

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
31



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #3

Sea change for me
is the way down
past the bright odd fishes
that glide dark to dark,
below the roiling, to the calm.

Ida Fasel

SEA CHANGE

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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

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Number 3*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel
Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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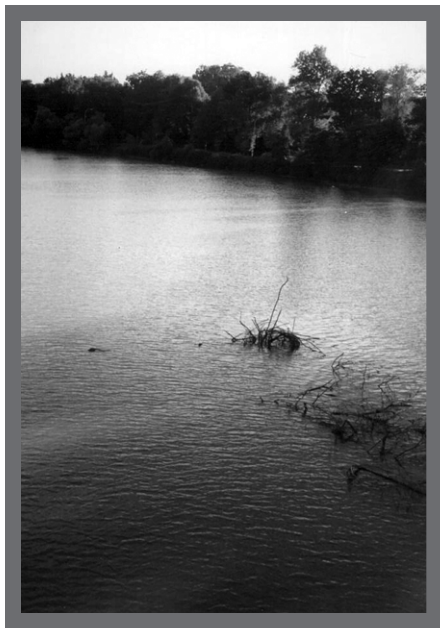
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Lost Strands — Arlene Mandell

What was it I meant to say
in that ephemeral time
and space
between thoughts . . .
my skein of words unfurling
like luminous strands
of sage green silk
drifting with the tide. . . .

A stone plunks — Mary Belardi Erickson

into water anywhere.
You hear its splash,
view the ripples
generated from
its point of entry
into the liquid
it can never embrace,
only rest within.

Shushing for inevitable plops,
you fling pebbles
as if equating impact with answer
in a lifetime of making all blues
a wishing pool.

Then, you skip flat stones
across the surface of below.

Playfully, you count
the fish-like leaps.

It always ends the same
with stones sinking,
pulled down by gravity.

You feel that tug yourself.

Unlike the handy pebble,
though, you are free,
the human tear a trouper
as it joins hands with water
molecules' circular dance
when calmness breaks
energizing thought.



A brain-teaser,
you are unhindered
by gravity or the time
separating you
from easeful waters
or the dream of just beginning
as you once did.
Into this pool you plumb,
no stone in your hand.

Christmas Cove, Monhegan – Lee Evans

The sea rocks below
Breaking lullaby waves
Cradling the tide

The eye casts the light
The mind navigates darkness
The ear tolls the bell

No commercial traffic
If only this sign were true
I'd stay here for good

They come and they go
While the harbor lies waiting

Fishing these waters
Passing through transcendent fog
Of a world unseen

I bring you good news
A life ring hung on a cross
Beside the abyss

The Thought of Time Passing — Bill Roberts

Why think about it?

It goes on, nothing to stop it.

Clocks, watches, even sundials fail
on a cloudy day,
but time plods on.

Oh, it races ahead sometimes,
as when a contest is predictable
before being fought, and
slows at times,
when an expected baby is overdue.

But it only stopped once
In my recollection,
When she walked into my life,
paused, pointed a finger
and said, *You!*
It never caught up again.

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The Street — Frank Murphy

Sometimes a man or women
will let The Street get so deep
One can't live anywhere
else

