

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
27



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #10

Enlarge my Life with Multitude of Days,
In Health, in Sickness, thus the Suppliant prays;
Hides from himself his State, and shuns to know,
That Life protracted is protracted Woe.

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 10*

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Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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Barbara Fisher



some call it second sight — will inman

some folks with cataracts
see better than others with good eyes
(how much have we been told is impossible
until we can't see it even if it's in front of us)
if you have cataracts, you'll find yourself
seeing unreal things from inside
projected on those gray screens
look at them awhile, they're as real
as rocks —

oh don't sweat some'll say you got
rocks in your head: at least you know
what you got:

they don't know, being so proof
against dark unders

when lasers peel away cataracts, will you
remember what you know? or will you deliberately
blind yourself again with what you can
observe and measure only?

it's like making a poem with regular beat
ta tum, ta tum to a metronome
when all the time, inside, your own heart
tells variations on an infinite theme

if you have cataracts, learn to see
better by their diminishing light:
then when they're gone, remember to be,
darkly, o suspicious of first sight!

Love/Hate — Hugh Fox

Watching too many French films, especially Eric Rohmer, every night an hour of neurosis, nastiness, desperate sexuality, confusion, the weather changes, at minus ten it was survival at plus forty it's Mardi Gras without the *gras*,

"Goodnight, my love,"

"Sleep well."

"You too."

Lights out, kiss sounds in the dark as I go to my room.

"Hope to see you in the morning."

"Me too."

"I love you."

"Me too."

On the train to Belsen, herded into the gas chambers,

"Breathe deep, the deeper you breath, the less the pain."

Geoff Stevens

Resolve, not pleas
changes more successfully
the base life into gold,
dries the wound of disappointment
better than the unanswered prayer.
A life extended by days unfulfilled
is ill conceived.
Live your life by resolve
not pleas.

Sunday Morning — Joan Payne Kincaid

*All my films...
show a world without
love.. Federico Fellini*

Now that the Doberman is gone there is more time to do things on the spur of the moment so punching in the remote I come across a film in Italian on TV without subtitles forcing me to remember studying the language at the New School and performing Puccini and Mozart with Tony Amato at the Amato Opera Company.

The film is operatic in scope and emotional detail.

It is clear how the natural rhythm of speech is inclined toward song;

the dialogue seems to be mostly questions: *che volio, per che, come, che questo*, all revealing alienation and hostility:

foreign songs . . .

Indian or Middle Eastern, Chinese

differences erode in the mind's sound . . .
domani, bravo, coraggio, a nostro amore, volio partire . . .
to leave the impossible relationships;
lascia mi parlare . . . woman a mere sex toy,
impotence of relationship easily cut-off on a cell phone;
death by self-sacrificing female victim
and the *messenger* is TV perceived by isolated characters
totally removed from each other yet
simultaneously observing the event unfold on screen;
a Don Giovanni character comments matter-of-factly
"la donna e mobile comme il vento."
When the film is over I think again of the faithful and loving dog
who lies with the wind
singing over his grave.

Sri Lanka: Children of the Sea — Mary K. Lindberg

Standing like ancient statues
in golden sand against a rising sun,
eyes soaring like lines cast
for rarely-seen schools,
wet-faced men and women
wait. Hours. Days.

The sea their gentle net,
generations of readiness
for early morning
fishing. They expect
a unique catch —
churning, rose-tinted waves
returning bodies,
their children.

You Opted for Non-Life — Susanne Olson

You live in a world
which I don't understand,
disconnected from reality,
bypassing life. You escape
to the night and shun the day. Are you
thinking, dreaming, or just existing?

You can't face the day, not function
at all, without darkness's help. I want to see
into your soul. What demons lurk there,
what festering sores,
what pain, anger, hatred, and fear,
that need to be numbed?

