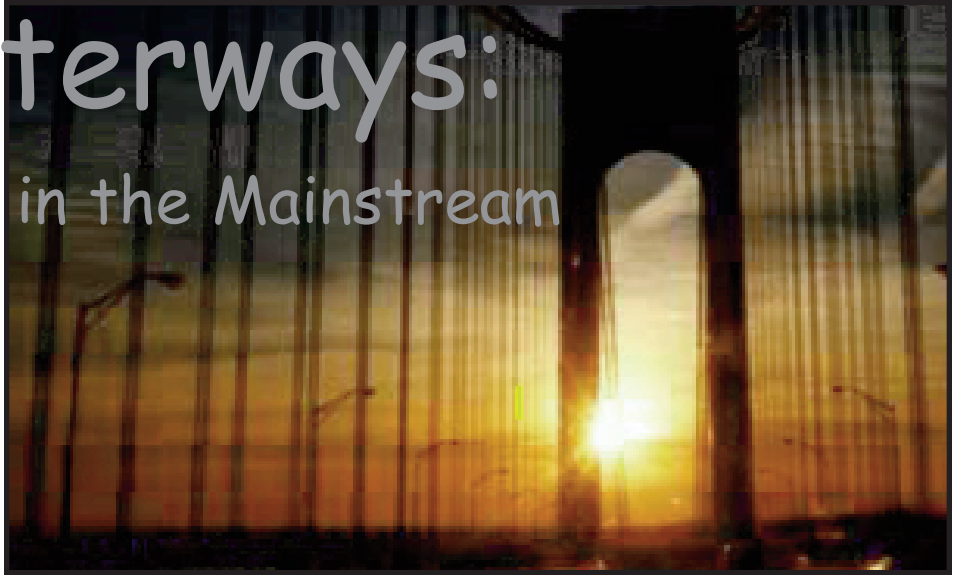


# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
28



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #7

Heave up, river...

Vomit back into the darkness your spawn of light.

excerpted from *East River*

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

# WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 28

Number 7\*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

## c o n t e n t s

|                  |       |                    |       |                |                                     |
|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Fredrick Zydek   | 4-5   | Thomas Reynolds    | 20-24 | Joanne Seltzer | 32                                  |
| Ida Fasel        | 6     | Joan Payne Kincaid | 25-26 | Anselm Brocki  | 33                                  |
| James Penha      | 7-8   | Gwenn Gebhard      | 27    | Hugh Fox       | 34                                  |
| George Held      | 9-13  | Patrick Carrington | 28-29 | Donald Lev     | 35-36                               |
| Rex Sexton       | 14-16 | R. Yurman          | 30    |                |                                     |
| Ellaraine Lockie | 17-19 | Geoff Stevens      | 31    |                | <i>photo on page 3 by B. Fisher</i> |

Waterways is published 11 times a year. Subscriptions -- \$33 for 11 issues.

Sample issues — \$4.00 (includes postage).

Submissions will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self addressed envelope.

Waterways, 393 St. Pauls Avenue, Staten Island, New York 10304-2127

©2007 Ten Penny Players Inc. \*This magazine is published 1/08.

<http://www.tenpennyplayers.org/mags.html>



*photo by Barbara Fisher*

## The Story I Tell Myself — Fredrick Zydek

I tell myself that death is but a little pause,  
that people who talk to strangers for a living  
either take life into their own hands  
or consort with saints, and that much of what  
I do isn't me but the wind moving through me.  
I'm looking for a mystical union between  
inner simplicity and the cabinet of curiosities  
I carry on my back like a trophy. I don't  
know why I'm always hunting a weather  
or an ocean made of words when what I love  
best about language are those rare moments  
when it can be distilled down to a single  
gesture, look or pose. Sometimes what is  
said in silence is louder than the spoken word.  
I tell myself that only with language can we

create the perfect heresy, get lost in a labyrinth  
of red tape or challenge science wearing  
nothing more than stones and synthetic threads.  
No matter how you release them into the world,  
words find ways to get themselves into trouble.  
I feel myself it's because they are only auditory  
symbols, bits of noise to which we have  
assigned the meanings of lofty mysteries  
that should never have to depend upon how  
much wind can be blown over a vocal chord  
to prove their existence. Writing them down,  
making marks to help us repeat the sounds,  
doesn't help much either. As dark marks  
on paper they are one step farther away from  
the wind. Toneless. Coals instead of fire.

## Return — Ida Fasel

Air spirals into skyscrapers. Water fill  
widens the shore. Alongside the shaky  
old bridge, the new Interstate  
quickens traffic out of town.  
I lean on the rusty iron rail,  
a slow-moving boomerang  
returned to its source.

