

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

c o n t e n t s

M.M. Nichols	4-5	Hugh Fox	17	Ron Singer	30-31
George Held	6-7	Geoff Stevens	18	James Penha	32-33
Joanne Seltzer	8	Joan Payne Kincaid	19-22	Lee Evans	34-35
Susanne Olson	9-12	David Lydic	23-24	R. Yurman	36
Ida Fasel	13-15	Sam Calhoun	25-26		
Donald Lev	16	Hugo DeSarro	27-29		

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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"

