

The 2River View

15.2 (Winter 2011)



Female Cardinal © 2011 by Robin Brown

new poems by

Allen Edwin Butt, Melissa Castillo-Garsow

Jessica DeWent, Richard Garcia, Cindy R. Goff

Nina Lindsay, Pamela Manasco, John Mann, Greg Nicholl

Nick Ripatrazzone, Richard Schiffman, William Stratton

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Richard Schiffman

Whiteout

The rooftops are white, the sidewalks vanilla-frosted,
the slush-cup clouds, albino river, fresh-laundered bluffs,
water towers capped in woolen white fedoras, bolls of steam,
an opalescent sky, seagulls knifing whitely by the levitating
 bridge,
a corpse lain out on morning's gurney, the sun, a wan, white
 moon
of itself, and from the dough-dull air a squall of listless flakes
 flicks
crystal dust upon my greying cranium—within which a candle
 gutters:
I call it *my mind*. There is nothing in it but wraiths in bone-white
 ghost suits:
I call them *my thoughts*. I call them *spooks and shades*, white on
 white, invisible
but for two fire-engine eyes, but for two coruscating coals
 burning holes
through a spectral sheet of cerebration. I call this fire *my life*, I
 call it *desire*
scanning, scanning the snow for that one sole smudge of blood:
 I call it
God's blood. I call it *the world, my love, my lover*. Where has she
 gone?
Wherever has she gone?

Allen Edwin Butt

In

If God makes clarity
it must decay. Blur shot with
sawed-off splendor momentarily
conceives of God again.

Example: one plain simile
in Greek, translated poorly
makes a rope into a camel, such
that we must wonder

what the English-speaking God knows
about needles: but it gets your
attention. I get sleepy & I say
it's late: not mannerism

(which anyway should not be
a pejorative) but eye raised
on "experience," lodged in a nutshell, keeping
time with claw-marks

on the wall. Don't be surprised,
then, if a story surfaces.
Stories are another thing that God
approves of, & the proof is

Once upon a time there stood
a castle, from which one could smell,
at every hour of the day,
the preparations for a meal of boiled

Allen Edwin Butt

cabbage—but the cabbage never
finished boiling. The king & queen
at last became impatient (nobles
do) & asked how long

they had to wait, for even
kings & queens need nourishment.
The cooks (who had the whole time
kept the meager menu secret, letting

their employers think that quail
& lamb awaited them) apologized,
prepared & gave excuses, said
Not yet. Until the king & queen

began to rhapsodize upon the topic,
had described the meal that they
approached as curves approach an asymptote
in such detail (complete

with thick béarnaise sauce, fatty
cuts of meat, sliced peppers once as fat
as the bosom of a wet nurse)—in such
detail that they could really taste it.

It helped that cabbage doesn't
smell like much, but really
didn't matter, since the king & queen
did not exist & also couldn't smell.

Melissa Castillo-Garsow

The Memory of Family Lobster

The sand beneath your fingernails.
The crunch in your teeth.
The sun.

No sé si aún me recuerdas.

They call orchard beach
chocha beach because it smells
of sex and pot and unflattering bikinis.
But one day I tethered my desires to the
Ocean. Anchored dreams to *va y ven de*
Corrientes oscuras.

Eating ceviche en Tecomán,
Listening to the laughter of the waves,
Getting stung by jellyfish at rockaway—
My brother and I ran
away on beaches
ocultándonos en el espuma
and he would foam anger.

But it was her fault.
One summer in the depths of the gulf
my father fished me out of the ocean
by my ears. It hurt when he yelled.
Like this orchard
Could grow not oranges
But *maracuyá*
Like being there meant mountains.

Jessica DeWent

Road Trip

You brushed off
my freckles
and held them
in the palm
of your hand,
and rearranged them
on my forearm, mapping
every place
we had whispered about
visiting but hadn't—
that new job,
the mortgage—
the Alamo, Sumter,
Savannah,
and the
veins of ancient
blackwater rivers,
Edisto, Waccamaw.

