

The 2River View

15.3 (Spring 2011)



New Poems by Jose Angel Araguz, Jennifer Atkinson
L. S. Bassen, Andy Cox, David Harris Ebenbach
Charles Fishman, Dan O'Brien, Susan Azar Porterfield
David Salner, Anna Lowe Weber

The **2**River **V**iew

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Cover Image

Eaten © 2011 by Jackie Skrzynski

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Jennifer Atkinson

Canticle of Hours

Drizzle and dawn intermittent: a produce truck grunts and whines
its way up.

Crows, pre-echoes, *cronk-cronk* from the bell tower: all four lift off just
before the noon toll.

Rain, unburdened, gives way to late sun: laughter spills from the
school's opened windows.

Cracks in the glaze, flaws in the stained-blue light: the splash and
warble of pouring wine.

Moonlight as if through a door left ajar: the high-pitched tick of a
watch on the nightstand.

Jennifer Atkinson

Canticle of Hunger

They say she neither ate nor drank;
Or she lived on music, seven notes so rich in overtones

She couldn't, having swallowed them, consume a cherry more;
Or seven angels brought her seven bites — full moons turned
edgewise,

Disks as thin as an egg-white glaze;
Or she fed on manna that filled her mouth like spun sugar, manna

Dropped from the beaks of birds, one taste at each of the seven hours
Or she took back her seven times seven pleas, gnawing and gnawing
the gristle,

Until regret, regret, regret turned to honey in her mouth.

Jennifer Atkinson

Canticle of Magdalene and the Lamp

for Rene Char and George La Tours

She feels your eyes like a blind man's fingers touch her contours,
the features of her face.

She has mused at the lantern for years, waiting, listening to the flame
contend with a draft, a gust, a calm . . .

The skull rests in her lap like a baby, heavy, anonymous, mysterious
as a newborn.

It is she herself who unbuttons her blouse, who vacates her alcove and
opens her hands to you, to whoever comes and then departs.

She stands, pushes the chair flush with the table, and follows you,
barefoot, treading too lightly to register a sound. Her hair, by now
tangled and coarse, harbors moths and spiders and the smell of
scorched milk.

Jose Angel Araguz

Hansel to his muse

I do not know why
I give the earth these phrases,
Sounds, thoughts,
All broken off in pieces
That trail behind

Do I expect to find my way,
To look back and have it all
Come together, or will I see
That I have led myself into darkness

Listen — each footstep
Cackles with the words
Of twigs and dry leaves

Hold me, sister,
And tell me when we are almost there,
When everything behind us disappears,
When home is what we walk towards

And these words are the sun
Cracking through branches,
The forest dissolving
In light.

Jose Angel Araguz

Street Performer

Blink and you become a child,
Beholden to your eyes to tell the truth.

If seeing is believing, then God has been painted gold
And caught mid-step, yawning in New Orleans.

Blink again, and a nostril flares,
A stray hair needles into the sky.

A dollar bill falls into the cup at His feet; a camera flashes,
The sound like chewing gum smacked between teeth.

Bright arms land at His side like birds;
Somebody yells: Get a real job!

We are all witness to something of the second coming
In those slumped shoulders smoldering with light.

When we shake hands, He calls me brother and leaves gold
Glinting off my skin like flames seething to ash.

L. S. Bassen

April Accident

Someone today will get the awful news
I saw as I walked across the highway overpass
en route to the library. Below, one firetruck
angled, closing a lane. The ambulance drove away,
lights flashing, but silent, no sirens announcing,
and on the grassy incline on its back splayed a car.
I slowed and O Jesus, someone just died there,
I knew. My body halted. Five firemen, two cops,
the crew from the upended flatbed,
another firetruck; a line of orange cones outlined
the scene. Three lanes down to two, no matter
for so few cars this cloudless mid-April midday
of white dogwoods opening, daffodils
and hyacinths, glowing forsythia
like the trees going green. How could
it happen on this flawless day? I rushed to the library,
returned books, and had to write this down.
But by the time I returned to the overpass,
the cones, the cops, the trucks and car were gone,
as if I had imagined it all.

