

# Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME  
32

#10



*Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*

VOLUME 32, #10

**Morning  
incensed, inhaled.  
Joss sticks smolder —  
ashen dawn's dragon dreams  
haunt.**

**James Penha**

NIGHT OF THE DRAGON DANCE

Waterways, Volume 18, Number 10

# **WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream**

Volume 32

Number 10

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel

Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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*cover picture and frontispiece by Barbara and Richard*

Sample issues – \$5.00 Subscriptions -- \$45.00 Waterways is published 11 times a year.  
Submissions will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self addressed envelope.

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

Ten Penny Players Inc. This magazine is published April, 2012

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



## The Sound of Loss

In the monastery's temple, on Lantau Island,  
I light incense for a friend who died.  
I hear the striking of ancient bronze —  
ripples of sound radiate into the air.

I light incense for a friend who died,  
meditating on reverberating waves —  
ripples of sound radiate into the air  
dissipate into the universal sound.

Meditating on reverberating waves,  
awareness of time and place fade  
dissipate into the universal sound:  
the Earth, spinning on its axis, hums in B flat.

Awareness of time and place fade.  
A monk spins a wooden mallet around;  
the Earth, spinning on its axis, hums in B flat,  
oscillates in circular patterns of sound.

A monk spins a wooden mallet around  
the bronze surface of a singing bowl,  
oscillates in circular patterns of sound,  
weaves tones of land and sea and air.

The bronze surface of a singing bowl  
thrumming an echo into hidden corners  
weaves tones of land and sea and air.  
The bowl and the Earth sing my loss.

Thrumming an echo into hidden corners,  
in the monastery's temple on Lantau Island,  
the bowl and the Earth sing my loss.  
I hear the striking of ancient bronze.

*Margo Roby*



## 1) At 25

Sometimes I forget him  
the old man walking  
ahead of me

Still he walks his  
slow old man

walk

Sometimes forgetting  
me

## 2) At 70

I have almost caught  
up to the old  
man  
walking ahead of  
me

But I am  
slowing down

3) ?

Who was it I passed?

Did he wave me

on?

Where am I going?

*Frank Murphy*

## Busker

'Dixie' the old busker  
Standing at the entrance of the Dixieland Lounge  
With his green mould bowler  
And chewed up harp  
Playing for pennies  
Tunes that no one has ever heard  
  
'Dixie' the clown  
The vaudeville drunk in a snot stained muffler  
And a roach coloured suit  
Dancing his heart out and slapping his sides  
Against the whoop and rattle of fairground rides

'Dixie' the filthy old sod  
With a twisted fag lodged in a crack  
At the edge of a frown  
The scum of old fits  
Dried to a crust on nicotine lips  
Smelling of sorrow, puke and bile  
  
'Dixie' the geek  
Knowing his place  
With a cringing scrape  
To the gangs of louts drunk on the town  
Dodging the spit and cigarette butts  
Aimed at his face

'Dixie' the dosser  
Fixture of the all-night cafes  
Torn black coat blown by the wind  
Across the rain swept promenade  
Dixie the lost child, fading out of range  
Pale cloud eyes  
Slowly going blind

*William Corner Clarke*

## Tail Spin

Rag and bone, the fallen Angel, vibrant once with tenacity and talent – playing the guitar and singing like a bird, for hours on end, with all the classy combos, up and down el Camino mambo – until the trill inside him became a rattle, and not only in his throat but in his brain as well; and his magic hands turned into rubber bands, from all the drugs he shot through his marimba throbbing veins. Now it's wine he craves. It's all he can afford from the small change he manages to cadge, mostly from his former fans and few remaining friends.

Sometimes in the night you hear a cry outside, as from a lost child, and you look out the window to see him picking through the garbage for survival – the song bird with the magic hands and golden wings, who flew like an angel over an enchanted land.

*Rex Sexton*



ashen dawn's dragon  
dreams morning smolder to fire —  
first light, first breath

*Scott Owens*

## O body swayed to music

*How can you know the dancer from the dance* – W. B. Yeats

hips flex  
knees bend  
feet touch  
glide along  
then lift from  
the floor

floating on air  
arms outstretched  
fingers keeping time

shuffle and shift  
flutter and twist  
live in the bones

the dancer a wick  
the dance a flame

*R. Yurman*

## Flora Arrives in Louisville and Plans Her Future

*“A damsel there from Lexington was pleasing to my mind” – “The Lily of the West”*

My turnkey of a grandmother  
left me ill-prepared for the world:  
tossing away the bulk of her plantation  
to the slaves she set free – as if they’d know  
what to do with money and freedom –  
and left me just enough to live for a year,  
“If you’re frugal,” her will insisted.

