

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
27



## Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #4

Where change of Fav'rites made no Change of Laws,  
And Senates heard before they judg'd a Cause;

Samuel Johnson  
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 27

Number 4\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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Goya

## **Senator Proposes Pink Plates For Drivers Convicted Of DUI**

### **Rochelle Ratner**

Pink's been his favorite color ever since nursery school when he fell in love with the Pink Panther. The thought of all those campy pink flamingoes out on the lawns is one of the things which drew him to Florida. He wears pale pink shirts with bright pink ties to the brokerage office every day, and yes, he's been open to ridicule at times, usually from the new guys. Once they realize he's making more money for his clients than most of them are they start hanging around his desk, getting all palsie walsie. All he's ever enjoyed is a glass or two of blush wine with dinner, but he can envision what would become of him if this bill passes — drinking in bars every night, downing one shot glass after another, trying to ignore the taste and smell, then getting in the car and just driving, hoping to hell the police pick him up before he kills some little old lady.

## Walking Haibun — Joan Payne Kincaid

On my twenty minute daily walk each plane  
tree is a friend: *good morning* people are  
*good afternoons* today given I had a late start.  
We respond in these brief ways knowing nothing  
of each one's private life, yet understanding  
the great variety of reasons why we walk here  
passing familiar faces each person with a different  
style and pace perhaps to lose weight, or speed up  
a heart, or just to enjoy a walk with a view.  
At the half way mark a cormorant is low in the water  
it's snake neck and head soon dives from sight;  
a swan flaps low and I pause to hear its wing-beat  
*music*. Today rain dimples the harbor and shines  
the beach roses already glowing rosehips. For the  
first time we wear jackets and pullovers in the  
surprise of late summer chill.

## The Hard Part — James Penha

*My tongue swore, but my mind was still unpledged.*

*—Euripides, Hippolytus*

My tongue has grown  
a bone  
and that's why  
my lip service  
ends here  
without wiggle  
without room  
to improvise.  
With neither twist  
nor tie  
now my tongue  
to tell you the truth  
swears  
to hold tune.

## On the Film *Brooklyn Lobster* — Donald Lev

I'm glad this enterprise turned out better  
for Danny Aiello than that pizza  
joint Spike Lee had him in.

I love to watch Danny Aiello in anything.  
And get back for a visit to Sheepshead Bay!  
Enid and I used to go over there all the time  
when we lived in Brighton Beach.

We'd eat in Marias Rondazzos or Lundys  
or occasionally in summer the busy little sea food place near the movies  
which I think was part of *Georgio's*  
whose store we'd sometimes shop in too;  
but of course we never knew  
about all that *sturm und drang*.  
But now I do.

3/06

## On the Film *The Squid & the Whale* — Donald Lev

I find

Laura Linney the most beautiful  
woman in the world.

Needless to say, I am a fan.

I see her pictures, her plays, whenever I can.

I watch for her appearances on tv.

And then there is the World Series.

Next door to the Upstate Theater is  
the Carriage House which has the most  
perfect clams on the half shell I know of.

And their tv is tuned to the Astros and the Whitesox.

I'm for the Astros, being a National League person  
(same way I am a Democrat and a Jew).

In all of this I see the face of Laura Linney.

She is as disappointed as I am at the outcome of the game.

10/05

## On the Film *Kinky Boots* — Donald Lev

I saw this one at the Rosendale,  
where I saved a dollar but there  
were no coming attractions!  
By no means an unimportant  
part of the cinema-going experience,  
coming attractions prepare one's  
brain cells  
for the proper reception of the Feature Presentation.  
While I'm being negative let me add this plea  
in the name of solidarity among English speaking peoples:  
that when they are showing dialect-faithful films from  
the North of England, they please consider English  
subtitles for those of us located at the greater distances  
from Hadrian's Wall! Unlike the Upstate, there was

available no program to guide one to information such as names of leading actors. I intend someday to discover the name of the actor who played the glorious transvestite: at once marvelously entertaining, and emblematic of the suffering of good teachers and good parents. A truly beautiful performance. Of course Charlie the heir to the business, at once imaginative and severely limited, is the bloke I most identified with. The story is how a venerable British business is saved from the clutches of Scrooge and Marley through the patronage of the Transvestite Community. A story for our time!

