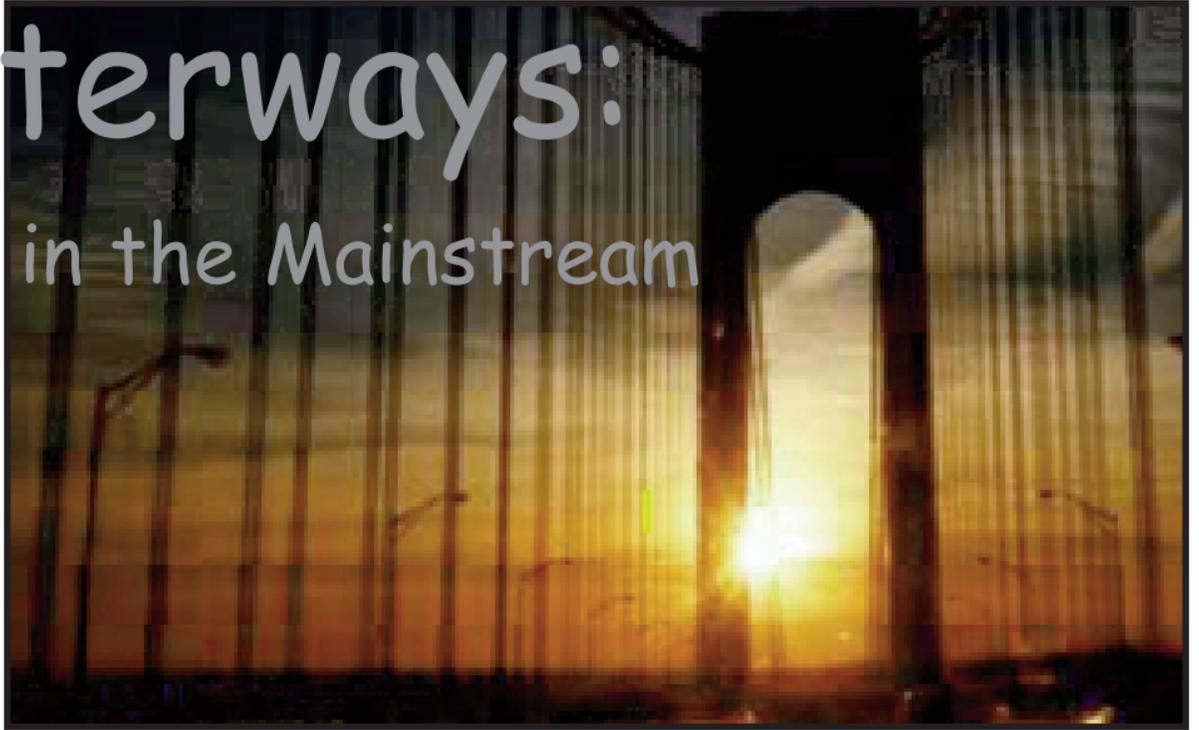


# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

28



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #6

Silence  
builds her wall  
about a dream impaled.

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

# WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 28

Number 6\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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## Last Silence — Susanne Olson

The last time  
I saw her  
she was angry  
caught in her own web  
of misunderstandings.

She did not utter a single word  
when I left, my destination  
half a world away  
did not surround me  
with blankets of caring warmth  
crucial anchor of my life.

Negated, expelled, discarded by the  
arms I needed to hold me safe

I closed the door.

The ties to my soul's living source  
were broken, ripped apart

by the silence of the lips

I begged to bless my journey.

Outcast, I traveled

across the endless ocean

tossed into a foreign land by

the hands I'd hoped

would shelter me.

Tears of void's despair  
salt of regret

and sorrow

paved the stony road

and led the way:

we never spoke again.

## Funerals and Loves — John Grey

Our third date, her father's funeral.  
down stone church steps together,  
hand brewing inside hand,  
I in my most somber suit,  
she in black, though still shapely  
and with much leg showing.  
I was the stranger in  
that close-knit family group,  
felt as if I had  
suddenly popped up  
in place of he who died.  
Weather tunneled the funeral,  
cold and gray, an incessant drizzle.

She introduced me to the people  
I would not meet again until the next one died.  
but a year later, we finally concluded  
that our love had died  
and it was just like this day,  
my face that suit,  
her looks in black.  
The world beneath was cold stone steps  
and the weather around us  
dark and dismal.  
We kissed the last time,  
sadly, pointlessly,  
like being introduced to strangers.  
When something dies,  
you see such people.

