

The 2River View

17.4 (Summer 2013)



new poems by

John Guzlowski, Taylor Graham, Kip Knott, Katherine Mitchell
A. Molotkov, Dave Nielsen, Andrew Oerke, Suzanne Parker
Andres Rojas, Megan Volpert, Steven Winn

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A. Molotkov

from *Time and Absence*

xxx

eighteen people died as I wrote this line
may someone remember them

xxx

let's count silences
let's share absence

on the vast snow field
of life's empty page
our words
are grains of sand

how much sand does it take
to defeat entropy?

and yet
we are a story
that took fourteen billion years
to write itself

and I wonder
about all that sand
all that snow

xxx

a melody
doesn't exist all at once
we hear a memory
enjoy an absence

A. Molotkov

we pretend that the past
is a living reference

that the moments
comprising our lives
make sense as a whole

that a note ago
we were the same

that a song
feels our presence

that a chord
struck at birth
still rings true when we die

we believe that a melody
remembers us

xxx

I unfold the ocean
and let it spread
over the table

the future
doesn't bother me

you are floating there
on a boat
too small to see
I become one of those
who watch you from the distance

let me know if the years we have
are enough for us

can I express absence
more vividly
than by keeping silent?

I fold the distance in half
and then in half again
until you're close
I stay awake
while you answer

xxx

the sand
the snow
I draw a few continents
on a paper napkin
and those who live there
don't realize how flimsy their ground is

can you refresh all my memories
at once?

can everything explode
in slow motion?

say nothing in my mind
keep your distance

in my worst case scenario
I die
as I write this last word

Taylor Graham

Border Patrol

Sun's behind the mountain,
sky barely dim enough to see -
it's coyote hunting time.
We aim for the wild north corner
through rimrock, up the creek
that rips our fence out after storms -
fence we put up to keep
sheep in, aliens out. My dogs
alert me. This morning
Loki dashes ahead, small,
sable Shepherd; in faint light,
I might mistake her
for those marauders. Boogie
pads along beside me,
assures it's safe
to let the sheep out - a new
lamb, no older than the ones
killed by coyotes,
those aliens who lived here
long before we came.

Taylor Graham

Cowboy in the Woods

I'd lost the trail from Thunder Mountain to my car. I was consulting my map, following dog and sun through aspen grove when, from between trees, rode a cowboy. He reined up his sorrel right in front of me, hooves almost touching the toes of my boots. "This is private property, you're in trespass." Raspy voice, clipped like horseshoe on granite. Nice sorrel, careful on its hooves. "Name's Denny Martin, I work for Mr. Scott, he owns this land. Roadhead's off in that direction." He gestured past his shoulder; then, without seeming to move, shifted his weight in the saddle. Cowboy and horse disappeared into forest, leaving just a breath of tobacco behind. As if he'd ridden straight off the Marlboro prairie into that upcountry aspen grove. Two years later, I happened on the obit. Denny Martin dead, lung cancer. What caught in my throat wasn't barbwire. I wonder what happened to his horse.

John Guzlowski

Eye Contact with the Dead

Don't make eye contact
with the dead in their coffins.
They've suffered long enough,
walked too long upon the earth,

smelled its sweet air in the morning,
loved the people they've loved,
loved you as much as they could,
probably more than you guessed.

Now, it's time to look away.
You don't need to see their eyes
on you as you turn away,
their eyes watching as long

as they can, watching until
you turn into your own grave.

John Guzlowski

The World after the Fall

Eve stood there
for a moment
and watched her grace
dry up like water.

Whatever sunshine
had lingered on her skin
was gone

and when
she looked at Adam's face
she wondered
what she could say
to him.

They had words
of course—
They learned them together
but neither spoke.

What could
she say?

Sorry?

Next time,
it'll be different?

I didn't understand?

She just shook her head
and he did too.

Kip Knott

Elegy for Someone yet to Die

Buildings lean a little
toward the moon as it slips
quietly out of the city

swallowing stars as it rises.
I skim its reflection
on an oily puddle with my feet,

breaking it into halves
then quarters, one phase
spilling into the next,

marking this moment
of my life in slices of light
added, then subtracted.

Kip Knott

Voices

In these woods,
elms drunk on rain
step out of their bark
and cry for you.

Are you hiding in the light
of invisible animals?
A blue jay cackles
as if it knows.

The steady voice of an oil well asks
Where? Where?

In the distance, the brittle Ohio
breaks and the throats
of smokestacks choke on stars.

Darkness blossoms in bare trees.
I hear you calling
from the white cave
of this page.

Katherine Mitchell

The Evening of the Last Calm

The man works quickly,
repairs the blue-jay's wing,
ties three knots with blue thread.

He remembers pulling weeds,
killing spiders.
He is now happy for any living thing.