I try to reach you, to share with you
what gives my life meaning and worth. You shut
me out, homing in on yourself. You spin
your cocoon of intoxication. Inside,
you feel safe and secure. What
terrible waste of a brilliant mind!

And yet, your life is yours alone.
You create your path and follow it
step by painful step.

What Is Left You — David Michael Nixon

As though the floor had rotted beneath your feet
and you had fallen to the damp dirt basement
and lay there in the pain and wetness,
waiting for rescue by a loving god
who did not even capitalize his name,
you lie there in your broken life and lie
to what is left you of a mind that once
could leap tall volumes in a single bound.

This is where you are and how you try to keep
yourself from giving up. What of the truth?
If you could hear it, would you let it in
(and what would become of you then)
or would you bar your mind's door strongly,
hoping to keep devouring truth outside?

What They Didn't Tell Us — George Held

No wonder our parents never told us
That if we lived long enough
We'd sicken and die, that we die
Alone, or if we were lucky
We'd die in a flash, of a stroke
Or an infarct. We knew pretty young
We might die in a car wreck or die
Of polio, because other kids had,
But if we made it out of our teens,
Our parents assured us, we'd make money
And live a long life of health and wealth.
Only when we live long enough to see

Our parents sicken and we have to look
After their bodily excretions
And try to figure out their addled words
And inexpressible needs,
Know their pain and see their fear, meet
Morphine and flirt with Euthanasia,
And watch them sicken and die before
Our very eyes and realize that we too
Will sicken and die with no one
To meet our own inexpressible needs,
Only then do we know what they didn't tell us
And why.

Betty, In Memoriam — Joanne Seltzer

She left us,
took a terminal walk,
went for a swim.

The sea-thing she became
washed ashore the next day
for still another journey
only to return as ash,
the contents of a vase.

Cancer did not get her, no,
she left us like a flower
on a broken stem.

Losses — Joanne Seltzer

She was a knockout in her day — real sexy —
this mother of mine with nasty bedsores
on her backside, her pubic hair mostly
fallen out. She doesn't shave her legs anymore,
tells me with something approaching glee
that one of the benefits of old age
is that shaving isn't necessary
no matter how sheer her nylons. The damage
caused by ruptured disk, fractured hip, two
mental collapses, three hernias, three
dead husbands plus near Biblical span of years
seems too
heavy to be ignored — along with arteries
neither of us trust. But the hardest to bear
isn't the losses: it's what we remember.

Cravings for the Cord — Brooke Strauss

Dreaming of the womb;
Imagining the warmth,
the view,
Of the curve
of the belly from the inside

Dreaming of a time
when the heart was too tiny to ache
and fingers had no desire to intertwine

A time when words didn't have the power
to hurt,
disappoint,
or stab one's eardrums

A time before halfway hugs
And air blown kisses

A time when it took just a little kick to make you feel alive

Sometimes
I wonder if we cry
in those first few seconds
because we don't have the words to say
Please

Don't

Cut

The Heart in Wider Fields — Ida Fasel

With thee conversing I forget all time — John Milton

They ask me
like a Catechist,
Rehearse the Articles of thy Belief.

Searching,
still searching
for the holding pattern,
staying power, last words,

I arrive creedless at dialogues
with God,
I with no Hebrew, no carrying
voice,

he with a full tonal range from
gentle legato to dramatic
fullness and power:
such beautiful things to hear
in the silence of inner spirit,
like the eloquent words
that come to you in the night,

not anything you can write down.

Evolution — Fran Farrell Kraft

We're frolicsome and fancy-free
Our youthful triumphs know no end
We're flighty and we will not see
From dust we come, dust shall we be

Years roll on, the road's seen to bend
A little, we begin to yearn
For more, begin to comprehend
From dust we come, dust is our end

The golden years no longer burn
For glory, for a jubilee
Of me and now we finally learn
From dust we come, to dust return

On the Film *A Scanner Darkly* — Donald Lev

I feel I am riding between Buddhist chariot wheels into
a future I pray remains future:
a far too druggy one for Robert Downey Jr. to
environ himself in if he is ever to
complete his recovery
(I feel a particular concern for him since
he and I both made our film debuts
in his father's *Chafed Elbows* where
he dozes in his mother's arms, while I
am being thrown off a roof onto Burns Street
Forest Hills); a piece of information nobody
needs to know but I thought I'd throw it in
with all the other fragments in this one-third-empty
jigsaw puzzle box of a film.

