

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

28



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 28, #8

Austerely greeting the sun
With one chilly finger of stone...
I know your secrets.

excerpted from *Skyscrapers*

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

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 28

Number 8*

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Doug Bolling

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Photo by Barbara Fisher

Crossed Lines — William Corner Clarke

In the ether
Beyond the black hole
Of the telephone receiver
I hear whispers, voices
Talking of revenge
Disembodied spirits
In a city built from shadows
And electricity

The words drift
In and out of focus
As the wires whistle
With the solar winds
I listen
Arched like a cat
On a windowsill

Ready to disappear
The moment they hear
My breathing on the line

But they notice neither
The moon nor me
Eavesdropping
On their secrecy
And eventually
I put down the phone
And leap
Without a sound
Into the undergrowth below
Bristling with static
As I go

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Listen — R. Yurman

If I could tell
you what I heard
with what I saw

You'd spit
that the taste of poison
shouldn't stay on your tongue

He wasn't moving
Even the air
was still

Listen
He was dead

Clockodials — James Penha

I watch cold hands
icing the black forest
cake of the day
like tired crocodiles
pivoting
'round their daily bread,
paddling toward
their ultimate reward.

Or not right away or not soon enough — Sylvia Manning

"Sylvia came by the day after Christmas
and one of the things we talked about
was how hard it was to readjust after the Sixties —
when we finally realized
that whatever we'd thought was going to happen wasn't
or not right away or not soon enough."

from *The Day After Christmas* by Albert Huffstickler [1985]

Soon enough for it to happen
would be only for you to have seen it,
a world come sane with recognition
for the obvious need for the freedom
to be ourselves — happily heroic,
with no jealous gods to placate.
That is to say, neither resigned nor afraid.

Now it's only soon enough
to silence the mind's relentless jeremiad
and begin again, every day more seriously,
to accept what is and to understand
everything may only be ephemera.

In those days it was only the lives we'd wanted
that we had to acknowledge wouldn't happen.
Now it's Life itself . . . but there we go again.

It consoles me now to learn
there were other times like the Sixties,
when the feeling that everything
was changing for the better
vanquished the usual expectations.

We were not Utopians
but Transcendentalists crossing over,
moving in the deep sure bliss of women
pregnant with love children
whom nausea leaves alone.

(I stay now in the transcendental
years prior to 1848, myself,
as much as my French and footprint permits.
You're not there, but neither am I.)

December 2007

Brooklyn Born — James Kowalczyk

Yeah, I was born in Brooklyn-and proud of it, yeah, come from the same place as the great one, and so many other talented and famous, the place movies fell in love with and then took for granted, stereotyped "des', "dem", "dos" . . . yeah, Brooklyn . . . where I went to my first classroom and got in trouble for imitating the teacher, where I got my ass whipped when I did something wrong, where I played skelcies in the street . . . felt proud when chosen for the fistball game, though I still got bombed with snowballs in winter while I ran home and waited for the bell to ring to let me in, yeah, yesterday the shame, the humiliation fell away when they let me be a part of . . . my friends, huh, what friends-cruel lessons in Brooklyn, stealing books from the library while they tried cigarettes and beer on the stoops. . .

I was a kleptomaniac for awhile, every time I went to Aiello's to buy something for my mother I would shove a soda down my pants, at first a small one but later as I kept getting away with it I didn't worry about the bulge and graduated to the larger sixteen ounce ones . . . yeah, acting out in Brooklyn . . . lying about where I was to get around a whipping, "get over here or I'll give it to you even worse" . . . having to walk into

the pain in Brooklyn . . . secret "fuck you's" and "suck my dicks" behind the bathroom door to my mother, Catholic school uniform, wanting to fuck the nuns and fantasizing with them, foot fetish and stocking dreams of spankings, "oh he's so nice" say the relatives every time they come over, as do the guys in Aiello's while I rob them blind . . . went on a Yodel binge once, stole an estimated 4,000 Yodels in a six-month period . . . yeah, baseball games on Saturdays with the altar boys drank wine on Sunday before serving Mass, filling up the little bottles in between swigs . . . yeah . . . in Brooklyn . . . smoked pot one day after school with my brother . . . I was in eighth grade, he was in college, hung up my uniform, took a toke and got a lesson in how to roll a joint, thought it was cool cause he did it, suffered from older brother worship, yeah, in Brooklyn . . . got, no, stayed high throughout freshman and sophomore years, the denial ingrained in me, the shame that I wasn't like the others in school that hailed from Far Rockaway, Maspeth, and Manhattan; whose parents had graduated high school and even college, who didn't walk into the pain. . . I sounded different, and I strove to be different, figured I was already an outcast, hell, might as well make the best of it, wore patched pants and walked around balancing my tube of drawings on

my finger, high, for all to see, delusions of grandeur now that I look back on it . . . yeah, in Brooklyn, took acid and talked cosmic bullshit, and threw the frisbee pretty damn well, yeah . . .

