

2RV

17.2 (Winter 2013)

The 2River View

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new poems by

Susan Alkaitis, Roy Bentley, Elizabeth Crowell
Renee Emerson, Susan J. Erickson, John C. Hall
J. Rodney Karr, Angie Macri, Mary Orovian
Laurelyn Whitt, Sally Van Doren

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The 2River View

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. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

Richard Long
2River
www.2River.org

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Susan J. Erickson helped to establish the Sue C. Boyton Poetry Walk in Bellingham, Washington. Her poems have appeared recently in *Crab Creek*, *The Lyric*, and *Switched-on-Gutenberg*.

John C. Hall is, until now, a previously unpublished writer living in Port Hueneme, California, where he is a student majoring in journalism and creative writing.

J. Rodney Karr holds an MFA for the University of Arkansas. His poems have been published in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Iowa Review*, and, most recently, *dirtcakes*. He lives in Denmark.

Angie Macri hails from southern Illinois. Her recent work appears in *Natural Bridge* and *Tar River Poetry*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she teaches in Little Rock.

Mary Orován is the author of *Green Rain* (Poets Wear Prada 2008). Her work appears in *Plainsongs*, *Poetry East*, and *The Seventh Quarry* (Wales). She lives in New York City.

Laurelyn Whitt has poems in *Nimrod International*, *Tampa Review*, and *Rattle*. Her first book, *Interstices*, won the Holland Prize. Her new book *Tether* is forthcoming from Seraphim Editions. She lives in Minnedosa, Manitoba.

Sally Van Doren is the author of *Possessive* (LSU Press 2012). *Sex at Noon Taxes* (LSU Press 2008) received the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets. She is a curator for the St. Louis Poetry Center.

About the Contributors

Susan Alkaits holds an MFA in dance from the University of Utah and currently lives in Colorado. Her poems have recently appeared in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and *Slow Trains*.

Roy Bentley holds awards from the NEA and the Ohio Arts Council. His most recent book, *Starlight Taxi*, winner of the 2012 Blue Lynx Prize, will appear in 2013.

Elizabeth Crowell is a poet and English department chair in a suburb of Boston. Her poems are published in or forthcoming in *Bellingham Review*, *Hollins Critic*, and *Poetlore*.

Renee Emerson teaches poetry at Shorter University. She has recently published in *Indiana Review* and *Stirring*. Her most recent chapbook is *Where Nothing Can Grow* (Batcat Press).



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Laurelyn Whitt
Five Unknown Schoolgirls at St. Mary's

Cropped out with dances,
ceremonies
ancestors whose
names they wore

like shawls, like stars, like stories.

Five unknown girls, measured
by anthropologists
arranged and photographed,
specimens in an awkward row.

Eighty years later, hanging
in a museum
relatives find them,
look into their eyes

uneasy but unbroken
whisper thanks.
When they leave, an attendant
sees five yellow post-its, sitting

in a ragged line
along the frame

on each, in Niitsitapi, a name.

This poem is drawn from a 1925 photograph taken by Oxford anthropologist Beatrice Blackwood on the Kainai First Nation reserve in Alberta. It is also indebted to an account of the Lost Identities photographic exhibition presented at Head-Smashed-in Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre in 1999.

Laurelyn Whitt

Five Unknown Schoolgirls at St. Mary's

*I can look into their eyes and their spirit
lives through them. Mi'ksskimm*

Missing from the image
is what the Grey Nuns took
parents, grandparents
arms reaching

the voices of five year-olds
ten years gone
thinning into winds,
their names and braids

taken
with their clothes.
They stand shorn
and uniformed and numbered

in white smocks,
laced boots.
Over and ended
the daily rituals

taking up their sisters' hair,
combing and plaiting
their mothers'
mothers' skills

how to soften buckskin, to
brain and smoke a hide
patterns of quill
of bead work.

Sally Van Doren

Defiance

We were drawn that way at a young age on the main line
West from St. Louis to the Columbia spur North to Moberly
Where our grandparents picked us up at the station

And showed us the quarry behind their house on Gilman Road,
Warning us not to try to jump off the edge of the cliff
With an umbrella the way Uncle Robert had.

Our mother had traced our blood to Squire Boone, Daniel's
brother.

It coursed through our father's veins when, as a 16-year-old
With a summer job on the railroad, he fought to get the cinder

Out of the tracks that blocked the switch as the 12:05 bore
down on him.

