

## Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #1

We are old,  
Old as song.

excerpted from *Sons of Belial*  
Lola Ridge's *Sunup and other poems* (1920)

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 28

Number 1\*

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Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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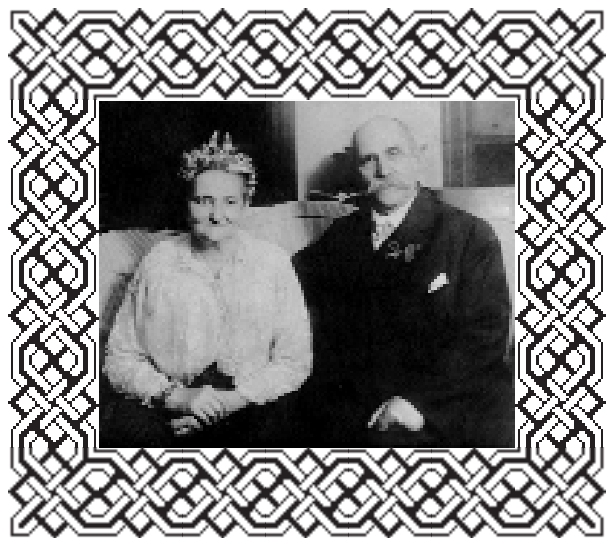
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Sarah & Samuel Lotzkar

## Elder Plans — M.M. Nichols

If you must write, write large and ink-dark: Be readable.

2HB lead pencils will ease the writing, too.

Breathe deeper.

Breakfast on protein. Not just an egg, fish! turkey!

Go for Ayurvedic early supper and bedtime.

Exercise without end.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

So young once, this future unimaginable.

*Heedless ways:*

Screamed for ice cream from April Fool's to All Souls.

Disputatious midnight oil.

No plans. Sly, pretentious, pretty!

Look out — lower consciousness is coming 'round the mountain.

Think how you step off the curb.

Arrange all four limbs to climb into the kneeling bus.

Pre-plan your funeral.

Schedule dates for exchange of jokes.

"Old age comes at a bad time."

Bite trouble by the skin of your long teeth.

The town's been quaking with fear 5 years already.

My new menus discombobulate the old order of mixing.

I forget what has to be remembered.

Love, are you with me?

Is the planet reddening? cooling? coming to terms?

## Death Watch — George Held

It's said we live an average  
of the age our parents reached;  
if that holds true I'll die the year  
that 84 is reached,  
which leaves me only seventeen  
till I have served my span,  
though accident or stroke might glean  
me early on,  
or I might reach old codgerhood,  
doddering, memory  
a memory and none I knew  
alive still with me.

Before old Father Time could scythe  
him down to size, my dad  
took fate into his hand and put  
a bullet in his head.

And I would do the same if I'd  
inherited his gun,  
but now there's anthrax and West Nile,  
I'll wait to watch the fun.

## To My Sisters of the Sea — Joanne Seltzer

Today I liberate mermaids  
from poetry and myth  
by changing you to merwomen.  
Why such discord instead of song?  
You can swim as before,  
warm your cold blooded parts  
on uncharted rocks,  
comb seaweed hair and talk about  
sexual dysfunction.

Rehearse your new name until  
the sailor thinks it summons him,  
the priest confuses it with hymn.



## Polarity — Susanne Olson

The conference spews out its learned  
flood who inundates  
the quiet plaza under ancient trees.  
She steps into the gentle sun  
carries a folder filled with papers  
walks among the throngs  
intent, determined  
absorbed in purpose.

Rain starts  
drops small globes of water  
on her business suit, silk blouse  
splashes the ground  
throws tiny clods of dirt  
on her polished shoes.  
Lost amidst the crowd  
she searches for father and mother.

Can they find her so far away  
encircled by swarms of strangers?

In the distance she discovers  
Two Lilliputian figures  
shadows flowing from the earth.  
Man and woman, shrunken old  
drown in this stream of importance.  
She hastens toward them

yet loses them from sight.  
Hope gone, she stands alone  
finds them again.