L. S. Bassen

Double Dutch

The big girls know the ropes
how to swing them to the beat
you have to feel in your knees
and when to spring and sway.

Then you're *in*, all at sea
scudding the breaking waves
buoyed by the song the big girls sing.
When you're grown you can't remember
the words, but the rhythm is written
in your bones. Now,
when you see little girls double dutch,
you navigate not only the grace
of getting in, but also the tack of getting out
without foundering, which matters now.

Andrew Cox

Exclamation Point

These two people were bushwhacked by a business arrangement. At 3 a.m. the tables on the restaurant patio danced a waltz without a witness. The church wondered why the room filled with people. Someone says to someone else we had better play it cool.

Block parties everywhere bring together those who should not be collected. The girl's shell collection waits in a box in the attic for her return. Going solo abandoned this man as he sat in his cubicle. The way she walks transformed the way he lived.

Who would have thought the father-in-law the dust would own the road. Who would have thought these two people's shoes would say hello. A ring will somehow become a dress and a chance meeting.

Uncertainty shakes hands with its two brothers here today and lost. One more sentence before we arrive then the exclamation point. The door opens and then they sit down to meet the new man in her life.

Andrew Cox

Goodbye

With lipstick and clear skin the daughters let you put them to the right of everything. To the left mothers fall off the map. You could feel outrage but what comes is the inward weather. Even mothers with blond hair leave behind their umbrellas.

A boy woos a girl while the shirts in the closet feel left behind. One word at a time the man finds under rocks what he wants to say. Someone you know is sick and you don't know it. Dead ends kiss the clues so they won't know where to take us.

When someone says everything is going to be ok a caterpillar eats another leaf. Birds perched on bats wonder why the belts don't match the shoes. On most days the weather refuses our kickbacks and bribes.

You can rhyme Mexico with go but it won't help the dictionary give us what we need. A mom meant every word she said but she's lost the urge to speak. No one understands why the word goodbye has fled with such speed.

David Harris Ebenbach

Shabbat Comes Over West Philadelphia

Shabbat comes over West Philadelphia on quiet wings. As the sun heads off into the higher numbers, up from Center City comes the night. Street lights hum on. Cars click slowly into spots on this block or the next while someone stretches out on a bench in Clark Park, the ongoing sound of the basketball not a rhythm but a cadence. Dinner time comes to kitchen after kitchen. People go in to their food and television, and those who come out again take to the steps for an evening of nothing much. They watch that nothing much. It never gets all the way dark here, the light is the orange grease they pop corn in at the movie theater, but it's dark enough that faces go over to further and further shadow. Buses and trolleys. It all continues, slower and slower, until the only things moving are the raccoons, the stray cats, the young men unable to rest. One kid gets dropped at home very late. Out of the car, up the porch steps to the front door. The sound of keys loud on a stilled street. He goes in without having noticed Shabbat moving down Osage Avenue. He wouldn't know how to find the sound of angels within the sound of traffic remote on another street, the buzz of the streetlight, the cadence of the heart. But he will.

David Harris Ebenbach

Space

all around this house, these
many white walls. Out back

the gray swingset fit for a child
of no size, and at the edge

of the far front yard the highway
carries its occasional traffic.

The sky is on every side of everything.

The horizon is the shuddering
of train track, the shuddering

of a line that in the middle
of the night feels all too close —

but in the day it shows us
how far we are from anything.

Charles Fishman

Burying Lenin

*The corpse of Lenin returned from its annual touch-up
this month with a bandage on the right thumb.*

— Susan Sachs, *Newsday* (April 14, 1997)

They keep burying Lenin in Moscow but
his embalmed corpse refuses to cooperate

How well this mummy has been preserved
yet how fragile it seems now: digit by digit
it breaks

The hammer-and-sickle flag no longer flies
in the red sky of the capital the *Internationale*

no longer marches — dark-booted phantom —
in the nation's heart Lenin's body lies on its back
in a black suit

but where is the famous worker's cap that he waved —
delighting the people — and which Vladimir Ilyich

clasped expertly between his enlightened fingers
and the imperious thumb? They have buried
the thumb

and have designs on the fist But Lenin's body lies
in Red Square in its coppery tomb: it is here

that the Red Army swore to defend the Motherland
and here that Hitler's *Wehrmacht* froze in Moscow snow
This is where

the Pioneer children in red bandanas took their oaths
where the cosmonauts saluted before rocketing into space.