. . . moved to another part of Brooklyn in '78, never forgave my parents for pulling me away from the familiar landscape of hell, the purgatory of my dreams, from the smell of roasted coffee beans every Saturday on Court Street . . . and Greenburg's candy store, from old Italian men playing bocce ball in the park, arguing in Italian, from wrapped up fig trees in the backyards, and baseball trophies . . . for pulling me away and plunking me down, in a foreign place, not like my Brooklyn, where I was born.

Images — Ida Fasel

We brought an earnest of coins.
We dressed in grown-up clothes,
Marie high-heeled, I veil-hatted.
The psychic wouldn't even ask us in.
"Children have no destiny."

Weren't there images all around?
Didn't we have dreams, desires, hopes?
Marie wanted a marriage that held
in holding hands the rest of her life.
And children. Couldn't he see them,
dancing at makeshift bases, Dad pitching,
a girl at bat, a hit! — hair flying
making it home, a little white scottie
madly in pursuit, a little boy apart
bringing his adoring mother wildflowers
from the land of sea-going grass.

I found a pink lady's slipper.
I didn't touch. I didn't take.
I only stood and looked, well-mannered
even in the wild. I never learned
to handle pain or guilt. I was ashamed
of the A's I got in school because
others didn't get them too. I paid
over and over for what I did not owe.

"I see an isolated bristlecone pine
at cliff's edge, exposed on all sides
to icy winds, numbing snows, sun-mauled bark."
I wanted to add, from the perspective
of long years, But oh sir! What magnificent
views I have of earth presenting itself
to sky, given the grace I am ceaselessly
grateful for, given clues of a universe
of unrelenting cruelty and wonder,
given the courage of things not of
the world, the bitter and sweet together
making final happiness a destined thing.

Kansas Hermit Games — Thomas Reynolds

At first it was a simple game,
Racing to the stream
Before thunder broke
From black clouds.

Occasionally it was chess,
A death match
Around the cabin floor
With an oversized rat.

Wind on August afternoons
Never threw a knock-out punch
But battered with a series of blows,
Hot breath tinged with pine.

Once with a stick of hedge wood
As crooked as a mule's back,
I batted seventeen straight walnuts
Onto the cabin's slat roof.

Leaves always cheered in autumn,
Gathering in dark ravines,
When my shots leaped from trees
As if sprung from a trapeze.

Wind through grass stood still
As with a calloused thumb,
I crossed the path of a fire ant,
Boxing him in with my scent.

Sun was our steady timekeeper
On that marathon of days.
And in the depths of winter,
We charted strategies to win.

Life is not always competition though.
Along the creek at dusk,
Sometimes it was just wind and me
Jogging along the rocks.

Orange leaves stuck to our feet,
And all conversation lapsed,
Just the hale, hearty silence
Of ancient rivals.

Pitching My Tent — Fredrik Zydek

I might have pitched it in the shadow of my father's house among the people and trees we had all known since birth.

I might have taken a job in the woods felling trees or in the mines picking my way through beds of coal. In our town you were either a lumberjack, a miner, a cowboy, a merchant or a drunken bum. No one went to college, but if the call came, everyone went to war. Life was getting born, skipping as many classes in school as possible, marrying young

and getting a job that didn't take you out of town. I knew better. What I wanted had yet to visit our neck of the woods.

To get what I needed meant moving out in ways that neither caused small talk nor dishonored the clan. I joined the Air

Force and almost at once began to soar like an eagle into who and what I was supposed to be. I pitched my tent as close

to that move as I could, knowing that even if the topography of the world had changed, it was all the chance I needed to become me

Going Home — Doug Bolling

There were so many rooms and air that
told of old stories nobody could believe
unless those who lived at the edges of
forests, edges that might have been failed
kingdoms marked by bent poles that burned
sky black.

