

The 2River View

12.4 (Summer 2008)



Awake © 2008 by Liz Amini-Holmes

New poems, prose poems, and sonic poems by
Craig Cotter, Jeannine Hall Gailey, Grant Flint
Gracie Leavitt, Luca Penne, Kryssa Schemmerling
Carolyn Foster Segal, John Surowiecki, Maw Shein Win
Elizabeth Wylder, Michelle Walbaum

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Michelle Walbaum

Couch in a house with five boys

It soaks in human oils,
fingernail-clippings in the shape of moons
when they laid there in rows, fat babies.

A girlfriend heard it, felt the edges of the upholstery curl.
Heard it move.

Feet edge out and
with a toe
 touch its underbelly,
 the fossil layer.

A GI Joe
with gnawed-off hand
 silent and stiff as if in church
while basketballs shudder outside, slip into nets.
And the boys yelling. And he's still inside.

Joe touches his green
beret but can't twitch his paralyzed eye.
Nor creak his neck back or forth.
 They've abandoned him
for moving limbs but

they'll get
 older, all of them but
Joe won't and
their faces
will droop but
Joe's won't

formed with a tool that molds men
to the angles they should have,
thirty-five, with gun and cap and smile and no
post-traumatic disorder.

Craig Cotter

Hi Ron Padgett!!

I just wrote 2 great poems
in a Jury Room
of LA Criminal Court

with a view of the trees
and the surface of San Gabriel Mountains

they are attached
like your 2 identical twin wrestlers
from Michigan State.

I want a flock of red hotdogs in buns
to fly by out the window
dipping and gliding together

like parrots (not like pigeons and starlings)

their song
in pairs Lennon and McCartney harmonies.
Haven't seen any new dim sum in twenty years

but it keeps getting made every day.

Craig Cotter

it's just about up

my life.
you
reading this
smiling
cuz you're alive
and i'm dead.

you don't know
in your heart
if the world will leave you
when you die.
as cheryl vossekuiil says:
BUMMER!

*

i never suffered.
my nature
and my birth
michigan woods and swamps
blessed me
with peace.

Grant Flint

Old Lovers

The girl would be grey now
Her teeth betrayed now
her breasts drooped, smaller
that an old man's breasts,

her lips drawn now, pinched
and grey now, her back stooped
her gait painful slow, those
eyes vague now, the spirit

crushed a thousand years ago
when she was young, the young
man young, an endless age
ago, but oh he would give all

he has or had to see her
once, one shining moment more
before going where lovers
go, old lovers go.

Grant Flint

Tombstone Softly Standing

These harsh years wind down my naked little wicked life, no music left, no wild assed sperm, no ancient cum, a dribble not a roaring stream of fireworks. I quiver gently, these proud useless minor days, dead tree still standing wickedly, too dumb to fall, the sap of life upright by chance alone, each breeze a potent ached for force of quick release, but no, I stand, I stand my ground, decay before your very eyes, no wisdom left to sparkle this dead day, a victim only of my own sweet human lies, a criminal in my waste of others time, their fervent secondary thoughts. Not here, not gone, too quick to bury, a furtive prisoner in my own polluted shell, I whisper sigh hiccup my visionary role of yesterday, a monument to passion spent, a rift in precious time, a wreck too savage to restore, a tombstone softly standing.

Jeannine Hall Gailey

The Woman Who Disappears

I died that night on the operating table.
It was not even childbirth —
just the scope, scalpel, balloon that did it,
my tissue so fragile the scrape, scrape
bled me to death.

I did not wake up with cramping,
infections and fevers.
My husband never drove me home,
stroking my hair, speaking softly.
I did not recover. And all my children were lost.

Here I am writing this poem as a ghost.
You can not come looking for me;
if you put out a bucket for my spirit,
it will not fill with water.
If you pray to a tree, I will not arrive
with the feathers of a white bird.

Now I cannot save you. We put our lives
in the hands of others, and sometimes
they drop us like eggs. Our castles disappear,
and you will wander, looking for us
in the islands of cranes.

See these wings? They are only for the dead
who try to rise again.

