

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

28



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #5

I shall know you, secrets  
by the litter you have left  
and by your bloody foot-prints.

excerpted from *Secrets*  
Lola Ridge's *Sunup and other poems* (1920)

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 28

Number 5\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## The Mermaid Parade — Jody Nash

You don't see the skin on legs in January  
But brilliant speeches abound on paper and  
Brightly lit billboards: and you will see  
Dancing on the slanted surfaces of icy roofs

By February in Manhattan:  
Dancers circling over the waiting earth  
A parade of newness like constellations  
Dressed in a yellow silence that tints the cold air

Lasting well into June where I have stood since noon  
On a balcony in Brooklyn waiting for inspiration  
One block from the beach eating a hot dog  
Thoughts from childhood mixing with the smells of carnival rides

Like the super tall Ferris wheel at Coney Island that scraped  
The edge of heaven in its revolution; a place unlike any other,  
Where at the highest point we touched the sky  
Swallowed by the young night; in awe of blue and pinprick lights

The earth a distant memory; the land stretching on forever  
Suspended in the embrace of a peculiar atmosphere  
That persisted until autumn was well established around here  
By then the Mermaid Parade has come and gone

Bits of discarded costumes scattered along Stillwell Avenue  
Like a rumor of the coming snows, the garden returning to sleep  
The last petal shed with the leaves of the turning trees  
The bread of endless transitions and the fruit of germination

Fancy fish restaurant  
overlooking a harbor.  
On a wall to the left  
of the receptionist's  
podium, an interior  
designer's display  
of 8 x 10 blowups  
of snapshots of proud  
fisherfolk showing off  
their catches — a smiling  
10-year-old barely able

## Remindful — Anselm Brocki

to hold a 3-foot albacore  
in his hands held close  
to his chest: a woman  
with a jaunty visor cap  
standing behind a string  
of 12 bass dangling  
like a chorus line;  
a middle-aged man  
pointing cheerfully  
to a huge marlin held  
by its roped slick tail

on a hoist — reminders  
of the kills of bison, boars,  
and deer sketched  
on the walls at Altamira;  
of photos of soldiers  
posing next to enemy  
dead from the Civil War  
on; of how close we  
still are to the Stone Age.

## PO/EMS — Richard Kostelanetz

a/dam/ant

a/dole/scent

a/greed

am/ass

am/oral

bra/zen

brig/and

broad/casts

dam/age

## Woman of the Mill — John Grey

She springs from the abandoned factory,  
cackling, sneering. . .  
I had a job here when I was twenty five years old.  
Face like dried meat,  
Hair as straggly as bon-fire flame.  
She almost lands on unclad foot on mine.  
If those toes were any rougher,  
They'd be a goat's.  
Careful she doesn't stab me with something  
like a sharp piece of machinery,  
or slap me with a rusty wrench,  
or rip at me with those claws.

I stumble back into the wet grass,  
the rocks, the bits of bricks,  
fall, bruise my back, scrape my elbow.  
She's sorrowful now, weary of being  
the witch of Michaels and Sons Textile Mills.  
She even offers me a hand  
though I scramble to my feet myself.  
"I'm okay," I say though it hurts.  
But I didn't work in this place  
When I was twenty five.  
I can heal.

## In Another Month 100 Years — Joanne Seltzer

Just another birthday,  
she claims,  
no big celebration.

Her note  
written in a firm hand  
thanks me for  
the pugs and hisses  
of my Valentine  
sent last week  
along with hugs  
and kisses.

Pretty much housebound  
she gets three meals a day,  
gets to the piano  
whenever she can.

She encloses  
a paper towel  
that features Charlie Brown  
and gang,  
a recent photo,  
some silly word games.

What noun has  
8 consonants,  
1 vowel?  
Answer: strengths.

She closes with a hug  
And kiss.

## My Mother's Old Sofa — Joanne Seltzer

Scratchy  
old-fashioned  
it sagged like tired flesh,  
made her ashamed  
for anyone  
even the social worker  
to see it  
let alone sit.