Sixty years later his grandsons spin the wheels of their three
speeds

On the gravel path above the wide brown river, sweating

As their knees pump on pedals their feet have out-grown.
We stay at a bed and breakfast on the bluff, walking down
To Dutzow for the Friday night fish fry. Back on our bikes

On the Katy Trail the next morning, stopping along the way
To swing on the vines and poke our heads in the caves,
Racing the last mile to the marker in front of the Boone
Homestead.

Susan Alkaitis

Graceful Exit

Could it be that you were laughing at me as you described the
drama of my slide,
even my elegance as I careen

toward the metaphoric tree like a seal pup—bloated, tender
and dumb—
your passionate gestures, the marvel! as a crowd gathers

your speech gains speed. I am large, then girl, then grain,
contracting suddenly without weatherproofing. I slip

beyond your boot as the story grows.

Mary Orován

Ghost

He came to me
from a sea of where
 a turtle a fish
 anemone
edge of a wave in the light.

They all gambol
 nimble
fretting at the weather
or do they

nothing to soak or scatter
 can't reflect in puddles
but is that last ring of a pebble
 I toss you dissolve to
breeze on a Calla lily
 or Day
a cartwheel Tarzan in trees
 they leave.

In a dream you came
sat on the bed & I modestly
in another corner *father* I said
 there is much I carry
I never tell—
then my mother entered the room
 on her usual broom
and swept me all alone again.

Mary Orovian

By the light of the

Moon half full over Manhattan
and everywhere later sooner
save for the cloudy
or so dusty dusk
ah my orblet hemi semi
demi monde

you promised ere more
that I too can again flame full
suchly shine
if you grant me a boon
as in the time of hoop skirts
or ancient loins' loin clothing only.

I desire not goods or false godlets or goodly fortune
goblets of pearlinesses or even niceties.
I wish to stitch hurts' knit brows with love and your beams
hopes filled like the fulling moon

and on the darkest light night
stealthy lune mine
knowing the next and next bring bettering
I too wax poetic
with ambition and willglow amber hope.
Though on your barren land pocked dry beds
nonetheless we make with you our own moist joy.

Susan Alkaitis

Secret Life of the Bird

Fate found the nest with the golden eggs.
So I dutifully slink on the disguise,
tailored tail feathers, porcelain beak.

I walk the walk.
They follow behind not aware
that sweat pools under the suit,
in my thighs. I shuffle along,
breath growing hot.

Faith draws perfect lines from them
to me. I'm a siren and
motherhood has fooled them.

Roy Bentley

The Bones of Appalachia

A friend of mine from Wise, Virginia
tells me, "You are one of us, we together,
the bones of Appalachia as the meat rots."
He says it knowing that both my parents
despise the rough country they come from
and live in what he calls "the literal world"
after leaving home and Neon, Kentucky.
He knows they say I'm not an Appalachian.
My friend was eighteen when David Walters
told him of Sin, the need to be born again.
He may not have known much of heaven
but he knew about things needing changed.
Says he went forward and accepted Jesus
"in some Jesse Stuart mirage of yesteryear
that never was." So he got redeemed, saved.
What Jack Wright swallowed, I swallowed.
Same savior. Same threats of hellfire and
same robber-baron Christianity as history.
Same stupid belief that want and poverty
are to be endured. Lies of that magnitude
burn like moonshine. Stink like a meth lab.
These days, neither of us believes in heaven.
If there is a joy after death for Appalachians,
it's in the springing back of trampled grasses.
Jack says he remembers mountain women
tottering to church in lace shoulder-shawls,
reeking of Este Lauder or morning toddies,
a few sporting bruises saved up from men
who literally hated the world. These dead
sleep now, if death is anything like sleep,
all the theologies of redemption put to rest,
under the pearling snows. Their bones are
in the hills they loved and hated to leave
if they had to, even to save themselves.

Angie Macri

Maidenhair

Our radiant maidenhair tree
with seeds soft
and bitter

stands under men who dive out
of planes from Hunter Field.
They glide over

the steam shovels and coal gondolas
around Sparta and the old
strip mines

of boulders, over soybean rust
and dry glacial plains.
We watch them

bloom from seeds to parachutes
of delicate red. Our ginkgo
grows

a thick crown, a rocket of fossil
through chaff, coal dust,
ash,

and diesel, great limbs reaching.
The men land from the sky
and drive away.

