

The 2River View

12.1 (2007)



Kicking Up a Storm © 2007 by Richard Biscayart

New poems by Ingrid Chung, Michelle Bitting
Michael Flanagan, Ellen Kombiyil, Robert Nazarene
Amy Pence, Lynne Potts, Terry Savoie, Sarah Sorenson
Anne Whitehouse, Erica Wright

The 2River View

12.1 (2007)

The 2River View, 12.1 (2007)

Contents

Ingrid Chung
Hunting Grounds for the Lost

Michelle Bitting
Washed in Flame
Soft Red Skirt

Michael A. Flanagan
Hospital Block
Inching Away



Alleyway © 2007 by Richard Biscayart

Ellen Kombiyil

Excerpt from Vincent Van Gogh's Journal, Saint-Remy 1889
Persephone's Letter to Demeter

Robert Nazarene

Cry, Baby
Monster

Amy Pence

Above the Baby's Grave
Demeter Rising from the Couch

Lynne Potts

Dairy Maid and the Cyclops
Lead Weight on a Line

Terry Savoie

Acorn Rain
Begging Forgiveness

Sarah Sorenson

Hansel and Gretel

Anne Whitehouse

Curse VIII.
Curse XXIV.

Erica Wright

Fording Calfkiller Creek
The Swelling of a Throat

The 2River View, 12.1 (2007)

Ingrid Chung

Hunting Grounds for the Lost

Mr. M once told me about how the
white men had whipped him until stars
shot out of his open back and he had chewed off his
bottom lip. When he collapsed,
he said he had seen it, the sublime. It was like
a moon with a mouth and it swallowed you
up to form your tears into marbles
and keep you warm.

I searched for it in the thorn bushes,
the loving biting thorn bushes.
Fancy being this way,
scrounging the wood for the abstract—I watched
a flower die from loneliness and a mother make love
to her son among raspberries.
My skin was cut; I love the gossamer of pus,
yellow to the touch.

Now I sit upon my breakdown— (my fingers
are dead you know and as
they fall into the
damp
soil they point to the sky)
reeking
of Buddhist incense and hurricane salt.

Michelle Bitting

Washed in Flame

*And no one can still recognize the woman washed in flame
for whom, of all her joys, burnt pearls in ashes is the sum
of what remains.*

—*Abraham Sutzkever*

*She makes a matchstick of her finger,
dunks the tip in Bombshell Red,
then her lips are two flickers.
In the shadows of her ears: smoldering
flowers. Draws a smoky line
between lid and lash and dashes out—
at the crowded rear of the oncologist's elevator:
one last fanning of her mahogany skirt.*

*Don't try to follow the logic,
this need for ritual preening, seduction.
Whether the doctor's even aware
of silk swishing between her legs.
It's pointless, futile as asking why
her cells' crooked kindling, the gathered
deadwood, amass their morbid camp
deep in her body's core.*

*Just remember the pretty Polish girl,
pinching her cheeks for the German soldier.
Zierpuppe, he said, lifting her onto the truck.
As if it mattered her eyes were two hazelnuts,
her skin: beaded milk. So lovely, so worth saving,
am I not? And he, head cocked, smiling,
pretending not to know
what awaited her, further on up the road.*

Michelle Bitting

Soft Red Skirt

That's what she wore, followed his wolf-shaped
face up the mountain path—Summer, the swelter
of eucalyptus, lavender, dilating every cell.

Was it curiosity brought her here, the subtle growl
inside his laugh? Between them, a quarter century years'
difference and two pair of eyes rife with off-kilter craving?

Maybe the way he preferred she lead, parting
milkweed, beach burr, thistle, along the switchback,
the better to view her shifting rump as they gobbled the trail,

reminding her of that Easter at her parents',
bending to pull lamb from the oven,
her flowered dress hiking up, father in the corner

with his cronies, their secret, murmured words:
sweet flesh young singeing the air, making
her cringe, years later, at any sudden scent of rosemary.