Lying on the living room floor,
he imagines stars overhead
and leaves falling
curled like paper catching fire,
imagines multiple pairs of steps
scattering the hunched leaves,
multiple sticks sharpened
for roasting marsh mellows.

He remembers singing nude
under a chandelier of running water
and robed with a choir,
voices a scaffold to the nave,
the ceiling vaulted
inside his mouth.

When he walks to the lake for water,
algae covers its surface
like clouds. He assigns identities -
sea horse, beard, wheelbarrow.

He holds the pan level
on his way back to the house,
avoids open fields,
though he has seen no one.

He ties a flashlight
over the card table,
inverts the lid of a sugar bowl,
adds water with a tattooed spoon.
The blue jay rests like a scar
on his open hand.

Dave Nielsen

Poem About a Deaf Woman

Imagine the lid of the piano
slammed shut,
or a glass chucked
against the wall—
Imagine all
that the animal hears—
dog, bear.
Think of the sound

of the road
from the pasture's
far corner—
or of a lover's breathing,
beside you in the dark.
And don't forget
conversations
in the elevator,

the talk that isn't yours.
No music to comfort,
yet no wind;
look out the window and see:
so many trees
like people
dancing to their headphones.
She can't hear

the pipes ticking
or the rain,
yet each moment is pounding,
wave after wave

softer than a tiptoe.

Dave Nielsen

Riddle at the Beginning of Time

No prophets yet.
Still, so much to be foretold.
Even God is a little uncertain.
Stones have yet to decide
upon silence,
and men gather
at the water contemplating
the world's first ship.

Of course there is a fat baby,
at its mother's pink
nipple—the world's first breakfast.

Does it feel early?
A fish jumps:
the world's first circle.

In the forest a wood cutter leans
into his very first chop:
something like philosophy,

something like bells
coming over the treetops.

What a moment!
A poet grows introspective
in the middle of a crossing.

Andrew Oerke

Dear Children,

When you were this small, I showed you how both index fingers jammed up tight together could raise a steeple; then we opened our doubledoor thumbs, tumbled our clasped knuckles inside-out and rolled over and, Hey! look at all the people stacked like mumblety-pegs in their pews. Uncle Carl made nickels disappear and re-appear suspiciously close to the cuffs of his pants.

Wish I could hand you the secret
but the secret is you *are* the secret.
If only you trusted yourselves instead
of them; it would save you so much time.

Wish I could dash to your shadows and say:
Lead them west in the morning to new frontiers,
and east of the moon at the end of the day.
Parents fade into the back country
where children cave into parents themselves.
You are all I have left for a legacy.
My ripe old words will glean their clauses with
commas that curl up into periods themselves
that will go to sleep inside themselves period;
at which time I will have done all that I could
and wish to God it were more than I ever did.

Andrew Oerke

The Sands

The sands drip through a woman's hourglass-
body of their own accord in passing.
They leave themselves to join themselves.
They count their sandy seeds like rosary beads
as they sacrifice themselves to the past, one grain at a time.

They unload the moving van of the wind,
and store the foam-rubber sofas of the moon.
The water spreads a plastic cape along the beach,
whose castles are built to crumble in seconds.

Clouds shake a salt and pepper shine and shade
on a progress of camels, packages and merchants
in a caravan for the Sultan of Curious Eyes.

Finally, the sand spins like a madman
whirling a dervish, and sinks back in dunes.
Anchorites and cacti live in the desert
where the soul has no distractions
and mirages wave the real from our eyes
so the "great sloth heart" can wake to its feelings
and the mind make images that slander the dust
with daydreams and visions that will not rust.

Suzanne Parker

Feed

The red fox keeps killing
the neighbor's chickens
for the thrill of it,
for bone snap and heat
+ stain + greed + warm
blood flooding the mouth,
for snarl+ legs+ the cornered
shiver of white feathers
in a viscous breeze,
for the low belly, tail high,
that red declaration
aflame in the field
+ fast, fast before its
even dragged the last meat
off the bone it is looking
at the few hens scratching
in the rafters, as if
heat could be cloaked
by dark as if their cries
weren't already his,
as if desire could be salved
with one small meal.

Suzanne Parker

Mulberry Picking

I don't think the orioles know their own splendor.
I don't think the mulberry tree knows it shivers as it holds them.
I don't think the berries' juice can slake any thirst as large as this
yet I march out each morning, colander in hand and beneath
the outrage of the crows pick what is difficult, sweet, what stains
under the nails and seeps into the tracks we all carry in our skin;
like a river, my greed flows purple, fast, and thunders
throughout the day, marking me, for all to see.

Andres Rojas

Encore

We fly, angels all
 now gravity's loss,
instruments of air better than real,
have Winehouse or Holiday voices
 at will, even Cobain's,

hold no jobs, can find anyone
known or not but seldom try, spend
our time instead with our one true one.
 Scientists tried to imagine

how the world dawned thus.
Now they spend their days
with their one true one.
 Priests too. Still

when I float off the grass
invoking like Parker
 on an unseen sax,
my solar plexus knows I'm not.
 And I'll never be. Him.

