

The **2**River **V**iew

4.2 (Winter 2000)



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Ward Kelley, Tony Keogh, Jane Pek, and Janeen Pergrin

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Katja

from *Rules of the Senses*

I (a reading)

And you may
call me, for the rest of your life
call me, read the service,
say the words, my
heart's not in it:

go on until your throat
aches. And at night
when off your shoulder falls
your shirt, that first
flash of brown
skin against white

call me again, your words
softer but the same:

I will not answer, I will mumble
every charm I know, my voice
rising wildly, my eyes
darting, darting south, sure you must,
afraid you will not come—

you may call for me, put your hand
on my shoulder, make me
warm when I have only been cold, press
the book into my palm, your lips
on mine

but I will not come. And when
your voice arrives smooth as water over
my body, when I shudder and say yes, still I will never
be yours, though the night continue,
though from my mouth you hear
the promise, though you make
the verse a furnace, and make me
the wine.

Katja

from *Rules of the Senses*

II (1989)

Rose from thick
dreams, washed off
humid sleep, steam
on the wall, clumsy
midmorning, your voice
which once said
desperate. I remember.
Hot water for tea.
Did I sleep? Your
figure printed
on the scarlet sheet,
stained, I remember rain
to come this morning could become
snow. Could come late. Your
voice which once said *sweet*.

Katja

from *Rules of the Senses*

III (Jim's reasons)

Your expression soft
in the morning, happy to see me
(for once)
at peace with you. Your cool
hand closing on the grip
of the cycle you sold
before we met, knowing
you could not stop in time.
And the way you explain
seasons, the water, things
I already know. How
did you admit me,
how does the change take hold?

Slowly, I think, as my eyes
adjust to the morning light,
your face, or is it moving
blurred as the stop sign,
easy to miss?

Alan DeNiro

Treatise on Atmosphere

Granted, steeples can only be built so high.
And air is only thick as a ghost.
Air isn't metal. You can't build buildings
out of wind. The blistering chill
nearly makes me want to pray,
but not quite. I'm listening for prairie
trains—shrill even a hundred miles away.
The sound of a train whistle
can break open the crabgrass along the tracks.
Briefly, and only during the night,
ice can weep from the stems,
as the train hurries to a coast.

Alan DeNiro

3 A.M.

The subway threads the tunnel. Centipedes
wake in mass all over the world.
I write a letter to my dead grandfather,
a flamethrower Marine.
The next stop is miles, the silence
around me shakes
enough to make my bones veer.

Ron Ellis

CANTO 1 Hung-up and dried

Hung-up and dried in the tent, on a misty glum morning,
full in retreat from academia and domesticia,
this lonely quest I ply, two-ply, four-ply polyester tread,
to follow Buddha, see through illusion my brittle self.

Slowly then and with plodding keys, the gas lantern
frothing off its hiss of light, typing hard lines
down the halls of my soft thoughts. Not looking back,
keeping always the thought forward
and learning to breathe the long meaty breath
taught by Walt and Charles and Jack,
and yea Ezra and Allen too. Not that such breathing
comes easy,
it's just my stumbling song.

Plump raindrops pat now and then rolling off the drizzle-spangled
box-elder that crowded out the nettles and the zany ragweed,
squatters taking over when the great elms died.
Sing woodpecker holes in the elm-stub, then,
and pay attention to the inside ticking words blabbing on
if you can find them as some jet plane hogs breathless the sky.

Cross-legged then and half-assed up to hips
in paraphernalia not of the smoking kind God forbid
but of the clatter kind, LC Smith dank old hoss,
and the creaking saddle of the senses,
hanged-up pauses between clogged-up phrases!

This much gangly language spun off a grungy Smith
makes a spongy dungeon of a poem prosy, but let it
hang where it may, dangle in the crux-fire
where the words come bubbly-troubley and the instant
censor says *No, you fool, it won't do!*

But it's on, it's begun, it's got to clear the censors
in long leaps of limby language.