Her soft red insides closing then,
opened now, with this man's hand on her ass,
key to the body's cabin. The quandary odd,

familiar, like that tale by the Brothers Grimm
about the poodle made to eat flaming coal—
the nourishment it took from its blistering fare,

muzzle dipping in to relish what burned in the tasting—
each time, the tongue left bruised and blackened.

Michael A. Flanagan

hospital block

afternoons when i was a little
kid, in the street with friends,
throwing a football, or tossing
a baseball, the ambulance
would race down the block,
lights on, engine roaring, i'd
try and see inside, i always
thought my father might be
in there, on a stretcher, sick
and dying, if i knew he was
at home, i'd watch, fingers
crossed, waiting until they
passed by our house,
maybe it was just living
on that block, where it was
a constant thing, sometimes
two or three an hour, maybe
it was my father, he didn't
lead a clean life, always with
a cigarette hanging out of
his mouth, always with a
drink in his hand, at night,
lying in bed, i'd hear the
siren, the lights reflecting
off my bedroom wall, i'd
wonder if they were
coming to us, wonder
if, finally, tragedy was
at hand, that thing i
seemed always to be
waiting for, holding my
breath, fastened to the
noise, the turning lights,
until they were gone

Michael A. Flanagan

inching away

silence like a last breath,
my footsteps on the brown
floor, late hour clocks,
cat's walking tired drive-
ways, this house on my
head, these debts in my
ear, tell me, what do
we do with our days?
can you get hold of one
thing that would truly
add meaning to the next
hour of your life? there
are children i see every-
day, they're all new,
where it's heading
we can tell them, but
what's the good in that?
from my window i stare
at a tree limb set against
a dark sky, i watch the
dull light of a lamp post,
i'm thinking about
traveling, no luggage,
a bottle of beer be-
tween my legs, an old
car down an empty
road, inching away

Ellen Kombiyil

Excerpt from Vincent Van Gogh's Journal, Saint-Remy 1889

(with four lines adapted from Letters to Theo)

I can't get it down—exactly how I feel
when I see the cypresses. Oh, the colors
are there, stark, arranged like music.
I paint canvas after canvas
hoping the metal band won't tighten
around my head.

I want to paint the time I walked with Theo
down the Rijswijk Road and we drank milk
at the mill after the rain. I'd paint it all green
but then how to express what goes unseen,
the taste of milk when I could drink absinthe,
the sound of rain?

I paint roses instead. The canvas
holds them for eternity, not one more
petal will drop against pale green.
Then this morning I saw the country
fresh again and full of flowers. What more
I could have done.

Ellen Kombiyil

Persephone's Letter to Demeter

Dear Mother, I have grown pale, my hair
brittle, my fingers like icicles.
I have only myself to blame.
It would have been easy to plan
my escape, to toss accusations like bones,
to hypnotize Cerberus with a song,
to switch his water with a drink from Lethe,
to induce sleep with a potion.
But I have grown numb to this place.

I tried not to stare at the fruit
which shone like rubies on the golden platter.
It beckoned me, promised remembrance,
the earth's warmth after a long winter thaw.
When my teeth split the seeds and their juice
startled my mouth, I felt blood again
flush my brow. I remembered thunder, picking
a flower, the yawning, swallowing ground—
the fruit wasn't sweet; it tasted like erasure.

Robert Nazarene

Cry, Baby

When I drove to the post office
I got something I didn't want.
When I went to the doctor
I got something I didn't want, too.
The brakes on my car
made a sound something like
metal grinding on metal.
That had to be something
I didn't want.
My girlfriend & I had a fight.
Late that night I got a phone call:
connected to a boot.
What did she want from me?
I wanted something:
a drink, to get lost. That,
I got, my first in fifteen years.
That week, my mother &
father died 24 hours apart.
That was really something:
bone cancer & Parkinson's.
I was shook.
They hadn't seen one another
for 20 years. They hated
each other. I think.
It was something or other.
I turned into a walking
Help Wanted ad, a *Lost*
& _____ ad. Mom & Dad
always wanted the best from me,
for me. Or something. Somethings
run in my family.

