

# Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream

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Volume 42

Number 9



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*James Penha*

## **Fish**

a found poem\*

Ukrainian psychologist Andriy Kozinchuk spoke while his militia unit was under attack. He said the savagery of the invasion had led to soul-searching among adults and children — a comrade's nine-year-old daughter asked him

Why do people want to kill me? —

and so he prepared to kill to protect his homeland.  
"It's not good for a human to want to kill somebody.  
It's not normal. It's normal for me to say that I love  
people, but today, no, sorry...  
I want to smash a tank or shoot them.  
We are not killers but we have feelings.

And if I survive? I hope to go to the UK

sometime, maybe have your famous food there:  
fish & chips. Yes, nice.  
I'd like the opportunity to try some.

\* "Ukrainian volunteer in Kyiv says 'If I live,  
I'll try fish and chips' as Russians close in."

—Metro (UK), February 27, 2022.

*Marilyn Braendeholm*

## **Fish Moon**

a bit of prose poetry

New Year's Eve means cod. Always has.  
Always will. So we head for the harbour.  
The whole family, and a few who aren't,  
squeezing into the old Volvo, always bits of  
Grandpa's job in the back. Trowels rough with  
mortar, buckets, crusty boots, white overalls.  
Grandpa's a bricky. A bricklayer. We race  
down the lane to catch Marc's fishing boat just  
as he ties up. Marc's a wave of a man, broad,  
well fed by the looks, he laughs like a sudden  
crack of thunder, and crashes about like a fish  
outta water. Grandpa hands him a large bottle  
of homemade cider. Marc hands Grandpa a  
package nearly as long as his arm. Cod for  
booze is the trade.

At home, Grandpa unwraps our cod.  
A high-gloss shine, silvery and smelling of sea.  
And I'm thinking it's a moon wrapped in  
brown paper.

*Marilyn Braendeholm*

## **Catch of the Day**

That fish on crushed ice  
doesn't know  
its beauty.  
Doesn't know  
its silver-plated shine.  
It thinks there's no glory

in a tail's slow sway,  
or lazing through  
sea grass and ropey kelp.  
Where's the glory  
for a fish on crushed ice  
when you're  
the catch of the day.

*Charles Rammelkamp*

## **Fisherman, Drowning**

I fell overboard before  
I could call out to my companions,  
water choking the cry in my throat  
like a baby strangled by its mother.

True how your life flashes past,  
unrolls like a carpet  
across the floorboards of memory.

I watched myself kissing my wife goodbye  
after I put my fishing gear into the van,  
my buddies anxious to get on the road.  
I lingered over the kiss wishing  
it could have been more intense,  
less perfunctory,

but as I sank to the bottom,  
tied up in my fisherman's straitjacket,  
lungs filled with cold lake water,  
I could not get past the memory  
coming upon a former girlfriend  
and another man unawares,

in a franchise breakfast restaurant,  
eating pancakes and holding hands,  
her eyes shining a love she'd never  
shown me, the two of them laughing;  
she looking up and meeting my eyes,  
guilt and defiance hardening her features  
even as I looked at her, like a mask.

Over and over again,  
she looking up and meeting my eyes,  
she looking up and meeting my eyes,  
she looking up and meeting my eyes...

*Deborah H. Doolittle*

## **The Poem that Took the Shape of a Fountain**

There it was, word after word after word spurting,  
the poem that took the shape of a fountain.

Jets of loquacious propulsion, hurtling  
into space, as if in a race to the top, just stopped,  
in Sisyphean defeat, tumbling in retreat,  
splashing down with a crash of droplets  
like thoughts.

(Cue the drumroll, please.) The mother on  
her knees  
restrains her child who looks into its watery depths  
for meaning and sees flashes of silver like fish  
swimming in a pond he remembers seeing before

and tosses his penny into the mix affixing  
a wish like a worm to a hook that his father used  
to fish with. If only, if only, if only, he could reel  
it back in like a line of poetry to try again.

What then?

*Frank De Canio*

## **Narcissistic Fish**

I wish the woman had unwonted sass,  
or ogled me when I sat in my seat.  
But she just seemed provocative and crass.  
And though I proved a bit too shrewd to eat  
the bait she dangled on the subway line,  
she'd smugly cast, from where she sat,  
a skewed  
demeanor meant to disassemble mine.  
She reeled me in with angling fortitude.  
I flapped about the car like landed fish  
maneuvering to get the hook removed  
and swim back in the sea. Oh! How I wish  
that she, like an ecologist, approved  
at leaving fish to sea, or flanked by glass,  
would get me buttered up like seasoned bass.

