

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
27



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #5

Deign on the passing World to turn thine Eyes,
And pause a while from Letters to be wise;
There mark what Ills the Scholar's Life assail,
Toil, Envy, Want, the Patron, and the Jail.

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 5*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

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An Epigram on Language — Matthew Landrum

Blessed Babel tuned our tongues
To sweet discord, a second fall.
But Lord, the things we've spoke and sung
Make it seem no curse at all.

you walk into a room — Michael A. Flanagan

you walk into a room and
they expect you to be some-
one, you're full of flaws and
it causes you to want to give
them something, do they have
any idea there are caverns in
your head like graves with-
out markers? do they know
that who you are is buried,
that you don't let that out?
you might stand there mum
but you lack the nerve for it,

it's almost the law, there
must be some kind of
presentation, the same as
a line of clothing on a pole
you have accumulated a set
of choices — *the comic, the
sportsman, the rogue*, you
wonder how many others
are playing the same game,
you study their faces, the
way a hand moves, a mouth
smiles, it's impossible,
you'll never know

A Hard Journey — David Michael Nixon

Every day, I want to smack someone,
to make a cutting comment, to swear
at some jerk or just someone
who innocently annoys me.

Every day, I must struggle to stay
my hand, my tongue, to keep what peace
I can, so that the small wars of
the present do not flare up and threaten
to rage into deadly conflagrations.

You have to fight fire with hard-won
caution, so that you may not need
the holy water of protest
and nonviolent intervention,
so you may save that liquid balm
to pour on fires others are bound to set.

Even if I were Smokey the Bear,
peace would be a hard journey,
always alert to hold back
my own folly,
always so many fires
to try to put out.

Bird Watching — Andrew H. Oerke

Sparrows prepare the grass, then peck in spurts,
then pause to peck again.

A cardinal appears
but respects himself too much
to lose decorum by association.

The cardinal yanks himself
across the clothesline yard,
pulsing through time and space
like an artery.

Robins also investigate the grass,
but they won't tolerate
the peasants' presence either
and they scam without a cheep.

The poor sparrows are too devoted
to their grub to develop a style.
They have their plumpness to keep in mind.
They are hungry and it will soon be night.

Going Home — Mary K. Lindberg

Officemate Brad with leggy blond
dash out of our office, faces
flushed like the sky
after a red sun drops,
their Independent Study of
Lady Chatterly's Lover.
My handsome colleague,
notorious for driving nubile
coeds to their cars
in that mile-long parking lot,
was said to have turned
over a new leaf
when tenure drew near.

Female profs in white shorts
walk toward cars; bronzed boys
in creamy convertibles sidle up,
offer rides. Parking spaces
rock with rousing joys
not shared in the classroom.
Moon rises. At the gate
D.H. Lawrence raises long prong
with hirsute arm, beaming into
each steaming car.

Empty Bottle — James Penha

Now I have seen through you

and beheld
the distortions
of the world
you know

clearly

you'd better
not stand
for it.

Two Routes, Second Thoughts — M. M. Nichols

How many my missteps —
every available pothole,
ankles away, as if an enemy cursed me.

Teens were bad enough, and the world's war
newsreeling. We hadn't heard yet
The enemy is Us.

My spastic sister, then
when we knew I was her enemy
crowed at me: "Life isn't all in books."

Is that what a friend told her?
some loving comforter
for slowness,

for the miles
she would have to go by skewed
improbable steps: her tortoise route.

I thought she wanted to punish me
with wisdom. Thought? Mad
brain, exercised

in wrestling against the real,
leaping to conclusions,
marching to war.

No inkling
I was to go twice the miles
rocking around and tunneling through

mountains of the mind, echoing
the poets, rapt in them,
at last stretching

the space
between my ears:
room for a voice of my own,

tolerably unbookish, to
speak peace and be
friends with.

Unspeakable — Bill Roberts

The family three doors west doesn't speak to us or, as far as I can tell, to anyone else on our block, but simply carries on private, hushed and forced conversations amongst themselves — stern father, loyal wife, son, his girlish wife and their attractive little girl, now perhaps three, the only one who looks at us and our dogs as we walk by, smiling but never, as instructed, does she speak. Once, their little black-and-white pug ran off their lawn and came at us threateningly, the fierce bark telling us we wouldn't be welcome on their perfectly-tended grass.

We laughed out loud at the outrageous mutt,
our dogs' tails wagging at his scolding,
but stern poppa snatched up the dog and
disappeared into the house, the pup having
violated the family taboo. To be honest,
I have not seen that doggie again since,
nearly six months ago. I shudder to think
what might happen if the little girl, talking
quite volubly now, should run toward us
as we walk by and exchange a pleasantry.

Reciting Poetry — Edward J. Rielly

Reciting poetry the two young men
sauntered slowly down the sidewalk,
testing memory, sharing favorites,
pulling quatrains and couplets out

of treasured poems, ignoring passersby,
cars whizzing along close enough to touch,
if metal, glass, and tires called as clearly
as poetry they had learned to love.

Naked — Anselm Brocki

Having wasted plenty
of time in the past
letting my mind drift,
mostly ricocheting
painfully, destructively
from guilt to guilt,
how embarrassing
now to look up from
an engaging book

in a fast-food shop
and see a gray-headed
retiree in a zip-up
full-sleeve sweater,
a baseball-capped
teen, a mechanic
in a lettered orange
shirt, a clerical girl
in white blouse
and black skirt —
all of them without
book, newspaper,

radio, or telephone,
through eating
and now staring
dead ahead as if
thinking their lives
over but actually
letting their minds
wander, unaware
that they are all
on display naked
in a public place.

On the Film *The Notorious Bettie Page* — Donald Lev

A film about innocence

An ancient mostly Hebrew literary device
that has persisted along side its Hellenic cousin
Oedipus, till now . . .

& a most convincing evocation of the
sweet, sick, fifties —
and of definitely the Fortysecond Street I remember!

5/06

Britain's Minister for Fitness reveals how she and her husband tackled an armed bank robber — Rochelle Ratner

They were at the back of the line. The robber walked to the front and grabbed one of the customers. Because the line was long they were able to slip out the door and run to the jewelry shop next door. They called the cops. But then they saw the robber come out of the bank and briskly walk away. Her husband followed him. When the man started running he tackled him, grabbed the gun from his belt, and jammed his finger into the trigger so it wouldn't shoot. She stayed behind with the children.

The Translator — Gwenn Gebhard

An American journalist found him
browsing the outdoor book market.
A graduate student in English
with no place to go
because the University shut down
after the fall of Baghdad.

He lives with his family,
his two brothers also unmarried.
His father, worried, proud, tells his son —
This is a chance to mature,
Maybe learn more about the world.
His mother hates his job.

He lies to them, always.
Never describes the things he's seen
or places he's been while at work.
A car bomb outside
the convention center; a suicide bomber
at the employment offices; an ambush
at a military checkpoint.

In his spare time, the translator is
consumed with finishing his thesis:
Disintegration of the Family
in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill.

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