Jeannine Hall Gailey

When the Bush-Warbler Returns

What happens to the bird
who keeps returning, cooing
to invisible
hatchlings in her ruined nest?
She doesn't blame you, really,
but the way she keeps
singing breaks your heart. Isn't
she the harbinger
of spring, now empty of eggs,
of the hope of changing seasons?
Too many times she brings
string home with nowhere to put it.
Too many feathers
pulled from her own coat
to line the home of no children.
Little bush-warbler,
no longer named nightingale,
sing us a new song —
not of spring, of water,
of how we can make it alone
all those weary nights
and the moon so pregnant with light.

Gracie Leavitt

For all victims of any creation myth

Go crying through you and through me — the water veil —
its lovely teeth — mounted by travels of his own crane —
surmounted by a barrel of death — the barrel on its side.

She cried for her common law husband — peeled back
crescent trappings — lined the lungs of her neighbors with his
nacreous groin — ate her own children.

This, to hazard — this, all sweetly treatised hereafter — your
trauma song — that monolithic intestine.

We said it — assholes talking about god again — soused
badly enough — I am a barrel on its side — I am a frame for
his teeth — I say farewell to all the masses — I kick a stone
between their knees.

The gantries aren't giving up — the cranes are flying low
— for now — please forget about not sleeping — for now,
a strand of helenin casks — about the girders — about
hanging yourself last night.

Gracie Leavitt

Homily, calipers, rock

Lambent slurs, lambent inadequacy — the scene he gurgled out of — not young anymore — shagged with prehension — bad knees.

Classical mute — spoke the homily of rocks — took calipers to the sky — stuck subtle tea drunk to the air.

Recalls he was raised in a motel by his mother — while speaking homily to the rocks — recalls curtsy and Baily's beads — turns the rocks to tisane and drinks it — bad knees.

Recalls motels and girls and which came first — tempestuous cinema of brindled gamines — mezzotint thinness held in — have become my calmer memoirs — and broken gates down with light.

Not but a willful junky nerve now — not but willful junky nerve — give it a name — name it after a day — give it to the palmistry above — pavé palmistry above.

He recalls — he throws rocks — his belly is full — there is a river.

Luca Penne

A Pirate Ship Trailing the Mayflower

The local bank's loan officer explains that her ancestors arrived on a pirate ship trailing the Mayflower. She admits her husband would have been a lousy pirate, just as he had been a lousy gardener, mortgage broker, and father. One day last week he dumped woodstove ashes in a plastic bucket and stored it in the garage. So their house burned down in the middle of the day, giving everyone in the village a thrill. The vinyl siding melted in curlicues of smut. The garage collapsed with a shudder of orange gusts. Firefighters tossed smoldering books through the living room window. Too bad crooked real estate deals, bribery, and the torture of small children and animals don't make us blush the way fire does. We need more and better pirates. But after the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, the pirates discovered their ship drew too deep a draft, so they sailed south to the Indies where trade winds scoured the decks and cannons rusted beyond all hope of firing. Still, they looted a few Spanish treasure ships, and returned to New England with cash enough to found this dismal suburb and plant their foundations in wetlands that sob all night with thaw.

Luca Penne

Something About Italian Cooking

The rigatoni isn't rigid enough to support the cottage we're building on the beach near Miami Falls. I can't remember if we should cook it less or longer, or maybe add potato starch to the water. Meanwhile the local mafia wheels around in golf carts. At the drive-in bistro, geezers whistle through their dentures as teenage waitresses serve platters of writhing spaghetti. "Italy was never like this," one old meatball sneers through his trifocals. The days look alike, smirking in the mirror. Tiny dogs chase the golf carts and bark to warn away the squirrels. We wanted to build our cottage here because the leftover pasta heaps like snowdrifts, a source of building material superior to the shabby particle board coming down from Canada. No tariff, either. We braid vermicelli into cables tough enough to tie down our cottage against hurricanes. We decorate by peppering the stucco with shells. The old-timers admire our effort, their plastic teeth wagging like shingles in a storm. The waitresses giggle and mock the old men. They promise to get the short-order cook to subcontract our framework and plumbing, and they'll persuade the slow man who mops the floor to slop our dunes with asphalt thick enough to frustrate the tides.

Kryssa Schemmerling

Before Hollywood

Los Angeles dissolves
beyond the frame. Behind

the rusty apparatus
of antique plots

reality leaks in
like stray light

around the edges
of early pictures.

The tracks
of the streetcar

Buster Keaton chases
in *Seven Chances* fade

into farms and ranches,
orange groves that scented

the air for miles vanished,
remnants of some vast hacienda.