We bought new  
phoned the Salvation Army  
but right before pickup  
she reconciled  
with shreds of stuffing  
and mourned many days  
another piece  
plucked from her life.

## The Knife-Sharpener Man — Bill Roberts

The knife-sharpener man usually works  
the dirt alleys in our town,  
ringing his familiar brass bell  
when he is strolling in the neighborhood,  
three-legged stool and sharpening wheel  
strapped to his bent back, ready to make  
our scissors and knives and tools  
razor sharp again with the turn of his wheel,  
sparks flying to let us know  
that the grinding process is generating  
the necessary energy to create sparkling heat  
from metal on stone, dampened occasionally  
by spittle from a callused forefinger,

a mandatory if not entirely sanitary ingredient  
for putting things right again,  
supplying this much needed though unscheduled  
service to lowly people who use  
their tools, laboriously dulling them over time  
until the knife-sharpener man returns,  
hailing us with his distinctive bell  
and for a few coins puts sharp edges  
back in our grinding, ordinary lives.

First published in  
Hidden Oak Poetry Journal, 2001

## A Prologue to Edgar Allan Poe — David Chorlton

Old tales of horror are set  
in twisting strands of fog  
where nobody can see far enough  
to find a way out.  
Hidden details suggest the worst,  
leaving us to dig into the pits  
of our imaginations  
while the pendulum swings so close  
the scent of its steel  
cuts slices from air  
we struggle to breathe.

In our times  
of televised autopsies  
when a camera follows the bullet  
into a victim's body, we would be following

an express train through a tunnel  
to the other side, but nobody has yet  
photographed a soul  
exiting the world.

A villain back from the dead  
sweeps a cloak across his face  
and flashes the whites of his eyes.  
He licks the blade of his knife  
to taste the mystery  
that comes from suggestion. Edgar Allan Poe  
returns through the mist  
and shakes deadly rain from his coat  
when he sits down beside us  
and prepares  
to strike fear in our minds  
with words, searching for one  
worth a thousand pictures.

## A Tribute to Jane Austen — Ida Fasel

On the floor of Winchester Cathedral  
a memorial slab:

"kindness of heart"

"the sweetness of her temper"

"charity"

"devotion"

"faith and purity"

"the extraordinary endowments of her mind"

All but book titles

Sense and Sensibility

Mansfield Park

Persuasion

her darling Pride and Prejudice

"the warmest love of her intimate connections"  
All but Elizabeth Bennet,  
Elinor Dashwood, Anne Eliot,  
Dr. Darcy, Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth.

The closing lines left to hope  
her soul's acceptance.  
All but her tongue-in-cheek  
for most of the world she lived in.  
All but the women we know by heart for their  
Mind and the men who deserved them.

"the regard of all who knew her."  
Including us.

## Barbarians — William Corner Clarke

The Winter Capital  
Is full of light  
When the invaders reach the gates  
All the bridges are decked out  
Like fairground rides  
The towers, smooth  
Like frozen waterspouts  
Are glowing from inside  
The pavements, quarried  
From crystal mines  
Glitter in the cold  
Jets of blue flame rising  
From brass forged power stations  
Point toward the stars

But the houses are all empty  
Everyone has fled the city  
The archives have been emptied  
Of every piece of history  
Statues stand without their heads  
Paintings have been torn to pieces  
And bonfires made from violins  
Are burning in the streets

In the central square  
Carnival festoons of coloured wires  
Link up lines of massive speakers  
That boom out in the clear night ear  
The sounds of raucous laughter  
Expressly for the strangers' ears

## Silence — Ellaraine Lockie

The aunt wrote that he died  
thinking his daughter didn't love him

because the daughter didn't write that last year  
She didn't answer the aunt's letter either

The words would have deafened  
with description of what happened

when a daddy dishonored his daughter  
Until her pubescent hand pushed him away

That at age six she hadn't known  
she held so much strength in her small hand

That by the time she forgave herself the oversight  
he was fragile with senility

The aunt wouldn't have let herself hear  
that silence can be a kind of love

## Following Ariadne's Rope — Carol Hamilton

*"Understanding is the first step to acceptance"*

Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Who did what to him  
was the quest, the mine  
where nuggets would emerge  
with enough digging, panning,  
sifting. Or should the process  
be reversed, seeing what steps  
we took to set forth the inevitable?  
Layers are laid down unnoticed,  
ourselves sometimes the irritant,

the catalyst. The deepest mystery  
could be hidden within me  
in the place I am least likely  
to look. And discovery can cause  
pandemonium. Rather than  
test with bird or candle,  
I will safely examine  
who did what to me.