In the car, somewhere in Tennessee,
you study my arm-map,
creating freckle-highways
that run wild over this
great land.
And we are
—always—
as this: making our way
between the only two real things,
Biloxi and Asheville,
life and death,
and for years
we forget
there has ever been
an atlas.

Richard Garcia

The Duration

Nothing much happened during the duration. But a child did say the word duration until its meaning disappeared. Cream puffs reigned supreme. Baked Alaska was big during the duration. We thought it would be a kind of interlude, but technically, it could have been forever. Snowdrifts were also popular. Something white, like laundry, hovered over the land. In a darkened circus tent, a hobo clown tried to sweep a circle of light into a dustpan. It was the duration. The way it eluded the broom. The way he could never quite sweep it up as it contracted, becoming smaller and smaller.

Richard Garcia

The Aftermath

The aftermath arrived uninvited, without retinue or precedent. Gray sunlight was gradually suspended. Stars formed in cliques, giggling, carrying on. Cosmic rays continued to probe unabated, as the aftermath remained uninvited. Several numbers piled on the couch, but added up to nothing. Blame the aftermath. Single-windowed souls were admitted, some bringing gifts of pomade. Tiny sandwiches were served, each of related interest. Low-grade voluptuousness eventually passed into sleep. The aftermath sat in a corner. No one spoke to it. The nerve.

Cindy R. Goff

The First Twinkle of Death

If I run fast enough
when I die
I can become a kite—
an armless ghost with renewed wit.
I will finally appreciate
the rareness of this divided earth
because I will have no throat.

I'll fly over Christmas Eve
packed with Catholics doing pirouettes for Mary.
I'll fly over the geometry of Greece
dotted with temples and ancient nudity.
I'll fly over a sky burial in Tibet
crowded with buzzards
filled to the brim with human femurs and eyeballs.

I'll fly past news satellites
and the moon with its American flag and golf balls.
I'll make faces at the camera on Mars.
But I won't get trapped in any orbit—
I'll keep moving forward
because the fun of being dead
is in the flying.

Cindy R. Goff

Pleasant Pirate

A million hearts roll in
on the waves,
knock into each other on the beach.
There are Nazi hearts, sparrow hearts,
elk hearts, dancer hearts,
Swedish hearts—
None of them beat in time.

In the afternoon,
a dead pirate kisses my shoulder.
His skin is delicate
like a blue corsage from 1927
flattened in a family bible.
But even in this state of decay
he is a wonderful swimmer.
He has come from the mermaid cemetery
to teach me how to read
the good-byes tattooed on every heart.
He stuffs a pillow with seals—
I sleep
while they pull me all the way to Nantucket.

In the evening,
I see him far down the beach
but the closer I get
the smaller he becomes
until he jumps into a shampoo bottle
and is carried away on the waves.
I'm too scared to jump in
and swim after him
so he just laughs and waves goodbye.

Nina Lindsay

Dark

In the thick pitch of early winter morning
cold rain streams invisibly from sky to ground.
In such darkness, does it even matter
where it's going, whether in thick ropes or
fat drops, whether it touches this end
of town or the other, whether it is late or early,
whether laced with honey or poison,
just that it's with us—and the dreams
all huddled silently on the bed, spines
and feathers, anxieties and desires given
form but unseeable, uncountable—each of us
listening for something, all of us
here, listening to the rain.

Nina Lindsay

Passage

The dream explains
my dream to me—

a four-legged fowl
with silken fur

tries to sell me
my greatest desire

in exchange for the smallest
I have in my pocket.

It is a coin
worn so smooth

by touch
I can't read it.

The dream stops
as I hand it over—

the dream and I both
gaze at it

both touching it—
it doesn't even gleam

in the ominous winter
sun of all my dreams,

it is so tarnished.

Pamela Manasco

Anatomica

Here, where your fingertips brushed
tissue hardened from a fish hook,
some neuron fired—oh.

Golden, this light tunnels,
purple ropes slide
down the spine,
a jolt to start a harbor's lights
to blinking.

Here, my knee, the skin peeled
away on concrete, and patched itself
as quickly. Here

a cast iron skillet burned. Here
a freckle met another: my body's
latitude. Have you ever
seen this whole skin, the stretch
of muscle underneath?