They returned. They walked there, faces
that were as ice but spoke anyway through
lips that knew heat, made words that wanted
to be jewels but sank in shadows between
the walls without a sound. As though gravity
of lost years ruled without pity.

This was the end of something that began with the hypocrisy of rainbows, wanted to fly too fast for the tawdry clocks of life in slow motion, the long harvested words that had filled the bins with dullness or gravel. A defying of thresholds.

They found mirrors in the hideous basement and put one in every room until the light broke against so much truth. Until the colors in the sleeping sky turned to a more familiar dust that whispered to the worn floors and powdered their shoes as they left.

You said Stop the World — Joan Payne Kincaid

You want to get off the blog — blabbing predictability
in contrast to the stumbling moment to moment . . .
end the war of potatoes and pots
wow even to post oneself to a different past to dare dream
of popping off a roof top in flight how it feels
to be thrown away rumbling thru life carrying too much
fooled by psy ops has the ring of silly thrills and trills
a young opera mayven;
little things had meaning made into a long trip;
leaves on the ground stop the routine, the unexpected
a neighbor calls *a messy season*;
green with cream designs as if someone painted a lovely collage
in mud at the road's edge;

going to church going to the graveyard
a solace from day to evening glass of dry gin urgent need
a simple thing to relate to let go . . .
to live with the dead on holidays
to see their souls re-invented:
to have no expectation day to day
bustling about with pies and salads and relatives
like a part in Our Town.

Open and Closed — George Held

Near life's end, Sartre opined we would all soon live in glass houses, the better to reveal ourselves. Secrets would end

in the new utopia; openness would reduce suspicions, relax tensions, lessen friction: secret's end would mean war's end.

But après Sartre, openness declined, secrecy grew: NSA, CIA, FBI, Homeland Security, offshore accounts,

gated communities, hedged and fenced houses, high walls segregate, isolate people, shut them out, class them off

from others; suspicions increase, tensions rise, friction grows, wars escalate; an existentialist's dream of openness closes.

Pimeria Alta (VII) — David Chorlton

Following the daily storm that beat against the doors
of the mission church, the sky cleared
for the sun to down and a beam of fiery warmth
touched the stone path winding between agave and belief.
It was the hour of the messenger's departure
with a letter in his pouch
declaring the state of the livestock
and the count of those qualified to pass from the desert
to an afterlife and be ruled
through all eternity from a Spanish throne.

nobody? — will inman

late 40s or early 50s
a carfull traveling from robeson county,
original home of the n.c. megirts,
back towards wilmington.
my father addresses aunt freida (sic) mcgirt,
n.c. president of the united daughters of the confederacy.
'Freida, bill doesn't believe in slavery'
'Willie, nobody believes in slavery anymore'
uncle harry sitting between aunt freida and louise love
gives an uneasy jerk.
'nobody?' news to me.

*July 16, 2005
assisted by
Clyde Appleton*

Nous Sommes — Hugh Fox

Nous sommes la chaleur,
le froid,

Feuilles
leurs
aim,

les genoux et les panoramas glacials
que viennent et aillent,
sont ailles
toutes les races, les yeux,
les langues,
ici et
nulle part

We are the heat
the cold,

leaves
flowers
hunger,

knees and glacial panoramas
that come and go,
are gone,
all races, eyes,
languages,
here and
nowhere.

Chagrin — Fran Farrell Kraft

The worst part is that it was just another disaster,
Well maybe not quite a disaster, not a catastrophe
but more than a disappointment, more than a mishap.
William Bendix would have called it a revoltin' development.

It was not quite a cataclysm but more than a mischance.
It caused anxiety, distress, even anguish, but not quite havoc.
The agony that followed was more misfortune than tragedy.
Was it a failure or a fiasco, a debacle or a misadventure?

The resulting tension, trepidation and torment did not
trigger an emergency though the pain was palpable.
A calamity might have been easier to endure
but it was just another disaster.

Skewed — Anselm Brocki

One thing about me
which must be skewed
toward the far side
of the curve of human
behavior is my attempt
to be socially invisible,
always wearing neutral
colors and getting rid
of ugly spots on clothes to
avoid drawing attention,
never talking on my cell
phone in a restaurant
or in my cubicle if others
are within hearing range,

and at work always taking
the long way to the men's
room because if taking
the short way, one woman
invariably looks up
from her computer, our
eyes in piercing contact
for a fraction of a deadly
silent second.