8/06

Afghan — Patricia Wellingham Jones

You crocheted it
in those long hours
after your by-pass.

When stronger,
you went to yard sales
and picked up scraps
and snippets and ends of rolls.

Hand diving
into sacks full of yarn
you plucked out
random strands in neon colors.

Inch by inch
your garish creation
grew.

I encouraged your hobby,
even called it therapy,
unaware of your plan

then threw on a smile
the day you presented it
wrapped in tissue
tied with gold cord.

Now in my sleepless nights
I wrap myself in that afghan—
jags of clashing hues,
edges wobbling
in and out.

The Penny Flute — Rex Sexton

Like ghosts in a dream, we huddled in the alley doorways,
hunched up against the raging snowstorm, and waited for
the Rescue Gospel Mission to let us in from the lethal night.
The usual assortment of city shadows on the loose, all shivering
in our Salvation Army castoffs.

Inside, there was oatmeal, a hot shower, and later (after they tossed
us out to panhandle for the day) a bowl of stew and a cot for the night.
In between, there were sermons, repent signs, pictures of Christ, Hell,
Satan, and the loathing looks of the Saved.

The satin shroud descending was all there was to see. All there was to
feel was frostbite and our minds and souls growing numb from the cold.

I had just been released from the County Correctional Institution and found myself half wishing I were back. But we all were wishing we were somewhere else, or someone else doing anything else, which is probably not an unusual wish, on any day, for the drifters, druggies, dipsos, jailbirds, the beggars, tramps and the mentally diseased who haunt the city's skid row missions. Perdition is our normal lot; but sitting in a blizzard was a little over the top.

A small child sat shivering beside me on the mission steps, clinging to the arm of her sleeping mother, who was not much more than a child herself. Thin, pale, disheveled, she sat slumped forward, in the swirling snow, head bowed, eyes closed, elbows resting on her knees. A tiny baby slept on her lap. Now and then, the little girl would peek at me. lost, frightened, eyeing me, no doubt, as another phantom in a nightmare which would not stop.

This was long ago and far away, and my memory of all roads which traveled nowhere in my life, and all the steps which led to nothing, and all the stops in between, are as blurry as the snowstorm was that day. But there were a number of odds and ends mixed in with us in the alley, driven from their flops and flats and slum tenements by a lack of heat. Odd happenings in life stay with you, and back then was not like it is today, where homeless families, jobless Joes, and penniless pensioners are common sights most anywhere, sleeping in the parks, alleys, vacant lots, or in cars or vans or out on the sidewalks. Watching the hurricanes on the newscasts brought back — Katrina, Rita, Wilma — with the thousands of lives displaced by an “act of God.” But then what act isn’t?

I had a penny lute in my pocket. I found it in my cell, hidden by some former inmate, maybe to be turned into a shank. The slim, tin, sad little excuse for an instrument helped pass the time, its lost lament filling the void in the dead of night.

I slipped it out and played it for the little girl, who peeked at me, cautiously,
as I tooted my lonely cell tune into the blizzard.

Listen to the wishes in the well
Listen to the wind atop the hill
Listen to the patter of the rain
Listen to the story of the dream

Listen to the silence of the night
Listen to the love birds in their flight
Listen to the whisperings in the dark
Listen to the beating of your heart

I smiled when I finished and held the tiny flute out
for her to take. But she shivered and turned away.

The Secrets of Life and Death — John Grey

The car slams into a telephone pole.

