Shorelines

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**Magazines**

*Abraxas, the Aurorean, Big Scream, Delaware Poetry Review, First Literary Review - East, Forge, Lilipoh, Main Street Rag, Prosopisia, Trajectory, Turtle Island Quarterly, The University of Tampa Review.*

**Anthologies**

*Song of the Owashtanong* (David Cope, Ed., Ridgeway Press, Roseville, MI, ISBN: 1-56439-135-3, 186 pages, 2012.)

*The Second Genesis: An Anthology of Contemporary World Poetry* (Anuraag Sharma, Ed., Ajmer, India, 548 pages, 2014.)

*All The Colors Of Life* (Ruth Moon Kempher, Ed., Kings Estate Press, St. Augustine, FL, to be published in 2019)

Rivers

As we turn our attention

toward the eternal magnet

at the center of the galaxy,

let us attempt to pause

where a pause is impossible,

to dance before the shaggy beast

that guards our illusions

in the prison of our dreams.

In the hard rain that beats away

at our poor, deteriorating roofs,

we search for cover

but instead find only diaries

of lost childhood

scattered across lighted pools

of fantasy, floating amid some

special toys, forgotten but not lost.

Yet the long days drift by, in currents

both dark & light, still all like

storm-lost branches out of reach,

while on the temporal shore

we see our unnatural enemies

as well as our intentional friends

passing on their journeys

to where even oceans must drain.

Shorelines

6AM morning campfire, orange

firing up the dawn. Fresh

green spearmint by a clear

stream. Water flows from

cold springs to feed the blue

lake. Minnows gather in

curtains of light. A ski boat

circles, sending waves to smash

the shore, throwing light

skyward, projecting brief

rainbows. Weeds grow from

cracks in an old pier. Rusted

steel upangles from white

sand. Two old dogs play at

waters edge, puppies

at heart. A whoosh of wings

pumps over the lake: white

swans in explosive flight. Down

flutters down to float

on a fluid surface. Boats

sit at tilt on a pebble

beach. A seagull worries

a dead fish, its eyes

long gone, sockets staring at

a sky that stretches out

over clueless cities, by seas

that birth tidal waves aimed

at distant shores, where

campfires blink innocent eyes.

In Tree Light

The white pine outside my window

grows old in the summer heat.

A robin sings its old song,

then flies away, music gone.

A woman in an apple dress

makes everything briefly red,

then passes by like an old wound.

The land is fragile as a match

burning fitfully in the wind,

but we sleep inside its sap

feeling the drumming of our blood.

We all love the sudden instant

when daylight steals our dreams.

You can feel your own dark heart heal,

that boat that leaks and breaks

just as you reach the distant shore.

Fly Fishing In The Rain

*for Gary Metras*

The pool pops and rolls, alive

All the way up to the clouds.

Branches on the side of the brook

Shake in the downpour, like a laughing man.

Down below, in the boiling depth,

Rainbows swirl, breathe deeply

While you, in boots & rain gear

Smile the foolish, happy grin

Of one whose lines sustain him.

From the depth, your wet heart beats

Vibrations through the rivers

Of your body, through your hands

That cast out & wait, feet that wade

The fast flow of blood & water.

Free Beach

Swimmers play

beneath a blue sky,

where big puffy clouds

make their ways

to parts unknown.

A small boy

hooks a splashing fish

& looks amazed

as it tries to swim

away from him.

In a splash of light

both of them are free.

The swimmers on the beach

scream in wet delight.

Cloud shadows pass

over the blue water.

The boy throws stones

at minnows that cruise

along the long shore.

Seagulls flutter above us,

flashing like silver coins

thrown across the sun.

Time to move on.

West Wind

In a Westerly wind

the seagulls scatter.

The lake is turning over.

Around my kayak

suspended sediments

achieve neutral buoyancy.

The gulls swim away

from one another.

In an Eastern wind,

they float together.

The water around me

is thick with green floaters.

The surface flashes

as if on fire

beneath the old wind.

I smile & breathe it in.

Home Of My Recurrent Dreams

Water runs through it,

like a stream, and

extends to the outside

where it winds through

the yard. The house has

a large pool that covers

the roof, above a second

story with hot-tubs, showers

& a cedar walled sauna.

There is a sixty-foot waterfall

on the hill behind the house,

& a series of ponds that lead

to the house-stream.

The only separate room is

the Plumber’s Lounge.

Storm Flowers

I bought chrysanthemums

on the last day of summer.

I made sure to get some in bloom

(white as nothing, yellow as

a soothing dream song) & some

big plants loaded with buds,

ripe with hope. I like to get both,

to carry us through to the season

when snowdrifts obliterate.

We planted them in rows,

bloomers & budders arranged

to maximize our viewing pleasure.

A week later, bent on revenge,

a storm came with angry wind

& rain that flooded our yard.

In the aftermath, blossoms

floated in a muddy flood

that flowed inexorably into

the thirsty, sucking storm drain.

New blooms opened the next day.

