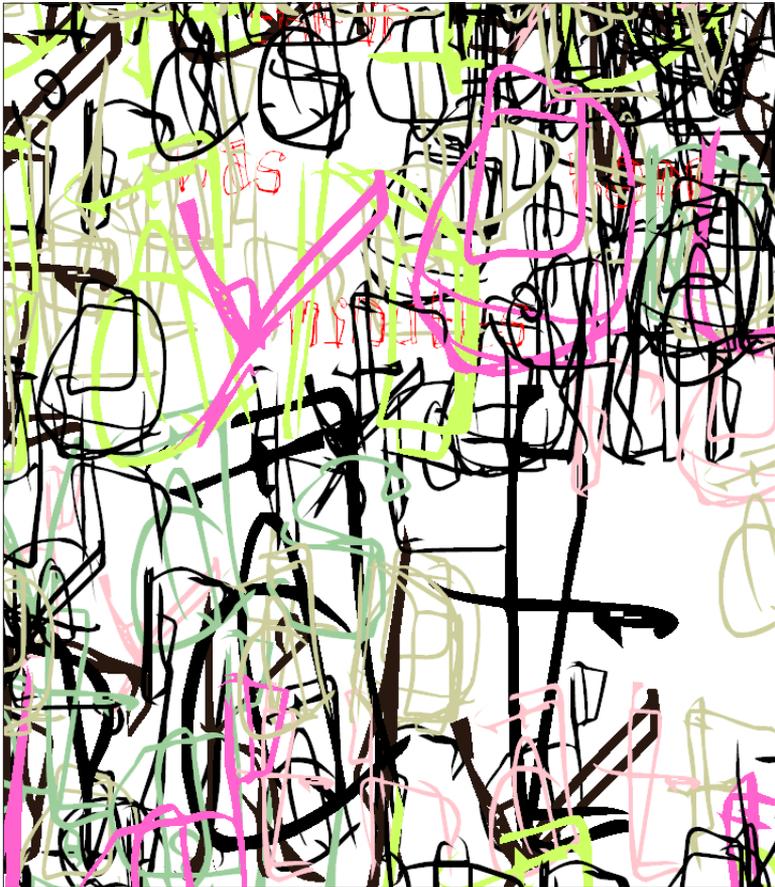


The 2River View

9.2 (Winter 2005)



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New poems by Louie Crew, Pamela Garvey, Stephen Knauth, Autumn McClintock, Robert Pesich, Madelyn Rosenberg, David Schuster Keli Stafford, Leigh Stein, Scott T. Summers, Lowell Mick White

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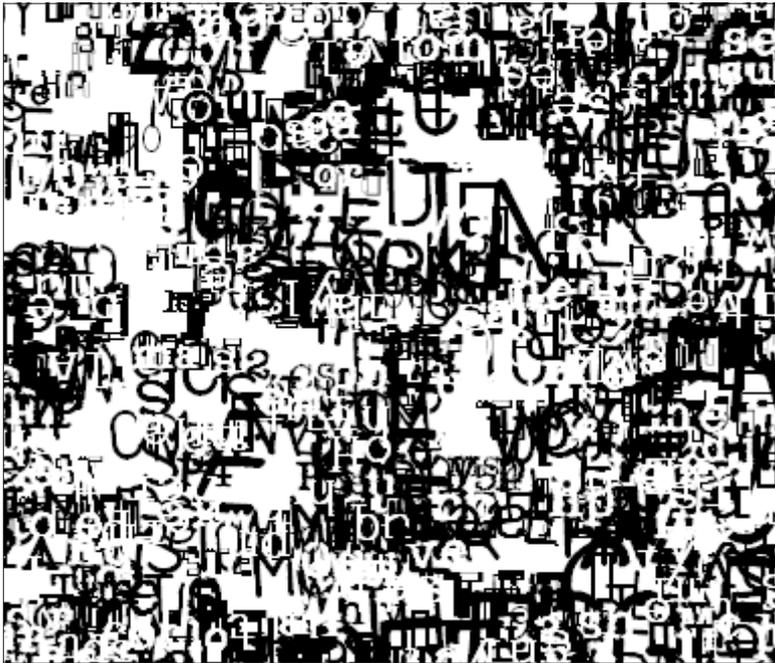
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Spiritus Mundi

Red worms crawl through ice cream cone tunnels
in a space spiraling just outside your mind.
Why? God is I, You, She, bringing incense
even to forbidden altars.

Suppose you want to touch the back of flowers
and feel guilty in a world where men fear
not at all to blow one another to bits,
away from home.

How much soul can we tabulate?
The smile of one no longer a virgin;
patterns of weakness as holiness;
learning that dead Christmas trees
are still pretty.