Charles Fishman

Finding Hitler's Head

Darker than you, it says,
without speaking, *Darker
than you*, nor will it blink
first or shift its gaze,
no matter how long
you stare.

As far as the head's concerned,
you aren't there and will not be;
it disregards your sudden burst
of speed and the creaking gears
of eternity's ship suddenly
breaking.

Dan O'Brien

The Firecracker

was just waiting
for me, water
-logged and fractured
beside a box
of matches on
the windowsill
that looked out on
our suddenly
profuse backyard;
in the house where
nobody spoke,
with a mother
that could never
shut up: I slid

open the slim
box, fingered out
a wooden stick
and struck the head
then passed the wet
wick through until
that mute wick flared
to life. And popped
beneath my hand
as the glass thread
slipped in between
my ears. I ran

outside, Mother
behind me, How
could you do this
to us? How could

I answer when
I couldn't hear
a word she said

anymore?

Dan O'Brien

The Worm

Alone in the boat
with you, rowing out
into the lake. Take
the Styrofoam cup
and with my fingers
dig through the fecal
loam. For night crawlers.
Blood suckers. His cold
striated, mucoid
skin, pink bulbous band
like a prepuce. You
show me how to hold
the naked tangling
thread, then push the barbed
hook through. Once, then twice
till my bait's a balled
crucifix of dirt.
Don't be a faggot,
you say as you cast
your line out. I drop
the live worm between
my bare knees, puncture
his middle, watch his
hermaphroditic
tail flipping blind. Ooze
spotting the wood grain
green. Then casting out
my loose loop, I see
the innocent worm
disappear beneath
that rhythmic lozenge
of sunlight. Such grace
when the hook comes back
clean. One time I left
the worms on their hooks
and smiled when I saw
you searching our house
for the source of all
that smell of death.

Susan Azar Porterfield

April 7, 2:46 p.m.

How I got here, I'm not sure,
this woodsy house, cellarless, with the snoring
cat on the couchback behind my head. It's raining. Literally,
I could cry. I'm grateful here and now
for my bare legs, bare feet, the undraped kitchen panes. I'm in love
with the tiny, blind worms who will wash in through walls,
adrift and confused, knowing best what the body can feel. Above all,
this unfilled air.

But this is too dramatic,
yes? Can I just say, then,
I'm not unaware that there's sorrow and searing pain
most everywhere in the world today.

David Salner

Gulf Coast Near Tampa

He cuts a chunk of squid with a scarred knife-blade
stained almost brown, stabs the bait,
threads the hook through the jelly-like meat,
whips the line far out in the channel,
tells me he's just signed up. A breeze comes in
from thunderheads on the Gulf, and a bank of clouds
trails up the river, smoke-like, from the mouth
to the icy springs. Rough water
flattens around our two lines.
Watch out for yourself, I say.
Watch out for yourself when you get over there.

David Salner

Three Straight Days

After another storm passes through,
and the parking lot is a lake of rain,
I kneel on my stoop and look at the trees
crowding over the roof line with the sleek
clarity of water on needles and leaves.
It's been raining for three straight days
and it's wet in the garden, wet in the fields.
Rain coats the lilies, the iris spikes,
shines on the tiny azalea twigs. Further up,
rhododendron hide under wet aspen leaves.

I'm an old man, praising summer rain,
how it blesses the bones. When I was a boy,
I ran where the creek water flooded the field,
out in the field where the creek water rolled,
I ran with my pants rolled up to my knees.

Anna Lowe Weber

A Man Dies in the South. A Widow Mourns

She was reluctant to claim the paltry moment of loss as her own. Didn't want any of it — the dark automobiles, blunt-nosed sharks drifting down the highway as the youngest grandchildren waved to nothing from the tinted windows like small-town pageant queens. She didn't want the ash-soft spot on her wrist he had not grabbed, had not clutched (what strength was there for that?) but had merely stroked with his thumb, lightly, mindlessly, the way one might rub a stone as a worried habit.