They were never wrong, the old masters,
if they could see me now, plump with a great tomato
down the gullet, rich in juicy smear
and with a hot cup of herb tea, snug
in the drippy tent, listening to the clunky things
rattling in the bulgy word-cupboard, setting the table
here in pell-mell what-the-hell ring-the-bell fashion
clattering out tomato-y succulent poems!
So the ironic dovetails and nosedives
incestuous spirals and brittle struts of wit
nosetails and dovedives
until the bi-plane crashes duality.
Oh yeah I want to singah
now comes a little songah—

*Long ago in the Sangha
Divas danced in the Dhamma.
They could do such wicked mambas,
in the hills or on the pampas.
They danced for all your papas,
they danced inside your mamas.*

The end of the first canto
is the end of Canto the First, number one.
Nothing much has been done.

R. Virgil Ellis

CANTO 4 Ponder underpinnings

Ponder underpinnings
that have brought us all
to a life-threatened state.
For instance, language.
Is it the problem?
Is it the solution?
Is the problem in the source of language?
In the shift from ? to language?
Let me explore.
Is the method electronic,
or any instant transmission
of the multiple offerings of the verbal font
(as if all those swarming flounder
could at once rise to a poems bait,
airborne school scaling finitude),
or rather is it of the jelling kind, where
in the frothing and bubbling soup
certain combinations agglutinate and then harden
as if taking on spines and torsos
that flex with ambidexterity?
Consider:

THE NEW POETS MUST,

since language is an endangered species of genetic
engineering, untwist academic umbilicals,
unbirth squalling linear words,
re-conceive diaperdom
kingdom come, under-
pinnings that have
brought us to this
life-threatened
fossil-fuel
state
conceive
an inverted
whirlpool encoding
into oceanic consciousness,
impelled globally into spiral
linking, emerging brave new words
twisting into gluons drafting wildest
cadences, oral worlds wet and bawling with
cauldrons of boiling silicon, spilling fusion
poetry, radiating the solar state, spiritual heat!

Richard Fein

Mass Extinction

Her eyes have turned from green to brown
this Tyrannosaurus-Rex among the dying grasses.

She, she must be a she
for by now the male of her life
has passed through her, and has been exuded
with the egg case.

A last supper, a sharing of food,
a passing of one's being into the bowels of another.

And now the fall wind
chills all creatures to stillness,
so her viselike, claw-legs open and close
ever more slowly

The time of sacrifices, of preordained altruism
has ended.

Here her shell will remain through the winter,
for even the ants have sheltered themselves deep.

But come next spring the rising grass tips
will spear the fragments of her and resurrect
the ruins of her body.

A dangling monument until once more
the society of ants dares emerge
and haul down this last season's flag
and pass her final remains among themselves.

Bridget Gage-Dixon

Nature Boy

Gloria had crimson hair
that fell in waves
around her shoulders
as we sat atop the dirt hill
making mudpies.
She poured water from a sand bucket
while I kneaded oozing mud
between my fingers
felt it creeping down my arms
dripping off onto the Sunday dress
I'd snuck away still wearing.
Thin fingers pulling through the dirt
she carefully constructed the moat
while I slapped handfuls of mud
atop each other,
carelessly creating my castle.
Until from the thicket
we heard his labored breathing
raised our eyes in his direction
to find him standing naked, watching us,
this man who existed to us only
in the whispers of neighborhood mothers
huddled beneath street lights.
This man they threw their shoes at,
whose presence always brought police
to sweep through
underbrush with nightsticks
as angry mothers with small arms wrapped
around their legs peered on.
He stood before us, as if legend,
until Gloria's laughter broke his spell
and she grabbed me by the hem
of my soiled Sunday dress
dragging me across the dirt
toward home.

Brdiget Gage-Dixon

Prodigal Son

he took his leave of us
without his divvy of the fortune
no pocket full of gold coin
to squander on cheap women
and expensive wine,
packed up his duffel bag
and caught the bus
to Parris Island
where they shaved his head
and ran him senseless
pressed his face into the muddy ground
and after eight weeks
declared he was a soldier.
My mother waited silently
for him to call,
never once complaining to her friends
how long it had been
since the phone had rung.
She'd puff her voice with pride
when speaking of him
but the truth lie just beneath
her bragging
in the way I'd find her well past midnight
rocking gently in the heavy wooden chair,
wrapped in the quilt
she had sewn for him
while he swam inside her,
and sipped hot tea
with only just the slightest tear
creeping down her cheek.
From the balcony,
I would watch her
tuck myself behind the banister
damning him.
Though she still denies it