Frugal, merely another way of saying,  
“Too timid to risk all in a glorious foray.”

So instead of a boarding house,  
I've checked into Louisville's most  
elegant hotel, taken its finest suite:  
a lady of money and mystery,  
to attract rich, slow thinking bees,  
and maybe arouse a few rogues  
to amuse myself with, before assuming  
the tedium of a wealthy planter's wife.

Tonight, my campaign begins  
with an opera box: Louisville society  
seeing me in all my finery, thought  
my lily-white fingers tremble.

I march into battle head regal,  
my bodice hinting at treasures  
whiter than alabaster and ivory,  
my slender waist yielding as cream,  
my fan a fluttering hummingbird,  
my hair in ringlets more inventive  
than airy pastry filigrees,  
my feet so dainty I float along —  
a flower for some wealthy dolt.

But how nobler to ensnare in marriage  
a clever man, rich as a potentate.

## Edgar Wainwright Spies Flora at the Opera

“A damsel there from Lexington was pleasing to my mind.” – “The Lily of the West”

She sat alone in a box, a goddess  
surveying us poor mortals below:  
my breath an emptied squeeze-box.  
Ever since I'd arrived in Louisville  
to pursue my fortune, I'd spied beauties  
on the street, on horseback, in carriages,  
frowning to examine bolts of silk –  
but nothing, nothing compared to her.

At intermission, I ran for refreshments,  
brazened into her box, handed her a glass  
of champagne or maybe lemonade,

I'd no recollection, so lovely was her smile,  
as if accepting a perfect rose  
from a dirt farmer's soil-spackled hands.

But boldness was all, so I talked  
like the April spate, made her laugh,  
her butterfly fingers alighting on my arm  
for an instant during one song or another.

For the first time since leaving  
my brother's farm, I knew I'd done  
the wise thing, that all the hours  
I'd practiced speaking like a gentleman,  
instead of the hillbilly I was, had begun  
to point me toward my exalted future.

She was beauty itself, and judging  
by her gown, her box, her taking  
the finest suite at Louisville's best hotel,  
rich as well, and mine for the plucking,  
if I played my cards like a Memphis gambler.

The opera over, I fought off other dandies,  
to hand her into a hansom, her laughter  
fluting for me to call on her tomorrow.



**Louis Beauregard Spies Flora,  
Soon To Be the Lily of the West, at the Louisville Opera**

Songs should be sung about  
this mysterious wench who swooped  
into Louisville like a falcon,  
and tore the wings off  
every glorious songbird  
in our fair and amusing city.  
Rumors fly wild as swallows  
from a burning barn,  
about where she came from,  
who her people are,  
and, most important:  
how much she's worth.

Not that any of that fru-frah  
matters to me: manacled to a woman  
who believes commingling  
exists solely for the unpleasant  
purpose of producing an heir.  
So I seek pleasure elsewhere:  
this Flora, I'll wager, more fun  
than a night in high yeller brothel.

But something not quite right about her:  
too calculated in looking like a lady  
of acres and slaves. If she's trying  
to land a fat catfish in marriage,  
only fair to play her like a trout.

The young buck next to her  
is impatient as a wolf to eat her up.  
I'll wager her teeth are sharper than his.  
A point of honor to show the scamp—  
who smells of the stable and sty,  
despite his fine suit and his hair  
slick as aspic at a banquet—  
how to woo, win and escape  
this specimen of feminine excellence.

## Leonidas Hubbard, Songwriter, After the Murder Trial

*"Still I love my faithless Flora, the Lily of the West." – American Folk Song*

You'd never know, listening to me now,  
I was tossed about in vomit-steerage:  
Sholem Leibovitz, my Russian-Jewish name,  
the name I forgot the instant I escaped  
the tsar's death-march army for America.

New York, more crowded and filthy  
than Russian pig sties, I moved south,  
left my past so far behind I'd never hear  
a word of Yiddish again, never wax nostalgic  
for Mama's chullent stews or the challah  
she braided and baked to a sweetness we Jews

will taste only after the Messiah comes,  
which he never will, so best to grab  
what pleasures this earth has to offer  
from its capricious cornucopia.

