

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

28



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #5

I shall know you, secrets
by the litter you have left
and by your bloody foot-prints.

excerpted from *Secrets*
Lola Ridge's *Sunup and other poems* (1920)

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 28

Number 5*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

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The Mermaid Parade — Jody Nash

You don't see the skin on legs in January
But brilliant speeches abound on paper and
Brightly lit billboards: and you will see
Dancing on the slanted surfaces of icy roofs

By February in Manhattan:
Dancers circling over the waiting earth
A parade of newness like constellations
Dressed in a yellow silence that tints the cold air

Lasting well into June where I have stood since noon
On a balcony in Brooklyn waiting for inspiration
One block from the beach eating a hot dog
Thoughts from childhood mixing with the smells of carnival rides

Like the super tall Ferris wheel at Coney Island that scraped
The edge of heaven in its revolution; a place unlike any other,
Where at the highest point we touched the sky
Swallowed by the young night; in awe of blue and pinprick lights

The earth a distant memory; the land stretching on forever
Suspended in the embrace of a peculiar atmosphere
That persisted until autumn was well established around here
By then the Mermaid Parade has come and gone

Bits of discarded costumes scattered along Stillwell Avenue
Like a rumor of the coming snows, the garden returning to sleep
The last petal shed with the leaves of the turning trees
The bread of endless transitions and the fruit of germination

Fancy fish restaurant
overlooking a harbor.
On a wall to the left
of the receptionist's
podium, an interior
designer's display
of 8 x 10 blowups
of snapshots of proud
fisherfolk showing off
their catches — a smiling
10-year-old barely able

Remindful — Anselm Brocki

to hold a 3-foot albacore
in his hands held close
to his chest: a woman
with a jaunty visor cap
standing behind a string
of 12 bass dangling
like a chorus line;
a middle-aged man
pointing cheerfully
to a huge marlin held
by its roped slick tail

on a hoist — reminders
of the kills of bison, boars,
and deer sketched
on the walls at Altamira;
of photos of soldiers
posing next to enemy
dead from the Civil War
on; of how close we
still are to the Stone Age.

PO/EMS — Richard Kostelanetz

a/dam/ant

a/dole/scent

a/greed

am/ass

am/oral

bra/zen

brig/and

broad/casts

dam/age

Woman of the Mill — John Grey

She springs from the abandoned factory,
cackling, sneering. . .
I had a job here when I was twenty five years old.
Face like dried meat,
Hair as straggly as bon-fire flame.
She almost lands on unclad foot on mine.
If those toes were any rougher,
They'd be a goat's.
Careful she doesn't stab me with something
like a sharp piece of machinery,
or slap me with a rusty wrench,
or rip at me with those claws.

I stumble back into the wet grass,
the rocks, the bits of bricks,
fall, bruise my back, scrape my elbow.
She's sorrowful now, weary of being
the witch of Michaels and Sons Textile Mills.
She even offers me a hand
though I scramble to my feet myself.
"I'm okay," I say though it hurts.
But I didn't work in this place
When I was twenty five.
I can heal.

In Another Month 100 Years — Joanne Seltzer

Just another birthday,
she claims,
no big celebration.

Her note
written in a firm hand
thanks me for
the pugs and hisses
of my Valentine
sent last week
along with hugs
and kisses.

Pretty much housebound
she gets three meals a day,
gets to the piano
whenever she can.

She encloses
a paper towel
that features Charlie Brown
and gang,
a recent photo,
some silly word games.

What noun has
8 consonants,
1 vowel?
Answer: strengths.

She closes with a hug
And kiss.

My Mother's Old Sofa — Joanne Seltzer

Scratchy
old-fashioned
it sagged like tired flesh,
made her ashamed
for anyone
even the social worker
to see it
let alone sit.

We bought new
phoned the Salvation Army
but right before pickup
she reconciled
with shreds of stuffing
and mourned many days
another piece
plucked from her life.

The Knife-Sharpener Man — Bill Roberts

The knife-sharpener man usually works
the dirt alleys in our town,
ringing his familiar brass bell
when he is strolling in the neighborhood,
three-legged stool and sharpening wheel
strapped to his bent back, ready to make
our scissors and knives and tools
razor sharp again with the turn of his wheel,
sparks flying to let us know
that the grinding process is generating
the necessary energy to create sparkling heat
from metal on stone, dampened occasionally
by spittle from a callused forefinger,

a mandatory if not entirely sanitary ingredient
for putting things right again,
supplying this much needed though unscheduled
service to lowly people who use
their tools, laboriously dulling them over time
until the knife-sharpener man returns,
hailing us with his distinctive bell
and for a few coins puts sharp edges
back in our grinding, ordinary lives.

First published in
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A Prologue to Edgar Allan Poe — David Chorlton

Old tales of horror are set
in twisting strands of fog
where nobody can see far enough
to find a way out.
Hidden details suggest the worst,
leaving us to dig into the pits
of our imaginations
while the pendulum swings so close
the scent of its steel
cuts slices from air
we struggle to breathe.