Andres Rojas

Seeing My Father

How did his car lay, solitary,
a lesser moon deflecting moonlight
barred by the shadows of pines,

my own from the porch light behind me
bent, another layer in the glass
under which his hands rose to the wheel,

barely seen through pollen and dust
as in life, his too-small chest and head
a reflection of glare and tired eyes,

wanting, perhaps, more than was there:
the non-gesture of breeze on branches,
the moon half hid in a cloud-cage sky.

Megan Volpert

We all fight

I think it would be cool to own a switchblade. But that means carrying it around and then that means using it, which seems like no fun. I'm not a violent person. Go ahead and throw me under the bus though, because I can lift it with my tongue. No kid ever bullied me in school. For years, I didn't understand it was because of my smart mouth. I didn't even know I had one until my father put soap in it. All people are strong and most don't know what their strengths are. The life is perfectly salvageable. It's just the person is not yet interested to be saved.

Megan Volpert

We see something terrible and bloom

Look at the sky, so you know what the emergency is. Fires happen at night. Floods happen during the day. Every natural disaster wants to perform when it can be best seen. There is this special type of black mold that only grows where there has been a flood. It's toxic. But there is also a mushroom, a black morel, which only grows where there has been a fire. It's delicious. The event is not really the thing, just a seed. In museums, I probably spend sixty percent of the time looking at people looking, and just forty percent looking at what they're looking at.

Steven Winn

The Beat

You feel it first, the
 thump
that thuds from nowhere up
and detonates
 a panic
so complete it takes another
 beat
or three to register
the car that's slid up
beside you, window cocked,
Gucci Mane throbbing from
 in there
through air and pavement, floorboard
 into you,
where panic flips to fury
in a beat
 a beat
 a beat
he marks, head dipped and
turned away, thumb tapping,
lightly tapping on the wheel.

And now how easily
it takes you in,
the insult of it vanished
in this intervention
of someone else's pleasure,
the blunt, concussive
 fact
of it,
the way it wraps him up
in it,
 the beat
repeating and repeating
in the space between.

And then the light turns green.

Steven Winn

Watching the Water

fall
all that
way makes the
mind resist its
plunging certainties
as the eye
flies up
through foam-
ing perturbation
to find a
silver strand
slung loose
in limber
free
fall
and then
another and
another after that
each one a
wish to end
incorporeal
in mist

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Contributors

John Guzowski has work in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Ontario Review*, and *Writer's Almanac*. *Lightning and Ashes* is a collection of poems about his parents' experiences in Nazi concentration camps. His novel *The Germans* is forthcoming from Cervena Barva Press.

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the California Sierra. Her poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Poetry International*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and the anthologies *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library) and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*.

Kip Knott is the author of four collections of poetry, the most recent being *Afraid of Heaven* (Mudlark). His poetry has most recently appeared in *Four and Twenty* and ***Right Hand Pointing***.



Silver Lake, Michigan: Sunset

Katherine Mitchell holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri—Saint Louis. She works professionally as an Alexander Technique teacher and teaches Argentine Tango at Washington University in St. Louis with her husband, Michael.

A. Molotkov has had poems recently accepted by *Kenyon Review*, *Mad Hatters Review*, and *Word Riot*. A. Molotkov serves on the Board of Directors of the Oregon Poetry Association. He co-edits *The Inflectionist Review*. www.AMolotkov.com.

Dave Nielsen studied English at Brigham Young University and is currently a PhD student at the University of Cincinnati. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Parnassus*, *Ploughshares*, *The Southern Review*, and other magazines.

Andrew Oerke has had poems in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, and numerous other magazines. In 2006, *African Stiltdancer* and *San Miguel de Allende* were published jointly by Swan Books and the United Nations Society for Writers and Artists. Subsequently, Oerke received the United Nations Literature Award. His most recent collection is *Never Seek to Tell Thy Love* (2010). Oerke passed away in early May.

Suzanne Parker is an editor at *MEAD: A Magazine of Literature and Libations*. *Viral*, winner of the Kinereth Gensler Book Award, is forthcoming from Alice James Books in September 2013.

Andres Rojas came to the U.S. from Cuba at age 13. He holds an M.F.A. and J.D. from the University of Florida. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in, among others, *Barrow Street*, *Cossack Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and the *New England Review*.

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Contributors

Megan Volpert is the author of four books on communication and popular culture, most notably about Andy Warhol. She has been teaching high school English in Atlanta for the better part of a decade. The poems printed here are forthcoming in *Only Ride* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2014).

Steven Winn is a San Francisco writer whose poems have appeared in *The Able Muse*, *Antioch Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Florida Review*, *Poetry East*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southern Poetry*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

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