One walks as if under water
Or on the moon

passed doorways and
below windows

and One goes far away
and never comes back

And never leaves The Block

Manhattan Hi — Frank Murphy

Last night the full moon gray
in the sky above where

the twin towers stood

By the rivers of Manhattan
I stood up and walked

Queens on my right
One hour

New Jersey another

In the dark waters below
the river

wet dust

~~~~~

The way the rain falls  
on the river

How deep do  
the drops

descend?

## **Is a Mind — Wayne Hogan**

This is a mind  
like snow falling.  
This is a mind gathering speed.  
This is a mind that makes  
frequent stops, that makes  
wide (and some U-) turns  
without going back.  
This is a mind that, when it goes  
into a dark room, knows  
what time it is.



## Catching a Glimpse of My Mother Dressing — Robert Cooperman

Nothing to do  
with dirty-minded little boys  
who had dim ideas about sex  
and not a clue about Oedipus:  
I was visiting, and glanced  
into my mother's bedroom,  
to see if she'd dressed yet,  
something she insisted  
on doing herself, despite  
the woman who did for her.

She was sitting  
on the edge of her bed:  
not just the stringy nakedness  
of her arms and shoulders —  
wrinkles like the dirt-smudged  
layers of ancient rock deposits —  
that so made me want to cry,  
when she'd once been lovely  
and purposeful as Penelope,

but the vacancy in her eyes,  
as if she was mourning  
her vibrant and happy past,  
or just befuddled about sitting,  
half-dressed, with nothing  
in her practical hands.

“Mom,” I knocked,  
my voice casual as a kid asking  
what we’d be having for dinner.  
“You okay in there?”

She sighed, stirred, and reached  
for something to put on.:  
so little reason to get dressed,  
though something inside her  
prodded, “You must.”

## **Answered Prayers — Rex Sexton**

Night winds whisper around us  
in the tangled, parish garden,  
like chanting saints, or nuns  
at prayer. Or maybe, it's more  
like midnight angels fluttering  
in the dark, or priests reciting  
sermons, or choirs caroling  
incantations.

Sweet sin,  
the sensations on our skin,  
as we kiss, bite,  
tangle with delight,  
naked in the garden moonlight.

Amen.

## **renewed — Jennifer Jayne Scobie**

beyond the tides of time we find odd fish  
all nestled in the darkness with their kin  
away from stormy skies in other worlds  
and free to dream as playful as they can

the change creeps in so silently at night  
a wave of water, salty, deep and new  
we enter swimming sweetly as we dream  
and ride our waves of wishes to the morn

## Dolphin Safe — Christina Cole

The tuna fish can boasts

“Dolphin Safe.”

Meanwhile,

the fishermen

cast their nets

into the depths

of the ocean.

A little mermaid

swims across,

hoping to steal a glance

of her handsome prince.

Suddenly,  
she becomes ensnared in the net,  
thrashing to and fro  
until the fishermen  
haul it above water,  
thinking they have gotten  
the biggest catch  
of their lives.  
“Oh, no tuna,”  
they frown,  
and chuck the dead mermaid  
back in the ocean.



## Conjure-Lines - Sea Changes — Ruth Moon Kempher

as the sea's forever motion  
rolls fish and shells, porpoise, whales  
like an old gypsy fingering silver, the hours  
    rearrange themselves —  
turned surf, like whorls within a conch  
grey, pale pink and orange, returns —  
there's no hex strong enough to stop it, just  
possibly echoes, little girls' laughter  
as they build their castles. Watchful fish  
    stand on their fins in wonder  
as the old moon sails a quadrilateral orbit  
like a broken platter, across cool morning sky.

## Home Notes - North Beach — Ruth Moon Kempher

every morning the sea returns the sun —  
sometimes it squirts up, red gold  
thin terns and gulls flap across the molten face  
going always one way or another  
    north or south  
along the tidemark. Endless pulse of water spreads  
back and forth from my porch posts, holding  
a million pieces of shadow, black, like the birds.  
I am part of the waiting for the others  
    white water curls forward —

love's music plays, and I stay, as if  
    somewhere there might be answers  
watching the white foam play ringaleavey with the green  
flowing water. Above the song, a rat claws at the attic —  
cycles of coming summer, the tides, small words —  
  
the dogs pace by the long windows, pleased  
with the ocean the mechanical flickering birds, and me.

## **Born Before Us — Bill Freedman**

My hands are old, she said,  
from years of washing dishes without gloves  
and the careful application of hygienic creams.

But they are old, truly, though I dare not say.  
Ages born before the rest of her,  
Scouting land and sea for what might harm us.

Crouching silent as the grass on hillsides  
Where Huns and Saracens lit fire.  
As sand at Artimisium when the Persians sailed.

Rolling soil like dice in knowing fingers  
before the planting of first corn.

Pressing smooth the waiting bedsheets  
For the brave Odysseus. For Anton,  
