she, too, must pass to procreate her child  
who will wipe her from the earth, thinking  
the Christmas trees will stand forever. Thinking  
there is no Easter waiting to dim her tinkling bells.



## **Accumulations – Roberta Gould**

Rice and the absent dog's kibble  
strewn near the kitchen table  
a clawed bag of lentils  
that spews when it's picked up  
burned popcorn on the porch  
spilled from a tipped bag of garbage  
and a greasy plate  
near the screen door  
loose hook missing its eye  
which someone didn't fix

I sweep the floor

## Counsel – R. Yurman

This shaking arm isn't me  
I can't still it

I shift the receiver  
to my other hand

The familiar weight  
vibrates against that ear too

while the unfamiliar voice recites  
"She has custody

Nothing can be done”  
And so when she moves  
across the continent  
she’ll take him

The formal voice  
repeats through my silence

“Even if he’d rather stay  
there is no legal remedy”

## My Father's Mail – Caren Lee Brenman

Saturdays I would ride with him to the post office  
where I stared at the fuzzy pictures  
of FBI wanted men  
their dark eyes hinting at a flat evil  
I could only imagine from tv show experience.

Their faces loomed like sentries  
near the numbered boxes  
stacked in columns of gold  
sliding my finger down  
to the window that was ours  
he would hand me a tiny key  
which fit smoothly and with a sideways turn

opened the door easily  
my small hands reached for the thick stack  
handing its weight to my father  
I looked back through the empty box  
to the other side  
where canvas baskets filled with mail rolled  
while men and women in gray clothes  
walked back and forth  
laughing and calling out honey  
or a name like Charlie  
as the little door shut  
I was locking them in  
to move, to joke, to never leave  
this business of mail.

Back in the car  
we would ride down Jersey Avenue  
keeping the envelopes on his lap  
he would lift each one  
look  
then throw it in a pile  
on the dashboard  
so that with each turn or stop  
they fell and scattered  
their sharp corners hitting me  
in random order.

## Of Dogs and Doormats – Ruth Moon Kempher

*[apologies to G. Stein]*

Doormats are not natural. Dogs we adore are more like humans but nicer. All the world adores a dog. The doormat lies there. This is all a doormat does – lie in wait for feet to step upon it. The dog lies looking at a door thinking open or beginning to.

Ask any dog. Doors are always  
in consideration. Open. Shut.  
Indoors dogs think outdoors.  
Outdoors dogs are thinking in.  
A dog wants in or out, always.  
Doormats are for stepping on.  
Dogs are excellent at that.



## **Fog – Gilbert Honigfeld**

The old professor just sat there  
fixing me with something between  
a look and a stare, fingers webbed  
over his reputation like a paunch,  
an obvious victim of strangulated  
multi-channel processing capacity,  
words missing connections like commuters,  
wisdom lost in the synapses of past  
sabbaticals greying now in primal mist.

## **The Fallen – Gilbert Honigfeld**

An honorable man,  
pillar of his community,  
you know all the clichés,  
I need not repeat them,  
so when he fell, he crashed.

They turned him out  
of the office he had worked  
so hard for, unhung his plaques,  
defiled his files, including  
the one marked PERSONAL, clippings and all.

He denied everything,  
right up to the signing  
of the consent decree, his name,  
his story, worst of all his face,  
all over the papers the next day.

And that was it,  
his life locked behind him  
as tightly, as silently, as per-  
manently as the stainless steel  
vault door of a failed bank on closing day.

## Dear Sandra – Arthur Winfield Knight

I remember your nose bled  
almost all the time  
when we lived in the desert  
near Palm Springs  
almost 50 years ago.  
Your mother lost  
all interest in me  
once I adopted you,  
but she never had  
any interest in you either.  
Now you live in Cleveland  
with your second husband

while your first husband  
lives in the flat above you  
with his boyfriend.  
My wife and I now live  
in the high desert  
in northern Nevada  
with our old dog,  
a retired racing greyhound.  
It's the best place  
I've ever lived,  
although, given the dry air,  
my nose frequently bleeds.

## Afterbite – Maria Marsello

At fourteen months  
my son spurned my milk,  
sought his favorite wooden slice of orange cheese, and  
balanced it on a four inch pink plastic plate to serve me  
so I'd hum num num num  
and say thank you,  
with feeling.

He conjured  
imaginary food,  
spooned it into his blue eyed baby's nose and ears,  
pressed a bottle of everlasting milk to stiff kissy lips,  
parroted num num num  
and thank you,  
with feeling.

In the grade school  
puppet play, he raised  
his butcher man with the washcloth cap and foam knife  
and devastated the audience when delivering his line,  
No, No, I will not kill Ox!  
We all clapped thanks,  
with feeling.

Having been told  
by trusted sources  
that this implicit reciprocity is a compact contract, I dread  
a numb, loveless adolescence. I refuse to rehearse advice  
or practice pleading to  
say thank you,  
with feeling.

Tonight he said,  
you know what,  
I love to drive home in the snow with you at night  
because when snowflakes come right at the windshield  
it's like we're on a rocket ship to the stars.  
I say thank you,  
With feeling.



## **Underpass – David Chorlton**

*(After one of my own watercolour paintings)*

Trains run every hour  
of every day  
inside the earth  
and never sleep  
They carry the poor

to settle their debts,  
to work for strangers,  
to be questioned,  
and when they are tired

to go back home. This is  
the underworld  
in which one should never  
look back. Arrows  
give directions:  
*straight ahead, turn left,*  
*turn right,* and instruct  
even the blind  
where to go. Here are

shadows lined with concrete,  
tunnels in which wind  
is turned to steel  
and clocks whose teeth  
chatter as the minutes

pass through them  
with people following,  
hands in their pockets,  
hearts ticking deep

inside their overcoats,  
each one with a ticket  
held tight in a fist.

