

Quercus Review

review by Michael Todd Steffen

In the summer shade of the Quercus Review (number eight)—featuring



Ed Galing,
an oak of the small press and friend of
Boston area poetry.

The summer edition of Quercus Review (number eight), across the country from Modesta, California, will be of interest to Boston area readers and poets and writers. Its featured poet, Ed Galing, at 90 years young, stands as a great oak of the small press, with a publishing career that spans sixty-some years. Ed is known widely to the local eyes of the nation, not least to friend and editor of the Ibbetson Street Press Doug Holder from Somerville.

I became aware of Galing's work first through the Ibbetson Street web site and in the pages of Holder's Off the Shelf run weekly in the Somerville News.

The featured section in Quercus gives 42 pages to Galing's work, the first four consisting of an informal essay by Doug Holder who characterizes Galing's experience as a "hardscrabble life," the poet's compositional effect a "no-bullshit, call a spade a spade style" and his poetry's turn of wit a "calculated ironic distance." It is an apt description of a craftsman's unseemingly wisdom and acquired skill with words and sense and how to place them, ever so nonchalantly, as in ONE DAY IN A NURSIN HOME, in which Galing, pushing his wife in a wheelchair to the cafeteria for lunch, is asked where his is taking her, and —

i reply with a smile
i thought today we would go

into the forest, and see the
lake, and the trees, and maybe
stop in the pizza parlor...

Galing's answer here is as wry as the names of those with whom he plays
cards in SENIOR CENTER—

during
lunch.
every day,
there is moe epstein,
abie weisberg, and sam
adelman, and me.

Galing's poetry bears on you to the extent that you are immersed in
language. People of some age and wisdom are keenly attuned to
language in a way others are not. Some of us must especially focus in
order to perceive the music in what is being said. A dip of the hand
does not find the resistance of wading up to your breastbone in a pool or
shoreline. Galing's wit and expression are so at one with the fluency of
his spirit, after these some years, the demarcations in the language, the
poetry, simply breathes from him. Ed sums up the almost transparent
union in his composition process:

I sit at the electric typewriter and bang them out... It is as if the poem has
come to mind long before it develops on paper.

Quercus is a reputable biannual literary journal of poetry, fiction and b &
w art, which has featured such names as X.J. Kennedy, Naomi Shihab
Nye and Charles Harper.

Their number eight, along with this generous feature of Galing's work,
includes poets and writers from every direction in the United States,
from Ashland, Oregon to Bristol, Rhode Island, from Houma, Louisiana
to Broomfield, Colorado, not to forget poet Mary P. Chatfield from
Cambridge, Massachusetts whose quiet description of waterfowl and
winter ice melting on the river in "Waking" reads itself as carefully as the
observation "the wing display the splashing the feathering/the reeds."

The fiction section highlights Frank Arroyo's "Acceptance," written with

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an exquisite patience for detail and palpable ambience. Reserving the story's plot for your curiosity, I can't leave this article without quoting from Arroyo's deft descriptive style, the narrator's perceptions as a child lying in bed at night toward the end of the story:

The silence of the house turned the air around me electric. I could hear the steady hum of the refrigerator; a car slowly turning some corner, and then speeding up; the wind seemed to rise with some great force, as if the ocean had come with it, leaves crackling against the bottom of the house, the wind caught in the swaying trees, a branch tapping the roof in a steady rhythm. Outside my bedroom window, through the twisting and blurring black branches, I focused on the thick blue air of the back field, how deep and tangible it seemed because for a moment it became a dark ocean of waves rolling with the rhythm of the tapping branch, the bright windows of the distant tenement building bobbing in the waves...

For a peak at this issue of Quercus Review and ordering information go to www.quercusreview.com.

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