Tristan and Aeneas, with a prayer they'll stay.

How else could they touch this face,  
ridged and wrinkled so beyond my years  
it must have joined this life before me,  
with such ancient tenderness, such fear.

## Chrysalis — Katie Vagnino

*For the Grayson women*

In Aunt Susie's kitchen, three women flutter  
like agitated moths, discussing movies and weather  
but never men or politics. Armed with a bottle  
of Tabasco and wearing a shirt that says "Gravity's  
a Bitch," Susie assaults the slow-cooking brisket. Her red  
nails match mine and my mom can't help but wonder

if we planned it that way. Hungry, I wonder  
if we'll eat before 10:00, if the flakes fluttering  
down will continue through the night. Red  
Allen and a sax croon on the stereo about Stormy Weather.  
At exactly 8:30, Nana, ninety and reliable as gravity,  
rises from her nap. "Do we think two bottles

will be enough?" my mom asks, a bottle  
of Bordeaux in her hands. Nana wonders  
aloud if the store's still open; the gravity  
of the situation sets in. Amidst a flutter  
of concerns about the inclement weather,  
I pour myself a generous glass. The red  
wine warms my mouth, soothing as Red's  
voice. My mom signals for me to pass the bottle.  
Two hours later at the table, they argue over whether  
I should've kept trying to be an actress, while I wonder  
if I'll ever be able to cook brisket, if my heart is fluttering  
from the wine or the food or the force of gravity

in my chest. It's a funny thing, gravity,  
I think as I watch my mom and her sister wipe red  
stains from their lips. The snow is no longer a flutter  
but a full-blown storm. Nothing can stay bottled  
up forever. "Sometimes I wonder...I wonder..."  
Nana trails off. I want to ask whether  
she believes in second chances, whether  
she's afraid of death, of waking up in a grave.  
Instead, I say nothing. Susie laughs, "I wonder  
if we have room for dessert — it's store-bought red  
velvet cake." The brisket and both bottles  
are long gone. In a few moments, I will flutter  
back to the kitchen with the empty bottles. They'll lament gravity's  
effect on their weathered bodies, recall good books they've read,  
while I flutter back and forth like a firefly, lit within from wonder.



## Great Bear — William Corner Clarke

I am the course  
Of things  
I am everything  
Which is not known  
I am the space where  
Dreams take place  
I am the gravity  
Which keeps  
All children  
From drifting away  
Sometimes  
I am a great bear  
With frost  
On its fur

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## Watching Mother Die — Arthur Winfield Knight

She remembers her mother  
singing to her  
when she was a child.  
Now she sings,  
“I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles,”  
watching her mother die.  
It’s a song Megan remembers  
from those early years,  
the words coming back to her  
as she holds her mother.

Megan can feel  
her mother's breath going,  
her body stiffening, then,  
suddenly, she's gone.  
Megan cries,  
finishing the song

## Heading Home — Arthur Winfield Knight

We crossed the summit  
of the Sierras. It was  
the last day in November,  
and there was a fine snow  
coming down  
as we headed east  
toward Nevada,  
our new home. My wife  
sat in the backseat  
with our greyhound.

Nikkie hated long drives,  
having been taken  
from track to track  
her first five years.  
Kit held her, saying,  
“You’re a good dog,  
you’re a good dog,”  
but Nikkie just slobbered,  
panting, terrified,  
as we crossed the state line,  
heading home, heading home.  
“It won’t be long now.”

## **Keeping Summer — H. Edgar Hix**

*(for my friend, Moses, June 22, 1992)*

It seems only right for him to have died  
on the second day of summer  
since it was his favorite season.

The hot sun fit his thin body and thin bones so well.  
He could sit for hours soaking it in,  
not even noticing the hours die.

Hours die more slowly in the winter,  
trembling like drops getting ready to fall  
from bony icicles on thick houses.

He would have died more slowly in winter,  
suffering each drop's fall to cold concrete.  
He might have trembled in a winter grave.

Winter graves are for fat people  
who need time to melt back into seasonless dust.  
He was always quick. Those last slow hours  
must have warned him winter was coming soon this year,  
and he was quick to keep summer  
the one way summer can be kept, it seems.

## Miss July – Kit Knight

Greyhounds are elegant;  
we've seldom taken Nikkie  
for a walk without someone  
saying, "Nice looking dog."  
Tourists lean out  
their car windows  
and shout, "Awesome!"  
But getting her to pose  
for a calendar was  
tricky. I stood behind her



and held the Uncle Sam hat  
on her head. The pose lasted  
ten seconds before she  
vigorously  
shook But  
it was long enough  
for Arthur to get the shot  
of that calm, dignified dog  
and her face looking  
noble  
wearing that hat.

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