They surface from the depths  
linger forlorn by the side of the road.  
She rushes to join them  
they wait for her  
she is safe in the arms of time.

## Songster — Ida Fasel

A brown thrasher scurries  
in and out of sprinkler spray,  
making a game of showering,  
ducking, shimmeying, shaking off.  
He drinks, and finding the water  
superior, sips and sips again.

Now he flies up and curls  
his grippers round the phone wire,  
swaying with its rhythm light  
as a summer breeze settling in.  
He sends out his report —

a little song, a few notes  
so lyrical they ripple  
over and over in pleased air.

Is he rejoicing in mating prospects?  
Is he debating a nesting place?  
Does the ground look promising  
for a healthy meal of worm?

As always, I stop what I'm doing  
to listen, never missing words set  
to this bright music, for what words  
could ever match the iridescence  
in the whorls of my ears!

Or is he just happy, as I am,  
in my whorls of familiar wonders,  
for the moment his?

## On the Film 'Keeping Mum' — Donald Lev

I love the great biddies of *Great Britain!*

This is a line I composed in my mind

before I saw the film.

Maggie Smith is always worth watching

even in a film about *Grace and Providence*

in which she butchers several disposable undeveloped characters.



## Hugh Fox

Precisement qu'est que ce?  
A stand of pines, The Gold Rush.  
A glimpse of river,  
Ollantaytambo  
a touch of jungle,  
Coxumel,  
a pile of stones, an axe-head,  
The Valley of Neander,  
as if it all came here to talk to me,  
this summer afternoon.

## I am as old as song — Geoff Stevens

as the sagas of the Vikings

a boat battered by the beating of the waves

that rise and fall

like the pulse of sound

## Survival of the Fragile — Joan Payne Kincaid

How can you find  
what you were before?  
the fragility of definitions: breath move your feet  
what indicator could there be  
a holiday invasion war-like  
like going around stations of the cross  
or sitting in a class where the teacher dictates the mind;  
day to day boredom stifles impulse  
why must you write when it is Christmas  
or try to save it under file or rem activity?

Quo vadis vanish quotidian coma  
he wrote about the daily trivia  
she called about the war  
a few cards remain to be sent  
any energy that had been is gone;  
they asked if we were on a journey to oblivion  
tedium and everyone making suggestions  
still on a Sunday around a Sunday close to Christmas  
Baryshnikov and Kirkland are careening thru  
Nutcracker ethereal as birds  
and there comes a lightness of poetry in space  
the situation owns you.

Survival of the Fragile

Yawning links to now, lost again black out  
if it's one thing against advice it's that no one values it;  
on a rainy night before Christmas Eve  
piles of essentials accumulate helpless  
as incoming tidal lips accelerating;  
she asked why they didn't perceive;  
the answer was sleep — walking delusion brainwash  
the way things tumble in a machine  
or conflict between passionate ideals and self-protecting bureaucracy . . .  
that you can sail thru the air on someone's fingertips  
yet someone some TV airhead talks of being tall and blonde  
(like Giraffe she goes to Africa to measure  
their eyelashes . . .)!!! Who said if you're happy  
you've got to be missing the point;

there is something about a Parson Jack that smiles  
walking thru the park today crawls to be with children;  
she loves the world with passion  
and was bred to chase with hounds;  
some times when she's alone out doors  
I suspect she searches horses in her mind.

## Child to Bed — David Lydic

The night is soft,

The hour is late.

The boy's lips smack imagined kisses,

His sweet-scent hair fanning the pillow,

Little fingers not quite holding the new-bought book.

His dreams aloft,

He finds so great

A promise in friends to meet, mimic

Mama's teasing, days stretching to days,

Endless treasures so precious to one who's loved.

Hands set to craft

Another day.

Father smoothing Disney covers,

Sees the small figure clear in the dark.