Seaglass

*for John Elsberg (1945 - 2012)*

A bottle washes up

On the Eastern shore

Some boys break it

& years later the sharp pieces

Are worn smooth as stones

But they retain their colors

Glinting amid the dull real

Stones that erode all around us

Reflecting ancient starlight

Bringing it all back home

Lifelines

As a young sailor I learned

to handle the lines. I’d stand

on the slippery bow to toss

the bowline to the dockhand, balanced

against the backwash

of the engine & the wave action,

hoping that the catcher on the dock

could grab the line from mid-air.

Later, in the Coast Guard, I trained

in the use of the line-throwing

gun, a 12 gauge shotgun

that shot a steel rod

over the bow of a drifting boat

with a small line threaded

through the heavy rod-head, a difficult

task in rough water.

If your aim was off, the rod

could hit, maybe even kill

the very stranded boater whom

you were trying to save. You had to

arc it just right, so that it fell

across the bow, so the boater

could retrieve the line & connect

it to his bow, so you could rescue him.

But sometimes lifelines break.

Nylon tow-lines stretch way out.

We stand behind a cyclone fence, in case

the rope might snap. The sudden recoil

could kill a man or knock

him overboard, to tread water

until someone bobbing nearby

can throw *him* a line.

On turbid days, afloat on

dark, forbidding waves, we need

strong lines, to lash us

to something solid on shore,

a post or a pier that might stand

against the wildly surging swells.

In dreams of flight above rough seas,

I search for you, to throw you these lines.

Waves

*for Roseanne*

It’s the end of July

in my 70th year.

I sit on a former tree

that drifted onto my beach.

I watch the waves roll in.

The home where we raised

our three children

is behind me. The kids

are on their own now

but we’re still here.

A cool breeze pets my face.

The small white dog we love

sniffs the water’s antic edge.

She’s happy in the moment,

trying to lap uncooperative waves

that just keep rolling in.

They wash away her pawprints,

as if they had never been.

She doesn’t even notice.

In The Wake

Halfway through

hurricane season,

the lost rain

returned to the body:

sad monsoon

after the big wave

that flooded

our defenseless cups,

that left us

waterlogged but thirsty,

even as the angry tide

receded,

even as the ancient tears

ran undamed

from new eyes

that opened underwater

to see the useless furniture

swirling inexorably

toward the sucking drain,

whirlpooling

with dollar bills

into a foreign currency,

faces adrift

in low vapor,

shoreline lined

with dying dreams.

Dream Of Flight

I fly over the shoreline

of Lake Michigan. I can

see all the way down

to the bottom & blue

sky & green water surround

me as I rise & descend to

the surface & back up

with the shadows of big fish that

swim through the turquoise depths.

From far above & away

I see you walking closer

along the sandy beach, your feet

washed by waves with

white eyelids sparkling

gemlike in the sunlight.

The Insomniac

I lay awake

where the river bends:

the jams of logs,

the broken, confused

rocks like heads of struggling

swimmers, the deep funeral places.

I breathe in the murky shadows.

I float incessantly

above the weeds. I suck

the black muck. Every morning

I am killed by the hot passing sun.

The Sunken Dream

A young man built his first house

in a lovely wooded valley

beside a slow-moving river.

He worked all summer on it.

He was proud of it, so it hurt

when he received the notice

of their plans to build a dam

that would flood his little valley

& leave his home & the homes

of his neighbors, two churches,

a cemetery & a small town

submerged, monuments

to technological progress.

People moved to higher ground.

Their skeletons remained

sunken beneath a dim surface

sometimes calm, often angry.

For years afterward, things

left behind floated to surface.

Once he found a soggy hope chest.

Some rebuilt on hills, some in ravines,

but after that he never put his heart

into another house made from lumber.

He blamed the government, but

his thoughts were persistent.

When he dreamt of his gone home,

he always struggled to rebuild it

though the stubborn waters still rushed in.

Bluegill Apocalypse

On the first hike of spring around a still mostly

frozen lake, I saw how hundreds of fish had met

their ends sucking for oxygen at every hole,

whole schools dying together. Most were smaller

than five inches, some perch, bass & crappie, but

80% bluegills. A large number were clustered at

the little channel between the lake & a smaller

pond. The fish from the lake had tried to escape

to the pond. The pond fish had tried to escape

back to the lake. Winterkill defeated them all.

Flow

Winter & summer

Flow together

Like man & woman

In the river.

Spring rains filter

Through levels of pleasure

In harmonious measure

Like loved & lover.

Within the river

We each discover

In body & soul

The other.

Flood Tide

Another day surges over

the horizon, flotsam

sloshing through its dark

sluice. Loose pages

drift in pools, like

travelers, asleep beneath

the hills. There is no

bowl to contain our

tears, just flooded floors in

a hastily abandoned factory.

Though pleasure pours

like rain, we swim

on until dark, emerging

from the water’s edge smelling

like wet sand. Submerged

beneath our common

respiration, we wonder if

the ocean breeze will

keep us on course or

blow us back into ourselves.

We have thrown down our

breathless waves, arriving

home late but still

somehow hopelessly

adrift. There is no

pail for love. Even though

we’ve wrapped ourselves within

each other’s arms, each

of us still drowns alone.