

# The 2River View

19.2 (Winter 2015)



*Chain* © 2014 by Drew Campbell

## **new poems by**

Randolph Bridgeman, Sarah de Sousa, Mia Eriksson

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Rajiv Mohabir, Charles Rafferty, Mark Schoenknecht

Sahara Smith, David Wright



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*The 2River View*, 19.2 (Winter 2015)

## **Contents**

*Heidi McKinley*

New Year's Drive

*Randolph Bridgeman*

reading to an empty room

stepfathers

*Sarah de Sousa*

The Garden of Forgotten Letters

Junin de los Andes

*Mia Eriksson*

A mini-crown of four love sonnets

*Joy Laden*

Radio Haiti

My Father's Pain



*Estanislao Lopez*

Digital Graveyards

The Very Wide Space Between Certainties

*Rajiv Mohabir*

Blowhole

Museum

*Charles Rafferty*

The Man with a Light at 3 a.m.

The Man with a Piano Strapped to his Back

*Mark Schoenknecht*

Dream Poem: Of Driving a Red Convertible with the Queen  
of the Underworld as My Passenger

Inside the Hoophouse

*Sahara Smith*

Woden

Stars and Sighing

*David Wright*

The Shallow Way

The Young Biologist on Her Honeymoon Ponders  
the Origin of Life

*The 2River View*, 19.2 (Winter 2015)

*Heidi K. McKinley*

## **New Year's Drive**

Newest year

Oh, you let go—

The snow, you say, will end.

The days lengthen a minute at a time but I can't tell.

I go on, blink up, do the dishes, sometimes laundry.

My days go fine, like a three legged animal.

I would rather not say this:

Oh you, let go.

The highway white as anything

And you reading out loud the entire drive.

More than once I will wish I were home.

Snow ribbons across the road in wind.

More than once I will wish I were alone.

*Randolph Bridgeman*

### **reading to an empty room**

what is it that makes me want  
to drive seventy-five miles one way  
in a car with balding tires  
and an odometer on its second go around  
to read poems to a man eating  
a bran muffin and reading a newspaper  
picking raisins out of his teeth  
and mumbling under his breath  
that if he wanted to hear goddam poetry  
he would squeeze his gay sons head  
until he spouted some of that shit off  
and there's the couple in the corner  
sucking face so hard i could be reading  
a suicide note on why i picked this  
coffee shop to end it all and take them  
with me when i blow a smoking hole  
right here in the middle of this strip mall  
forty feet deep  
and then there's the two old ladies  
every poetry reading has them they come  
together and sit right up front waiting  
to hear something serious  
something that takes them back  
to the days of sunday walks after church  
of moonlight drives  
and lovers lanes  
but when my first poem "big dick willy"  
has them cracking a smile  
i'm thinking they knew  
this guy too



*Randolph Bridgeman*

## **stepfathers**

joseph must have had the toughest  
daddy issues not that every kid  
doesn't think their father is God  
but what if he actually is  
and when the holy ghosts  
been in your woman  
how do you stack up to that  
most men would have dumped her  
and no one would have blamed him  
or my father who came home  
from the war to a pregnant wife  
but like joseph he wanted to  
do the right thing too  
and still it ate away at him  
always feeling like the odd man out  
every argument my parents  
ever had ended with my fathers  
oh yeah well you fucked  
the next door neighbor  
and i wonder if it ate away  
at joseph that way too  
with the father  
the son  
the holy ghost  
and marry too  
he must have felt like a fifth wheel  
like most of us stepfathers  
like joseph with his honorable mention  
and the rest of us with no  
mention at all

*Sarah de Sousa*

## **The Garden of Forgotten Letters**

It is no chance encounter  
meeting you  
here  
in the garden  
of forgotten letters

Spaciousness, O  
gracious landscape  
in which to build  
this graveyard

Moonrise over the Mojave  
A valley  
full of monuments

In the beginning  
we spoke  
like creatures  
of the desert, scavengers  
afraid  
even of ourselves

and now to find  
you here  
is to speak  
the language of sowing

with which we bury  
seeds, hunger  
in a place  
they cannot grow

*Sarah de Sousa*

## **Junin de los Andes**

Last night I dreamed  
of that windless day  
at La Boca  
The empty house  
still there  
meaning a life was possible  
I am happy in this dream:  
What perfect luck  
that the elements should  
conspire  
to bring a windless day  
a fisherman and his love  
together.