The Kennebec took me nautical miles  
to lands of chivalry. Blueberry shrubs  
on the river bank nourished me  
through dark forest dangers,  
a knight to the rescue. Sometimes  
I was the brave knight himself.  
Sirens sang me past old Fort Western,  
past Indian wars to Arthur's court.

A driver slows up, yells Elm Street.  
I point. Straight off this bridge,  
up Chestnut, first right.  
I lean over the river and think  
what a long way I have gone  
to come back: the future  
nothing but the past.

## Nativity — James Penha

True to what they say about Christmas,  
I saw the melancholia in my mother's voice  
this holiday morning, the sadness  
of a madonna for the loss of a son betimes to men and to the world,  
yes, but more a weariness with ninety-two years  
without an assumption of her own  
for how she wishes her son gathered  
his children 'round her  
in simple glory and gratitude  
to a matriarch . . .  
she'll not find greatness or grandness  
by my doing  
and if she thinks  
of my doing  
her generations



in spills and end runs  
she'd open her eyes  
to shake off the memory of me  
swaddled upon her lap.

## The Hudson — George Held

Now he can see it through his bow window,  
beyond the January gingkos and elms,  
the glint of gray-green Hudson at the end  
of West 11<sup>th</sup> Street. That's Jersey  
across the river, where on frigid days  
in the '40s folks drove cars over the ice,  
ice too thick for the dull-gray icebreakers  
to chop open a channel to Albany.  
Back then he'd lie in the back seat, drowsy  
from visiting his Uncle Jacob's flat  
in the Village, and gaze up at the George  
Washington Bridge, sparkling with lights, no  
lower deck thickening its majesty yet,  
comforted by the sight, then fall asleep

before the car reached the Henry Hudson Bridge, on the way back home to Edgemont.

Some summer evenings the family drove to the Yonkers waterfront near the once flourishing (now gone) Otis Elevator factory to watch the sun disappear behind the Palisades. The scene was like a picture-postcard, gulls and cormorants fishing off the pilings, and much as he appreciated their landings and takeoffs against the sunset, his thoughts would settle on Giselle, who had gone away to camp and who'd begun to intrude on his dreams of Joe DiMaggio and a BB gun modeled on Red Ryder's repeater carbine.

How many times had he crossed the river  
on the Tappan Zee, the Mid-Hudson, the Rip  
van Winkle bridges, looked both north and south  
at the expanse of water; how many  
train trips had he taken along the river bank  
to Hudson or to Albany, hooked on  
the view of the Catskills, comparable  
in life to their images in paintings  
of the Hudson River School; how vivid  
the scene of mountains and river valley  
from Olana, Church's hillside palace,  
from which he reckoned, before he built,  
he would have the best view from the east bank;  
driving Route 9, how the signposts for Dutch  
or Indian names — Poughkeepsie, Brinckerhoff,  
Taghkanic, Kinderhook — had delighted him

along the way. He'd even seen the headwaters above Glens Falls. For years raw sewage and GE's PCBs had so poisoned the waters that by the time they'd reached the Upper Bay their stink and putrescence embodied the word "polluted," and round the piers the river barren, good as dead.

But today there is a River Keeper and regulation of all that gets dumped into the Hudson, and even the sturgeon are making a comeback. And he's happy, because he's wanted the river to come back, to be able to discharge the clean waters of the Adirondacks, to be a vivid testament to the power

of nature running through gorges and past  
villages and estates with their moorings,  
and under the hulls of sailboats and scows,  
and along Westside Drive to the ocean,  
and because his imagination has long  
sought renewal there in that mighty flow,  
the sun now nearly set on the Hudson  
as he watches it through his bow window.

## Night Sweats — Rex Sexton

*The scary lair of sleep  
where white mice in lab smocks  
dance around alarm clocks.*

I am moving, not moving,  
somehow being transported,  
a step at a time,  
around the broken chairs and tables,  
between the crushed beer cans and empty bottles,  
passed the pile of unpaid rent bills,  
toward the easel in my garret corner.  
The sky-lit loft is an aquarium of starlight.  
Munch-like moons haunt the heavens.  
Van Gogh constellations swirl the sky.  
Atop the nightstand, paint jars sparkle like prisms.

The ghost-white canvas shines with astral light.  
I am painting, not painting.  
Slanting forward, I slash the canvas  
with road signs, religious symbols, astrological charts,  
corporate logos, chemical formulas, designer labels,  
mathematical equations, secret signals . . .

The creatures from my cracked world, cautiously climb out  
from their demimonde tableaux - their Brut Art rendered gin  
mills, strip joints, dice dens, night clubs, jail cells, missions,  
soup kitchens, back street labyrinths, blind alley flops — bag  
ladies, homeless families, penniless pensioners, beggars, winos,  
hookers, junkies, grifters, gangsters, orphans, runaways, — my  
non-sellable oeuvre of the near-dead, and the might-as-well-be  
— which includes my sallow "Self Portrait in Straight Jacket,"  
rusty dope needles sticking through my head. . . They slither down



the warped walls, crawl out from the festering stacks, crowd around me with their dead end eyes, watch me as I work.

