

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

27



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #9

Fresh Praise is try'd till Madness fires his Mind,
The Waves he lashes, and enchains the Wind;

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 9*

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Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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song roots — Will Inman

dark deep in us sounds an ocean drum
in an inward valley copse flute a finch
and a thrush. winds pluck a rainbow harp. we
are never without primal joy.

blue skywings
transport us into joy-deeps of nearness. we
can go far in to rediscover ourselves.

how hard we try to smother our inner songs.
how we strive to turn our drum only
into furystorms.

black holes are not our
ultimate soundless sounds. we have known joy
in the wide risks of waking. the demonic

whirlbasts burst out and under with new
beginnings, sources of fresh drums
and songs.

we do not need to wait, we cannot
wait: our flaming dusts carry what is known in us
deeper than pain. drums and song, shorn and
shattered, outlive fury. even god's. that dark
whirl, penetrating down, sows our knowings
in a beyond-time waking.

song stir deep than lips and throat, drum

beats further in than blood. rejoice

and know, in every soul-sound, is a reach
beyond.

Beethoven Eavesdropping — Mary Lindberg

Beethoven eavesdropping
peers through glass window
of music school conducting class,
wavy hair askew, ear trumpet in hand.

Beat-up grand piano pretends
orchestra sounds of his Third.
Under bushy brows keen eyes
attend clueless conducting.
Student holds downbeat up,
baton flies, flails, vibrates,
a white, aimless motion
as pianist weaves a miracle,
a two-handed out-of-tune Eroica.

Maestro frowns darkly
following jittery baton
leading his symphony's funeral march.
Shaking salt-and-pepper mane,
he shouts "Die Klasse ist wichtig!"
words ricocheting off the wall
like the first four notes of his Fifth.

Hearing new music in his head,
hungry for beer and wienerschnitzel,
he strides over empty cello cases
stomps down the brightly-lit hall,
steps falling faultlessly in rhythm.

Mozart Visits New York — Mary Lindberg

Mozart arrives, gets concert tickets,
Village crew cut, sunglasses from
street vendor, blue jeans at Barney's,
iPod in SoHo.

Central Park carriage ride reminds him
of Vienna; in midtown, he harmonizes
subway rumbles, sirens, car alarms,
listens to rap on his Pod.

Later he plays Strad at Met Museum,
goes to concert, composer called
Beethoven. Loud. Fast. Audience springs to
feet like frogs jumping into lily pond.

Mozart amazed. Beethoven makes music
out of moonlight, puts funeral march in
one symphony, singers in another.
What would this deaf man do next?

Carnegie Hall features Mozart's own
g minor symphony. He wears wig.
Stands up in side box, waves usher's
flashlight, conducts at faster tempo.

Orchestra plays to lighted baton of
short man in denim. They nod:
he knows the music. Standing ovation;
conductor sends bouquet to box.

Mozart bows, dons shades, hails cab
to Mozart Cafe on West 70th where
they play his Turkish Rondo
Presto. He likes New York.

Geoff Stevens

Explanation you will not listen to.
My false praise for your understanding nature
does not unwind you.
Fire flames my spring
tempers its mildness.
Anger ticks off inside.
The alarm goes "ding!"
I come out of the corner that you have me in,
a whirlwind with a tongue that lashes in to you,
strips the bones of argument bare,
but leaves the wounds you gave me clean.

Dream Animals: Dormasaurus — Fredrick Zydek

There is nothing to prove they are covered
with feathers: no images locked in sandstone,
no imprints on coal, no etchings on stones,
no drawings in the caves of southern France.

Yet what they bring is a thin, feathery sleep,
dreams that move from the moon to the wind
more gently than lilies bloom or as sudden
as spring's mauve first appears on the trees.

These creatures can be translucent things
To a mind slumbering in its past or giddy
As leaves caught in a quick wash of rain.
I knew one that could breathe fire and ice.

he could step into a dream quiet as a cat,
talk with angels, stand against dragons, sing
with the heart of bear and fragment into
butterflies — those flying flowers of the forest

who knows intimate things about the geography
of dreams, the inner land of the soul,
the ceremonies old men use as required
reading to reach the voiceless shore.