Like a mantra, I am chanting:  
*Alumine, Confluencia, Colon Cura*  
As if to preserve a myth  
As if to call back a ghost  
As if to witness your joy again  
water like glass,  
reflection of snow, volcano  
line heavy with the weight  
of a fish that does not know  
it will live, you will let it go

*Mia Eriksson*

## **A mini-crown of four love sonnets**

### ***Winter***

This is where it all began  
with your hand half way up my—and the sand  
I have a knot in my thigh, ingrained with a grain.  
I was being literal about picking your brain  
with a spoon. You're full of scabs but when you're naked  
you shine like a ballpoint, an android  
and you taste like a bit tongue, a mouthful  
of blood, when I think of you I think of  
being ripped apart. I think the snow is everything,  
the way it muffles the sound of cars,  
turns the world into an orchestra when melting,  
stabs every shameful eye with light as bright as stars.  
I walked willingly ahead  
it was summer then.

### ***Spring***

It was summer then  
you had been drinking  
since your brute first threw  
a fatherly fist at your sister  
Everybody's got a childhood trauma  
Shit lingers not like bruises but like  
broken arteries or cardiac dysrhythmia  
The coke makes you older see if I  
care I always liked your ragged temper  
and that you were gonna die young  
I still go to Toronto  
just to feel your eyes  
on my shoulder I have put it down  
as something insignificant

*Mia Eriksson*

***Fall***

Something insignificant  
like a shoulder covered only  
with thin white cotton  
on an unbearably hot day  
or something like a sign / or a saying / if i cant  
starved for attention  
some thing  
no one  
ever did / as if / it mattered.  
I loved you the most. I knew you  
were a damaged motherfucker.  
I held your whole body down  
and it was light as a feather.  
You were like a baby deer in the snow.

***Summer***

you were like a baby deer  
in the snow, my darling euphemism  
my Doctor Enemy God and Lucifer  
I wonder about those  
who do not want to kill themselves  
are their veins less prevalent  
their knives less decadent or their  
convictions not worth fighting for  
I can't remember now  
if you smiled or not if I  
choked or not if it  
rained all day / as it always did  
back then / I bury my feet in the sand  
this is where it all began.

*Joy Ladin*

## **Radio Haiti**

Reporter describes  
earthquake-broken girl of five  
in a broken deck chair, dying.

“Her lips,” he says, “keep shaking.”  
It isn’t news, but he can’t stop watching  
the girl’s lips quake like fault-line.

I want him to pester  
the government and God  
her dying represents,

to pin and fix the quaking world  
with morality, tragedy,  
blame. Blame

anyone, anything, I tell him,  
but change the subject  
before her lips stop shaking.

*Joy Ladin*

## **My Father's Pain**

It's time to talk about his pain,  
the pain of a point  
moving at right angles to itself  
acquiring length and breadth and depth

as some points do,  
my father explained—I was seven—  
drawing one, two, three, four dimensions  
on a scrap of yellow paper.

My father was in pain. The point of his pain  
had become a plane  
as it moved through him  
at right angles to itself. I sat in his lap,

his pain moving through me  
at right angles,  
acquiring a fourth dimension.  
"Time" he said, drawing angles and arrows

on his scrap of yellow paper.  
I didn't need his explanation.  
Time was inside me, a dimension of pain  
moving at right angles to itself

from generation to generation.

