

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
27



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, Volume 27, #2

Wealth heap'd on Wealth, nor Truth nor Safety buys,
The Dangers gather as the Treasures rise.

Samuel Johnson
from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 27

Number 2*

Designed, Edited and Published by Richard Spiegel & Barbara Fisher

Thomas Perry, Admirable Factotum

c o n t e n t s

Lola Ridge	4-7	Patricia Wellingham Jones	15-16
Anselm Brocki	8-10	Rex Sexton	17-18
Stephen Crane	11-12	James Penha	19-20
David Michael Nixon	13-14	Mary Lindberg	21-23

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

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



Reveille — Lola Ridge

Come forth, you workers!
Let the fires go cold —
Let the iron spill out, out of the troughs —
Let the iron run wild
Like a red bramble on the floors —
Leave the mill and the foundry and the mine
And the shrapnel lying on the wharves —
Leave the desk and the shuttle and the loom —
Come,
With your ashen lives,
Your lives like dust in your hands.

I call upon you, workers.

It is not yet light

But I beat upon your doors.

You say you await the Dawn

But I say you are the Dawn.

Come, in your irresistible unspent force

And make new light upon the mountains.

You have turned deaf ears to others —
Me you shall hear.

Out of the mouths of turbines,
Out of the turgid throats of engines,
Over the whistling steam,
You shall hear me shrilly piping.
Your mills I shall enter like the wind,
And blow upon your hearts,
Kindling the slow fire.

They think they have tamed you, workers —

Beaten you to a tool

To scoop up hot honor

Till it be cool —

But out of the passion of the red frontiers

A great flower trembles and burns and glows

And each of its petals is a people. ————

—————| Come forth, you workers —

Clinging to your stable

And your wisp of warm straw —

Let the fires grow cold,

Let the iron spill out of the troughs,

Let the iron run wild

Like a red bramble on the floors....

As our forefathers stood on the prairies
So let us stand in a ring,
Let us tear up their prisons like grass
And beat them to barricades —
Let us meet the fire of their guns
With a greater fire,
Till the birds shall fly to the mountains
For one safe bough.

Extracted from *Sun-Up and Other Poems*
First published in *The New Republic*, 1920

Memoir — Anselm Brocki

Under the circumstances
of the twentieth century,
naturally, I did the best
I could with what was
given but secretly feel
late at night it would have
been far easier, even more
enjoyable, with eight
added inches of height
to see what was going on

over heads in crowds,
look level at competitors
or even slightly down;
ribs that curved in, not
out, to feel more at ease
in a swimsuit at the beach;
more manageable hair
that didn't need a knotted
nylon stocking top to bend
it down at night; and most
important, a more cheerful

outlook instead of worrying
all the time about not being
able to keep up—pay bills,
get a promotion, clean out
the garage, plaster zigzag
cracks along the foundation
of the house, stay ahead
of the weeds—and most
of all, wasting so much
precious time on lack
of achievement and death.

A Youth in Apparel that Glittered — Stephen Crane

A youth in apparel that glittered
Went to walk in a grim forest.
There he met an assassin
Attired all in garb of old days;
He, scowling through the thickets,
And dagger poised quivering,
Rushed upon the youth.

"Sir," said this latter,
"I am enchanted, believe me,
To die, thus,
In this medieval fashion,
According to the best legends;
Ah, what joy!"
Then took he the wound, smiling,
And died, content.

Life in Backyards — David Michael Nixon

Groundhog beyond
the chain-link fence—
chipmunk leaps through
the holes, one side
to the other;

grass grows both sides
and under; dirt
is everywhere,
the ground of all
being; air feeds
the fire in
the living; rain
will come and life
in backyards bloom.

Emma's Journey: 1920 — Patricia Wellingham Jones

Emma's family followed the trail of honey,
hope a sweet trickle down their throats.
They wrestled an ancient Ford truck
from Oklahoma to California,
gasped in the sharp light
of orange-flavored air.

Young and sturdy, her arms browned,
Emma turned stringy from work,
dropped at night with the weight of tree trunks
felled by strangling vines.
Dresses shrank and faded
in the searing sun of August,
dreams failed to nail bad choices to fence posts.

Her family drifted back to the home place
just in time for The Dust
to choke the land.
She stayed in the California sun.
Followed the season's cycle
from sorting line to packing shed.

Emma found her gold in peaches
and oranges, apricots and pears.
The friends she made in those early years
were the sweetening of old age.

Night Ride — Rex Sexton

I steal a ride with the ragman,
around us raw winds rip.
He lashes his horse down the foggy streets,
wagon wheels rattling like demons in the mist.

Ghost garments fly through the air,
land in his cart on angel wings -
wedding gowns yellowed with age,
threadbare suits, faded pants and shirts,
overcoats, baby bonnets, babushkas,
feathered hats and lingerie.

The howling winds form a chorus,
singing songs as we chase through the streets,
of joy and sorrow, birth and death - phantom
voices in a holy dream.

Clothes swoop down like spirits.
Scraps of lives float everywhere.

The sun and moon on a merry-go-round...

After the Fall the Fall — James Penha

Umbrellas in a blizzard
abandoned
like toadstools in the autumn forest
with no one to see them
or use them:
are they poisonous
or visible
or can they hear the fall

of each of the six sides of one snowflake

or must we wait
for the awful sound—

after ignored mushrooms
under parasols blanched
by the drift
that compresses

the delicate calculus of the snowflake

—of the avalanche?

El Dorado — Mary Lindberg

"Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"
The shade replies, —
"If you seek for Eldorado"
Edgar Allen Poe

In my hand I finger a gold
filigree necklace, so designed
that light flashes as it did
five hundred years ago.

Why does the heart beat
faster when carats are real?
Am I as crass as those
who trampled Mesoamerica
with boots of greed?

And all, the story goes,
because a Spanish poet invented
a king who swathed his body with
ground gold, prayed naked on a raft.
Amazed, his warriors threw gold and
emerald offerings into the lake.

Later poets embellished the story,
like the intricate swirls and figures
on this necklace. The gilded lake king
grew into a shining city where gold
was as plentiful as air.

Like a vine that grasps for sun
strangling the tree, thousands
died to grasp the gleam I
hold dancing in my hand.

As centuries slide soundlessly
over the shimmering city, I
put the necklace back in the case,
coveting only the story it tells.

