

The 2River View

6.3 (Spring 2002)



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NEW POEMS BY

Mansour Alajali, John Amen

Grace Bedwell, Teri Browning, Howard Good

Brandon Hobson, Prasenji Maiti

Spencer Ryan, John Sweet, Phibby Venable

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Richard Long, Editor

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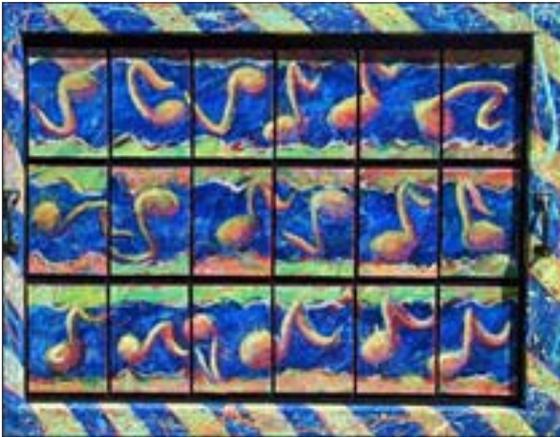
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Flowers

That all that is me
Is a pity!
The wood gatherer
The blower of ashes
With whom everything would bloom in hand
Is
Ablaze.

Little Razan

The beautiful baby's gone!
Some doctors would say brain trauma
Others would say encephalitis.
Whatsoever doctors would like to say
About the cause of breathlessness,
I, her father, would like
To cry my heart out.
Ours is our words
Words which are but bloody pointed hooves
Digging out remote rocks
In an absent horizon!

Mansour Alajali

The Wordless Shore

A woman
Stretching out her hands towards a wordless shore.

A woman
Sized to emptiness.

A
Woman
Naked to the ground
Chatting up her soul
Dreams of nothing.

Nothing
And the sea would be on fire.

John Amen

At This Hallowed Moment

Angels lurk behind colonnades,
haloes fading like an untended campfire.
Like a dead bird, silence drops—the tired sun,
neurotic minstrel, crooning its madrigal
in the key of frustration.

I am a master at building temples
in which I never worship.
Desire becomes my Trojan Horse.
Morning arrives like a cop delivering a subpoena.

Standing like a young king beneath a barren fig tree,
I am ready now to garb my quest in sackcloth,
to drive nails through the palms of everything I know.

John Amen

Where Do We Go From Here

I pretended that spring was my sister,
summer my concubine, that
my ambitions were blessed by the sun.

I beat my effigies as if they were pinatas,
finding nothing inside them
but dry bones and the stench of formaldehyde.

What will we do now,
watching grass grow
like stubble on a rapist's face,

knowing the altars we destroyed
were never holy?

Where do we go from here,
now that words are lost
like gewgaws in an earthquake
and silence swarms around us
like the vulture of an empty prayer?

the mathematics of your end

your shell unclenches
reaching in to / grabbing
on to the

muscle: tongue.

i thumb through your
layers. you unfold like
leaves from the
stem, like letters
written against

rocks in june
or your
flesh that you
had scraped away with
the metal like

i had. like we had
both tried to forget /

your jaw prying
showing
your teeth off
like stars.

in your
struggle

you are like the
veins. you are
like the tears that
drip
you
are

something i
do not understand

, yet.

you & i are
like geometry.

the shapes, the
whole circumference

the lines that
fold on our skin
still

Grace Bedwell

move

i keep writing you these poems
that have no words.

they sit on my tongue / expanding
in my saliva.

they are small feelings:
as soon as i inhale them i
forget their significance.

they are single words like
move or *artifice*
sliding
down my finger tips

i watch them fall off of me,
peeled away like the bark of white
birch trees.

i push them to the side & watch

them dissolve into white noise.
i am left with this:

i cannot write this any more

Teri Browning

Ten Years and a Coffeepot

Dogs bury bones in earth,
up-end flowers that were live
now dead and wilting fast.

Buried bones have shrouds
of creeping phlox that cover scars
in earth like buried pasts.

Here we sit bone-deep in cluttered rooms
with things we cannot throw away;

I might need that broken coffeepot
or you'll find cause to use
that splintered fishing rod someday.

I have, I am,
one shoe of a pair, and worn.
The years have passed, now there's time
but nothing left to say.