she spent those nights
reliving moments
inspecting judgment errors
wondering if she'd yelled too much,
or not enough.
Months later
the old black phone did ring
for her
he'd called to tell her
that he'd married
and sitting on the threshold of her bedroom
I watched as she drew herself up taut
squeezing back the tears
and didn't ask why she hadn't been invited
just congratulated him
and asked the name of his new wife.
She has waited now
two decades
fattening the calf in vain,
offered countless polished explanations
of his absence
at family gatherings,
and though we've pushed him from our minds
abandoned hope for reunion
she can still be found from time to time,
as if standing at the fence line waiting,
wrapped in his quilt,
sipping tea
and rocking gently.

Clark Holtzman

Getting Puerto Rican Ghosts High

Up they go like hats tossed into the air!
Now nothing in San Juan will ever be the same
There will be no thanking your lucky stars
And nobody will get to wish you were here

But thank God you made it through the night
This afternoon. You looked Latin, positive
Even Frisbee-like before the band marched on
To walk the streets until it was time to go

Now you're floating on vectors of happy light
And our island nation is gratefully in your debt
This hadn't happened in so many years
We'd begun to think everything is *ex officio*

In San Juan the dear departed have a saying
And by god they keep saying it, over & over

Clark Holtzman

Women of the 999 Dreams

Meanwhile, you and I, forswearing
everything but our right to realize a small profit
have traveled here to rekindle our faith in
human nature and old-fashioned common sense

And the child in blue points at enigmas
the guessing of which is half the fun, and which
the others in pink and yellow evidently are bewitched
by. The existence that gesture makes inevitable

leaves us astonished, struck dumb, holy
like a pair of tyrants on their way to an accounting
Something new & unspeakable is coming to us

and soon. It's bound to measure everything we know-
like a metric of the ineffable. The trick is recognizing
yourself before someone wakes you and you vanish

Tony Keogh

Of Ripples Reflecting

In the lank limbs of an afternoon
deluge,
the shadows of a lost cadence
oozing from the low cloud.
Vast distances of circumstance
unbridgeable,
a tumbling thistle seed in the wind.
The reflection of a mad red dawn,
ripples uncontrollably,
competing with the dark shadows
of stolen nights.

Tony Keogh

Innocence Be Damned

When the innocent last vestige
is lost in the ancient flames
and delaying too long
is dragged farther in
and with honesty is bared.

Falling in,
surrendering,
will the tender rose be soured,
and with the innocent last vestige
it's embers scattered on the wind.

Can the monstrous white horses
once unbridled be contained,
and the innocence once lost
leave a vacant vacuous void.

Will guilt and slinking shadows
eclipse the joy and pain,
of brittle innocence.

Jane Pek

At MacDonalds on a Monday

This is what it is to grow old, then:

To sit, wheelchair-bound, a straw hat hung from your neck with string so you will not lose it, dressed in red and yellow floral print.

Green veins twisting from your face and arms; faded skin folded into contours with the nudge of bone rising at knee, wrist, elbow, knuckle.

To be fed salty fries and Chicken McCrispy greased in oil and fat, shredded anchors of taste offered by the sandpapered pinchers of the two Filipino maids flanking you (whose names you still can't remember). They eat your leftovers in silence, hunched in shiny shame and contrition.

You are here only because you can no longer stand to splutter oil into a pan and cook; because anyplace else is too expensive for the dirty canary purse with its slippery clasp; because you have nowhere else to go. It is not the milk of pity that rises, watching you, but the last pulls of dignity.

Jane Pek

Inconsolable

Hearing the news third-hand,

the intimacy of words turned vulgar
in my mouth when I tried to repeat
them. We were crafted of stone
as we pulled sounds from the air in
acknowledgment, magician-like,
secure in the fact that the loss was not ours.

He sounded so solemn before he
told me. Were the questions of fate,
of cause and effect, of how and why
and where, of sundry existences—
were they all rioting in his head too,
distilling appropriate concern
into the cold vapor of curiosity?

We marched through the car wreck
this time, heads held high while
eyes sifted for signs of disaster.
No longer crammed in the backseat,
noses pressed to the smell of dirty glass;
eager to catch the frailty of it all
as we crawled past on the expressway.