I repaint us all in a castle in the clouds, feasting around a royal table, dressed in finery, flush with merriment, while cherubs circle chandeliers, and virgins dance on marble floors, and rainbows arch across a kingdom where ketchup is no longer a vegetable for politicians, and lives are no longer negotiable to corporations, and liberty, equality, fraternity reign forever, and no child is left behind.

Anything is possible when nothing is real.

## Edge of Night — Ellaraine Lockie

Black with blue swollen veins  
He sits in stained denim  
on the train station bench

Elbows on spread-eagled knees  
Sparrow hands on head hung low  
A plastic produce bag for a hat  
pulled over his ears  
Preserving the rising heat  
The fragile lobes from frostbite

As winter eats its way  
into the San Francisco Bay  
with butcher knife teeth

## Death Comes to Dinner — Ellaraine Lockie

*Six months* were the doctor's words  
resounding from the phone  
I needed a number  
Choked it out of him  
Telepathic telephone cord twist  
His words wedge in my throat  
As if the shrimp I'm eating  
suddenly spawned bones  
Or the phone cord ran amok  
Wrapped itself around my neck  
All the while slithering  
The table surface  
A cat-size serving  
Of scampi snagging the coils  
While the patient paws

The reptilian twitch  
Purring his priority status  
Oblivious to the cancer  
Consuming his insides  
As surely as he  
nibbles a shrimp  
And I vomit  
the venomous words

## Punch — Thomas Reynolds

At thirteen, my daughter's friend  
Is learning how to box,  
sparring twice a week.

The gym is dim and shadowy,  
And when she jabs a left hook,  
Striking at spinning dust motes,  
Her thin arm with extended fist  
Becomes a sweeping jackhammer  
Traveling the length of the gym.

Sweat beads above her upper lip,  
And both eyes remain tightly closed,  
But her thoughts are inscrutable.

The boy who taunts her going down,  
Or the silence of an empty house,  
Steady dripping of a leaking faucet.

Whispered encouragement of a father  
Whose memory is growing dim,  
Dead in a car accident three years ago.

She sidesteps to the edge of the mat,  
And for whatever grips her attention,  
Beyond the slamming of some door

Echoing across an empty parking lot,  
She unleashes one blistering punch that  
Based on her grim smile, seems to land.

## **Grandfather Tom — Thomas Reynolds**

Was either a paragon of freedom  
Or just an uncouth old man who'd ceased to care.

Came to live with the family  
When my dad was only a little boy.

My aunt's nose still wrinkles  
To think of him at the kitchen table.

Taking a bite of a chicken leg  
And setting it back in the pan.

No one could eat when he was at the table,  
Bits of gravy caught in his long white beard.

And there was the old woman he took up with,  
The wrinkled harridan hobbling down the hill

Clutching her flannel bag instead of a broom  
Bewitching every dog that crossed her path.  
At least none dared come near her except Tom,  
One day trailing her down the narrow path  
Clutching a hickory stick and pleading with her  
Not to do anything foolish, you overstuffed bat.  
Dust flew with every cross-legged step  
And her hand waved in the air to shoo him away,  
There was no use arguing;  
her faded shawl in the wind resembled bat wings.  
It would have seriously harmed his reputation  
If anyone other than a man driving a sawmill team  
Had seen him sitting atop the split rail fence,  
Staring at his hands as if the sky had fallen.



But the free spirit, with flowing white hair  
Who posed for the photograph in the apple tree,  
Clutching a prize Jonathon in each oversized hand,  
Smiling as if nowhere else could ever be home,  
Was back at the dinner table that evening,  
Licking his fingers with biscuit in his beard.

**samantha — Joan Payne Kincaid**

dying cat  
aware as ever  
studies a bee  
flowers  
birds  
wind  
sunlight  
to take along with her

**it is in this moment**

**for jack, a Doberman — Joan Payne Kincaid**

you think of him  
being gone  
telling yourself  
                        he is  
gone                  the last look  
                        in his eyes . . .  
you are                  drained  
this beautiful sunny day  
the way                  liquid  
leaves a strainer                  empty  
no more moments  
                        with him to be  
in                          this numbness  
his bright eyes

## Dream Fish — Gwenn Gebhard

It arrived on our wedding day  
from a cousin of your father's mother.  
You do not share his passion for Inuit paintings,  
like cave paintings, only more colorful.  
But I am fond of this dream fish,  
its healthy size, orange scales, open eyes.  
Hovering midstream, this sleeping salmon  
is like a lizard basking in sunlight. Dreaming  
on its bed of blue river stones.