5/06

## On the film *Scoop* — Donald Lev

Beware, Scarlett Johansson. You are in danger  
of becoming Mia Farrow!

But this was funny, a true old fashioned Woody Allen comedy.

About time!

He must have found out what I wrote about *Match Point* and made amends.

7/06

## The Dark Night of the Soul — Arthur Winfield Knight

Our greyhound awakens us,  
yelping, at 3 a.m. Kit says,  
"She's having a bad dream."  
I know. Nikkie lived in a crate,  
on concrete, for five years  
when she wasn't running.  
She would have been killed  
when her running days were over,  
but she came to us, shaking,  
covered with dandruff.

It took her months  
to learn not to be afraid.  
She didn't know how to play,  
and taking a walk scared her.  
I sit on the floor next to Nikkie  
petting her. "You're a good dog.  
It's all right." Fitzgerald said  
3 a.m. is the dark night of the soul.  
It's true for dogs, too.

## The Letter — William Beyer

The letter you have sent,  
brief as it is,  
asking questions  
I prefer to ignore,  
about my health,  
current activities,  
suggests a definite curiosity;  
hints at the obvious,  
emotional distance  
still between us.

Your unexpected letter,  
carefully written,  
with words  
unusually small,  
disturbs,  
the subtle evasions,  
what is left unsaid,  
leaving our personal distance  
greater;  
more currently drawn.

## Character Development — Carol Hamilton

I was always such a Puritanical Bohemian,  
careful and careless of consequences  
at the same moment, but deciding  
when to twirl and get dizzy,  
whoop up armfuls of autumn's bright leaves  
or eat Turkish delight, chin adrip  
with sweetness, begging more.  
Now I'm neither. I take my pleasures  
steadily, savor every bite with quiet attention,  
as my little cousin unwrapped Christmas gifts,  
maddeningly, the tape pulled so not  
to mar paper, flat rectangles  
before the real gift was examined.

What happened to me? No longer  
plunged to despair nor rocketed  
to ecstasy, but always delighted  
with this or that, like a child  
content to play for hours with mother's  
button collection. This is not the stuff  
of the novels I used to read and write.  
I think now that I was tweaking my life  
into a plot, but I've lost my taste  
for fiction, and now I like to read  
less of Raskolnikov and more  
of Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail.

## What Marcia Gave Stanley — Bill Roberts

Marcia gave Stanley, so he tells me,  
round-trip air tickets to New York,  
plus tickets for good seats to "La Boheme"  
and "Parsifal" at the Met.

Of course, Marcia and Stanley  
have only been married three years,  
so that explains her extravagance.  
I called Irene, my wife of forty-five years,  
and told her of my colleague  
Stan's good fortune.  
I also reminded her of my birthday  
coming, on schedule, in a few weeks.

After a long, breathless silence,  
Irene told me politely that  
if I were a good boy,  
she'd think it through,  
do a little clandestine researching,  
double-check her findings,  
and then provide me  
with Marcia's number.

## The Sprinter — Philip B. Crosby

*For Leamon King*

Gone in dry cinders  
and empty corridors  
of white chalk dust

times you commanded  
long jumpers running up the sky,  
the silent monologs of distance runners,  
and shot putters hurling planets.

High jumpers stood hands on hips  
fine boned, almost delicate  
like a group of focused deer,  
pole vaulters crowded their poles,  
even vendors stopped selling

to hear the gunshot  
that lifted thousands  
and made the stadium  
a wreath of hands.

## Sightings — Ida Fasel

From the hotel, a view  
of the pyramids and Sphinx.  
At the Museum of Antiquities,  
crystal eyes said to stare  
into eternity. Near the oldest souk,  
in the tumid street, a donkey  
loaded down, kicked and cursed,  
kicked again.

I wanted to shout  
Stop, you fool!  
remembering Balaam's ass  
and his lowly loyal eyes.

Tombs of kings, tombs  
of queens, tombs of sacred bulls,  
ram and crocodile headed gods.  
A donkey took me up  
the steep path to Beni Hasan.  
Can't a donkey who stops  
for an angel  
wear a god's head too?