## The Window — Ida Fasel

Down by the river  
where rents are cheap,  
in the flats where flood  
is always a threat  
and houses are  
abandoned, fired, vandalized,  
old tires, auto hulks collect.  
Mother's Day roses just delivered  
by Floral Air. In the window  
a hand watering.

## Painted Silence — Joanne Seltzer

Mint-julep cool as melting snow,  
has a nap to it — the velvet  
fingered by a painter newly blind.  
It hovers like incense  
at a *Greek* mass for the dead.

I didn't invite but when it came  
offered a cup of herbal tea.  
I looked at it and it looked at me,  
two strangers with the same destiny  
filling the dark hollows of my bed.

## Name Bearers — Thomas D. Reynolds

To me, my grandfather is a picture,  
boxed in by a solid oak frame,  
staring with an inscrutable gaze  
from my aunt's faded flower print.

He is not the imperious patriarch.  
He neither intimidates into silence,  
nor beckons with benevolent gaze,  
this small collection of name-bearers.

How often I sat at the table as a child  
staring at those eyes squinting at the light,  
head cocked as if hearing an inner voice,  
one he never seems quite able to place.  
Maybe it is our faces he strains to see,  
the timber of our voices he leans to hear.  
What to make of these new breed of Reynolds.

He appears perpetually to withhold judgment.  
As judges go, he's not a gavel beater,  
but he's Arkansas shrewd, taking us all in.  
In cases involving imposters, you see,  
the looks don't quite cut it. Nor voices.  
Rather some indefinable tilt of the head.  
The glacial drift of conversation.  
A beckoning of ancient blood.  
A quality of silence.

## Abandoned Garden — William Corner Clarke

The abandoned garden  
Behind the school  
Has a host of orange trees  
But the fruit is small and green  
From lack of light  
  
Beneath the trees, debris  
Cartilage of old and strange machinery  
Poking out from pallid grass  
Pieces of stone dislodged  
From walls and ledges  
Washed out colours of sweet wrappers  
Tossed from classroom windows  
A dead cat becoming dust  
All in shadows of a shadow land  
Except for the morning  
When the light arrives with promises  
Long broken by the noon

It's an old house, this school  
Built when Zografou still lay  
Beyond the city limits  
And there must have been a time  
When light could linger there  
A time when space and living  
Mingled gladly, overflowed  
When wine was drunk on the balconies  
On sultry summer evenings  
And children's laughter  
Rang around the orange trees  
For children, like oranges  
Don't thrive in gloom

But the city sprawled and spread  
And someone built an apartment block  
Right next door  
Cursing the garden  
With sunless sadness  
Of forgotten days

## Waiting for Afghanistan — Gwenn Gebhard

Beside a barren desert road  
a man sits  
on a wood frame rope bed  
reading,  
one bent knee  
up against his shoulder,  
holding wide pages  
with both hands.  
The sparse colors  
of his white robes,  
pale striped turban,  
pink and red blanket,  
fade into the horizon  
of storm clouds  
and turbulent mountains.

## Imperfection - Ellaraine Lockie

I learned early on  
the complexity of people

How paradoxes teach confusion  
when unspeakable exploits  
are packaged with compassion

Childhood cross stitched  
in a quilt of contradiction  
Where betrayal traverses trust  
weaving in and out of the same weft

Indistinguishable and insidious  
in its undercover destruction  
From needle pricked fears  
that stuttered the security blanket

Leaving threadbare spots  
as though molested by moth  
Patches of thin skin exposed

Fifty-five years and  
finally unafraid to confront  
the bare facts of human frailty

First published in  
Sweet Annie Press

## The Man in the Alley — Rex Sexton

He stood shivering,  
hand in hand with himself,  
a bundle of rages  
holding itself  
in the dead of night,  
staring through the darkness —  
a frail, wasting, shadow of himself.  
Then he took a step forward,  
Although he had nowhere to go.

## May 10, 1990 — Carol Hamilton

The clock on her desk  
had stopped years before,  
but my father had bought it  
for her, and the clock was  
as handsome as he once was.

The clock in her kitchen  
made its little leaps  
into the future, though, in the night  
by some miracle unexplained,  
she stopped, too.

## Worldview — Anselm Brocki

When my besieged  
Inner self can't  
stand the thought  
of one more day  
at work or another  
social dinner, a less  
partisan, more  
wordly part of me  
compares my single  
well-off life of car,  
house, and health

care with the lives  
of Cro-Magnons  
spreading across  
Europe after the last  
Ice Age, oarsmen  
in a trireme after  
being rammed during  
the Battle of Salamis,  
and soldiers on both  
sides in World War I  
spending their final  
days in senseless  
muddy trenches.