We know her, you see. That left us
sitting, too aware of our breathing
that packed in the strangeness; struggling
for another phrase of grief to string,
a form of sympathy to proffer unpolished
by the insincerity of the masses.

I wish I knew how you felt
that I might console you.

Ward Kelley

Deep Sea Diver

You cannot see all the way to the top,
through all the cloudy green water;
the lengthy hose, connected behind
your sight, is your only recourse . . .

what if death came down the hose?
Cool and slow, a snake of a joke,
to you who stands planted in sand
all the way at the bottom, alone.

Someday it will, but now help
only comes down: air, without
the punchline snake, and you feel
as though the fellow mariners up

there have your best interests in
mind; and they do, they do, even
on the day they send the snake down
and pull you back, all the way up.

Janeen Pergrin

After the thaw

The river, a frostbite victim,
is frozen in its extremities:
its edges and shallows covered by canopies of ice;
its sun-warmed center flowing
in figure eight and half-moon pools.
The debris of late fallen leaves and limbs
and all of autumn's remains drift to the center.

This is the season when winters skeletons are
exposed.
Bare tree branches clutch husks of hornets nests up
to an overcast sky.
Split stalks murmur restlessly in the fields
and only crows reply.

Janeen Pergrin

Muted

There are a thousand cries a woman makes in her lifetime.
CK Tower

some are so muted
they only come out as a sigh
barely heard above the water rushing to the drain,
the cat's claws across the kitchen floor,
and a car's tires pressing loose stones
into place
as it backs away from the house.

Janeen Pergrin

Leaving Our Mother of Good Counsel

Each flight was treacherous.
Smooth soled saddles slipping on every well-worn step.
We were wrestling with our coats
wedged by each others elbows and knees
while the sisters waited on the bottom step
reciting *Quickly, children quickly.*
The mammoth wood doors were flung open
and out in the lot with their engines grumbling
the bus doors screeched *Escape.*

The 2River View, 4.2 (Winter 2000)

About

Katja is an avid neurologist, reader, runner and wife. She lives online at www.geocities.com/m_katja.

Alan DeNiro has written a poetry chapbook, *The Black Hare* (A Small Garlic Press). He edits *Taverner's Koans*, an online poet's resource and poetry journal, and his poems have appeared in *Willow Springs*, *Blue Moon Review*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere.

R. Virgil Ellis lives near Cambridge, Wisconsin. He has most recently placed poems with *WordWrights*, *New Works Review*, *new digressions*, *The Wolf Head Quarterly*, and *Mississippi Review Web*. His site is woodhenge.com and he can be contacted at rvellis@woodhenge.com.



Richard Fein has been published in numerous print and electronic journals.

Bridget Gage-Dixon divides her time between her children, college, and poetry. Her work has recently appeared in *Avalon*, *Poetry Tonight*, and *Poetry Superhighway*.

Clark Holtzman lives in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and Washington, DC. He has published in a variety of little magazines and through small publishers. For the past five years he has collaborated with Los Angeles artist Barbara

Nathanson, transforming book microfiche cards into installation art, installation art into a series of poems, then the poems into interpretive paintings.

Ward Kelley is a business executive and poet . Fairly new to publishing, he has enjoyed many initial successes, including poems in *Ariga*, *Oblique*, *Pif*, and *Skylark*.

Tony Keogh was born, lives, and writes in Dublin Ireland. He works as a University Technical Administrator, but words, music and archaeology are his passions.

Jane Pek is essentially a slacker, a romantic, a cynic, a writer, and a student at a junior college in Singapore. Her home in cyberspace is www.geocities.com/SoHo/5456.

Janeen Pergrin spent 20 years writing COBOL and is now returning to her favorite language: Poetry. She lives in Williamston, Michigan, with her two sons. Her work has appeared in *Conspire: A Quarterly Journal of Literature and Poetry*.

2River is a literary site on the Daemen College webserver in Amherst, New York. The address is

<http://www.daemen.edu/~2River>

2River publishes individual volumes by authors, as well as *The 2River View*, a quarterly journal of art, theory, and poetry, which first appears online and afterwards in print. Interested contributors should read the submission guidelines on the 2River site.

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