*Estanislao Lopez*

## **Digital Graveyards**

In the walls, web traffic hums binarily with grief  
and our metadata whispers to us no words of consolation.  
Some sleepless nights, I open E's profile and let his light,  
like an infinite procession, sink into the sheets.  
Our metadata makes exhibitions of our regrets:  
01:02:13 disputing motives for his suicide; 00:15:54 spent  
saying nothing at all. In the last press conference, as our nation  
finally falls, it will be said that our biggest failures  
were those private ones. The aunt caught stealing gifts  
at the wedding. The friend no one could save.  
Our metadata is unable to be embodied. Our bodies  
self-immolate to make *a point*. Not a point as in *the line*  
between two. Not *a line* as in *of thought*.  
The inanimate reanimates his body. My fingers  
graze his information. No one is ready to forgive.



*Estanislao Lopez*

## **The Very Wide Space Between Certainties**

God has built a machine from my own bones.

His motives  
are his own business.

The soul? An electromagnetic signal pulsing  
from star cluster to star cluster, craving reciprocation.

A ghost ship sailing  
along ghost water.

A machine  
designed to brush away my fears  
like spiders from a child's hair.

Some say  
there is a precise science to it all,  
which terrifies me.

*Rajiv Mohabir*

## **Blowhole**

I trace your  
passing on a skin mark, that  
spot you left, a memento,

god-trance  
of turned up surf.

Your salt, a vesper whispered  
through sooted nostrils,  
a sooth said: *Fuck*.

*Cunt*. Yet  
fecund. And come. Anoint

my hollow with just the tip.  
A cross in coconut oil

on your fingers and spread  
on my lips that crack like whips or  
wisps of voice in scream

as I risk drowning.

My head a hydra,  
prepare to empty over and

to be overrun.

*Rajiv Mohabir*

## **Museum**

Someone opened the graveyard's  
door. A breeze scrimshaw—  
scratches the halls.

Grey. Ash.

Cetacean  
ghosts soldered into snuff mulls  
with silver lining.

On your bones  
I draw me  
stabbing

your lungs until you spit fire.

Should I hang  
your milk-spit frame from rafters

for fathers to point out  
masculinity to adventure-eyed sons,  
naked under death

etchings, stirred to plunder  
by the leaf-rattle of a desecrated temple?

It's time  
to staff the scarscore,

to cast new gods  
of bone

*Charles Rafferty*

**The Man With a Light on at 3 a.m.**

The moths that had been getting in all week  
have found the only lamp  
left on in the living room.  
They strut and flutter across its fabric.  
They loop and dip above the light  
they love so much. Only the darkness  
can save them, but he knows  
they will not fly to it. Now that he has  
repaired the screens, now  
that the breeze can filter over  
the nude body of his wife  
on the August sheets, now  
that the commotion of their landing  
in the bed won't waken them, he can  
crush them with a tissue  
without fear of their return. The living room is  
bruised with the powder of their wings,  
the smudge of their guts  
as he pinches them out against the wall.  
He leaves their marks  
for the woman to find. He wants her  
to know that he loves her  
this much, that he killed these moths  
for her—even the ones that were big enough  
to almost get away, even the ones  
she would have wanted him to spare.

*Charles Rafferty*

## **The Man With a Piano Strapped to His Back**

The man can't make it up the stairs anymore, so he listens to his family moving above him in the old routines of bathing and sleep. He wishes one of them would come back down, pull up a chair, and play him a song of love or a song of hope, though he hasn't been tuned in years. His wife offered to take some lessons or to buy him a piano he could play in addition to the one he carried. He said he'd rather she just polish the one he had. He could see it was full of smudges from the children's jelly-sandwich hands when he caught himself in the bay window, at evening, as the birds died down all over their part of town. It needed to have one decent chord banged into the keys so he could feel it reverberating through him like a purpose. When it was time for bed, he couldn't take the piano off, and his wife complained he was bruising her as they slept or made love. Each morning, he clawed his way off the mattress they kept on the living room floor. The straps dug into his shoulders and his gut. There was absolutely no give, and though he sometimes tried, he couldn't get the blade under the fat bands of leather. Ironically, he has never learned to play, but of course he couldn't reach the keys anyway. The only music he'll make is when he falls over dead. He keeps telling himself he has this to look forward to, the chord of 88 fingers.