In our times
of televised autopsies
when a camera follows the bullet
into a victim's body, we would be following

an express train through a tunnel
to the other side, but nobody has yet
photographed a soul
exiting the world.

A villain back from the dead
sweeps a cloak across his face
and flashes the whites of his eyes.
He licks the blade of his knife
to taste the mystery
that comes from suggestion. Edgar Allan Poe
returns through the mist
and shakes deadly rain from his coat
when he sits down beside us
and prepares
to strike fear in our minds
with words, searching for one
worth a thousand pictures.

A Tribute to Jane Austen — Ida Fasel

On the floor of Winchester Cathedral
a memorial slab:

"kindness of heart"

"the sweetness of her temper"

"charity"

"devotion"

"faith and purity"

"the extraordinary endowments of her mind"

All but book titles

Sense and Sensibility

Mansfield Park

Persuasion

her darling Pride and Prejudice

"the warmest love of her intimate connections"
All but Elizabeth Bennet,
Elinor Dashwood, Anne Eliot,
Dr. Darcy, Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth.

The closing lines left to hope
her soul's acceptance.
All but her tongue-in-cheek
for most of the world she lived in.
All but the women we know by heart for their
Mind and the men who deserved them.

"the regard of all who knew her."
Including us.

Barbarians — William Corner Clarke

The Winter Capital
Is full of light
When the invaders reach the gates
All the bridges are decked out
Like fairground rides
The towers, smooth
Like frozen waterspouts
Are glowing from inside
The pavements, quarried
From crystal mines
Glitter in the cold
Jets of blue flame rising
From brass forged power stations
Point toward the stars

But the houses are all empty
Everyone has fled the city
The archives have been emptied
Of every piece of history
Statues stand without their heads
Paintings have been torn to pieces
And bonfires made from violins
Are burning in the streets

In the central square
Carnival festoons of coloured wires
Link up lines of massive speakers
That boom out in the clear night ear
The sounds of raucous laughter
Expressly for the strangers' ears

Silence — Ellaraine Lockie

The aunt wrote that he died
thinking his daughter didn't love him

because the daughter didn't write that last year
She didn't answer the aunt's letter either

The words would have deafened
with description of what happened

when a daddy dishonored his daughter
Until her pubescent hand pushed him away

That at age six she hadn't known
she held so much strength in her small hand

That by the time she forgave herself the oversight
he was fragile with senility

The aunt wouldn't have let herself hear
that silence can be a kind of love

Following Ariadne's Rope — Carol Hamilton

"Understanding is the first step to acceptance"

Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Who did what to him
was the quest, the mine
where nuggets would emerge
with enough digging, panning,
sifting. Or should the process
be reversed, seeing what steps
we took to set forth the inevitable?
Layers are laid down unnoticed,
ourselves sometimes the irritant,

the catalyst. The deepest mystery
could be hidden within me
in the place I am least likely
to look. And discovery can cause
pandemonium. Rather than
test with bird or candle,
I will safely examine
who did what to me.

Tanto o poco? — Doug Bolling

Tell me, does pain of existence
hurt a lot or a little?
I am curious for there's a
long way to go and comfort
is always best
& already this soreness in
the memory & a certain fever
about the present & they say
a future can bring many downfalls
to any voyager whatever his
rank or shame.

Already I am hesitating at
this next turning whether
to go or run & I would much
appreciate your prognosis
if such is possible.
I promise to undertake what
ever therapy you prescribe,
if you do
for they say the journey
is very dangerous
& I am alone.

Grandpa's Remedies — Thomas D. Reynolds

For a cut on bare feet,
It was a dash of turpentine.

A sour stomach warranted
A snip of ginger on the tongue.

For midnight cough an onion poultice
Rubbed on the chest.

A touch of the gout,
The absence of fatback and hog jaw
For two straight days.

Depression in late afternoon
When the sun sank into the Ozark hills
Received a splash of spring water on the face.

Maybe a walk to the end of the dirt road
Rutted by sawmill trucks.

Moving a hand across new cut wood,
Feeling the dust between two fingers.
Sensing that trace of iron at the back of the tongue
And repeatedly spitting into a crack in the earth.
For the death of a young son
No salve or poultice could touch,
Staring into space
And silence.
Walking to the door
And glancing into timber
As if someone was calling.
Trying to recognize his hand
Atop the kitchen table.
Nothingness.
And always that taste of iron.

Salsa — Arthur Winfield Knight

Kit's in the kitchen
making a pasta salad
with chicken and salsa,
and our greyhound
sleeps at my feet.
I just read a poem
by Michael Madsen,
where he mentions
getting a postcard
with no message,
but there was a picture
of Reno on the front.
It's in the mid-90s,
but the swamp cooler's on,
so Kit and the dog and I
are cool. Everything's cool.

Account — Geoff Stevens

Shred

lest you shed your secrets
in the litter you have left.

Do not leave the footprints
of your transactions
for all to see

and lose the money
for which you have sweated blood.

