

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
27



#8

Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #8

A Frame of Adamant, a Soul of Fire,
No Dangers fright him, and no Labours tire;

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 8*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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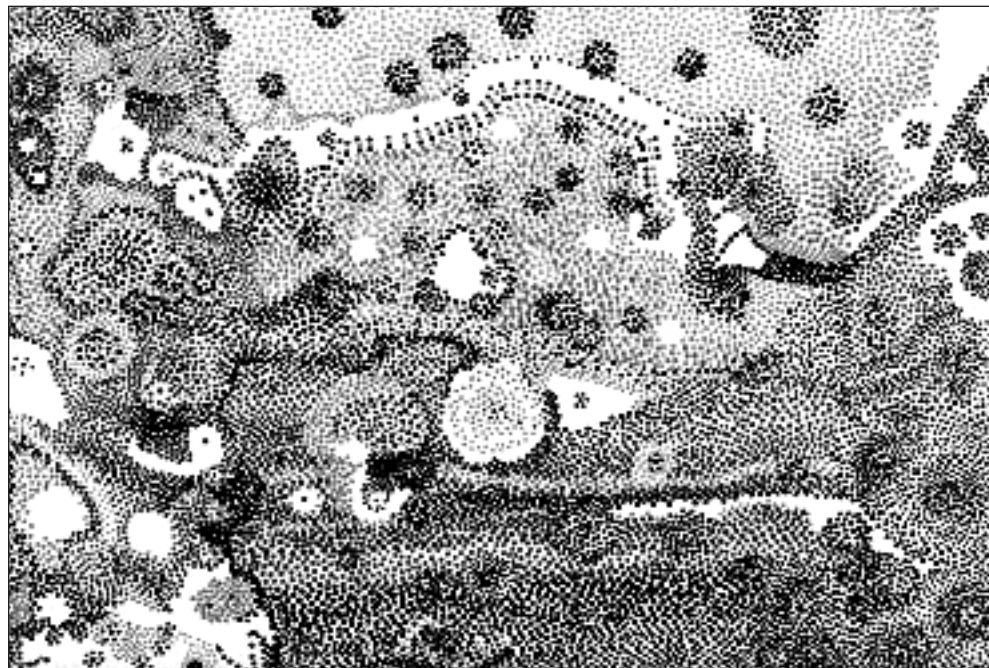
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desert child — will inman

she lies naked under rags. world gone
shrunk like an old apple leans over. her eyes
look up at world as from sea bottom
to hull of a ship, passing over, blind.
world wants her, needs her, but she
is still too young to help

yet she longs. hopes. world's lean eyes
feed her hunger, her stomach swells, she
cries

give her an old bone to suck on, let her
press her gums to that; her mother's dugs
are dry

(where are those who call abortion murder?)
(where do they hide the milk?)
(how do they spend their money?)
(what do they plant in the mouths of their young?)

she's black, you say? she's over there somewhere?
she doesn't matter in the balance of things?
her cry is not in tune with the song of god?
her wasted body will help reclaim Sahara?

(where are those who await the second coming?)
(where are those who pass by on the other side?)
(where are those who make the world safe from everybody else?)
(where are those who imagine Lazarus and God have to be male?)

it is she who groans at the tomb of your blindness
it is she who will raise you to yourself
it is she who will make the world safe for us all

unless we stay dead to her starving

Home Visit — Patricia Wellingham Jones

The redhead in careless
bloom of youth
peeks over the banister
of the old family home, hisses
to her mother, my sister,
Here comes Aunt Pat's boyfriend!

They dissolve into giggles,
as do most local women,
at the gangly, ill-shaven man
lumbering up to their door.
They see only the rabbit teeth
under a crooked nose under close-set eyes
bracketed by large ears.

The boys know a different man.
They sweat with him
as they dig trails, build footbridges
over creeks, work to save
the woods around the town.
They do laugh behind his back
when he plants flowers
at signposts among the trees.

Old Boy Scouts, now the men of the town,
watch him driving his beat-up van,
hauling their sons armed with tools
and water for a day's heavy work
in the forest.

The men never notice the shambling gait,
wringing hands, skin fiery around women.
Their memories see the confident stride,
swing of hammer and arm, balance
on a beam — skills he taught them
and is teaching their boys.

i dreamed i was working on an assembly line — Michael A. Flanagan

i dreamed i was working on an
assembly line putting together
episcopalians. in the dream i
didn't know what episcopalians
were supposed to look like so
i began making them roman
catholics; i'd been raised a
roman catholic and thought
it might be easier. when i
was young my mother had a
thing for the parish priests,
she was always having them
over for dinner. growing up

i had to go to church every
sunday. when i had the
dream i was home in bed.
my wife told me i was
laughing in my sleep; the
laughter had annoyed her
and she woke me up. lying
there still half asleep i felt
wonderful: it seems in the
dream i had been god, and
in the first few moments
of consciousness, the roar
of all knowing hadn't quite
gone out of my head.