Teri Browning

What Hides

Degas, you so loved a dancer
that you gave her immortality
in scenes of flight through air
and it doesn't matter which way
you portray her lips or mouth
or legs in lift so high
that we don't see the marketing
of female flesh, the blood and sweat
waiting in the wings—and all there is,
is grace and tilt of head that hides
a tear, spiraling to plop on stage,
exhausted tear, sister of the one
who never made it to the show,
the one that Degas hides.

Howard Good

At the New England Holocaust Memorial

Puritan-gray evening in Boston,
I find on a long traffic island
suggestions of smokestacks,
the dead rising around me
as serial numbers and exhaust.
Tourists prefer someplace else,
that nameless intersection
familiar from dreams.
But I was always already here,
among the young orphans with old faces
safe under Plexiglas.

Howard Good

Evening, Copp's Hills Cemetery

Once, before there were children,
we walked among old gravestones
(stained, tilted, corroded teeth)
from which the names had faded,
never thinking we'd be back
and women would still be leaning
gloomy elbows on window sills,
waiting for night to dreamily float
into view, vaporous and immense,
a melting ashen swan.

Brandon Hobson

Hamlet in a Madhouse

Insomnia,
You're like the gods
Trying on costumes in a dark room.

Young Ophelia brought me tea,
A book,
And a blanket to hide under.

For three whole days
I watched her trace her shadow
With a finger,
Mumbling nursery rhymes.

At night, I saw Ophelia's mad ghost
Sitting cross-legged on the floor,
Whereupon, at the site of me,
She stuck out her tongue.

Brandon Hobson

Saint Augustine's Lamp

A woman was dismantling my lifeline
While I instructed shadows
To stay close.

At the seaport,
Saint Augustine gave me a lamp.
We argued over chess
And hot tea.
His laughter crumbled mountains.

I insisted that his ears
Were the devil's white mice,
That the china doll in the store window
Was his dead grandmother.

*The morning, he said,
Will preserve your loneliness.*
Whereupon he turned himself
Into a swirl of blue smoke.

Inside my lamp,
I made little animals from clay
While everyone else
Sailed out to sea.

Gimmick

It was late in the morning when the sun was finally persuaded to rise, rinsing his gleaming teeth of fire with yours at the nasty slipstream of memories, crushing angry passion flowers and wild berries among your virgin forests to face the day like a man as he must without you—and why must you be always so cold and serene like the distant stars? this sunny day is like any other among the serenade of sorrows that remind you of cold battles foregone and old soldiers deserted like nobody's mundane business—it was late in the evening when all the bottles of perfume finally rushed to woo you and your aroma and musk of richness that made the sun go quietly down across the yonder rivers like a dandy whimper—and so the sun must rise and the sun must set and the sun must cry and wry its useless hands 'til you're aflame and nearly all your rivers go all so blatantly dry

Prasenjit Maiti

Roopsa

Your face is all over those tea cups and
wine glasses and
acid, honey laughter
Your Indian face and name
that I can write no more like
Indian rains and lightning
Your face is all over households that
hold their breath
in a silent prayer of nonsense,
chanting some litany or
other
for your return,
walking along the bluegrass
of Southern Avenue
as the rains tumble and fall,
as the rains and
your face and
the rains are all over the place

Spencer Ryan

Contingencies

Tomorrow I will meet someone I don't know.
Just yesterday,
while I was trying to figure out which grapes
have pits and which don't,
I caught someone's eye.
She smiled. I smiled.
We could have been friends.
We could have shopped from the same grocery cart.
Today, I wonder
what kept me from asking:
Is it the purple or the white?

Spencer Ryan

Morning Ritual

Night leaches into morning,
gray dawning gray.
My eyes suffocate beneath their plastic sheathings;
I rub at the corners
and they fuzz, settle like fog.
I cloud my coffee with cream
and dissolve my spoon in it.
The first sip blunts my tongue
as acrid caffeine mixes with fluoride;
I drink more to keep myself from retching.
The newspaper crackles like dead leaves.
Acid gathers at my fingertips
and everywhere I touch, I rupture a word.