Robert Nazarene

Monster

The blackboard clung to the wall as if to save itself from the abyss. Light, wove its way in—but seldom out—from the tall glass windows. One-by-one or in little cliques my classmates, no, the others— took their seats at each oak-lidded desk. Little acorns. The tile floor gleamed. In its reflection I watched my mind race like flash cards, felt the ache in my belly. Earlier that morning, Mother and Father had quarreled at the breakfast table. Quarreled is such a polite word. Neat. Not like the warm, fetid mess pooling in my seat, then running the length of my brand new pant legs.

The children all laughed,
then headed out to their tidy plots
of public dirt.

Then, it was only me
and the janitor, spare and lean like Zeke
in Dick and Jane.
Two losers, come to hate one another.
Mop. Bucket. Mess.
Them. Me.
Monster.

Amy Pence

Above the Baby's Grave

Were you arboreal *In memory*
before you landed *Mildred Phillips, born*
or just caught *in 1910: died*
in the net of *1912: darling we miss thee*
heavens—

I think of you often *Moss in the folds*
in the trees *winged angel—her parents dead but*
still a baby, still *two decades later—*
with the full ruddy *crown of the head*
limbs of Michelangelo's *polished smooth*
Christ: for aren't you *like her birth*
above me now *this opening*
crossing into *arching above*
a mimosa as here *the trees, runged around that*
I weep by your
grave—aren't you *lost*
every absence in me *infant*
made flesh— *core*

Amy Pence

Demeter Rising From the Couch

The way I heard it:
a field, brown-eyed
susans: a child
in the field, and then
the rape, the taking down
to that place: The way
I feared it was the fall
of the spirit
the browning of the eye,
the girl's entrapment
in the underworld

Too old to identify
with Persephone,
I understand
Demeter's wintering—
split from her child almost
half the time
powerless in that hollow-
eyed stare
back

*She rises
and goes to
the mirror—
hollow-eyed, waiting for
sounds:
the door,
parting car
shoes off—
all arrangements
of modern-day
custody*

*She rises
to see how
her daughter will weather
the visit:
curling tight
a little shell
hiding or the nameless
anger flaming
up in her*

Lynne Potts

Dairy Maid and Cyclops

Just as the air had all it could take and knew it, I know when a sky or anyone has had enough and will pour forth verbiage; you do it too and I'm there with my pail to bail you out from under beams in your eye scan to uncover what dalliers do/did while Cyclops slumbered in their craven hunger, that is: rummage through the litter for a stick that won't bend in water, burn it and twist it for insight which doesn't come through; we wish, we wish.

You pail barn milk and off to the house where I keep my one eye on you, a habit acquired, passed on since cave men took to sticks, then paint, which was the end of them as dalliers; took on a wall to break through, clutter of verbs and pronouns too, then who could say what utter nonsense they had for dinner, but I tell you, still hungry.

Now it's me pale, agog not to be confused with Agape who was beginning and end, saw with one eye cave hollows, rummage sales: rusted hoes, milk bottles, eye glass you can't use without switching lenses, even then you'll see verbiage taking over, hunger-talk talk with a switch dipped in water to bend reflections, a shed around the edge, dally lily in vast vase set out to see through, see through and tell, of course.

Lynne Potts

Lead Weight on a Line

Yes, I knew it rang but I was receiving off on a tangent as in: here's what the substitute said: carry chalk to the bored: think until bells go off in your head and I said I do not talk under duress, phone lethargic to the ear—absence of silence: how we act or not; a posse came across the mountain once and waited; it was too late; chalk it up to a fact of absence; I'm here in the park, litter and board on the ground, every one around talking in a wiry way at a distance unable to hear.

Inhibited my habit I'm not talking while the waiter asks are you still working on your plate,; well, Lovie, I work but I'd hate to think of my food approached by hammers and chisels, especially oysters ready to slip off the lip of shells found in chalk cliffs hanging like a loose tooth about to be pulled out of oblivion; Oh I know a posse when I see it, ready to ring a string, slam the door and the molar goes flying; then sure, you can't eat or chisel either, all you want is a cotton-wad stint.