## Goya's Portrait of Ferrer — Mary K. Lindberg

What would it be like,  
he thinks, green eyes  
rising from the velvety red book in his hand,  
if my wife were really  
in love with me?

His dark Byronic hair rushes  
forward, as if blown by wind  
sailing words off the page.  
Three fingers grip the verses,  
capturing the idea.

His absent gaze  
ticks the moment when  
the physical world fades;  
he sees only his own thoughts  
stirred by word, phrase,  
rhyming couplet.

She would; no she wouldn't.  
But then, if she did,  
we could do what she won't.  
That might be quite pleasant,  
even sublime. I think she will.

First published in Beloit Poetry Journal,  
Vol. 57, No. 1, Fall 2006, p.6.

## Leaving the Lowlands — Patrick Carrington

I am in no way the right man for this place.  
I try to believe I could learn to live  
like the wild animals, to find  
nourishment in seeds and berries,

at peace in the thorny chaparral,  
independent of baggage. Yet I know  
I am totally unacquainted with them,  
worried about the bread supply,

troubled I am not in any manner able  
or faithful. All men know this — and still  
I climb toward the perch of gods  
as if I am that angel looking homeward,

where each breath will slowly kill me  
because I move there uninvited,  
unwelcome, because  
I am what I am and no more.

## Senior Citizen — Bill Vernon

You walk in a crowd  
and no one seems to  
notice your presence.

Say something  
and everyone looks  
around for the speaker.

You've disappeared  
beneath gray hair.  
It's a disguise.

Few are able  
to find you  
underneath.

Even a mirror  
confirms you are  
now somebody else.

## **a hand in lifts the heart — will inman**

he was admonished to keep clean  
he was old and weak and afraid of falling in the shower

he asked if a fellow in the men's home

could help him bathe but was told that was against  
the rules, that if a fellow resident helped and fell  
the home could be sued. he could get help from outside.  
the assistant could take risk on his own.

at first a friend from his poetry workshop helped. then  
he took his risks and bathed alone.

he had by the rules to keep clean. by similar rules, he  
had to risk alone.

what loss! he could not get a fellow resident's help . . . morale could have been raised: trust could be built.

but no: the fear of being sued came first. residents lost a chance to grow stronger together.

priority was fear of loss  
to home offices.

No. risks had to be on outsiders. morale could not be raised from within residents. financial security came first.

these old men could live and die  
alone.

*23 december tucson*

## The Time and Temperature Lady — James Babbs

when I was younger  
I dialed her number  
late at night lying on  
the bed in my room  
because  
I loved the sound of  
her voice  
the way she said  
the numbers like  
she was speaking  
just to me and  
for a long time  
I thought she was

really out there somewhere  
sitting alone in some glass booth  
waiting for the phone to ring  
and even after I discovered  
she was only a recording  
there were still nights  
when I called her and  
held the phone to my ear  
after she'd finished hoping  
if I waited long enough  
her voice would come back on  
asking me  
if I was okay and  
did I need anything else

## Strength in Family — Bill Roberts

They're so tired of her at this point  
That they give a weekend party  
To honor her coming passing.  
In her bewildered state  
She accepts what is inevitable  
And will pass on for them.

To spare them further suffering,  
As they have suffered terribly  
Over her ten years of illness.  
Her doctors call the latest episode  
A tumor flare, releasing calcium  
In the system, confusion to the brain.

It will pass, he predicts,  
And she might hang on another two years,  
But her family will not have it.  
Enough, damn God, is enough.  
She, so strong over years  
Of unrelenting fight,

Will toss it in, close her eyes and  
Quit — to accommodate family,  
Most of whom I have never met,  
Most of whom were not around to  
Meet in these ten years of struggle.  
There is a strength in family.

First published in The Comstock Review, Spring 2000 Vol. 14 No. 1)

## Good Death — George Held

"I was the treating doctor, and . . . this is the first time ever a man has legally ended his life."  
Dr. Philip Nitschke, N.Y. Times 9/26/96

Voluntary euthanasia, that good  
Death, dwells with us at last,  
Now the Australian has punched the key  
On his lethal laptop.

The inexorable crab grabbing at his gut,  
His wife's hand in his, he  
Starts the process of self-  
Extermination.

The computer activates the Rube  
Goldberg apparatus  
Rigged to release enough barbiturates  
For pay-back on death row.