John Sweet

the alchemy of fear

on any given afternoon
in this season of gray light
jesus christ is murdered

i am not here to
approve
or disapprove

am not a believer in
anything beyond the cradle of
my cracked and bleeding hands
and some of you may
recognize this poem

this unconscious clenching
of the jaw
this benediction of crows offered
silently on I-88 out where
the indians have reclaimed
the billboards as
their own

what i never knew at
twenty-three was that my anger
would slowly melt into
resignation

the same empty battles fought
day after day for ten years
until the morning i wake up sick with
the realization that
nothing will ever be won

and what can i do
for this one small boy but love him
and how can this ever
be enough?

what i learned
from my own childhood was
bitter resentment

the alchemy of
fear into self-doubt and then
how to forge a weapon
from my weaknesses
or maybe something
less

maybe only a wall
or maybe nothing more
than a thin sheet of glass

this room too bright despite
all of the doubts that
cover the sun

John Sweet

in this picture i paint

and it leaves
occasionally

not the addiction to words
but the
ability to make them cut

there are days spent
waiting for rain or the deaths
of my teenage idols

long afternoons wasted
beneath
some new brutal silence
and the furniture seems familiar
in this house

colors i recognize
and the damp smell of
decaying wood

the sound of my son
downstairs laughing as his mother
chases him through the
kitchen

and the cats all cry for food
and my hands curl in
on themselves
as the need for violence becomes
too big to ignore

we are none of us dogs
in this picture i paint and we
are none of us gods

we are only ourselves
trapped in the world of
human noise where
anything can be forgiven

Blue Shadows

In the blue shadows of night
there is a song playing without
sound or lyrics
it is heard by the man with no
ears and the woman with no
wares in the market place
it is a chaste song
gone awry seeking an audience
this is different, said a boy,
swinging his legs to no tempo
hanging on to each word
that was not there
and humming a divine tune
of compliance

Phibby Venable

Sea Songs

never at a loss with words
you are speaking to black waters
it is early and the sea spills
reddened spikes across endless noise
you whisper ballads to the dancing gulls
off key and salted with aged foam
these days you lean too heavily
on visions of fresh dawns
carve too many faces from the sea's wall
there is a dolphin singing godly verses
with a ribald beat
women with existential eyes
hum lyrics you have never heard
sigh now in recognition
they have borrowed your songs

About the Authors

Mansour Alajali lives in Benghazi, Libya, and holds a B.A. in English. He likes fishing and photography.

John Amen has work in *Ludlow Press Journal*, *Samsara Quarterly*, and *Three Candles*; and edits *The Pedestal Magazine*. His first book of poetry is scheduled for release this year.

Grace Bedwell lives with various family members and three cats while awaiting the end of high school. She has nervous hands, likes hip bones, and never knows what she's doing. Work of hers has recently appeared in *Sometimes City* and *Stirring*.

Teri Browning is an alternative educator living in the Appalachian mountains of southeastern Kentucky. Her poems have appeared in *Avatar Review*, *Birchlane*, *Zuzu's Petals Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

Howard Good is a professor of Journalism at the State University of New York—New Paltz and the author of seven books, the latest being *Media Ethics Goes to the Movies* (with Michael Dillon). His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals and e-zines.

Brandon Hobson holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Central Oklahoma. He recently completed a young adult novel. He lives with his dog Chaucer.

Prasenjit Maiti is Senior Lecturer in Political Science at Burdwan University, West Bengal, India. His publication credits include *Blue Collar Review*, *Green Queen*, *Monkey Kettle*, *Nightingale*, *Paper Wasp*, *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, *Pulsar*, and *Skald*.



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Spencer Ryan has lived most of his life in Missouri, where he studied poetry, Russian, and the migratory habits of daydreams. Recently, he was reincarnated as a software engineer and a Texan.

John Sweet lives in Upstate New York with his wife and son. He has been writing for twenty years, and publishing in the small press for the past fourteen. Recent work of his is in *Buzzwords*, *Moria*, and *Spinning Jenny*.

Phippy Venable holds a a degree in Social Work and does grantwriting, research, and fundraising for Appalachian Resources. She has a chapbook—*Indian Wind Song*—and poems in publications such as *Appalachian Journal*, *Apples & Oranges*, and *Southern Ocean Review*.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. All publications appear first on-line and afterwards in print. Submission guidelines are available at www.2River.org.

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