Scrubby brown hills that stood
for everything -- Ancient Rome

to Appomattox — burned
onto nitrate mined

from studio vaults. Combustible
as parched sage-brush

and chaparral. Unstable
as the fault-riven plate

of earth shifting, always shifting
beneath Hollywood.

Kryssa Schemmerling

Laurel Canyon

Your house stood top of the ridge,
just past Wonderland
Ave and the burned-out remains
of Houdini's estate, haunted
by his wife who tried to call her husband
back from the dead, but eventually gave up:
*Ten years is long enough to wait
for any man.* Decades

later your mother
in her caftan drifted
out of the canyon to meet her lover,
pausing on her way downtown to paw
through thrift store bins of pinafores
fit for a child star, so old and thin
they disintegrated against our skin.

Up there in the snake-rattled hills
everything was always poised
to go up in flames — marriages, mansions,
movie folk pitched at angles
above parched ravines
where joy-riding teens plunged, carcasses
of cars visible at bottom,
rusting among wild sage.

We held our breath
and floated like tiny William Holdens
face down in the pool
deep end shaded by jacaranda
and gasoline trees swamped
with drowned bees.

Carolyn Foster Segal

Camera Obscura

Light falls
on the gabled roof,
illuminates every pock-
mark in the bricks
of the house
where you imagined
you would always live.
Here are the willow trees,
the heady lilacs — you can count the
shadows of leaves on the walk,
the benches, the faces of
all those you ever wanted
to love you —
you with your back turned,
mourning now
the inverted world.

Carolyn Foster Segal

My Mother's Hats

Lying on the floor of Miss Barbara's Hat Shoppe,
her poodle draped over my arm like a diva's scarf,
I planned my life, while my mother tried on Easter hats.
I took notes, I made lists, I knew
what I needed: a black patent handbag,
red high heels, one straw hat, trimmed with
pink silk roses, and one blue satin circle
with a little veil that cut across
my made-up eyes; I wanted magic, a tube
of scarlet lipstick, clip-on faux pearl earrings,
and a fox stole, the fox clamping down on its tail,
like the end of a story. Bright-eyed, I sang
to the mirror. I wasn't dreaming then
of war or a handsome boy with a ponytail,
and I loved church, with its
incense and Latin hymns, the singing
in tongues. I wanted mystery, a French
twist, white carnations; I wanted
time to start and time to stop.
I wanted a hatbox like the one
I'm filling now
with all my mother's hats.

John Surowiecki

Mr. Z. Dies in His Blue Velveteen Chair

He smokes an L&M, watching a cooking show:
man in a cravat sings as his wife braises a shank of veal.
Dogs, stupid animals, are barking somewhere
and his poor pigeons are pacing their coops.

The wild grapes are fat and dark this year;
so far the robins haven't discovered them, although he
knows they will eventually: a blur of orange and brown
and then glimpses of vacant black-dot eyes.

His chair embraces him with its bulky blue arms,
grape-blue with its own silvery bloom; his cigarette
has burned into his leg; the man spoons out marrow;
the robins have come and gone.

John Surowiecki

Sister Ruth Picks Lice from S. Z.'s Head

*L'enfant se sent, selon la lenteur des caresses,
Sourdre et mourir sans cesse un désir de pleurer.*
— Rimbaud, "Les Chercheuses de poux"

S.Z. refuses to cry, drowning
in the folds of the nun's black sleeves.
The other children are red-eyed
and even the tough guys are quiet.

She dips her fingers in kerosene
and the sweet smell makes him queasy.
Her breath burns the backs of his ears;
her nails move like plows across his scalp:

a click here, a click there,
that's all there is: no real pain at all,
only the sarcasm of her caress
and the embarrassment of being unclean.

Maw Shein Win

A bed with softer animals

It is raining.
It is Tuesday night.
There are 36 steps up to Alan's apartment on the East Side.
A bed with softer animals.
A doberman pincher walks into a 7-11 and buys a carton of milk.
I notice these things.

Rain waters the buildings and they grow and grow.
Makes thieves work harder.
Softens mountains.
Ruins sandwiches.

Some paintings make me cry.
I Like Crying.
Gunsmoke was a good show to cry to.
Also, the *Waltons' Christmas Special*.

Alan is reading about cannibals in New Guinea.
The cannibals average at five feet tall.
They roast their dead for 30 days then bury them in the jungle.
Alan told me it rains more in the jungle, but I knew that already.