## Tanto o poco? — Doug Bolling

Tell me, does pain of existence  
hurt a lot or a little?

I am curious for there's a  
long way to go and comfort  
is always best

& already this soreness in  
the memory & a certain fever  
about the present & they say  
a future can bring many downfalls  
to any voyager whatever his  
rank or shame.

Already I am hesitating at  
this next turning whether  
to go or run & I would much  
appreciate your prognosis  
if such is possible.

I promise to undertake what  
ever therapy you prescribe,  
if you do  
for they say the journey  
is very dangerous  
& I am alone.

## Grandpa's Remedies — Thomas D. Reynolds

For a cut on bare feet,  
It was a dash of turpentine.

A sour stomach warranted  
A snip of ginger on the tongue.

For midnight cough an onion poultice  
Rubbed on the chest.

A touch of the gout,  
The absence of fatback and hog jaw  
For two straight days.

Depression in late afternoon  
When the sun sank into the Ozark hills  
Received a splash of spring water on the face.

Maybe a walk to the end of the dirt road  
Rutted by sawmill trucks.

Moving a hand across new cut wood,  
Feeling the dust between two fingers.  
Sensing that trace of iron at the back of the tongue  
And repeatedly spitting into a crack in the earth.  
For the death of a young son  
No salve or poultice could touch,  
Staring into space  
And silence.  
Walking to the door  
And glancing into timber  
As if someone was calling.  
Trying to recognize his hand  
Atop the kitchen table.  
Nothingness.  
And always that taste of iron.

## Salsa — Arthur Winfield Knight

Kit's in the kitchen  
making a pasta salad  
with chicken and salsa,  
and our greyhound  
sleeps at my feet.  
I just read a poem  
by Michael Madsen,  
where he mentions  
getting a postcard  
with no message,  
but there was a picture  
of Reno on the front.  
It's in the mid-90s,  
but the swamp cooler's on,  
so Kit and the dog and I  
are cool. Everything's cool.

## Account — Geoff Stevens

Shred

lest you shed your secrets  
in the litter you have left.  
Do not leave the footprints  
of your transactions  
for all to see  
and lose the money  
for which you have sweated blood.  
Trash now the efforts of the sneak  
thief  
that searches through your can.

## Tredegar — Sam Calhoun

I took the familiar path,  
an old railroad grade leading  
into a forest where the sun  
disappears beneath the canopies  
of tall pines;

Crossed the stream on  
a fallen tree, and pushed  
back the brush guarding the  
entrance to the abandoned  
iron mill and sat

down on a granite stone.  
piles of slag and broken  
bricks litter base of  
the remaining stone walls, degraded  
from years of weathering.

Like a book exposed briefly,  
it's preface train wheels,  
on the factory line used to transport  
supplies to the main route across  
the rotted bridge.

And by shovel or by hand,  
we'll blow the dust from  
the cover, remove the  
pages of leaves until we reach  
the chapter summary, all that's left  
for us to read in a mountain of blank pages.

## Passages — Robert Brimm

The cars change shape  
as they come and go  
in the warped window glass

of a store that once was,  
dusty now, this begrimed  
keeper of secrets,

these windows that  
have seen it all  
in this small town: deaths,

funerals, weddings, births,  
departures of its young  
who sometimes come back,

stand beside a grave,  
listen to an acorn falling,  
slow ticking of eternity.