When the doctors saw you open, pump your heart
with intimate fingers, that is called cracking the chest.

We are so breakable. See this knot
above my back, the small
curve between & above
my hips: they drew a needle
through the skin & bone,
and with a soft pop pulled out marrow.

See here, my underneath of bone
was broken. Now kiss the ends,
fused nub of calcified cage.

We do this to our hearts before
we wake—we grow a thorn cage
all around.

Pamela Manasco

String Theory

From our bed, sheet-slanted light bends,
curious and slender.
My toes, your shins,
the blankets' shedding noise, we say
adagio and pucker the sheets as we breathe.
For hours, only half asleep, we curl
around the mattress; we will never
understand it, how the winter winds
spin tiny worlds in order,
they will tell us nothing
of the spine by which we find them
tethered. Ice spirals on our windows,
scratching with its nails andante, andantino
as the smallest slice of sunrise comes.
And it's no secret that my heart lies
in the stars; among the nebulae expanding
I could spread and crackle open,
my soul a clam shell, unhinging.
All that light, such formless
motion, the dark matter that multiplies
itself and tears further the seam
of the universe and says the things I
can't say: how I love the stars, I loathe
the stars, the empty spaces between
them and the rooms I break
into slowly, closing doors in darkness,
biting off the threads that tie us nearer.

Driving home tonight I'll hit a butterfly
and watch it smear a wet mark on the wind
shield, fleck of yellow dust.

John Mann

Go Toward the Sunset

Bratislava is not on our list,
said the woman who ran
the tour. Said the woman who
counted the lives. Said the
lives one by one. They all fall
down the chute of the real.
More than you can count.
Now the ants march across
his cupboard one by one.
It doesn't matter what the
forecast is. Thunderheads blow
up every day or not. You must
embark. The tide rises under
your boat. They are setting up
colored flags on the other side.
They are preparing a welcome
for those on the guest list.

John Mann

Join the Visigoths

They were the only ones who offered arms repair as part of the package. He'd had bad luck with the cylinder on the .44 cap and ball. It physically fell out of the pistol. Of course, severance pay was death. Those guys never cleaned their beards. Banquets were gross. Vomit the currency of communion. They spoke a language of grunts. Once you became their friend they were on you like tight jeans. He didn't get the women. Ironic smirks and outright guffaws. He assumed manhood was always in question. The men circled them like wary fish. Who knows what happened at night, in the tents. Nobody ever talked inside those skins.

Greg Nicholl

How Quickly It Is Done

It is a ditch,
a dead end of broken cane
and thistle
where a boy pokes a dog with a stick
its nose covered in flies.

Its neck stiff.
The body still pliable.

He knows its name,
has seen his brothers smear blackberries
into the white fur.

He is a boy.
The dog is nothing more than dead.

Seven cigarette butts
litter the ground, one lined with lipstick,
beer bottle caps and matches.

He wonders how it died:
the gash above the eye, wound below the ribs,
each a sign.

It is nothing more than dead.

Greg Nicholl

At dinner he watched his father
remove the spine of a fish,
each delicate bone intact.

A simple act.
Lifted. Transferred to a plate
then taken away.

The way a hand comes down,
sudden. How quickly
it is done.

And when he slipped beneath the bath
he held his breath,
watched light through water and knew
the way we see things
before we die.

Nick Ripatrazone

She Had No Tongue

An onion snow in March: white
filmed thin between the pines,
flakes melted moist beneath our palms.
Our hands were hot. Our mouths
were not. She stopped talking at noon
but spoke with her fingers, pointed
the way across the bleached forest
and I followed. We stopped
at a leaning bundle of snow plants,
blossomed pink-red. Honeyed,
even up here so high, air dead
and dry. I kneeled to touch
but she said no; finally, a word.
I tugged one from the root.
I would steal life from them
to coax a voice from her lips.