Needlepoint — Geoff Stevens

Scar tissue
white lesions on the blue
more than disseminatory vapour trails
left by some jet engine
on its way to lower lands
the healing marks of fingernails
that reached their architect's hands
up into the air
in an attempt to touch the sun
and scratch a signature
in multi-storey words
of lasting stone

Hart Crane: His Last Apocalypse — Joanne Seltzer

"The bottom of the sea is cruel"

Voyages

1

The world retains its ambiguity.
As I descend, the ocean's peeping-Toms
study my wake and blow indifferent kisses,
thinking me garbage from the ship above
or some new-fangled, bulky anchor, dropped
for purposes that fish don't understand.

2

Symbolic though they are of constant movement,
fish win respect for stasis in a world
indifferent to change, hostile to progress.
I brought my preference for pretty sailors
to the stateroom taken by a woman
who Hamleted my lunatic Ophelia.

3

The water that I swallow cleanses me,
"Goodbye," I told the woman, thanking her
for the companionship we briefly shared.
"Goodbye," she said, believing that I meant
an hour or two of solitude on deck,
not an eternity among seashells.

4

O I have known such passion in men's arms
I thought I entered Godhead, became Sun
entwined with Star, was crucified and died,
arouse again, redeemed the sinful world,
found power in the breaking of a tower,
took solace from a kitten's famished mew.

5

What will the moon think? Will she forgive me?
Will she accept the normalcy of death
and skip herself in water like a pebble,
joining me on that springboard called a bed?
The cruel sea, less cruel than the land,
supports the moon's recurrent resurrection.

6

Without a family history of love,
like foam-born Venus in the churning sea
or lonely, mottled fish that spawn their young,
I want no one to save, no one to save me.
My lungs become replete with salty fluid.
A condom flushes down this giant toilet.

Should you Live So Long as Me — Bill Roberts

Should you live so long as me, you'll see
the miracles that happen over the years
almost without notice until one day

in your fifties or sixties, no one hobbles
about from polio, cleft palates become
kissable lips, club feet traded in for
dancing feet, spinal curvatures straighten

crossed eyes are caused by a butterfly
landing on your nose, meningitis is rarer
than a wooden nickel, pills you swallow
control heart disease, depression, even
migraines, and all sorts of other afflictions

will be on the run — the menace of cancer
crippling arthritis, Lou Gehrig's dreaded
disease, MS, measles, mumps, and all those
other childhood invasions — AIDS, too —

All with limited life spans, soon to be but
painful memories of earlier years — yours
and mine, should you live so long as me.

Censured at Starbucks — Ellaraine Lockie

The book bumps my
Swiss chocolate bar square
off the tiny table
to the freshly wiped wooden floor
where the carefully rationed quota
of daily decadence
winks cocoa bean brown eyes
in clandestine persuasion

I'd pick it up
and plop it in my mouth
(Suspecting the life expectancy
of most germs outside a medium
is less than sixty seconds)
if it weren't for the three-year old boy
watching like a dog-in-waiting
to see what my next move might be

Role model mindful
and with maybe meagerly concern
for castigation from customers
old enough to consume coffee
I proceed with the picking up part
and place the chocolate by my thesaurus

The implied trip
to the trash can in the corner
is obscured behind a need to write longer
than a three-year old's attention span
and a clientele's turnover
when I can carefreely complete
my consummation of the culinary act

On the Film *The 10* — Donald Lev

A lot of what passes for humor these days
fails to reach me
but this is genuinely funny.
It is *Satyricon* & Henry Miller;
the Marx Brothers & the Brits'
Carry Ons and *Bedazzled*—
and very close in spirit to Bertolt Brecht
& Bob Downey—
but, hey—
we've come a long way
since the 20th Century!

9/07

On the Film *Paris Je T'aime* — Donald Lev

It was this or "Sicko."

I like Michael Moore

but I don't need to know any more
than I do already about the sins of the healthcare industry.

My Paris, however, coming mostly
from Hemingway and *Casablanca*,
as in "We'll always have Paris"
needed some serious updating.

Leading lights, directors and actors,
of the current film industry
contribute miracles of brevity,
Poignancy, and completeness
To this zesty pot-pourri of neighborhoods;
that in no way replace
or make obsolescent
the eternal sentiment:

"We'll always have Paris"

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