## "Truth and Reconciliation" — R. Yurman

*what the truth  
swallowed whole  
finally tastes like isn't  
forgiveness but  
blood — John Sweet*

Small bites  
tiny sips  
that's all  
our mouths can hold

It may seem  
at such a rate  
the task will take forever

But swallow too fast  
and we gag ourselves  
The tongue is short  
the esophagus narrow

Yet "mercy,  
After all, is just another  
word for power"

While the taste of blood  
now that's a different matter  
Blood rouses lust  
for blood

No wafer  
of forgiveness  
till the rampage  
runs its course

And then the wailing  
in each other's arms

And then the beating  
of the drums

*Quoted lines are from  
Corinne Clegg Hales'  
poem, "Testimony"*

## Dragons — Ron Singer

In those days as we huddled round the fire,  
sleeping, waking, sleeping, in a pile,  
always pretty much cold and afraid,  
or just afraid, there sometimes came a noise  
like a wind, but not. And we would know  
it was only some huge animal,  
a musk ox, saber tooth, or dragon,  
a beast that, daytimes, we would have fled.  
Even nights, when the fire could be trusted  
to keep him out there in the dark,  
if the wind was right -or wrong—his breath  
would waft around our cave, as if something  
spoiled had fallen in the fire.

## Two Days Early — Jean Wiggins

Ancient oak trees draped with filmy moss  
in Columbia Cemetery, near Nankin, Georgia,  
an old gentleman swatting mosquitoes,  
raking leaves on a humid Good Friday morning  
walks over to see us strangers  
standing by graves. He inquires, "Is this your family?"  
"My father's," my husband replies.  
The old gentleman is curious,  
but with the deference of genteel manners,  
doesn't probe. When my husband gives his name,  
we know he knows the family story.  
I ask about the graves marked by white stakes.  
  
"They are slave graves," he says.  
I am thinking they are icons  
of each step they took.

## Longitude — Hugh Fox

1.

"How long do you think Shakespeare's gonna last?"

"He don't worry none about it, dat's for sure..."

As the candle turns into Edison lights into fluorescents, last forever, the panels on the roof pulling energy from the stars and the earth collapses inward on itself because of all the cavities left after all the oil and coal were used up.

2.

Bugs, canes,

Bukowski? ? ? ? ?

Winans? ? ? ? ?

Lifshin? ? ? ? ?

Moi? ? ? ? ?

L'Anglais? ? ? ? ?

Jesu Cristo? ? ? ? ?

Where have all the  
cro-magnons gone?  
Long time lasting,  
long time ago.  
Nixon's problems?  
The Alhambra!  
Where have all the Anglo-Saxons gone,  
long time lasting,  
long time ago?  
*Et tu et moi?*

L'Academie Francaise    Marseilles.  
*Me fait chier\**

\*Makes me crap/Is a pain in the ass.

3.

Hiroshima

Kurds

Meilleur to paint  
the caves  
and worship the

(Hercules strangles the Merman)

stars.

4.

Screaming tadpoles

"I understand

(the lilacs)

birds,"

satellite

M  
 E Y  
 D R  
 A D  
 V N A  
 E E  
 D U  
 V  
 E

laptop

5.

A  
 B  
 C  
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 mail

au lieu

de

OMNIA GALIA ES DIVISA

EN TRES

(the conquest

of

forgetfulness

PARTES.

## **On the Film *The U.S. vs John Lennon* — Donald Lev**

The thing I carry away is the tenderness, sweetness of Yoko Ono looking up at John, singing, speechifying, lying in bed for peace . . . and then the child . . . and then the shots.

Lots of well presented familiar images of the time — Nixon in so many historic poses, and many of the heroes and some of the villains of the Revolution.

In '68 I moved to the city to concentrate on poetry, left most of my activism back in Queens, running contrary to the choices of almost anyone else I knew.

But I remember a "be-in" in St. Marks Place — "all you need is love" and "give peace a chance" blasting from the Electric Circus.

And on (I think it was) the first anniversary of the shooting, I pulled my taxicab over to a curb and observed the moment of silence for John.

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