Nick Ripatrazone

Travis or Trent

or Terry; you misheard his name
but followed every word of his story.
Wool hat in the summer tugged
halfway down his balding pony-tail, he
explained how he got each license plate
on the garage wall. He'd be dead
in less than two months
but that afternoon, chipped cups
and board games spread along tables,
his wife collecting money outside,
you watched him talk, fingers
along raised metal, like no end
exists for this life.

William Stratton

Grandpa

*Nothing is a something, it'll suck you dry as the whisper you
can hardly hear that tells you why. — Chris Smither*

Forty years ago I lost my arm,
up on the hill to the corn picker,
walked the mile back to the house
with my belt around my arm.
I tied it with my teeth and dialed
the operator with my good hand,
but I never felt like I lost anything
till I put down the bottle
and picked up the farm again,
colder, less a few pounds, sober.

It was a long mile, I thought about the hay
catching fire and tearing through the loft,
raining down on my heifers the spirit
of sensation, and I felt my missing hand grip
that husk for the last time.

Last year my son drove his truck
into a pond. His last words a thank you
for the drink his friend poured.
I never died from feeling the lack
but I gave unwillingly my son
to the empty space the booze forms.

I know I have one more in me.
This past thanksgiving, I asked my grandson
for one last bottle, scotch. I want to drink it
on my deathbed, and remember his father.

William Stratton

My last words

I have already uttered them, unknowingly,
though they sit apart now in some disorder
awaiting the proper moment to unite.

Perhaps already I have poems that contain them,
a narrative imbedded in something self important
which on that day I will be ashamed to admit
is grandiose and wholly insufficient.
Perhaps I have spoken them on the phone to my mother
as words barely words, but in a language
only that bond could pass in understanding;
or engraved them into some table when I was younger,
in passion to some cause I can not remember.
Perhaps I will simply slip on an untied lace
and the long-awaited words will consist
of no more than a few vulgarities
as I float down the stairwell.
On that distant day perhaps
I will be inspired beyond what I am now capable of.
It is no good to speculate.

I hope I will think of some other day
when those words and I had
a better time of it, when I sat on the bank
of some slippery river and watched the water
dive down the arced stones towards sunset,
and never once stopping to whisper any farewell.

The 2River View, 15.2 (Winter 2011)

Contributors

Allen Edwin Butt has appeared in *Poetry*, *Venerable Kittens*, and elsewhere. "In" is part of a sequence called *20 Prepositions*, three of which are appearing in Issue 7 of *Peaches & Bats*.

Melissa Castillo-Garsow is currently pursuing a Master's in Creative Writing at Fordham University. Her fiction appears in *A Daughter's Story* and *Shaking Like a Mountain*.

Jessica DeWent holds a BA in Creative Writing from Grand Valley State University. Currently she works for a fair trade company writing about and researching art from third world countries.

Richard Garcia is the author of *Rancho Notorious* and *The Persistence of Objects*, both from BOA Editions; and the chapbook of prose poems, *Chickenhead* (FootHills Publishing).

Cindy R. Goff holds an MFA from George Mason University. Her poetry has appeared *Exquisite Corpse*, *Ploughshares*, and



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elsewhere. Her books of poems are *Appalachian Flood* (2009) and *The Gods of Greenery* (forthcoming in 2011).

Nina Lindsay is the author of *Today's Special Dish* (Sixteen Rivers Press). Her poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *FENCE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere.

Pamela Manasco is a freelance writer and editor living in the Birmingham, Alabama. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina—Wilmington.

John Mann has appeared most recently in *The Gettysburg Review*. His play—*Mass Destruction, Weapons Of*—was produced by the New World Arts Theatre in Goshen, Indiana, in 2004. His chapbook is *Wyoming* (Finishing Line Press 2008).

Greg Nicholl is an assistant editor at the Johns Hopkins University Press. His poetry has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Natural Bridge*, and elsewhere.

Nick Ripatrazzone has work in *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Esquire*, *The Mississippi Review*, and *West Branch*. *Oblations*, a collection of prose poems, is forthcoming from Gold Wake Press in 2011.

Richard Schiffman has poems appearing or forthcoming in *32 Poems*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry East*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

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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, more recently, blogging and podcasting from Muddy Bank.

Richard Long, Editor
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