Angie Macri

The Live Oak Lives in Livid Ways

The live oak lives in livid ways
of evergreen, and so it clings
to every southern sun. It keeps
everything in its living wages.
A live wire, your voice, saying
I can go. No, I will keep that day
as a liturgy of honey bees
and their effort, of building
combs in a livelihood of pollen,
in the hollow of the tree,
in a space of smoothed bark
and hanging gold hexagons
as pieces of turtle shell.
The hardwood spreads
its heavy crown, Spanish moss
dangling in nebulas. Jays
flare among the branches,
eating the acorns that it bears.
The black bees hear the piping
of their young queens. In all this,
you don't mean anything.
As the morning star becomes
an evening star in an orbit
on the other side of the sun,
that day will become a rite, built
in a space wrapped with wax
of my belly, words of my choosing.

Roy Bentley

The Death of Chance Locke

His wife Rose says a sphere of blue light
“with zigzags” arrived in the room, the dog,
his dog, the one he named after Dorothy’s—
a talcum-white toy poodle version of *her* Toto—
that dog barking at the light or the presence
of death, or both, though death is always
present under white fluorescent-lit walls
and doesn’t seem to mind being the center
of attention. Everyone in Florida at least
dies warm, so he had that going for him.
And a doting wife who hovered, twisting
the ephemeral and mysterious into a shape
at once recognizable. Even his first name
was a grammar of expectation of unheralded
good, the honed moment of unbearable happiness
that waltzes in from nowhere or Pennsylvania,
cocking a Panama hat and motioning for a chair
to be moved closer. You know what I mean—
Chance is all about what’s not out of the question.
No saint, this one had a reverence for the light:
the ways it falls onto downturned orchid petals—
he raised white Dendrobium orchids in slatted
wood boxes hung from the sides of date palms.
The zigzags may have been a hesitating, having
a look at his boxed flowers or the wind-denuded
bougainvillea yet climbing one wall of his house.
Then again, it may have been a ball of nothing.
But according to Rose Locke, some of us pass
from this life as if a vessel of sorts is emptying
of a grand mystery, the blue and zigzagging fact
of that display forcing eyes to open, at least one
truth given a context it lacked until that instant.

Elizabeth Crowell

Pronunciation

It was 1980; the hostages had sat
in Tehran a hundred days.
The school clock's stiff hands
clicked with my teacher's voice
correcting me again and again
as I called Holden Caulfield's sister
Phobey instead of Phoebe.
Finally, he had to bomb my desk
with a twenty-pound dictionary.
"Look it up!" he screamed.

It was a well-planned rescue.
Half a life later
as I look at the cities
we have mouthed our way into
my tongue halts before it sends
a word on its way,
unsure how to pronounce
stunted prayers, wrecked museums,
what the living say
about the dead.

J. Rodney Karr

Snow

makes us humble.
Notice how it stares.

It defies who we are.
Say it's beautiful and die
after sliding uncontrollably.

Curse it and each flake
will be a lover to your hair,
brow and tongue, an angel
spread across the ground,
a man in useless clothes.

Sled and sleigh, but do not
give it tribute. It is not god,
idol, or nature and can't care
to be proclaimed a day off
or that very special white Christmas.

And do not give it scorn.
It will disappear. It will
come back. If not today
then tonight. If not
this year then next, heavy
and sad, light and gay,
swallowing architecture
and landscape, changing
your perception of palm trees.

And when it turns dirty,
don't blame the snow.

Blame your audacity to call it pure.

J. Rodney Karr

Kaleidoscope

Now the lovers come,
the road too long
for talking, the talking
too long for the road.
He grips the wheel
and squints at dusk,
searching for deer
that may suddenly
cross. She passes time
observing beautiful
forms, reducing love
in a cylinder of mirrors.
He is only a pleasure
in its design. She forgets
the deer, the whole
day better forgotten
in its own distortion
as chiseled sun drops
behind splintering trees,
as diamonds of horizon
turn with each turn
of her hand, as snow
crumbles like crystals.
Beauty on a thousand
axes collides with her eyes.
Inertia, like love, brings it
forward. Deer pass, gone.
Darkness helps them see.

Elizabeth Crowell

Suspension

The boys, high and thin, hear the hushed spray
of what they tag on the wall but can't see
in the dark except for the peach-light hum
behind them from the school lot
with its painted arrows that go out and in.
They imagine their despair as like the very poor's
who have no schools, tag the subway trains,
and wear loose-falling jeans like their own.
While the script swells on the brick
they learn, by their own mimicking,
of feeling that is and is not their own.
Afterwards, ambling from lawn to lawn
in the silent night, hard-whispering
the urgency that will not fit its thought,
they are caught in headlights, arrested by the police,
loathed by their parents, kept out of school,
(one will never return), the way
the moose who wandered town for a month,
who made the evening news, lost from his forest
enjoying the nozzle of lawn chairs,
the tap of his hooves on macadam,
fell from wonder to nuisance with a speed
beyond what his quiet lumber could carry
and was stunned by men in green as he bowed
his well-carved head to love the well-kept grass.
They lay him sideways on the metal bed of truck
and drove him back to the wild,
but not to the wild of his before.