Our Enemies

Each day their cheeks recede a little more,
their hair falls in larger clumps
only to become lining for a bird's nest.
A bird as simple as the sparrow, spied
by the wife of the man who owns
one of their land's largest homes.
Her skin soft as fleece, this woman,
who cultivates just the right seed
to attract the prettiest birds,
smells like the inserts in our magazines,
the ladies in shimmering evening wear
who seem to fall from a net of stars
far from the grenades
donning the young boys we photograph.

Shoes and Story

I.

Her feet were actually wide, flat
and dirt-tanned from bare-footed work.
The slipper itself at least a C width. The heel,
thick, walkable. The step-sisters' feet
were pushed in, arched and smooth,
like their shoes. Their feet chafing,
sliding around in that lone shoe
the prince had held out like a platter,
they stumbled forward, sweating fear they'd break
the wobbly heel, chip the shoe,
sever toes or ankle with toothed glass.
But they *would* live with slivers of glass
lodged in their feet, occasional trickles of blood
trailing the palace. They'd get used to it.

II.

The wicked witch also wanted a triple click
ticket home, any home. So she was ready to kill
the bobby-socked, pig-tailed adolescent, skipping
arm in arm with brainless and heartless.
The girl's feet were meaningless
to this quest—same size as the witch's feet.
One size fits all in this world, looming
large, grainy colors we can box into thirteen inches.
It's not about the body, anyway.
It's about the shoes. The broom-riding hag
and the girl both knew, knew that the shoes meant
prestige and style, that if the girl removed them,
her feet would've shriveled to stockings:
the feet of the Eastern sister, crushed by her house.

Free Dirt

Says the sign
and, lo, they come
throwing open their tailgates,
their trunks and hatches—I turn away
afraid I might see a man dragging
a bulging suitcase with both hands.
One pickup bears the sticker VIOLENCE
is the MOTHER of TIME, its
driver patiently waiting his turn in line.
Free Dirt, blue spray-painted letters
on a muddy scrap of corrugated tin
propped up along the roadside with bricks,
rocking in the evening breeze. Free dirt, as is, roots
and grubs, pork bones, spark plugs, doll arms, black
spoons, no returns, no questions please, right here in
plain sight, naked red mound scooped high and ready to take,
you shovel it, you haul it, you spread it, you own it, and sweet
unshaven lambs of desire, they come!

Stephen Knauth

My Friend

My friend says
he lived a long and happy life
driving to work today.

He tells me
he can smell every astringent molecule
of the overgrown orange hedge flowers along Route 10.

During his lunch hour
in the crummy little postmodern park downtown,
he accepts the brown-headed cowbird,

the couple on a blanket sharing fries,
the decrepit island nation in the news again
as part of his physical body.

He says it's okay
for me to doubt his bliss.
That's part of the picture, he says, backlit and smoldering,

and thanks me for my contribution.

Oh, Night

I'm the werewolf of Cambridge,
Mass. Air thick
with the smell of honeysuckle,

I stare up at the lamppost moon
and howl as I do
at all things bright and vain.

It's good to love
the way bugs slap themselves
against its plastic casing. Oh,

to have an exoskeleton. To fall
from the top of a desk or shoulder
and not be bruised.

To hear nothing
over the sound of my own buzzing.
I taste my sweat

then shake the saltwater off,
watch it spray
in jeweled droplets

across this circle of lamplight.
Oh, dirty sidewalk, Oh, gutter
of my dreams, leap at me

with splayed legs and paws.
Leap with a saliva grin.
I could be hard carnage.
I could nightmare this night.

Propriety

There's only so much you can do
with a broken fishing rod and a dead sister,
you said to me over charred salmon.
It wasn't charred on purpose but the marinade

still tasted good. I think,
tonight, after smiling politely
I'll leave all the pleasantries behind
and kiss you on the wet mouth

with my wet mouth. How long, after all,
do I have inside this man's body?
I'm a little drunk and have been reading
too much lately to realize

the foolery of lips after fish dinner.
Your blouse is tight around your pudgy middle,
an invitation to stick a finger in
up to the second knuckle. How you'd giggle.

Ante Up!

Everyone seems to be clutching something
in this blue casino.
Even me, my chewed up pen
lost in the mine shaft
within my fist.

I might last a few more rounds at this table.
The old-timer next to us has been losing all night,
says it takes time for the stars to travel
to the other side of the heart.

The great blizzard of ash is forecast to continue
for years. People have been travelling with chains
for generations.

Are you following me? Know that all the scenic roads are closed.
But this is not a good reason for going deaf.

Let's stop at The Great Divide for beer and boiled eggs,
share our dirty jokes until we're empty and wet from weeping.
This is when silence plows it open.

Can you hear the horizon in your breath?
We still have a chance to see
the Sasquatch, retreating ever deeper into the shadows,
illuminating the way with her winter coat
of moonlight and diamonds.