Geoff Stevens

What need of gentleness,
the soft touch given,
the soft touch received,
the warmth without a flame
that scorches flesh,
that sears the brain?
What need of peace,
The haven safety of a home,
A place to rest from toil?
The hard man scorns,
but time will come
when the hard man needs.

Carni-Vale — Matthew Landrum

Spinning arms of the octopus
wave farewell to flesh.
Shish kabobs,
conies,
and Polish sausage
spin on long rotisseries,
dripping grease
into perpetual piles
of peppers and onions.

Barbeques smoking behind
ramshackle stands,
mix pungent aromas

with the sweet smells
from the confectioner's shop
and the sweat of the summer night.

Saintlike,
smiling over
the crazed revolutions of the gravitron,
the Ferris wheel glides
another circuit.

Screams cut
the heavy air
as the zipper
clatters
a rotation.

Fortunes are lost and won
on circus games
and spun like cotton candy
at the gypsy's booth.

Stumbling off rides
or stumbling drunk
the revelers
trip the trodden grass
where the lovers pass,
looking at one another with
carnivorous eyes.

Gangsters — Bill Roberts

I hang on to you, my little man,
for you demand undivided attention.
It's spring and things fly up
from new moist grass,
flitting erratically, causing you
to leap, bound, squirt in different
directions, ignoring the leash,
pulling like a sixty-pound sled dog
instead of the standard dozen-pounder.

A lady runner this morning
suddenly stopped to caress you,
laughing when I told her you were
half longhair dachshund,
most likely half black leopard.
You're four and a half and
should have outgrown your childish
ways by now, but no matter.
I'm going on seventy and
together we're the childish, mis-
chievous, unpredictable gang of two.

Subway Truths — Brooke Strauss

Racing underground
Flashes of light between blinks
Faces with no gleams in the eyes

I'm hoping that no one notices that the speedy curves make
my fingers
curl tightly
around the top of the seat in front of me.
Commuter next to me reads the morning paper.
Does he know that the touch of his thigh against mine comforts me?

Little girl on the other side
looks at me curiously with a tilted head,
as my eyes dart from word to word on the "In Case of Emergency" sign.

Wonder if she knows how to read.
Couple in the corner;
Each of them sits with folded arms and
the woman inches away to the edge of her seat and crosses her legs.
I wonder if she'll forgive him.

Young mother holds her baby tightly in her arms,
as she studies the map across from her
looking for a destination.
Does she know where she wants to go?

As a woman offers her seat to an elderly man,
I try to guess how many more times he will ride this train.

As the subway slides into the next stop,
those left standing bump against each other like pinballs .

The doors open then smack back together like a giant's hands catching a fly.
I bite my bottom lip as a hurried businessman leaps to save his life.

Finally the train pulls in to my stop.
It's the last one on this line.
The rest of us are forced to go up the stairs
and back outside to a place
where subway truths are left behind.

Top of the World — Mary K. Lindberg

"Many victims are spread throughout the so-called Himalayan death zone, a surreal region in the range of 24,000 feet where life can't be sustained"
(New York Times June 18, 2005).

I dare not linger
or slow my pace,
else join icy climbers
littered like terracotta
smashed on tile.

But I am tempted to halt
on Everest and greet
that German woman
who died sitting up,

her long black hair still blowing
four thousand feet below the summit.

And nod to the young man
spread-eagled in blinding yellow gear
who froze dialing
his cell phone for help.

At 24,000 feet
right and wrong
morph into cold and warm
— I have seen it —
men and women step
over the frozen fallen
not daring or caring
to stop for them.

Down On My Knees — David Michael Nixon

Down on my knees
in the dirt, whose
weeds these are I
do not know or
am not sure, but
the woman whose
garden this is
has given me
tips: these are the
cultivated
plants; here are the
weeds to pull; there
a pretty weed to
keep; if unsure,
don't pull, come ask.

Given my own
way, I might let
everything grow,
but I need the
money, so these
staunch weeds must die.

I grip them and
I rip them out.

Hardy Males — Ron Singer

Somewhere in the frozen north — no, south —
close to where the polar ice cap melts,
a penguin stands, an egg atop his feet.
All dressed up in ice-blown finery,
he wiles the months away, sucking up the chill.
Applying Darwin's theory, you might say,
he's making sure his genes survive.

