

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
27



#11

Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #11

Who frown with Vanity, who smile with Art,
And ask the latest Fashion of the Heart,
What Care, what Rules, your heedless Charms shall save,
Each Nymph your Rival, and each Youth your Slave?

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 11*

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c o n t e n t s

Sylvia Manning	4-6	Lyn Lifshin	12-14	Matthew Landrum	20-21
John Grey	7-8	Geoff Stevens	15	Joanne Seltzer	22-23
Ida Fasel	9-10	Mary Lindberg	16-18	Anselm Brocki	24-26
Hugh Fox	11	Jim Hart	19	Donald Lev	27-28

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We Could Have Been Beautiful — Sylvia Manning

We could have been beautiful
also, as beautiful
as these the Quebecois —
open, trusting —

but we unfortunately
used all our goodness
to fight the fight against
Vietnam, evil war

and it sapped our young
of that sweetness we suppose
exists no longer, though it does

among these who have no
deep cultural shame
to always have to hide.

We could have become again
as beautiful as they,
the Quebecois, who after all
are only human.

But then the next wars
came easily across us,
and now we know
that we are lost,
this time for good.

So we can only glimpse
in others, as these are,
these Quebecois,
beautifully human, young and old,
what we killed in ourselves
through killing others:
the human soul.

Anna in the Mirror — John Grey

You just have to believe the mirror.
You just have to relate
to the wealth of its silences.
Repentance be damned
and regrets could never look this good
in a pane of glass.
You have to be your own moth
In your own flame.
What better for your boat in their storm
than to tie up
to your own reflection.

Nothing to be learned outside of this.
No tearing, no burning
to suffer some deeper truth.
That's too expensive anyhow.
You can afford this.
So spend yourself like a small fortune
On your own face, your own body.

For this is the meeting place, serene.
This is where you come to
Acquire your own legend.
Oh what logic it is.
Oh what a silent and blissful shining.

Self-Portrait — Ida Fasel

She has
painted herself
in reverse, hair braided
straight to the rump. Is she hiding
secrets

of the
universe in
her face, a vivid stroke
or two challenging the viewer
to guess?

Is she
ugly to the
point where ugly becomes
beauty? Or indeed the other
way round?

I would
linger for a
touch of something baffling—
a Mona Lisa hinting at
a smile.

For Lynn — Hugh Fox

We've never flesh-to-flesh met, but pictures
and e-mails every morning-evening,
we bring on each others' dawns,
nightfalls, rain and forest fires,
lava earthquakes, the swinging
of the seasons, her and her polio—
wheels, me and my orchiectomy,
a Rembrandt today, a Renoir
tomorrow, Sigfried and Brunhilde,
Debussy, La Fille Avec les Cheveux
de Lin. The Maid with the flaxen hair,
reaching across oceans into the
impossibilities of all-time/space
eternity.

The Pretend Poet in Boston — Lyn Lifshin

It's fine that I no longer
remember his name. Or
just what was so shady
about him. He fawned
over me after I read in
Boston, held me while my
mother waited, anxious
to leave. "Niskayuna
the next weekend," he

whispered in my hair. I
admit. I melted. He never
called. Unfortunately
his name is coming
back as I write this,
Bart, and the name of
a man who was probably
president then. I was be
tween lovers between
knowing the next place
in my life so it wasn't

surprising another poet
appeared interesting
enough for a Saturday
night tho when he re-
used tea bags, washed
out and saved his paper
yogurt cups, I thought
anyone that stingy
couldn't manage life
with another poet

VAMP — Geoff Stevens

Fashion is a variation on a theme,
the way you go about your vamping,
it's your certain style, a gimmick to convince,
a preference over rival diversions,
that are not so well applied.

You are a may-fly-complete, not just a nymph,
Some failed creature that has not achieved
Its full potential metamorphosis.

Sarah Bernhardt Exhibited — Mary Lindberg

Sarah Bernhardt Exhibited
(Icon of an age, very thin, splayed hair,
her leggy Hamlet played to
full houses.)

Famous for dying on stage, she
entombs herself in a coffin amidst roses.
In the finally filled box
captured on film,
her carriage crux of procession,
streets of Paris burst
their banks as men
in black hats and mustaches
scramble to keep up.

When the work of art is a person,
what do we see?

Center stage
an empty serpentine girdle
sparkling silver and gold;
bronze sculpture
of female lover;
headless tiara
of glistening stones;
"quand meme" on silver
spoon handle, embroidered
on velvet gloves, carved
in her doorway-shrine,

reminder she played
"against all odds"
all the time.

At night
museum lights dim,
corset shadows wither.
Sarah sneaks into the stays
outstretches her arms,
faints, and dies
slowly, again
and again.

Nutritional Facts Not on the Label — Jim Hart

She refuses to eat — until he comes back she will starve herself thin — pretty — all the things he wants — wanted her to be — she will be through starvation.

I remind her of his stories of women left behind — of his bragging that his will was stronger than their won't — and ask — a bit sheepishly — how many dead women she thought there'd be — if all who came before her — had taken the same tact.

Footwashing — Matthew Landrum

It is no easy thing
Washing one's feet
In the bathroom sink,

For washing the second foot
Means standing on the first;
Still slippery and wet against the bathroom floor.

Perhaps it would be better
To towel dry
And not risk the linoleum,

But there is little thought of this
In the bustle
Of a Friday night;

Cindy Lou will be at the door soon
And it would be best
Not to have dirty feet.

How to be a Tough Old Broad — Joanne Seltzer

Wear something purple
as in a poem
and the announcement
you are now a Red Hat
brassy more than gold,
an image that embraces
insults of age.

Pose with other Red Hats
also dressed in purple,
scowl at the camera
until it blinks,
pretend life is just
a parlor game
no one wins or loses.

Nonlinear — Anselm Brocki

Which came first—
past, present, or
future? Obviously
the present into
which we were born
to be contented
with successive
moments of sun
on new grass, wind
through trees, rain
spatter, and night
stars for several
million years.

Future next, about
10,000 B.P. when
smart enough to
invent Elysian fields,
Valhalla, nirvana,
and seventh heaven.

Last and clearly least
important of all —
the past, considered
lightly in the 14th —
century Renaissance
dabbling in lost Greek
and Roman art, not

taken seriously until
the 19th by archaeologists
in the Middle East,
Darwin, and later Leaky
in Africa, whose efforts
many still consider
doubtful or a waste
of time.

On the Film *The Illusionist* — Donald Lev

We seem to be in old Vienna or old Prague
sometime in the old Hapsburg days.

We are under the illusion that Jessica Biel
has been murdered by this really evil tempered
crown prince, yet flickers beside us in a
stunning period dress, and we'd do anything to
not give up the illusion, so we join her in an
illusion of our own, but this not
entirely corrupt police chief
apparently traces us somewhere where Jessica
dressed now in charming simplicity, is
brushing her horse.

All the actors, except the crown prince, are beautiful, the setting makes us nostalgic for the old regime, and illusions are charming but often don't last . . .

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