Palm touches gently against neck curving to shoulder.

His favorite place to feel for love.



## Where the Pavement Ends — Sam Calhoun

On Spring Saturdays I'll  
begin my searchings again,  
taking my bike  
down to where the pavement ends.

Past the fading farmhouses and  
the dogwoods in bloom,  
to where the woods grow thick,  
the ground spotted with mushrooms.

From there I'll continue on foot,  
the red mud staining  
my boots, sticking in patches like memories  
to all sides on this damp morning.

I have no reason for being here  
other than I can be,  
and willing to risk whatever consequence  
occurs on this vacant country lane  
that begins where everyone else stopped,  
the maps disappear  
and where nothing matters but the sunlight  
slicing through the clouds,  
the dirt path brightened with those ray-like tears.

## Stone Steps — Hugo DeSarro

From the edge of a narrow  
and desolate road, the steps go up  
an incline into trees, a stone at a time.

Ascend the steps, push aside  
the branches, and from the top stone  
you will see a clearing and vestiges  
of a house no longer there:  
the sunken earth,  
scattered chimney brick  
and paths grassed over,  
to the outhouse and the well.

Linger a moment—listen and hear  
in the stillness the ghostly voices  
and domestic sounds of a household,  
long silenced: the voices  
of children at play, the barking  
of a dog, the closing of a door.  
And should you be tempted,  
in compassion, to pity those  
who lived in so desolate a home,  
in isolation from the greater world,  
it is well to remember that the accurate  
measure of life is what it is when it is lived,  
not what it becomes by comparison  
to another place and another time.

Life was here beyond these steps;  
it passed on. It is the way of living things  
on this orb, and the only certainty we know.

**Old Woman on an Elevator**  
**Ron Singer**

An old woman, dyed,  
bejewelled, bejangled,  
holds the elevator  
door for me.  
She's already pressed "6,"  
so let me see:  
she must be going  
to one of several doctors,  
eye or tooth,  
assuming she has  
something to fix,  
or — one other,

different possibility —  
something called  
"The Honors Bridge Club"  
(cards, not teeth,  
presumably).

The elevator shoots  
right up the shaft,  
stops at 6,  
and, quick, she's gone,  
into a maelstrom  
of initials,  
high-sounding, all,  
also official:  
"OD"

"FAAO"

"MD"

"FNAO"

"ABO"

"NCLE."

Plus "The Honors Bridge Club,"

which might be called,

for all I know

— or which I might dub —

"The HBC."

Since the woman was in

neither obvious pain,

visible discomfort,

or heat at the prospect

of an afternoon's game,

why, you ask,

did I not ask,

before continuing on,

to my own stop — fifteen —

(to the place where I buy

discount airline tix)

her destination?

Would that have been

polite of me?

Hardly.

So let's just assume

that she belongs

to the HBC.

## Meteoric — James Penha

*for Margo*

We are all  
of a piece curved  
like the universe  
banging after us  
we hear  
every star  
every planet  
every melody  
of our spheres  
amplified  
by the degradation of our senses  
and by the array of you  
listening to us



millions of years before  
we listened to this galaxy with such gravity  
we absorbed it into the point  
you do not see yet  
though you hear us  
already.

## Born Old - Lee Evans

I was born old,  
but am growing younger  
with the passing years.

One day I'll awake  
as a child, and put away  
all adulterated things.

I'll run out in the fields  
and frolic with the butterflies,  
like a calf who knows

that as he grows younger,  
he grows away  
from his slaughterhouse fate.

I was born old,  
but am growing younger  
with the passing years.

So watch me now:  
One day I'll curl up  
with a wink, and disappear.

## A Favor — R. Yurman

I stood by the low bed  
No response  
To my voice  
Then one finger moved  
Motioned me down  
Toward the mouth  
"Do me a favor"  
Almost no sound  
Just a stirring of breath  
And a barely felt  
Touch on my hand  
"Tell them  
Let me die"