## Where the Cardinal Couple - Sylvia Manning

Where the cardinal couple  
came to bathe in sprinkler

Where he came first before her  
to test the waters and the others

I've buried her today,  
or their daughter.

Swiss chard and epazote  
and a large clear piece of glass  
resembling water mark her grave.

Surely he knows or will surmise:  
she is there, where water  
sprays the air, like diamonds.

*May 28, 2011*

**you at desk with captivated child – Sylvia Manning**

*(for Tony holding Stella)*

drawer open

she in your lap

who tries to touch the light

beneath glass on desktop

(this now on my computer desktop

as we've learned to accept

hearing said, or the screen saver

or the wall paper, or however)

in these last days toward  
fourth month of mourning

a photograph of you with child  
of you the grown-old child  
who holds the infant  
who seeks to touch the light

meant to ease my work  
as holding her that day  
lightened your own

at your desk with drawer open  
with long cone of light  
from western sun of afternoon  
back to us still again  
from the glass protecting wood

a fascination stronger than  
someone, me, with camera  
for her so new to the light

to whom you look from hair askew,  
grayed, in your frayed flannel jacket,



your own child self  
looking always out to me,  
desktop to desktop

then to now  
time and all its darkness  
weaker than this moment:

her study in your office  
of the mystery of clarity  
her finger touching its  
cool smoothness

your restfulness  
outside time if  
ever so briefly

on my desktop  
as we've learned to call  
the first thing seen  
on the computer screen

daily, mornings and night,  
that light that early afternoon,  
that man, you,  
that child, yours to hold  
always

looking out for her  
looking to touch light  
looking out to me

## **Another Montreal note, summer 2007 – Sylvia Manning**

Then on Sherbrooke I see a proper little bourgeoisie slap (yes) a bicyclist passing her.

The bicyclist is not deterred nor does he even seem bothered, but the nice little lady tells me, who has stopped a moment just in case she wants to say something besides what she said to him – which I didn't quite get – and yes she does but I only understand that she doesn't like it – oh, no,

She switches to English and tells me it's dangerous, they're all dangerous –

And I consider he's not supposed to be on the sidewalk, and he is moving fast (too fast to be even dissuaded by her hitting him)

But anyway Montreal isn't yet too friendly for bicycles. After July 18 they can't go on the subway Metro, though this morning I did see one – an older man who must have convinced the attendant who knew him, from many rides, to let him take it home one last time?

## **Conviction – Scott Owens**

And when behind me  
the door closes  
the bridges burn  
the locks are changed  
no lifelines are thrown  
across the widening gap  
between where I am  
and where I used to be,  
know that even then  
I will flounder, flail  
struggle forward  
the rope across my shoulder  
pulling still  
what wouldn't be pulled.

## Door – George Held

Why do I adore / the girl next door?  
La porta, la puerta, la porte  
Dver, Tür, door:  
Openings and closings  
Entrances and exits  
Beginnings and endings  
Till the door of life  
Closes behind you.

## **The Flower Arrangement, Jane Austen House. Chawton – Alan Catlin**

Outside the room where Jane  
wrote, her sister Cassandra's  
letter describing last hours of  
her best friend, companion,  
literal sister of the soul, in stilted  
handwriting no doubt made less  
legible by stress and grief, weathered  
now, rust stained, fading so,



a transcription of the text renders  
what can no longer be read in prose  
as elegant and as poignant as Jane ever  
wrote. The rooms and hallways  
scented now with garden grown flowers,  
dried lavender; the room beyond where  
Jane wrote enlivened by fresh picked  
blossoms grown nearby, a legacy, like  
the words, living on.

## **Alien In Hades – William Corner Clarke**

Few friends before, but no friends now  
When I go underground  
When I go down to the ferry  
To take passage  
To the Land of the Dead

All kinds of people travelling this road  
But all of them alone  
Alone with their souls  
And the sum of their memories  
Clutched tight to their breasts

Sallow, unhallowed and unshaven  
After drinking all night  
I walk along with them  
Carrying false papers  
And fearing discovery at every turn

I pay Charon with an old subway token  
And he does not notice my deceit  
On board the ferry no one speaks  
Cigarettes and wine would have helped  
To pass the time

It's not exactly picturesque down here  
This sea of mud and lye  
With dark clouds of stone hanging  
From the rusting iron rafters  
Of a dirt encrusted sky

I can already hear the howling  
Of the watchdog's heads  
On the far off shore  
I had a plan prepared  
For getting back alive — But now  
I just don't remember how  
Or why

## On The Black Suzuki – William Corner Clarke

Leaving Lancaster  
Late morning  
Taking the coast road  
On the black Suzuki

Gathering speed  
Across the marsh, the sky  
Shot with the gasoline light  
That precedes a storm  
The seagulls calling  
Against the wind

Throttle open wide  
I keep a constant eye  
On the rush of the incoming tide  
Out to wash me away  
Before I gain the high ground  
On the other side

With water at my wheels  
I just make the rising turn  
To the safety of the ridge  
Dropping into first  
I stand on the footrests  
And twist around

Nothing but sea  
Behind me now  
The road lost, a memory  
It's only trace, a drunken  
Line of telephone poles  
Stretching back  
Into the thunder clouds

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full of its inability to fall. Summer  
will never strike the ground  
so much as acknowledge its presence  
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