How It Matters — David Michael Nixon

Everything you do
changes the world around you.
We all still die, and leaders
send armies of youth into
rivers of fire that rush from
all directions. Money poisons
rich and poor, laziness
breaks your mother's back,
but when you write singing lines
or play with the wild kitten,
a kind of light and darkness opens
into a pattern never known before.

Fla. Legislator Throws in Towel Over Pie — Rochelle Ratner

She thinks of her country house where, when locking up for a week or two, she throws an old dish towel over the just washed dishes to keep them safe from mice. She recalls the huge palmetto bugs in Florida. Then she skims the article: a pecan farmer cum legislator is challenging a proposal to make key lime pie the official Florida trademark. Not that he'd want pecan pie, either, it's just the principle. But screw it, it's not worth bothering about, it could be chicken pot pie, for all he cares. Too many pressing issues to think about. She folds up the paper. Her friend, raised in Florida, made her a key lime wedding cake. That was sixteen years ago, and she probably should say former friend.

Donating Blood — Bill Roberts

I sit on the outside sill of a wide window
Peering down as each shirtless man shuffles in
Cautiously, one by one, takes a seat before
His dark blood is drawn into a syringe
By a nurse in white or a nun in a black habit.

This appears to be dead-serious business:
The nurses and sisters whisper something
Consoling to the men, and each clenches
His fist, becomes wide-eyed, and often
Turns away, avoiding the sight of his own blood.

These are brave young fighting machines,
My father tells me later, our house directly
Across from busy Georgetown Hospital
In the capital of our warring nation.
They are about to defend us in Europe

And the Far East, places unfamiliar to me.
Much of their blood will be given again
At those places too, but never will they
Be afraid to give it, my father tries to assure me.
He is dead wrong: I've looked in their eyes.

First published in the Winter 1999 anthology, *The Unbroken Circle*

At War in the Third Grade — Bill Roberts

The first half of third grade was in the fall of 1943
At Hyde Elementary in sleepy Georgetown,
Within spitting distance of the muddy Potomac
And firing range of the wide-awake White House.

Miss Polikoff was an imposing figure with sleek
Black hair and an enormous hooked nose.
I don't remember a thing she taught us
Those days about addition, spelling or reading

But she reached me about Nazis persecuting Jews,
Some victims members of her family in Germany
And Poland, geographical areas then unknown to me.
Miss Polikoff often fled from the room in tears,

Leaving us in stupefied silence until she returned,
Still moist about her eyes and prominent nose.
We moved across town between semesters
And I had a different teacher who made us

Memorize terse, boring facts, none of them to do
With Jews persecuted in Germany and Poland.
I learned to keep quiet on the subject until long after
The war's end. Most other people did too.

people dream — Michael A. Flanagan

in bed with pillow and sheets they
lay there, their heads down finally
they sleep, they breathe, they've
waited for rest and they have it,
they cough, settle in deep, they
turn on their side, now their eyes
violent tumbling, they roll over
and slam a hand hard on the
mattress, something chases them,

soon a dead love, some dead father
or mother stands alive again, their
words and all their flaws alive
again, things close in and whisper,
secrets form and disappear, the
world in cartoon shadow, puzzles
and mazes, your dark silence,
while cat's in alleys stay awake,
the birds waiting, the sun wide
open, in the sky somewhere
on the other side of the world

On the Film *Nashville* — Donald Lev

I was reminded seeing *A Prairie Home Companion*,
that I had never before seen *Nashville*
or any other Altman film.

So I rented the video
and settled down at 4 am with a glass of wine
in front of 159 minutes of
spinning America.

And it was full, filling, fulfilling,
and could have gone on longer.
I thought of the Marx brothers.
I thought of *La Dolce Vita*.
I thought of what is . . .