Meanwhile, back in the temperate zone,
short of stature, bare on top, round in shape,
a human father hops from foot to foot,
shaking, dancing, cowering in the shower,
waiting for the water to get warm.

Feet flat and splayed, Charlie Chaplin-style,
bird and man, both hardy males, very much alive.

On the 1948 Classic *The Fallen Idol* — Donald Lev

What is black and white
but impatience with all
that delays truth?
I got there late
but caught up in no time;
the couple in the tea house;
the kid looking through the window;
beautiful throatcatching London;
and in the end, the mind on the gun
which doesn't go off, thank God!
Brigid Murnaghan (Interview, Home Planet News #54)
finding Graham Greene "erotic"
gave me a laugh when I need it.

3/06

On the Film *Leonard Cohen-I'm Your Man* — Donald Lev

I missed the crystal sound of
Judy Collins, with her immaculate diction.
Too many singers today end the notes of their
songs (if that's what they think they're doing)
beyond recognition. Even Canadians. I
tend to look up to Canadians as images of
what northamericans should be.
After all they honor as one of their great
poets and singers this
gentle, celestially confused,
Jewish gentleman
who together with Jesus and Suzanne
enters your heart and just sits there.
I didn't know he was an ordained zen priest.

He is, after all, and in all probability,
ordained by birth into an even more ancient priesthood,
to which he brings honor.

8/06

Winter Solstice XXI — Hugh Fox

It becomes twenty-four hours a day of night, almost-night, a touch of light, then night again, all she seems to be able to think about is The Dead back in Brazil, dead boyfriends, aunts, her secretly Jewish father who prayed mysterious private prayers the eighteenth of every month, eighteen as in H'ai, the Hebrew word for life, every letter with its numerical equivalent that in H'ai adds up to eighteen, her mother, dead at sixty from lung problems, she's back in Florianopolis almost full time, beach and islands, Christmas means summer for her, and I'm back when the Atacama Desert was all swamps and rivers and lakes, before the Andes rose, when everything was frozen except for a narrow strip around the equator and Paleolithic man wasn't paleo at all but fresh and new and very much alive, like me today, one of my better days, even accompanied by my ancient ghosts.

An Artist in Vienna — David Chorlton

A criminal with hands in his pockets
looks over his shoulder
toward the winter breath
coming from his pursuer's mouth.
A judge stares through his passive spectacles
at the noose around the neck
of a man he has condemned. The eyes
with which a murderer
surveys what he has done with an axe
suggest that he can't help himself.
These are the early works
of Franz Probst, on whose stairway
I followed the scent of turpentine
and alcohol until reaching his door

which he opened with a smile
for every visitor. Nobody knew him then,
beyond the few who shared
his whiskey, always aged for seven years,
and the stories he told
of being an artist in a family of women.
When the last of them died
he broke all their furniture and picked up
where he had left off forty years earlier,
beginning with a portrait of himself
the way he looked at war's end
with blue hunger for a face. Lifting weights
kept the power in his arms
but his drawing hand came loose
so the lines were never as sure
as they were when he was young

and wandered through the Jewish quarter
sketching beards and black silk coats.
With an altar on his kitchen table
built of postcards and clippings
from the daily news, surrounded by candle wax
and shot glasses, he used to weep
as he stood his latest picture on the easel
and flexed his muscles to prove
that he was strong where other men were violent.

Reading — Anselm Brocki

In addition to memorable
ways writers put words
together, like "Shall I compare
thee to a summer's day"
and new facts, like mirror
neurons that enable us
to mimic and understand, my
other reason for reading
at breakfast, lunch, and just
before bed is awareness

of my being an informational
device made up of wet cells
that can somehow remember
tan symmetrical smile lines,
skyscrapers building themselves
with inner cranes and hairy
marathon legs running; put
them together to make stories
with a beginning, middle, end,
and purpose; project stories
both backward and forward
for a convincing past and future

and thereby conspire with
writers in a created thought
world within an ongoing,
uncaring universe of space,
planets and stars, one in which
my name and feelings exist
as long as my memory cells
are buffeted by the stuff
of living and keep firing
this illusion that is me.

Spastic Twin and Her Sister — M. M. Nichols

Toddlers, often content together
somewhere else,
far away from the drapery-darkened house

Now ferried across a lake
to its wide strand: life-hugging
earth under a sun.

Somebody carries her over the dimpled beach,
the gulping sand.
Another somebody helps her plant

one foot in it, then
the other and WHAT, STAND? Take her hand,
precious Lord!

She falls: rubbery octopus, laughing
in the wind and waving
to lake waves. We don't know danger.

Nobody
could stand still
on ground so whimsical.

We slept through virgin nights, children born of
air and hidden suns, lulled surf,
the sailing planet, love.

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