*Mark Schoenknecht*

## **Dream Poem: Of Driving a Red Convertible with the Queen of the Underworld as My Passenger**

*When I ask her to tell me about Hell,  
She shakes back her Bette Davis-style hair  
And describes the circle  
Reserved for those who never learned to dance,  
How they're hanged from nooses  
To sway and kick for eternity.*

*This is her way of saying that the disco is a must tonight,  
That she didn't come all the way to Cleveland just to sit around  
acting dead.*

*But then the rains begin,  
The flesh of her human form  
Washing away  
Until all that's left is a skeleton  
With an ash-blond wig  
And sequined gown.*

*I drop her off at the abandoned subway station on West 25th Street,  
And she begins her descent down the crumbling stairs toward home.*

O Death, my queen. Sister.  
How long did I ignore your calls?  
I leave my window open tonight,  
Listening  
For the screams of tires  
Far off on Interstate 90.

*Mark Schoenknecht*

## **Inside the Hoophouse**

Red-winged blackbirds  
Falling from the sky over Beebe, Arkansas.  
No one could explain what caused it.  
Imagine  
Shoveling bird carcasses  
From the garden,  
Piling them  
By the dozen  
Into a bucket  
Or wheelbarrow.

I continue my work,  
Ripping out the sections of chard  
The beetles have already eaten,  
Trying to save what good harvest is left,  
While raindrops break against the plastic canopy,  
Sounding like the wings  
Of a thousand birds taking flight.  
I hold one of the plants up to the tarp overhead,  
Inspecting it, careful,  
As the tatters of a crushed wing.

*Sahara Smith*

## **Woden**

The pagan god of poetry  
and madness  
saw his lover standing by the window.

He tried to tell her  
that her body was a bank of snow  
somewhere outside Milwaukee  
where the tracks of some small animal were barely visible  
by moonlight.

Her eyes were eucalyptus trees  
that rattled  
in the rain.

But he said nothing  
so he wouldn't get it wrong.

Our words are paper cups  
we dip into the ocean  
of our longing.

To this day, I cannot comprehend  
the proper way to tell you  
that I miss you

but it's something like a pale hand  
in a dark room  
opening.



*Sahara Smith*

## **Stars and Sighing**

Here it is: The secret of the soft skin,  
the quiet flesh you sinned against  
and wore so cleanly thin.

Here it is: the bird beneath the cracked moon's  
ragged rising;  
the roses in the limp room damply dying.

There are two motions:  
stars and  
sighing.

We are the bruised miracle,  
needing the chapped and chattered Word,  
immaculately misconstrued and overtongued  
and badly heard.

We rattle in the time that we will bendlessly become,  
and shuffle on the loose feet of a borrowed battle drum.

I am my native land. I am the soil  
and the scars;  
The stains of coffee cups and circuits  
of the stars.

and history...  
and history...

And history, the spidered orbit  
of a bone beneath an acre  
of wet grass.

*David Wright*

## **The Shallow Way**

We have taken the children  
farther out to the sandbar  
so we can all stand  
thigh and waist and belly deep  
beyond the break of the great  
lake's waves before they settle  
themselves on the beach.

Your friend's elderly mother  
sidestrokes around us.  
Her white swim cap breaks  
the green plane of waves again  
and again. She wears blue goggles  
and her speckled skin like a creature  
born to the familiar waters.

Out here I should love the deep  
but do not. I want instead to take  
the children back to warm sand.  
But we've drifted and lost  
the shallow way in.