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Villains — Anselm Brocki

Though well aware
how absurd to be
alive inside a body
driven by instincts
developed for jungle
trails, dangerous
river crossings,
and now stretched
to its limits by e-mail
piled up, mutual funds,

and income tax forms,
the sensible part of me
that used to laugh
at everything — solemn,
usual, silly, or ridiculous —
wishes it could still do
its job as well in making
that choking sound
in my throat, convulsing
my chest, and bringing
tears to my eyes, but
finds it harder & harder

to carry out, and can't
decide if the villain is
too much information
and experience for my
jungle brain, weariness
of ageing cells, or the dire
circumstances of human
overpopulation, depletion
of our natural resources,
& the extinction of beauty
on Earth, but strongly
suspects relentless ageing.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse? — Joanne Seltzer

1

The beacon of regret looms tall
as we reflect upon the sail
fitted without retractable reef.
We share no system of belief
that mitigates anxiety
over the wrong done to the sea
and float or drown depending on
the moody woman in the moon.

2

Is this a harbor or a light
strapped on a donkey's back at night?
Will we soon crash against the thing
we try to clear by following
destiny disguised as chance?
What bridle has the donkey dance
high on a cliff without a hint
of equine grace, indifferent
to victims of insatiable greed
lured to their death by servitude,
humility and nimble hooves?
Do cutthroat pirates dream of love,
pity pretty girls they plunder,
weep while innocence goes under?

3

We publicize some risks worth taking:
breathing, loving, crying, making
art out of pain, making more pain
by spending our lives painting scenes
on which we scrawl *God's* signature.
And when the beacon shines too near
walking the unforgiving flow
of water toward epiphany,
surrendering to mythic deep,
seeking eternity in sleep.

He Was the Poet With Such Startling Early Poems I Read Them at My Own Readings Lyn Lifshin

tight, startling. I can still quote his lines and that first book's brilliant cover stunned. So when I read, as I often did, around the time of the Boston Marathon in that city, and my host said this poet would come to hear, I was high, sure I'd finally get to meet him. (After all, for a while, no one knew if he was living or dead).

I can't remember if he said hello before I read but at the intermission he might have and then, he left, fled as if he didn't want to talk to me. Maybe he was shy. Maybe he despised any small talk. I'd

guess both were true. He told many he liked my poems and when he guest edited one of the biggest littles, took three or four of mine. We never got to know each other though someone thought we'd make a good pair. The next time we saw each other was at an art colony where he had a new girl friend and mostly stayed in his room, let her bring him the cabbage dish of the day. (It was September and the colony cooked what it had too much of too often. I even wrote a poem called *The Colony of Cabbages* but I don't think it's one he chose) Only the Chinese painter at that colony had enough sense to have a rice cooker in his room on the day it was stuffed cabbage then sauerkraut, then

cabbage inside tomatoes, fried cabbage, slithered cabbage, raw cabbage, boiled, sautéed cabbage. Maybe it was a way to show how with so little one could do so much. Anyway, since he never came to meals and there were so many fields and woods to lose yourself in, we hardly saw each other. Once all the colonists piled into someone's car for a quick trip to Emergency at the hospital. I forget why. Maybe a hunk of cabbage bolted into someone's eye. And one night, as if for once we all should do something together, we went to a James Bond film and had a beer later. This poet tried to guess each woman's choice of her sexiest man. He couldn't have been more wrong thinking mine would be one of Barbra Streisand's ex

husbands. It was hard for me to come up with anyone I knew but I said Delbert McClinton for his voice and the poet's girl friend said Woody Allen was her crush and that she went to hear him play clarinet in NYC every Monday. I don't think we said goodbye. The last night at the colony, a pianist was supposed to come to play. I can't imagine this poet on those brown velvet couches making small talk with the host, waiting what turned into hours drinking scotch and trying to be clever. Next morning I packed to leave, the night as uneventful as our non existent talks had been

A Terrible Beauty Is Born — Ida Fasel

Vincent Van Gogh, *Self-Portrait wit Felt Hat*, 1887-88
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

He squeezed
paint straight from the
tube. He licked paint off his
fingers, He launched green on green in
light that

made all
woody shadows
golden. A face in the
mirror, he painted himself in —
a face

ranging
the luminous
turquoise to cobalt blue
of the Mediterranean,
a face

ever
under threat of
the sunless surfacing,
not God's nor Theo's goodness could
prevent.

A face
a kicked-in door,
glimpse of wild things within,
the scarred wood and the clear great wants
holding.

A face
harried driven,
fierce as will to the fight
to bring the sublime through by way
of earth.



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