Maps

We are building larger telescopes hoping to see
the place where there is no more light.

Light does not disappear once inside a black hole
but is compressed into a seed.

Space and time can tear not unlike a basket.
Some seeds need to be burned in order to germinate.

Meanwhile, names are disappearing faster
than their discovery. Entire languages reduced to ash
as we search for new energy.

The universe is surrounded by fire.
These lines are ash of what was said.

Madelyn Rosenberg

Boston Transfer

I am from fiddles and sweet tea,
from Wal-Mart messiahs
And too many apologies.
I am from shoulder mountains,
rusty drive-ins,
butter-shined stars.
You can move me
with high-tech, tapas
and a U-Haul with aliens painted on the side.
I will watch *Andy Griffith* reruns
and tell closed-door neighbors too softly:
I am from fiddles and sweet tea.

Marion

Maybe she drank what Alice drank;
she speaks of rabbits and tea
Of feeling small when she covers her hair with the
knit, wool hat that ladies wear
because they are ladies.

She debates over crackers:
Wheat Thins, Triscuits, Wheat Thins
She buys Sanka and raspberry jam
(Never mind the seeds) and the Triscuits.

At dinner, she says: Those potatoes could be snowballs
The parsley flakes are evergreens
And winter's so cold in the rabbit hole
Where she surely drank what Alice drank.

Blue Trees

The year Gauguin completed Blue Trees, Van Gogh lived with him in a yellow house in Arles. The next year Van Gogh committed suicide.

Gauguin shut the sun
tightly in his paint box.
That early winter
with Van Gogh in Arles,
Gauguin parceled the blinding rays
and primed his jute canvas.

There is no other explanation
how an incrementally
weightless shade of blue
cuts a swath
like splattered Solaris
in the ocher foreground
across a tree
that becomes
just light enough
to a young girl
whose fervent desire
is to ram it
mastiff stiff
into the man beneath the shadows
hands thrust in his pockets.
He whispers
Vous y passerez, la belle
Your turn will come, pretty one.

Gauguin secured the lid
lest a single photon escape
and drip into poor Vincent's
Mobius loop of winter dreams:
Madonna and Child, tabloid murders,
ships at sea.

The Trunk

*When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute.
But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute and it is longer than any
hour. That's relativity. — Albert Einstein*

You counseled me
to look down
at my own stable trunk
rooted in solid earth,
not up at branches
that sway any which direction
to a master made of wind.
Yet, what of the Earth?

It moves
tectonically
rippling of magma,
as hot
as any desire.

A tree
grows from the inside:
forges
thousand year rings
which for the tree may be
like sitting on a hot stove
or spending time
with a pretty girl.

You persuaded me
time is not linear,
it dwells in my head.
I take this lesson home
and calculate:
in some mathematical
universe
an Earth is moving, wildly confused,
while the branches are stone still,
caught
in a drama of relativity.

A Furious Hum

A mere rib that shrinks and grays
and the barbed-wire hair
that was once a pre-bunny

titanium blond, middle-class
to her fingerprints.
Cushioned now, passive as a sofa,

she can hardly speak, cannot
even die though the body is dead,
the womb is open, the dances

forever put in storage.
She sewed up the gaps in her life
with a gasp that shut out

the seethes and the swells
of the spasming nerve,
the strung-together flesh

and wore the mantle of a lady
like a straight jacket.
Who speaks out of her mouth

with its fumes and its roar
as only a mad child would howl?
She carries her revenge in her throat.

Run

Guided only by cracks in the pavement
she runs,
her body ice-pale, ribs poking

through her skin like wings.
Every step burns her breathless.
The wind rides

her heels and whispers
words to the back of her neck.
She gives up a sigh to the air

and it hisses like raindrops falling
on fire.
She knows now what it is to breathe.

It is all uphill
in the cold, her hair a liquid darkness
like a halo of icicles

as she runs
from a wind that strips skin down
to bone.

Three Ghazals for Departure

I

Miriam danced in Exodus while the Red Sea drowned the horses.
The children of Israel all must be old men by now, or worse.

A poet is a child that tells every secret told. I know her.
I know the cantor, I know the Talmud like the blind know Chagall.

On Yom Kippur, it rains enough to warrant a black umbrella.
Forgive me for cheating and swallowing you down before sunset.

Who is naive to be the one to ask for hands wrapped in heat.
He is callous who promises the hands and then asks for them back.

I want a cauldron of palm tree hearts and trembling psalms.
Let us be together for ever until we find someone better.

II

After the party, they came home to find their piano missing.
It must not have wanted us, said mister, going straight to bed.

When it rains, little Moses rescues the worms from the road.
He does not wear gloves. He pokes them back inside the ground.