You make it, somehow. My son  
is watching the grandmother  
roll her head to breathe,  
as she cuts her way across  
the waves, always rolling  
away from the incoming surf.

I cannot breathe. I hold him  
tighter than he likes. I do not  
tell him my feet cannot reach  
the bottom. He says he is not  
scared, that he sees the shore.

*David Wright*

## **The Young Biologist on Her Honeymoon Ponders the Origins of Life**

It starts, either way, on a beach,  
with a finch in one hand  
and a pair of shoes in the other,  
a pair of very fine shoes hooked, each  
over a delicate finger. White sand  
settles in the pale, creased leather.

And the finch, his tell-all beak,  
pecks the graded-crease of your palm  
where you have gathered  
her like a souvenir of your weeks  
in the islands. She may calm  
down, her brown feathers

warming under your touch.  
You will have to stand  
here with one another—  
you and your bird seated  
in the cup of your hand.  
Who brought you together?

To know, you will have to speak  
certain words, make demands,  
and then learn to tether  
everyone you love to the earth. Sleek  
male finches demand  
you free their lover.

You throw your shoes and the birds flee,  
yet you raise your left hand  
and open it. One flutter  
and this sign you desire to keep  
but release, becomes evidence,  
not specimen, not tamed, not a prayer.

*The 2River View*, 19.2 (Winter 2015)

## Contributors

Randolph Bridgeman has four collections of poems: *South of Everywhere*, *Mechanic on Duty*, *The Odd Testament*, and, forthcoming in 2015, *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town*.

Mia Eriksson is currently pursuing her PhD in Gender Studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She writes poetry in both English and Swedish. The poem here in *2RV* is her first poetry publication.

Joy Ladin has published six books of poetry, including Lambda Literary Award finalist *Transmigration*; her seventh, *Impersonation*, is due out in spring 2015. Her memoir, *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Generations*, was a 2012 National Jewish Book Award finalist. Ladin holds the Gottesman Chair in English at Yeshiva University.

Joshua Estanislao Lopez has had poems appear in *Meridian*, *Mid-American Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and elsewhere.



Heidi McKinley is a student of journalism at the University of Iowa. Her work has been featured in *1947*, *Kawsmouth*, and *Typehouse Literary Magazine*.

Rajiv Mohabir is the winner of the 2014 Intro Prize by Four Way Books for *The Taxidermist's Cut* (Spring 2016). He received his MFA from Queens College and is currently pursuing his PhD from the University of Hawai'i.

Charles Rafferty's tenth book of poetry is *The Unleashable Dog*. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Oprah Magazine*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Southern Review*. Rafferty currently directs the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College.

Mark Schoenknecht holds a BA in English from Michigan State University and an MA in English from the University of Massachusetts—Boston. Schoenknecht has worked a variety of part-time, hourly jobs while focusing on writing poetry.

Sahara Smith is singer/songwrite/poet from Austin, Texas. In 2010, T-Bone Burnett recorded her debut album, *Myth of the Heart*, which National Public Radio called "a hybrid of folk, Americana, country, and bluegrass." In November 2010, Smith appeared on *The Dave Letterman Show*. Smith is now working on her second album under the name *Girl Pilot*.

Sarah de Sousa lives in Seaside, California. She is a dancer, educational counselor, step-mother, wife, and perpetual student of philosophy, literature, psychology, and meditation.

David Wright has poems forthcoming in *Nassau Review*, *Sou'wester*, and *Tahoma Literary Review*, among others. His most recent collection of poetry is *The Small Books of Bach* (Wipf & Stock, 2014).

*The 2River View*, 19.2 (Winter 2015)

### **About the Artist**

Drew Campbell is a member of the f/32 Photography Club in Asheville, North Carolina. He has exhibited his photography at various venues, including the Black Mountain Center for the Arts and the Swain County Center for the Arts. Campbell teaches photography classes at the John C. Campbell Folk School.

### **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  
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