Renee Emerson

The Escape

She left behind a deep faith in the good enough, thirty years in Tennessee
for the cornfields of Indiana. The acres of stalks looming, sky a parchment
singed, white froth on a dog's lip. The house she was lulled to,
bought on credit.
Twin mattresses belonging to someone's children, pushed together. At night
a leg or arm slides into the gap, becomes numb and separate from the body
like a criticism between lovers. Mother told her she was weightless to him,
sunlight on his shoulder. But she did not want to be left a little at a time,
like streets abandoned to darkness. The fields surround as graceful as the arc
of waves in the ocean, as endless. She walks the paths the cows make each day
with their large comely bodies. The air clenched around her like a fist.
In the bathroom she tests the faucets: hot / cold, on / off. Her face in the mirror:
what can reflect, what cannot.

John C. Hall

Ghost Lady

the children all call her the ghost lady.
she is whiter than any clean bone and walks between the graves in the cemetery.
the children follow her and watch and wonder and whisper.
will she sink back into one of the graves?
i follow her too, like the whispers, lost, laughing, sighing, behind the stones.

John C. Hall

A Feast Rightly Earned

with a handful
of rolling shells
and a shotgun,
cousin david
led me along
the hills and valleys
of his countryside.

he missed every shot,
and as the last shell
whizzed by the perched crow
a nearby herd of cattle
chased after the thunder
in our direction.

we leapt and pirouetted
through the soirée of cowpies,
and as he dove over the
barbed wire fence,
i slid under like
so many second base hitters.

we walked the long walk
back home after that,
no crow, no rabbit, no buck,
but returned with a bounty
much heavier than
flesh.

Renee Emerson

Rebecca

An iron gate
and the drive that follows:
interlocking beeches
arched overhead, like church.

An impediment, this night
I wear as a dress
from another century. Even now,
I think of you on the staircase,
the blood-red rhododendrons
in profusion.

And another night, from years before:
Laughter, salt-water stained
boards, a bed. You,
dark-haired like a foreshadowing,
and the scent of crushed-lilac
from your garden by the sea.

Susan J. Erickson

Casa Azul

From the spectrum of ghosts, I painted
this house blue to guide my father
and mother to my door. They sit
with Diego and me in the yellow kitchen.
Papa's hands tremble
when he lights my cigarette.
Mama trails the scent of incense from evening mass.

Papasito hides behind his camera.
He records the portraits of our shadow
selves—the ones we want
the mirror to reflect. Papa reminds me,
“Do not smile. You seduce the camera.”

At Mama's feet, the dogs
lick crumbs of pan dulce
from her fingers. She fusses
about the kitchen. From the strongbox
of her chest she pulls
a white handkerchief, bandages
my painting to soak up its blood.
Her rosary beads click, bones breaking.
She is tired of my gashes and scars.
When she returns to the spirit world,
I will reopen the wounds. They are
the palette from which I paint myself.

This house of cobalt
is the womb where I will die. For years
Death and I have played at the game of *exquisite corpse*.
Before my first communion, Death drew
my withered leg. I counter,
sketching my heart. See
how it palpitates in my bare hands.

Susan J. Erickson

Frida Kahlo Prepares an Altar for Día de los Inocentes

The sugar skulls that honor my babies
are tiny as the skeletons of the doves
fallen from the thorn trees onto the patio
of the Blue House. No sugar letters
spell out names on the skulls.
My broken body took each baby
from me before I knew if it was he
or she. The nest of my pelvis is flimsy
like the sticks the doves throw together
to cradle young. For my *angelitos* I bring
a toy truck, tin whistles, cardboard puppets,
a baby's gold necklace. I raid the garden
for marigolds, string them into garlands
to drape over the altar, bright as lights
around a carnival ride. Their fragrance is bold
as mariachi trumpets—who can sleep?
Tonight sit with me. Drink tequila.
Sing for the Inocentes, yours and mine.

When it is time for them to slip back
to the spirit world we will kiss them on the lips
of their souls, where Death dares not touch.
We will pour a shot for Death. And laugh.