Trash now the efforts of the sneak
thief
that searches through your can.

Tredegar — Sam Calhoun

I took the familiar path,
an old railroad grade leading
into a forest where the sun
disappears beneath the canopies
of tall pines;

Crossed the stream on
a fallen tree, and pushed
back the brush guarding the
entrance to the abandoned
iron mill and sat

down on a granite stone.
piles of slag and broken
bricks litter base of
the remaining stone walls, degraded
from years of weathering.

Like a book exposed briefly,
it's preface train wheels,
on the factory line used to transport
supplies to the main route across
the rotted bridge.

And by shovel or by hand,
we'll blow the dust from
the cover, remove the
pages of leaves until we reach
the chapter summary, all that's left
for us to read in a mountain of blank pages.

Passages — Robert Brimm

The cars change shape
as they come and go
in the warped window glass

of a store that once was,
dusty now, this begrimed
keeper of secrets,

these windows that
have seen it all
in this small town: deaths,

funerals, weddings, births,
departures of its young
who sometimes come back,

stand beside a grave,
listen to an acorn falling,
slow ticking of eternity.

"Truth and Reconciliation" — R. Yurman

*what the truth
swallowed whole
finally tastes like isn't
forgiveness but
blood — John Sweet*

Small bites
tiny sips
that's all
our mouths can hold

It may seem
at such a rate
the task will take forever

But swallow too fast
and we gag ourselves
The tongue is short
the esophagus narrow

Yet "mercy,
After all, is just another
word for power"

While the taste of blood
now that's a different matter
Blood rouses lust
for blood

No wafer
of forgiveness
till the rampage
runs its course

And then the wailing
in each other's arms

And then the beating
of the drums

*Quoted lines are from
Corinne Clegg Hales'
poem, "Testimony"*

Dragons — Ron Singer

In those days as we huddled round the fire,
sleeping, waking, sleeping, in a pile,
always pretty much cold and afraid,
or just afraid, there sometimes came a noise
like a wind, but not. And we would know
it was only some huge animal,
a musk ox, saber tooth, or dragon,
a beast that, daytimes, we would have fled.
Even nights, when the fire could be trusted
to keep him out there in the dark,
if the wind was right -or wrong—his breath
would waft around our cave, as if something
spoiled had fallen in the fire.

Two Days Early — Jean Wiggins

Ancient oak trees draped with filmy moss
in Columbia Cemetery, near Nankin, Georgia,
an old gentleman swatting mosquitoes,
raking leaves on a humid Good Friday morning
walks over to see us strangers
standing by graves. He inquires, "Is this your family?"
"My father's," my husband replies.
The old gentleman is curious,
but with the deference of genteel manners,
doesn't probe. When my husband gives his name,
we know he knows the family story.
I ask about the graves marked by white stakes.

"They are slave graves," he says.
I am thinking they are icons
of each step they took.

Longitude — Hugh Fox

1.

"How long do you think Shakespeare's gonna last?"

"He don't worry none about it, dat's for sure..."

As the candle turns into Edison lights into fluorescents, last forever, the panels on the roof pulling energy from the stars and the earth collapses inward on itself because of all the cavities left after all the oil and coal were used up.

2.

Bugs, canes,

Bukowski? ? ? ? ?

Winans? ? ? ? ?

Lifshin? ? ? ? ?

Moi? ? ? ? ?

L'Anglais? ? ? ? ?

Jesu Cristo? ? ? ? ?

Where have all the
cro-magnons gone?
Long time lasting,
long time ago.
Nixon's problems?
The Alhambra!
Where have all the Anglo-Saxons gone,
long time lasting,
long time ago?
Et tu et moi?

L'Academie Francaise Marseilles.
*Me fait chier**

*Makes me crap/Is a pain in the ass.

3.

Hiroshima

Kurds

Meilleur to paint
the caves
and worship the

(Hercules strangles the Merman)

stars.

4.

Screaming tadpoles

"I understand

(the lilacs)

birds,"

satellite

M
 E Y
 D R
 A D
 V N A
 E E
 D U
 V
 E

laptop

5.

A
 B
 C
 D
 E
 mail

au lieu

de

OMNIA GALIA ES DIVISA

EN TRES

(the conquest

of

forgetfulness

PARTES.

On the Film *The U.S. vs John Lennon* — Donald Lev

The thing I carry away is the tenderness, sweetness of Yoko Ono looking up at John, singing, speechifying, lying in bed for peace . . . and then the child . . . and then the shots.

Lots of well presented familiar images of the time — Nixon in so many historic poses, and many of the heroes and some of the villains of the Revolution.

In '68 I moved to the city to concentrate on poetry, left most of my activism back in Queens, running contrary to the choices of almost anyone else I knew.

But I remember a "be-in" in St. Marks Place — "all you need is love" and "give peace a chance" blasting from the Electric Circus.

And on (I think it was) the first anniversary of the shooting, I pulled my taxicab over to a curb and observed the moment of silence for John.

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