*Jack D. Harvey*

**Exuma 1967**

Powdery blue fish  
your intricate  
leavening describes  
the ocean in meditation.

You hang like  
tin crescents  
in a forest,  
pointing  
every which way  
to the absolute.

The coral fan spreads  
her dandy branches,  
the anemone gulps  
with longing  
for sun and rain,  
steady providers  
of other climes;  
for change, too,  
the rose sighs  
in her  
cut-out garden.

Such blooms, such creatures  
find their way,  
their blind will  
moving like the wind;  
wild geese  
home to roost,  
oracles  
marooned and mute  
in the vast  
the magnificent room  
of countless things.

*Ron Singer*

## **Cold-Water Swimming**

(short form)

My wife, Liz, and I, in long-gone days,  
would immerse ourselves, dull our senses,  
in frigid waters. We must have been crazy.

These acts, foolhardy or daring,  
were committed at a tender age,  
back in the pre-infarction phase.

Our first venue was Barrachois Grande,  
on the Gulf of St. Lawrence,  
near a campground where we stayed.

This trip to eastern Canada  
was serendipitous, occasioned  
by family illness, a change of plans.

On a sunny day, heaven- (or hell-) sent,  
we essayed a plunge into the bay.  
It was “most refreshing,” shall I say?

In 1969, this plunge took place,  
the summer before Liz and I were wed,  
(She proposed on a mountain one day.)

We lived in Chicago. Lake Michigan,  
warm and beset with alewives, all dead,  
did not tempt. Summers, we travelled, instead.

Our second, very-cold-water venue  
was Montana's Kootenai River Dam,  
built by the Army Corps, U.S. of A.  
It met our cold-water expectations  
--yea, surpassed them! Pieces of ice  
may have floated alongside our heads.

## **Baby Birds**

Two baby birds in a bowl  
without fish, breathing heavy,  
looking at a skiff trolling by,  
its passengers waving  
at the water, wondering if  
they're getting there. Two  
baby birds in a bowl without  
fish, breathing heavy, wondering  
about the stock market, the price  
of tea in China, about the world  
as a field filled with licentious  
carvings of Dante in every  
Wal-Mart where there is a Wal-Mart.  
Two baby birds in a bowl  
without fish, breathing heavy,  
taking turns wondering how they  
ever got here and if they'll  
ever get here again.

AN ANSWER FOR MONIQUE.



Wayne Higgins

In *Waterways* (volume 41 number 10)  
Monique Laforce posed the question:  
*"Is Aesop the winner of the slow race?"*

Wayne Hogan

## The Farmers' Ways

are many, but not so many  
you can't count 'em. Farmers  
have ways of making things  
you can eat and get fat from;  
make you heavier down where  
the toes on your feet are than  
up where your nose is.

What farmers do is duck soup easy—  
bury things in the ground, pour  
water on 'em then go home  
and smoke a pipe and read the  
paper, go and dig the things  
back out of the ground, wash 'em  
off, load 'em on a wagon and  
take 'em straight to the  
Farmer's Market downtown  
and sell 'em. That's it.

Duck soup easy,  
the farmers' ways.

*Sylvia Manning*

## **Nature Morte?**

Curious way to say  
still life, n'est-ce pas?

Dead pheasant or empty crockery,  
a big fish on some bright blue platter.

Cut flowers brought in for décor  
but ready to carry to a grave site.

Dead nature, still lifes —  
meant to please, naturally,  
those of us still alive.

*Richard Spiegel*

## **Accept the Now I Know**

Scribblers fish for words

that taste of truth

and artifice.

Schools swim past.

Waters flow.

The fish monger

comes to market.

# Our Geography of Poets

## **Bali**

James Penha

## **Maryland**

Charles Rammelkamp

## **New Jersey**

Jack D. Harvey

## **New York**

Frank DeCanio

Ron Singer

Richard Spiegel

## **North Carolina**

Deborah H. Doolittle

## **Tennessee**

Wayne Hogan

## **Texas**

Sylvia Manning

## **West Sussex**

Marilyn Braendeholm

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