I check to see if I'm alive

as if there's any way of knowing,

as if it'd be available to me

in this shaken state if there was.

Next, I investigate the one

in the passenger seat.

Is she alive or dead?

No way of telling what I am

how could I recognize what she is?

We're speaking to each other now,

our voices raspy, twisted like

the metal that digs into our bone.

We're hearing and we're understanding
so we're both the same
whatever that is.
But who can say that for sure.
Maybe one of us is one thing
and one of us the other
and there's already some haunting going on.
Didn't they always say,
the truth is out there somewhere?
Maybe they meant in here.
Maybe it wasn't the truth
they were talking about.

thoughts at the end of August — Michael A. Flanagan

the birds talk and the oceans
rain and something goes
wrong, in your bones you
feel an ache that is not
metaphor, you wake now,
tired each day, there's pain
when you walk, the knees
and the arms and the neck
and the back, it seems to be
everywhere, and naturally
you think cancer, but is

it real, you wonder if maybe it's just age, the booze, and all the old sad chemicals you used to pump down your throat like peanuts, has all of it come back to haunt you or are you just self absorbed, using your time these sunny days to give yourself something to worry about, are you a fool or are you a fool, the doctor will tell you everything, but you don't go, if you wait

too long it will be too late,
the way the sky shifts, the
clouds movement, the smell
of rain, hot summer, crisp
cool autumn air, your nine
year old daughter holds your
hand walking thru a grocery
store, you can't be dying, the
whole thing is absurd, it's real,
but no, no, no, it must be
other than the blank black end

No Room — Anselm Brocki

"I don't like one bit what's happening to me," Harvey says to Laughing Mildred at the All-Nite this morning in their private corner booth.

"When I first went homeless after getting over the shock of being evicted, it was like breaking free from the rat race — no more job, rent, or saying nice things every morning when you didn't feel like it — but I still had

big bitter ideas about how the world works, who bosses are, and what they want.

"All the time I was reading the paper, getting stirred up inside or laughing at new laws they passed to keep the poor where they are, but no I'm getting more like all the guys who come here. All I think about lately is scrounging enough money to get one of those big, thick army sweaters at the Surplus.

"Who cares if it's sick green?
It'll do the job of keeping
me warm. It was so cold
in the alley last night that
I had to wear my shoes.
You know how that feels
after the blood stops
circulating. I might even
have to invest in one
of those sleeping bags
with a hood because I'm
working up to an earache,
and there's absolutely no
room in my life for an earache."

Visiting Father — David Chorlton

*I went to your aunt's funeral, he says, but refused
to speak to anyone. I put the flowers down
and stood in the shadows
where nobody would see me. There's no use
in talking when you don't understand
the language, family or not, and besides
they all make me sick. After all the digging
I did in her garden
she might have thought of me,
but not a penny. Not that I care; for thirty years
it's been the same. I talk in English,
everybody listens in German. He pulls*

The Daily Mail from the news rack,
reads a few pages and returns it. *Since your mother died
I don't hear from anyone. I can't wait
to get out of Vienna and sit in Tenerife
With a beer and the sun for company.* I suggest
some places where he'd find company,
and tell him who has asked
how he's getting along. *It's a waste of time
visiting because I won't be invited back
and there's nothing I can say to anyone
that they'd understand. I wish I'd never have come here
in the first place.* We tighten our scarves
and go outside. *I never know when I'll need
to find a toilet. The doctor has no idea*

what he's talking about so I put up with it. I make suggestions for a better diet. At home I open a can or put a packet in the microwave.

When you're alone all you need is to be full and have a drink. Television's bloody awful here though I'll watch an action film because what is said doesn't matter anyway.

When I ask whether he'd come with me to see an exhibition he waves a hand and sweeps my words aside. Paintings all look the same to me. I wouldn't know what I was looking at. You go. Do what you like. You always did. Don't think you can come here for a week And change things. I didn't invite you.

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