Bell-bottomed and tasseled, the receiver hung a left over after the call to action, not just eating fishy tales the length of the bored, nobody listening until belle weather comes over the mountain, posse putting on airs black as a gap in the stomach wall, nobody caring, nobody caring a bite of hamburger bun, chalky white enough to stint the flow of conversation, wire more or less than possible as an air wave of getting by-by in a basket of triskets, can't be kept or dropped.

Terry Savoie

Acorn Rain

Hardened, honey-
colored acorns
hammer
a wrought-iron table
with a one note, two note
syncopation, non-

stop, insistent,
drubbing the roof,
rolling into gutters,
pummeling downspouts.
If only we could get some sleep—
we think (we

think)—
in all this racket,
but all we do
is get a late-August drumming
of acorn rain, argumentative,
keeping us fixed on

the ceiling
fan & heaven's
pelting & coded message
on & on & no
relief nor any idea
of ever being set free.

Terry Savoie

Begging Forgiveness

I lie on my back, pull
a light spring
blanket up & over my head

allowing my toes to breathe, un-
covering them

so they become lily pads
waiting for the morning fog to lift
off Pickerel Lake.

Closing my eyes tightly, I pray
for forgiveness

as black spots dart
before me
like spawning bluegill swimming

in the shallows, circling
their pebbled, shoreline nests

with eyes wide open
but vacant as my confessor's eyes
in his practiced indifference,

while their tails sign
my absolution.

Sarah Sorenson

Hansel and Gretel

I. Abandonment

It was everyone's fault,
because everyone was hungry.
So the ditch rats,
stuffed through the ribs with rejection,
were spat out whole and pink,
Slick and wet with the globbed spit
of farewell; goodbye; good luck!

Given back to the sap of foreign grasses,
they grappled with the nighttime,
and lost their names in its darkest bits.

The crumbs were left to bake
among the ruins of home.
Eyes vacant; birds throng.

II. My First Home

I learned the rules of attraction
after the first construction,
which was spit-shined together
with colostrum and roe,
the spiny backs of half-skinned fish,
and gills stirred into a mother-of-pearl-paste,
slapped onto ginger walls
as spackle
and an embalming glue.

I welded the cages together with
doves' nests, brine waste.
The journeying babble of the stream
carried the suffering downwind
and out of range.

The snow came in blankets of powdered sugar.

Sarah Sorenson

III. A House of Gingerbread

How lost is lost, anyway;
and how gory is the prospect
of my crystalline lure,
plunked right down out of the dreary cold
and released, salivating, into their wildest dreams?

IV. The Fire / The Homecoming

No one gets fatter.
I burn the fire brighter.
The last legs of twilight dash about
on walls of yeast and cider.

They trudged home with pockets full
of my jewels and sugar-glazed glass,
the smell of my smoke shocked into their skin
like an atomic blast,

Two silhouette-shadows.
Back, now, into the thick grease of the everyday,
the dead eyes of the new mother,
the creaky hinge of the old father.

They follow the birds back to where it all began,
without the guidance of the crummy remnants.

Crows and grackles and starlings,
the beating shame-song of robins' wings

Ann Whitehead

Curse VIII.

A collision in the park
between two runners—
I didn't observe it but heard the cry
and turned and saw a man on his side
not moving on the pavement,
and a woman standing not close but nearby,
watching him without approaching.

Clutching his elbow,
he screamed at her to go away
while she refused,
her hands folded across her chest,
her back bent like a question mark.

Some people stopped
and some kept walking.
Suddenly he wailed like an animal in pain;
twisting on his back, he kicked the air,
writhing while he cursed her.
She remained where she was
not leaving or coming closer.

Two teenaged girls exchanged looks
and hurried past;
an older man stepped up
with a cellphone,
but there was an ambulance
parked on the Drive.

The fallen man let loose
one more scream
and spread his arms wide
while medics lifted him
on a stretcher and evacuated him.
Not until he was gone
did she walk away.

Ann Whitehead

Curse XXIV.

Oh, for the potent substance
that could heal me from affliction!
Criticized, I brood and suffer.
I turn on myself
and eat out my heart.