## Tumbleweeds — Patrick Carrington

I skitter across the heat of lonely towns  
like a drop on a skillet, stopping only  
to smooth myself out in bars  
with strings of women  
who don't tie themselves  
to lives like mine. There was a time

when the prophecy of dust clouds rising  
from a young woman's broom  
made me wonder  
where you hide glass slippers  
in a place this shattered. And when  
she slipped the brass rail on her foot

to swallow the medicine of sour mash  
like a sword, I'd wait for midnight  
and give myself to her as wholly  
as her hundred proof misery. I don't  
stare anymore at the ripped wallpaper

of upstairs rooms or look to windows  
with the circular reasoning of denial  
and wait for some magic  
as her arms flutter above me,

due north. It takes no chimes to roll me,  
no wind to send me limping  
over the world, to the next town  
where no one will welcome me home.

## Fishing with a Cormorant — R. Yurman

a carved ring  
just wide enough  
slides along the pointed bill  
over the bulge of eyes  
the sloping forehead  
and tight around the neck

attached to it a kind of leash  
draws the bird back  
into the fisher's boat  
once it has sliced  
the water diving deep  
to grasp the silver-scaled perch

a catch it cannot swallow  
a catch it must yield up  
to the fisherman who owns little  
beyond the collar and this skiff

at day's end he slips  
the ring back off  
and tosses the starved bird  
a single fish

## Russian Roulette — Geoff Stevens

With blackcurrant outpourings  
spewing their beluga caviar  
into sturgeon rivers of emotion  
you feed the delicacies of promise  
on the hot buttering-up toast  
of future loving success  
into the receptive psyche  
of your would-be conquest



## The Osage River — Joanne Seltzer

Engineers, designing for power,  
sized her up, surrounded her,  
called her the Missouri whore.

Snorting at impassive men,  
she wipes the foam from her mouth,  
pulls herself together,  
a gentle spirit cursing God,

Then travels east, as always,  
toward the Missouri.

Published first in the anthology *Cattle Bones & Coke Machines*

## Witnesses — Anselm Brocki

After millions of years  
of mindless expansion  
into space, gigantic  
collisions, furnace stars  
burning themselves up,  
and uncaring, brutal  
evolution here on Earth  
with life forms destroying  
each other in dark caves,

openly on savannas,  
or slowly with disease,  
maybe it's an encouraging  
sign that to amend its  
amoral ways, the universe  
has allowed one species  
to evolve with mind  
enough, at least, to be  
aware of horrors going on.

## Sanity — Hugh Fox

In sync with the smashed squirrel  
on the road, the withered corn and gold  
goldenrod/soy the collapsing barns  
and balletic deer, thick green scum on the  
ponds, one last maniac cutting the grass  
in front of his shack with its hour acre  
lawn, then friends for fifty years at the  
Poulenc concert, as if I'd never  
left Chicago/Urbana-Champaign, astonished  
by bank-robbers and car-bombers, territorialness  
and tribalness, as the fog blots out the  
landscape, one cicada left and my head begins  
to sing *When at night I go to sleep. . .*

## On the Film Constantine's Sword — Donald Lev

A good documentary based on a book by James Carroll, an ex Catholic priest, Vietnam War protestor and man of conscience, whose FBI agent & Air Force General father has never forgiven him. The book & film are about anti-Semitism and the history of the Church, concerning which phenomena the findings are right on. The few surprises for me are not that Christianity started downhill when the Emperor saw the cross in the sky and kicked off the almost two millennia of European anti-Semitism that culminated in the holocaust, but that Constantine murdered his own

wife and child. What a Saint!

Then there is Saint Edith Stein. (I happen to be a former member of the Edith Stein Guild but that's a story I'm not telling here.) I never knew about the letter she sent the Pope in 1938, which of course that Saint chose to ignore. . .

And the controversy about the Polish nuns at Auschwitz — I used to think the Jewish groups were fussing over nothing — but the film showed the big cross they'd erected right in front of the concentration camp. That is offensive.

As to the current Pope, I used to feel a little bad having had to mention his Hitler Youth history in a poem — but I did not know then that he had restored the infamous Polemic According to John to the Good Friday liturgy — which had in the good old days contributed to many a pogrom.

The film deftly brought the theme forward to include the Constantinian reign of George W. Bush, and his dark alliance with the right wing megachurches.

ISSN 0197-4777

**published 11 times a year since 1979**  
**very limited printing**

by Ten Penny Players, Inc.  
(a 501c3 not for profit corporation)

Subscriptions -- \$33 for 11 issues.  
Sample issues — \$4.00 (includes postage).

[www.tenpennyplayers.org/mags.html](http://www.tenpennyplayers.org/mags.html)