

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

29



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 29, #2

Hoping to fly like birds,
But utterly exhausted,
One can only watch the twilight pass away.

Phan Thuan

excerpted from *American Moon*

(translated by Ai-Jen Lin Chao)

published in STREAMS 8 (Ten Penny Players)

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 29

Number 2*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

contents

Madeline Tiger	4	Paul Kareem Tayyar	14	Lee Evans	24
David Michael Nixon	6	Sherry Weaver Smith	15	Thomas D. Reynolds	25
Ellaraine Lockie	8	R. Yurman	16	Joanne Seltzer	27
Noel Sloboda	9	Patricia Kelly	17	Sylvia Manning	28
Ida Fasel	10	Geoff Stevens	18	Donna Barkman	30
Lyn Lifshin	11	Michael Hathaway	19	Davide Trame	32
Ruth Moon Kempher	13	William Corner Clarke	21	Donald Lev	34
		Gerald Bosacker	23		

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

©2008 Ten Penny Players Inc. *This magazine is published 5/08.

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



New York City Prayer, June 2003 — Madeline Tiger

How do I thank-----

How do I pray to -----

—to "source that gives us what we need", "alternative concept"

—Alicia Ostriker's suggestion, Midrash group, 6/03

"If you want the bamboo, go to the bamboo" (saying of the Japanese haiku poets)

If I see the pigeon, I see

the pigeon feeding the pigeon.

If I am here, I am here

nor the oversleeping nor the tunnel

nor the river itself

but the being here

nor the highway nor gridlock and

ambulance, nor

sirens and the crazy and the

avenues, but the Here.

If I found parking, I found
a place and I am here. If
here is humus and bread
fresh melon and vegetable crisp,
here is tea, I go to the
teapot and pour.

If I wear bangles, I do.
If you speak,
if you allow me to speak,
if one finds a word and a word
we go to those words deep there.
There is the word and sky.

And if there were great blossoms of
clematis this morning billowing violet
blue in waves flowing over
the lamppost, I look. I say
Look! At the clematis!

And if I have slept
past trouble, sleep has
taken me past trouble to
this day, silver, blue, here.

If I want to be thankful
No—if I AM thankful, this
day: the opening, the bamboo
and the opening through bamboo.

Even in Sleep — David Michael Nixon

I am waiting to be lost,
but so far, I am always
right where I left me.

Even in sleep, I know the way,
And swim through dreams to daylight.

In the Dim Back Garden — David Michael Nixon

No strange failure appears
in the dim back garden.
We remain there for now,
as hollyhock and pansy,
tulip and glad bloom and wither
and we sip hand-squeezed lemonade
under the catalpa,
whose giant bean pods shake
in the warm goddess breath.

Harbinger Ellaraine Lockie

How could I know
you'd be so upset
about the dead bird
on the dining table
Just a teenager
Probably out imbibing
Slugging down
pyracantha berries

Then drunk diving
the window
I kept its carcass
to share the sadness
and the beauty
Close, you could see
the red breast
bookended in black
Still, you could feel
the oil slicked feathers
Steal a sensuous stroke
Silent, you could hear
the harmony of death

But you didn't
See the sadness
or observe the beauty
You felt the fear
of a drive home
after eight
bottles of beer
Of hands shaking
In a sales meeting
Of the plastic bag
that held the bird

From the Garden — Noel Sloboda

Broken god, every summer, you come. The same rock, a fragment of one of your ancient alters, all that remains, a settee now, as you bask under the warm sun. The same sun you came close to touching in millennia past, before your wings were shorn, before you shrank. So many skins past. You soak up the warmth, hoping it might restore you, making you swell and soar and sing again. Yet what the sun wants is blood, and you take your victims whole, spilling not a drop. You remain shackled to the ground, silent, barred from your throne in the sky. Sometimes, though, worshippers come, mostly little boys, who take a step to speed you toward your destiny. Shadowing the old rituals, they take your head with a rock or spade, spraying the hot stone with blood. One day—a bad day for little boys—the rough bed grown incarnadine will become a platform for launch. Your wings will bloom and you, unbroken god, will swell and sing and soar again.

A Few Words — Ida Fasel

With God,
every breath is
an angel. With angels,
their every word is *hineni* —
"Send me."

Father,
may I serve you
all my life, flying a
little lower than angels, a
blue bird.

First published in The Deronda Review, Vol. 1, No. 1.