There was nothing stricken when it was time. No final utterances or gestures. But the walls of the room seemed acutely white, and the large black men who carried him out were kind, she later recalled. They were strong, lifting him like he was nothing. The day was hot for March, and the humidity was something to get lost in. Something to palm as it all went limp.

Anna Lowe Weber

Of Course the Dead Are Hungry

They want one more stab at it, one more go round.
Even in such a state — their eyes stitched shut, mouths removed.
Well, not removed. More accurately, bunged up. Caulked.
Didn't you know?
Their mouths are filled with grout.

Before the newly-dead wake, the long dead are hard at work,
filling that gaping hole with a putty that dries alabaster white.
The ears and nostrils they fill as well, tilting back the heads
of the newly-dead to funnel the sealant down.
With their trowels, they smooth the surface
between plaster and flesh
so that when the newly-dead wake,
there is nothing of our world to take in,
nothing to see or taste or smell.

But their memories betray them,
and they try to call out for a hint of what they once had.
Their arms wave and grope, wanting so badly
to remember the salty warmth
of flesh going into flesh.

There is nothing to hear, their ears
plugged up as they are with putty.
But from within, something still resonates.
From within, there is the red hum and vibration
of machinery. There is the dog's high-pitched whine,
constant and clear. Begging at some toy
that can't be had.

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Contributors

Jose Angel Araguz was raised in Corpus Christi, Texas, and now lives in Eugene, Oregon. His work has been published in such journals as *The Acentos Review* and *Rattle* and featured in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. New work is forthcoming in *Hanging Loose*.

Jennifer Atkinson is the author of three books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Drift Ice*. She teaches in the MFA program at George Mason University in Virginia.

L.S. Bassen won the 2009 Atlantic Pacific Press Drama Prize. Currently, three of her novels are serialized at troubadour21.com and friedfiction.com/. She also reads for electricliterature.com.

Andrew Cox is the author of *The Equation That Explains Everything*, (BlazeVox, 2010), *Fortune Cookies* (2River, 2009) and *Company X* (Wordvirtual.org, 1999). He lives in University City, Missouri, where he edits *The UCity Review*.

David Harris Ebenbach teaches Creative Writing at Earlham College. His poetry has appeared in, among other places, *Artful Dodge*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *Mudfish*. His first book of short stories, *Between Camelots* (University of Pittsburgh Press), won the Drue Heinz Literature Prize. www.davidebenbach.com.

Frozen © 2011 by Jackie Skrzynski



Charles Fishman is the author of *The Death Mazurka*, a 1989 American Library Association “Outstanding Book of the Year” that was nominated for the 1990 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. His more recent books include *Chopin’s Piano* (Time Being Books, 2006) and *In the Language of Women*, to be released this spring by Casa de Snapdragon.

Dan O’Brien, a former Hodder Fellow at Princeton University, was recently awarded a 2011 residency at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Bellagio Center in Bellagio, Italy. His poems have appeared in *32 Poems*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Margie*, *New South*, *Nimrod*, *storySouth*, and elsewhere.

Susan Azar Porterfield has two books of poetry: *In the Garden of Our Spines* (Mayapple Press) and *Beirut Redux* (Finishingline). She is also the editor of *Zen, Poetry, the Art of Lucien Stryk* (Ohio UP).

David Salner has worked as an iron ore miner, steelworker, machinist, and general laborer. His second book, *Working Here* (2010), was awarded first prize by Minnesota State University’s Rooster Hill Press. His poetry has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Threepenny Review*.

Jackie Skrzyński teaches drawing and painting at Ramapo College of New Jersey. Her art has been exhibited at Ramapo College, The University of Arkansas, Georgia State College and University, and Columbia College. The images here in 2RV are from her series of deer roadkill.

Anna Lowe Weber currently lives, teaches, and writes in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in *The Cimarron Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Iowa Review*, among others.

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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.

Richard Long, Editor
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