What I don't know is how lightning feels on the body.
Or what makes a glow worm glow.
Or why the neighbor keeps knocking his head against the wall.

Maw Shein Win

Let us be young again!

1. Touched by an ankle.
2. The scud missile, the buttercups, the long lost relatives.
3. A woman walks into the library. She carries three plastic bags. In one, pearl onions. In another, a half-knit poncho. In the third, a book on Sufi masters.
4. He pulled a long thin worm from the soil, moist and unforgiving.
5. Let us be young again!
6. He had to admit that his amnesia was a detriment to his “emotional” and “psychological” well-being.
7. The typewriter sits in the corner for god knows how many months. You watch it smirk. Black teeth.
8. Safety is overrated.
9. *Guardar ao abrigo da luz, calor e unidade.*
10. The deer of Nara, the ferns of Kamakura.

Elizabeth Wylder

Clark Street, 1871

The beauty of a fire hot enough to liquefy iron
is not what it destroys but what it creates:

how melted marbles are a prismatic galaxy-knot,
only the size of your fist and waiting for a bang;

how, fused together, slate pencils become muscle,
ribbed and contracted, slow twitch wood;

how it is impossible to tell the ivory billiard ball
was burned, or why that is what he chose to save.

Elizabeth Wylder

Two-Percent

The milk — it coats my stomach:
a blackboard's worth of chalky flakes
to cushion the boozy relapse-blow,
the lessons unlearned, cold and
caught;

 a snowdrift to bury my
flushed face, my chapped, red
hands in; a white cloud
in which to dizzy-sleep and plead —
make me pure; just not yet.

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Authors

Craig Cotter is the author of *Chopstix Numbers* (Ahsahta Press), and poems from his new manuscript *Awake* are upcoming in *Ambit*, *Aufgabe*, *Court Green*, *Los Angeles Review*, and *Nimrod*.

Grant Flint has poems in *Amelia*, *Poetry*, *Poetry New York*, *Slow Trains*, *The Nation*, and *Weber*.

Jeannine Hall Gailey is the author of *Becoming the Villainess* (Steel Toe Books). Her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review* and on Verse Daily and The Writers Almanac.

Gracie Leavitt writes for *Orange Life*, and her poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Caketrain*, *elimae*, and *Fourteen Hills*. She will soon begin working on her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts.

Luca Penne received his MFA from University of Missouri, where he won the Emerson-Poe Award. He currently works in ski slope maintenance to purge himself of the flatness of the plains.

Kryssa Schemmerling holds an MFA in film from Columbia University. She is currently finishing a documentary about surfers in Rockaway Beach, Queens. She lives in Brooklyn.



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Carolyn Foster Segal teaches at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and writes occasional columns for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*.

Luca Penne received his MFA from University of Missouri, where he won the Emerson-Poe Award. He currently works in ski slope maintenance to purge himself of the flatness of the plains.

John Surowiecki was awarded the first Poetry Foundation Pegasus Award for verse drama. He is the author of *Watching Cartoons before Attending a Funeral* (White Pine Press) and *The Hat City after Men Stopped Wearing Hats* (Word Works). Publications include *Gargoyle*, *Margie*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, *Silk Road*, *West Branch* and *Xanadu*. He teaches poetry courses at Manchester Community College, Manchester, Connecticut.

Michelle Walbaum is working on a BA in journalism at Rutgers University. She lives in New Jersey.

Maw Shein Win is the author of two chapbooks, *Tales of a Lonely Meat Eater* and *The Farm Without Name*. Her poetry and prose have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Chiron Review*, *Hyphen*, and *No Tell Motel*. She lives in Berkeley, California.

Elizabeth Wylder lives in Chicago. Her writing credits include poetry and flash fiction in *California Quarterly*, *Poetry Motel*, and *SLAB*.

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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View*, occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series, and podcasting from Muddy Bank, the 2River Blog. All publications are archived at www.2River.org, where you can read the submission guidelines.

Richard Long
Editor

About the Artist

Working primarily in acrylic paint on board, Liz Amini-Holmes has been influenced by the Symbolist movement of the 19th century, expressionist literature, and Polish poster art. Her work has been exhibited at MTV corporate offices in New York and in cafes, bookstores and galleries throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Her website is www.lunavilla.com.

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