An interpretation of this poem is posted on
www.pointandcircumference.com/deronda/main.htm

In the One Space that Wasn't Frozen - Lyn Lifshin

The heron, deep
in pond water,
still as sticks

and then, a sudden
swoop like the
last fruit falling

off a tree into snow
I happened to see it,
standing near the

window, that flash
of tangerine and
golden in its beak like

a barb of sun, a slice
of guava in colorless
air. It's been so long

I don't remember
something I looked for
and wanted to come

came so fast

Fields Smolder with Light — Lyn Lifshin

Temperatures falling.

Moon slivers on the
rolling skin of water.

Geese in half light,
armada of feathers.

Wind blows them closer.

One silver band glows.

Their onyx, black flame
in a night fire.

After Walking the Dogs — Ruth Moon Kempher

damp air

and a darkness of birds

veiling the horizon

A Poem for Michael Jordan — Paul Kareem Tayyar

They say you could fly,
That you could have eaten a meal
In the time between take-off and landing,
The rim like a buffet table you returned to again and again,
Forever hungry.

As a boy I hung a poster of you on my wall,
The one where you cradled the moon in your hand,
Leapt towards the basket that hung like Heaven itself,
Your grace seemingly capable of pulling it down to earth
For the rest of us, letting us run our hands through its hair.

Four Blackbirds — Sherry Weaver Smith

Four red-winged blackbirds
take crimson west
under fog.

Bird-throat call ends.
Bent from the heaviness
of the day's last gold,
rye grass heads rustle.

After fog pushes light
into tree roots,
into cracks in mud,
dark comes out to spin
around in a slow wind.

sunset in The Sunset — R. Yurman

three birds sail
across pale orange
 blacken with each sweep of wing

the undersides of clouds
 catch pink fire
wires strung house to house
 cut the sky

when I look back
 toward the hills
it is already night

Patricia Kelly

my friend's beloved

deceased cat purrs

fading thunderstorm

Geoff Stevens

Afraid to land in case I fossilize
I fly around on my pterodactyl wings
I'm millions of years old
and a little deaf
can't hear myself creaking along
didn't hear the news that I was extinct

It Might Be Funny If they Didn't Need One So Bad
Michael Hathaway

There's this old black hen -
we'll call her Mary -
dedicated & belligerent,
she sets on a cluster of seven eggs
on my back porch.

It is an effort in futility
since we have no rooster
& there is no fertility . . .
unless, of course,
she's trying to hatch
the Chicken Messiah . . .

(dedicated to kentuckyfriedcruelty.com)

They Will Probably End Up In Museums — Michael Hathaway

while changing eight cat litter boxes
with a Discovery Channel show about dinosaur dung
playing in the background,
it occurred to me that
a million years from now
anthropologists who discover the landfill
at what was known as central Kansas,
in the center of the North American continent,
may be infinitely more fascinated and enamored
by the petrified contents of these reeking black garbage bags,
as well as the little petrified nuggets I scoop daily
& tie & discard so diligently in plastic grocery bags
than anyone ever was with my poems.

Sandcastle — William Corner Clarke

And the warrior's castle
Pride of the summer morning
Is about to be destroyed
As the white winged watchers
Wheel and screech
High above the encircling tide

The massive walls of sand
Built to tempt the waves
Are breached and foamed away
The noble paper flags
Are stolen by the wind
The dizzying towers melt
Into the rush of spray

And the ocean takes possession
Of the bucket and the spade
And the watchers
Read the roar of light
On the toss of the green sea weed
And dip and soar and celebrate
The victory in sight

But then a whisper
From the hidden moon
Reminds the water of its role
And sighing by the grey sea wall
It drags its spoils of war
Back to the counting
Houses of the deep

And all the while
Across the battle lines
The coiled blue listeners listen
Within the echo of their shells
To the rise and fall of empires
To the ticking
Of the sands

Gardening — Gerald Bosacker

A long dead tin can,
robbed of its sheltering luster,
bereft of identity and content
rises from the topsoil grave,
shaking off its new armor of muck
while impaled upon my spading fork.
It drips mystery of origin and content
now halfway converted to rust.
What did it shelter and hide before?
It now unfolds a slimy conclave of worms.
This cluster of marauding Annelida,
voraciously seeking new worlds
to proselytize into productive loam,
converting all subterranean Earth.

Blind worms that fought off oxidation,
now digest the reddening rust.
They sing, Spring is here,
so stop digging and lets go fishing.

Richard The Third's Hump — Lee Evans

You can step off the train at Penrith,
And the first thing that you see might be
The ruins of Strickland's Tower—
Or the McDonalds' golden arches besieging
The hungry ghosts in the castle's keep,
Urging them to lay down their shields,
And get in line for a Happy Meal
Of flesh they need not see dismembered

O Stalwart bastion against the Scottish raids!
The roots of bracken, feckless feet of tourists
Disintegrate the sandstone into red dust
That swirls about the advertising campaign
Squatting heavily upon our shoulders,
Like the hump of Richard the Third—
Leaving us to rehearse that role,
And exit the scene tragically.