From my window I watch
a tiny silver helicopter,
like an ornament or a toy,
heading south
in a blue-and-white sky.

Whirling gusts pluck
the last leaves from the trees.
My mind babbles;
I am plagued by thoughts.
How to extract the quiet self,

the one that doesn't speak,
but writes? Where fidelity
and honesty are one?
Say of me, I listened.
Say of me, I tried to understand.

Yet I made it harder than it had to be,
afraid of attention,
unwilling to permit mistakes.
When laughter could have helped,
I wouldn't let it.

Let these curses dry up,
light as leaves, and blow away.
The struggles are unending.
They are life itself.
They have my attention.

Erica Wright

Fording Calfkiller Creek

Our better days are ahead, but she doesn't hear.
The dog has tired us in circles.

We chose this leg, said we could stomach the foaming,
the mean streak, said something about not minding the cold.

And isn't that just like us? I heard of a girl who set out
to bury her brother, found she couldn't lift him, so lifted

a knife to her body instead. It isn't the same thing at all.
Now two bodies uninterred.

Erica Wright

The Swelling of a Throat

The way a dress hangs on a woman
who's been sick for months,

the way her dress hangs resigned
to the emergence of bones.

And the man who hauls her bag out
isn't a lover, but someone she's paid

to deliver her, to leave her
by the curb. The way I realize all

at once that I've forgotten the details
of a friend's face or that her face

didn't always scare me.
Light has torn her skin into fine ripples,

and rest is due. *It's like you said*, she says,
and I hate her for it.

The 2River View, 12.1 (Fall 2007)

Contributors

Michelle Bitting has work forthcoming or appearing in *Glimmer Train*, *Passages North*, *Poetry Daily*, and elsewhere; and *Blue Laws* forthcoming from Finishing Line Press, December 2007.

Ingrid Chung, graduate from New York University where she received the Thomas Wolfe Prize for poetry is teaching seventh grade in the Bronx through a New York City Teaching Fellowship.



Market Street © 2007 by Richard Biscayart

Michael A. Flanagan has poems in many small press periodicals across the country.

Ellen Kombiyil lives in India with her husband and two children. Her poetry has recently appeared in here in *2River*, *Eclectica*, *The Hiss Quarterly*, and *Sojourn*.

Robert Nazarene is founding editor of Margie / The American Journal of Poetry and MARGIE / Intuit House Poetry series. In 2006 he published the recipient of the National Book Critics Circle award in poetry. His volume of poems is *Church*.

Amy Pence has poems in *Mudlark* and *Red Booth Review*. In 2003, 2River published her chapbook *Skin's Dark Night*. The poems in this issue of 2RV are from her manuscript *Ablaze*, a finalist in many national poetry competitions.

Lynne Potts has read at Poets House, Columbia University, Ear Shot, 440 Gallery in Brooklyn, and Cornelia Street Café. In 2007, a fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Terry Savoie has poems in recent or forthcoming issues of *The Iowa Review* and *The North American Review*. Other poems of his have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Cortland Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Northwest Review*, and *Poetry*.

Sarah Sorenson writes poetry and fiction and has been published in *Eclectica*, *Half Drunk Muse*, *Morpo Review*, *Poetry Motel*, *Stirring*, and *Verse Libre*. She lives in the Deep South.

Anne Whitehouse is the author of *The Surveyor's Hand* and *Fall Love*, as well as short stories, essays, reviews, and feature articles. Her poems in this issue of 2RV are from the manuscript *Blessings and Curses*.

Erica Wright is the poetry editor at *Guernica* and teaches at the City University of New York. Most recently, she was a semi-finalist for the "Discovery"/The Nation 2007 Poetry Prize.

The 2River View, 12.1 (2007)

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. For submission guidelines please visit www.2River.org.

About the Artist

For over twenty years, Richard Biscayart has taught English as a second language. Biscayart has taught in Taiwan, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Panama, and Japan. He is currently teaching ESL in Milford, Delaware..

Richard Long, Editor
September 2007

2RV

12.1 (2007)

2River
www.2River.org
7474 Drexel DR • University City • MO • 63130 • USA