Who knew when I stepped into my first  
Louisville saloon I possessed a talent  
for composing songs? Why I've attended  
this trial, Flora, caught with Louis Beauregard,  
Edgar Wainwright, the dandy who swore  
she'd love him or no one; his blade finished  
poor Louis, a man you could always count on  
to stand a round, if only to keep from returning  
to his wife, cruel as the Russian witch, Baba Yaga.

How wonderfully Flora lied, claiming she'd never  
seen Wainwright before that crimson morning.  
Her tears flowed more naturally than springs;  
her bosoms heaved so beautifully,  
each man in the courtroom sat entranced.

While listening, I got down my song's refrain:  
"The name she wore was Flora, the Lily of the West."  
Long after she's wrinkled as my bubble's withered-  
apple face, my song

*Robert Cooperman*

## **In the Parsonage Graveyard Howarth, England**

Where the Brontë's lived. Average age at death, twenty six, child mortality rate, forty per cent. Overflowing graveyard draining into shared water source. The most familiar sound heard inside: the mason's chisel inscribing stones

*Alan Catlin*

## What They're Making

fools of  
some of us;  
robots of  
some of us;  
rabbits of  
the rest.

*Wayne Hogan*



## **Thirty-Five Years Ago**

When my wife was dying  
she told me  
to find a blonde  
and go to the Riviera.  
I found the blonde,  
but we flew  
to San Francisco.  
After owning four homes  
in three states,  
we're still together.

## **Little Miss Holsum**

My mother was born  
on St. Patrick's Day,  
so it was always easy  
to remember her birthday.  
My wife and I agree:  
she was incredibly sweet.  
She reminded me  
of Little Miss Holsum,  
the girl pictured  
on the bread wrapper.  
Sometimes I wonder why  
she stayed with my father,  
but she'd say, "Someone  
has to take care of the sick."

Doctors wanted him to have  
a prefrontal lobotomy  
when he was in high school.  
She'd begin a sentence  
with, "I think," and he'd  
slam his fist on the table  
and shout, "I'll do  
the thinking around here."  
Mom would have been  
in her nineties this year.  
St. Patrick's Day is only  
a couple of weeks away.  
"Here's to you, Mom."

*Arthur Winfield Knight*

**This dishwasher – why not! cold**  
flowing backward will be clean again  
though you rinse the cup

upside-down, slowly, wallowing  
and since you are left handed  
you have to reach across

till your skin tightens, grows  
scales and once on shore  
your jaws flatten, consoled

that the dead are drinking instead  
are already flowers and each evening  
becomes one more grateful hillside

waiting for rain the way all dirt  
holds back the dead as riverbanks  
– it makes sense! inside this sink

an overpowering thirst for under  
– what you call daylight  
was once eternal rain

and night after night you wash  
this same cup, over and over  
to start a simple fire.

*Simon Perchik*

## She Only Came

She only came for the circus.

The clowns were funny.  
The lights were bright.

She left because

the rides were not tall enough  
and the tigers were too tame.

*H. Edgar Hix*

## Awakening

Days of ceaseless rain  
the sky a turgid soup  
thick with gnats.

Dawn – pale shafts pierce  
the forest's canopy

green scent of spruce  
rouses me.

*Arlene Mandell*

## After, Yusuf/Cat Stevens

In '72, I tuned  
to Cat Stevens  
inviting us to ride  
the peace train.  
I dreamed  
through the night  
of flying  
among treetops  
and never doubted  
I couldn't.



On  
down  
the street  
a solo flutist  
played  
a rooftop gig.  
His melody flowed  
and lingered  
my direction:

the sky way  
catching a cosmic train —  
the teaser,  
vivid childhood realities:  
my flying deep and high  
the stairwell  
while my body slept.

Never too far away  
trains still whistle  
their timbre into the wind.  
Their distant rumbling rhythm  
calms like chamomile tea  
carries me somewhere  
sure enough.

*Mary Belardi Erickson*

## Slow to Rise

rise in the morning  
first dream of new year  
five ships at rest on cradles  
return to boat yard  
one hundred years ago  
Year of the Dragon  
the old Chinese fishing village  
burns, fanned by the winds  
stinging smoke

rise in the morning  
rain and steam  
off harbor's mouth  
a skipjack in slow motion  
making signals  
in shallow water  
and going by the lead  
dried fish and incense  
offers longevity and felicity

*Neal Whitman*

ISSN 0197-4777

**Very limited printing**

Ten Penny Players, Inc.

(a 501c3 not for profit corporation)

Subscriptions -- \$45 for 11 issues.

Sample issues — \$5.00 (includes postage).

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