Before the drummer, I was engaged to a man who cried all the time.
I would hide in the bathroom doing *this* with my fingers in my ears.

You can only disappear once and then they will find you out.
Swift and certain chaos will tell you to try your luck again.

To end what it is, he uncovers the shoebox with all of her letters.
He rips them to pieces; she kisses his fingers. *Read them aloud.*

III

What I know about absence is that it is jilted and insistent—
Every time I call, absence lets it go to the machine.

You can fold a map in half and make the distance shorter.
Try writing a sonnet to an atlas and you will see what I mean.

In the hotel room no one ever comes to make the bed for them;
They order Belgian waffles and play solitaire all afternoon long.

All the women at temple wear black stockings, but why is it cold,
Why challah and poppyseeds, why remember the food and not the service.

The compass points south, the clock is stopped at twelve.
Even children know when to say goodbye and what kind.

Cleaning Gutters

for Michael Mandel

I'd rather watch bubbles float
on the surface of a stale cabernet
in a deep corner of the Bowery,
in the dark, near a candle,
on a wooden chair
that refuses to conform
to my ass while a saxophone
slurs its master's grief.

Kerouac, seeping Odysseus,
slaps my back, invites me to piss
with him in the alley.

Cats scatter, dive
into sewers,
their cries echo
against the dank brick
of subterranean walls.

Jack says, *Dig that sound*,
zips up before me,
slips into night.

Trumpet sings now.
Slide with that poetry.
It's a sad sound, like the cats.

Gettysburg

Flies circle his head
like a black halo,
lay their eggs
near the bullet lodged
in the meat of his brain.

Scattered among the trampled blades,
like broken pottery -
fragments of skull.

Before the colonel
gave the order to advance,
he pinned a note to his uniform.

*My name is Jonathan Victor
and I love my mother.*

He imagined her proudly smiling
as the morning sun darted
off the golden buttons
that adorned his blue coat.

Cock Pheasant

I was sixty yards past the bird
by the time I stopped.
When I walked back from the car

he was warm and limp.
I gathered him in my arms,
feeling guilty, not wanting to be seen.

But traffic was light.
No one caught me
clutching the dead out-of-season

pheasant. At home I cleaned the bird,
threw his guts in the trash
where that night

they were pulled out, eaten,
by fearful striped feral cats

who lurk in
storm drains across the street.
I aged the bird

three days in the refrigerator,
then plucked him,
braised him

in a Dutch oven with leeks,
marsala, garlic, and mushrooms.
I drank a bottle of Argentine merlot.

The cock pheasant and I became one.
Our feathers went into a plastic
bag. I later tied

soft-hackled wet flies with them,
with my iridescent covert feathers.
Two years later on a drizzly

midday north of Yellowstone, I
caught a cutthroat trout on one of
those flies, and released it.

Dakota

They come to me at night
in dreams sometimes

The dogs and cats I've loved.

They visit only for a moment or two
to show me they are well,
that they are happy,
that they miss me too,
and then they go on about
their business.

Dakota died three weeks ago today,
a little old man of 16.
Gray hairs covered his face,
but his eyes were still bright and shiny.
He visited me last night.

Alex his brother brought him to see me,
leading the way, as always,
and Rugay was there, and Grief,
Sally, Black Cat, Russe Radigans,
Rouella Strepan, Whitey, Cohab,
Festus, E., Zeke, Sky Hook, Mike,
Blackie, Trooper.

They formed a procession
of love and hope
crossing an ancient eroded hillside
tangled in greenbriers and blackberries,
vanishing into the brush,
into the wild, into the mystery.

Last summer Dakota would
wander out onto the steps
sit happy in the sun
basking, until, warmed, he would come in
sit beneath my desk to help me
write.

I woke this morning crying.

Authors

Louie Crew is a native of Alabama and an emeritus professor of English at Rutgers University.

Pamela Garvey has published in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry International*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. In 2003, she was a semi-finalist for the "Discovery"/*The Nation* award and in 2002 was a finalist for Prairie Poets Prize. She is an English professor at St. Louis Community College–Meramec.

August Highland uses text as the compositional elements in his alphanumeric paintings. Sentences, phrases, words, parts of words, letters, and parts of letters make up every stroke and gesture in his visual work. He produces images in both miniature or monumental sizes.

Stephen Knauth lives in North Carolina and works as information architect. His poems have appeared in *North American Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Seneca Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. His latest collections from Four Way Books are *The River I Know You By* and *Twenty Shadows*.

Autumn McClintock loves baseball and Pictionary. She lived in Boston for five years but moved to Philadelphia without seeing the Red Sox win the World Series. Bummer. She's had poems in *Comstock Review* and *Potomac Review*.

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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. Publications appear on-line and in print. Writers interested in submitting to 2River should first read the guidelines at www.2River.org.

Richard Long, Editor
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2RV

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