## Tenure Track: First Day — Mary K. Lindberg

Do come in, Charles. I'll adjust the blinds. Our most senior committee sits in this room.

There, is that all right now? Good. You met some members at your interviews, I believe.

For tenure we use an ancient but sure method. The chairman circulates a small wooden box; members drop in white or black balls. One each. I'll tell you, truthfully, once we had a celebrated case. Yes. No one expected any black balls. First class candidate. Department service, students, teaching, publications. A slamdunk, if you will allow a colloquialism.

As the box circled the room, someone (we were never quite sure who) slipped a black ball in the slot. Ah, here's the box itself. You

can examine it in the flesh, so to speak. Feel the edges of the ballot hole. Quite worn, yes? But nicely lined with leather. Tuscan, if I recall correctly. Yes. When dropped in, the balls all sound alike. No one knows the results until the chairman unlocks the box. Some still talk about that vote: "Almost unanimous;" others frown: "Only one black ball." The chairman of course was unequivocal: "One is enough." For the candidate, black balls appeared everywhere, rolling in twenty thousand directions. More importantly, roiled the department for quite a while. Factions. You understand. Unpleasant business. But come, we have stayed here long enough. I'll lock up. Ah, yes. Now I can show you your office.

## Factory Town — John Grey

Kind of them  
to make the air for me.  
The stuff the trees,  
The plants, the grass produce  
would never do.  
Almost gracious in the way  
their chimneys  
spew out more gray soot  
than my lungs would ever need.  
Even at night,  
when the factories  
seem like graveyards,  
they're still considerate enough  
to keep those smoke stacks pumping,  
a warm red glow even in winter,

and in summer,  
a steady string of toxic clouds,  
thicker than humidity.  
How do they survive, I wonder,  
in the outer suburbs,  
in the countryside,  
where air is so innocuous,  
and doesn't foam,  
doesn't lather the throat, the nostrils?  
How do you know it's air  
unless you cough along  
in rhythm to your breathing,  
unless somebody tells you  
that's the price of doing business  
unless you realize  
how much you pay that price?

## When Titans Meet — Anselm Brocki

With all the counter, booths,  
and tables full at the All-Nite  
this morning, Top Grouch -  
that's the one who never  
leaves his morning newspaper  
on the table but cautiously  
opens the trash door with  
a paper napkin, shoves  
the folded newspaper in,  
and pours the dregs of his  
coffee cup on top so no one  
else can read it without some  
disgust—and Bad Mouth-  
that's the one who says

to all the servers, "Why don't  
you learn English to show that  
you're grateful for getting  
to live in this country?"—  
sit down across from each  
other for the first time.

All the regulars nearby quiet  
down, expecting sparks and  
heavy-duty insults, maybe even  
a small atomic explosion, but  
it doesn't happen.

"At least they serve real eggs here," Bad Mouth says. "Most places make lumpy yellow soy or something and call it eggs."

"Yeah," Top Grouch says, without looking up from the newspaper.

"I've heard you say soccer is for little girls," Bad Mouth says, "and like watching grass grow, but what about that French guy who head-butted the Italian in the World Cup game?"

"That's how foreigners act," Top Grouch says, putting down his newspaper. "They don't speak a civilized language and never learned how to fight like men. But they do the same thing in fights with their wives. You ever married?"

"Forty-eight years," Bad Mouth says. "That was enough for me. She was a neat freak who took charge of everything. I'm a pack rat. She was of the throw-it-out school. It was like living your whole life in the Navy, always taking orders."

"I know what you mean, Buddy."  
Top Grouch says. "No matter  
what they say about how  
precious marriage is, intimacy  
sucks. Alone is better."

## Time — Hugh Fox

Thursday again, as if yesterday were  
last Thursday, too much passing over too  
quickly, I keep telling myself Focus, focus  
in on the NOW, drink your Irish creme slowly,  
eat your unbaked chocolate cookies slowly,  
concentrate on the lights, the deer, the river,  
night, winds, moon, only maybe so much Tibetanism  
makes it go even (Shantih, Shantih, Shantih)  
faster.

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