Like the flame-fringed scorpion  
Turning tail on itself,  
We scarcely know whether to scorn  
Or praise this creation,

Brainchild of noble Dr. Nitschke,  
known for his bedside manner  
and now a candidate for the Nobel  
Rest-in-Peace Prize.

Now the rest of us who ebb into  
The geriatric sea  
Too slowly, whose threshold for suffering  
Or self-regard is low,

Know that in the final pinch we may  
Elect to play at God,  
Author of so many other good deaths,  
And end what once was sacred.

## Where Grass Is Greener — Geoff Stevens

When young you had your ears greased  
to remove your inquisitive head  
from between the iron railings.  
Your dreams were always of places  
on the other side.

And although today the wall is high  
with broken swards of glass  
cemented to the top  
you have learnt to enter through the door  
and wonder why you never  
thought of it before.

## Obedience Re-do — Joan Payne Kincaid

She wants brown monkey and a chew stick  
in back of me on the puter chair  
tri color Parson Jack Russell  
from a long walk and obedience class  
where the substitute teacher tried to drag her  
on a metal choker until she yelped and I said enough  
and then in a corner she got tangled  
on an "about turn" and I fell like a stone  
nearly landing on her but being a Russell she's used  
to barns and horses so was way ahead of it;  
never again some stupid heel command on a metal  
choke and never forgive the guy for doing  
such to a four month old pup who was doing her best.

## The Deaf Ventriloquist — Jack Conway

There is a bag lady on Asylum Street who speaks in tongues, which ones, I have no idea. She says that her life has been like a blind man reading lips in an insane asylum.

"You don't know who to believe."

She says she is, of all things on this earth, the ventriloquist for the universe.

"I'm the one who puts words in your mouth and makes you speak," she claims.

"That's insane," I told her.

"You see," she said. "I just did it again."

"Are you telling me you put *all* the words in everyone's mouth?"

"Didn't I just say that," she said. "How could you?"

"It's hard work," she said. "I haven't got the time for this," I said.

"I'm not in charge of Time," she said. *He's* in charge of Time."

She pointed to a man carrying a green plastic bag  
filled it seemed with redeemable bottles and cans.

"It's a bad night for mouth-breathers at the redemption center," she said.  
I left her there. She's crazy as a loon. What did she think, I was a fool?  
Besides, I saw her lips move.

## This Child Rarely Smiles — R. Yurman

The long peak of his cap  
dips into his food  
shades his eyes

He cannot see the screen  
I touch his arm  
He leaves it on

It cannot bother him

He gives me gifts

a batter at ready  
meant to dangle  
from some ribboned home-team pin

glasses imprinted  
with ballplayers' faces  
lost knives discarded watches

Past the objects he hands me  
terrors gather behind him

I have nothing to offer in return

## For Tony the Cat (We Miss You Already) — Paul Kareem Tayyar

She places seven flowers upon your body,  
One for each year that she had you,  
One more for good luck as she fills in the dirt.

"I loved you so much," she says, as she closes your eyes,  
"If you want to return you know where to find me,  
If not I'll see you again when my own heart gives out."

She places the lantern over your grave,  
She lights it before blowing a kiss to the wind and going inside.

## On the Film *THE QUEEN* — Donald Lev

She looked just like the Queen, and he was a very reasonable representation of Tony Blair and being an anglophile and a little bit royalist I loved them both.

They might have been Disraeli and Victoria in some of those Palace scenes.

I remember on the day King George VI died (he reigned throughout WWII, an age of giants, & left 2 small daughters, Elizabeth the Queen and her sister Margaret Rose

who always used to be interesting copy.)  
I was in midtown Manhattan, I guess  
somewhere in my teens, I forget the actual year  
I was seeing a movie with my friend and second mother, Betty  
born in the County Galway, Irish to the core,  
who had tears in her eyes for the king, (whose death we learned of  
from the Times Square news tower) not that the Irish  
loved the British monarchy, just that  
things colonial are complex, especially emotionally.  
The elder of the two little princesses became Queen.  
She was Taurus like I was. This has to be  
in this record, it is that kind of record.

The film was basically about the Princess Di thing and of course, in that family Di was little loved, and the Queen had enough tsuris (there's probably a British upper class word for tsuris, but I don't know it) and the queen as I knew she would, kept her famous stiff upper lip stiff and came through it, naturally, with a lot of class and dignity and Tony Blair, who I do not like as Bush's lap dog, I had to like in this. He was this slightly left popular politician who understood everything.

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