Two Voices in Winter — Thomas D. Reynolds

My dad's niece drove from Wyoming
On the Christmas after he got cancer.

As soon as she stepped from the white van,
We could see the resemblance to her deceased father.

Suddenly the house rang again with my uncle's laughter,
A bit higher and stuttering than remembered.

His voice drifted through the rooms of the house,
With the warmth and music of a rain shower.

His eyes still sparkled with optimism,
Saying that things would be all right.

Somehow.
And made us all believe it.

How the fire within us can endure
Long after our world has grown dark.

And yet within my father is another voice,
That rose within me as I walked in the snow,

Born of the frozen ground,
That says that life is hard and unrelenting,

That watched as the snow picked up,
Swirling now in the north wind,

That caused even the dark mare to lower
her head and head for the barn.

Where Eternity Meets the Sea — Joanne Seltzer
Lands End, Cornwall

Beyond attractions
built on cash
gulls fly overhead,
butterflies
unbutter Celtic
late summer flowers
that burst magically
from rock,
the tour guide points
across the water
at Deadeye Dick
and other local blokes
gone from tin mines
to the American
gunpowder frontier.

This western edge
of what was known
remains a testament
to what is dreamt.

One time, one forest — Sylvia Manning

When I leave
(quand je pars)
the forest deck
(le salon de la forêt)
I may never be here again.

I'd like to record forever, then,
should such be true:

a mother speaks
French here, as
gently as the breeze,
more gently;
a child twirls slowly,
her "dance as if leaf"
in the dapple of light
through poplars
and pine, high,
trop haute,
above us.

Soon she runs —
because her energy
is without limit,
she is very young.

And another mother
speaks, as gently
as the breeze.
And another child says, like a bird's
tentative query in new territory,
a few notes.

This is one time,
one forest,
several people,
all female,
in the perfect light
and shade of light,
today.

Bitter Harvest — Donna Barkman

From the top of the gorge, I see them:
two deer galloping upstream,
then pounding back, panicked by gun shots,
running for their lives.
I can smell their desperation,
see their dark winter coats stained red,
hear their wild silent call before they drop.
Each is bound atop a car, their taxi to the
taxidermist and the butcher, eyes still startled
in death, bullet holes still stinging.

My neighbors use the stealth of bow and arrow,
the forest secrecy of platforms nailed up high.
Their hunter presence unannounced, they pierce
their unsuspecting prey with sharpened steel.
A doe hangs from a tree, split from gullet to gut,
life juices running out,
as I wonder if this trusting venison *au jus*
is more delectable to harvesters
than deer steak carved from terror?

Continent — Davide Trame

Low tide on a winter morning,
the sandbars thicker, higher, large,
spread over with bald patches of brown mud
where egrets land, loiter, linger, their stares
at one with the infinitesimal nods of the air,
on a horizon of bare trees and reeds
where sunlight trickles and whispers in between.
And the lagoon water still like a gaze
left behind that waits, in the lustrous
eternity of mirroring veins.
I arrived early for the boat after the walk
and knew I was early
before looking at my watch and checking the timetable
on the pontoon, lulled by lappings, moorings whining,
my fingers following the numbers on the chart

breathing blue silence.

It was one of those moments when you feel
you are early anyway and you are glad
of any empty extra-time.

Time for throwing sticks for my dog
on a just discovered grass patch
and sit then on a bench on the bank,
a high bench, like a throne.

Time to know it was a time

I would later want to remember
when it surfaced slow and quiet
like mud in low tide

on which breath should be like the egrets' legs
scarce but vast in its loitering,
a naked continent and ages to linger
away from the routine web of hurried days.

On the Film 'Dixie Chicks: Shut up and sing' — Donald Lev

I am proud of the Dixie Chicks.

I happen to be, strangely enough, a devotee of country music since the age of 11.

I will not discuss how this came to be as it would take many more lines of verse than I feel like expending now.

Country music is a music of the working class (yes, America, it exists and is called for some reason the "middle class"). This is the muddy, oh so slow moving, very conservative arena where real things political take place.

Marx himself observes this, which is why he trusts this Class to bring in socialism. You can't win them all.

But then, "it ain't over till it's over."

Quite a look into the music industry too.

Not as bad as say the meat industry, but

An industry.

Any way, let's have one more round of applause for the Dixie Chicks.

& one more Bronx cheer for our unbeloved President.

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