
1_2
WINTER
1997

The 2River View



Poems by Brenda Harrison Bell,
Carol Cross, Holly Day, Richard Fein,
Craig Levebre, Elise M. McClellan,
Terrie Mollohan & Andrew Warfield,
Paul J. Sampson, and Glenda Zumwalt

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New Orleans Poem

Brenda Bell

afterwards, lying in the dark,
with the ashtray on her stomach,
she watched him
fumble
to put out the cigarette
with only the ember for light

and thought
how too casual a touch
can lead to
burning

User Friendly

Brenda Harrison Bell

Articles in professional journals back up claims by computerphilic practitioners that many people are more frank when communicating with a computer. You could admit murder and mayhem and a computer wouldn't raise an eyebrow—if it had one.
Psychology Today

When Waldo decided to get even with Bertram, he credit-carded the lock on the Computer Assisted Psychotherapy Lab—Official Personnel Only door and re-programmed Bertram's machine. After he was finished, any mention of routine and simple sexual practices—like missionary positions, nocturnal emissions, or unwanted erections in crowded public conveyances any mention would draw from the computer a delay just slightly longer than normal, then words that somehow managed to look prim on the screen: "Well, I suppose we do have to talk about sex, don't we?" Let there be the slightest deviation from the norm, the barest hint of, say, uprightness or tables or beaches, and then the machine would shudder delicately and click, "I'm sorry, but to be perfectly frank, that kind of thing turns my stomach."

Bertram's favorite sexual fantasy, harmless and charmingly unimaginative, with which he managed to survive the tedium of his life—

that confession, should he ever make it, would be met by pulsing screen and these words flashed on every unit in the lab:

"That's the most disgusting thing I've ever heard; please leave the room or I'll have to call the police!"

Fortunately, the medical school at the university boasted a first-rate psychiatric unit. Every month the admissions clerk steals the box of peanut brittle which Waldo sends to Bertram.

Purple Polar Bears

Carol Cross

It's snowing again, or still,
my world has been white so long,
I can't remember which.

I drop another birch on the fire,
insurance against the cold.

I sit here, cradle my coffee mug,
the one with purple polar bears
dancing between green snowflakes.

It's not fun anymore, this world,
where color has lost its meaning,
where polar bears and snowflakes
are always white.

The Ice Maiden

Carol Cross

Everything about was white,
glistening and shining; so shining
that the human eye could hardly
bear the radiance.

The Dreamer of Dreams
Queen Marie of Rumania, 1915

In what secret ritual have I caught you?
You stare, startled bird, from the canvas.
Your mantle of fallen stars only hints at warmth.

I see coldness in your eyes, emptiness in your heart.
Your hands carry a lump, whose heat escapes
cupped palms, to spatter red at your feet.

Flanked by white bears, your escort to feasts
unknown,
you wander barefoot across icy tundras under
midnight stars.
Twinkling lights your way through this night which
never ends.

Whose heart is your burden?

Cold Toes

Carol Cross

The furnace has kicked on,
its reassuring purr
rumbles beneath floorboards. 4 a.m.,
quiet time for insomniacs and snowflakes.

I am awake; no one else is.

I hear heavy breathing at my side,
no noise from the two rooms down the hall.
It's just me, the furnace and the dark.
I wonder if there is new snow.

I want to get out of bed,
to peer out the window. But I don't.
Even through drawn shades
I see the glow outside.
I know it has to be new snow
reflecting light from street lamps.

Instead, I snuggle close to the man at my side,
warming my toes, hoping not to wake him
but wishing he were awake.

What of Now

Craig Lefebvre

Specific Ingredients, what are they?
How is it that they are
How is it that they've become

Fingering through the old photo albums
What were they, other than lapses in time
Who made it possible for this to be

And what of time
where has it been and gone off to
For if growing up were so hard
why do the memories seem so fond to me

These memories
There who I've become
Undress me
remove my cloak of thought
I'm bear memory, that's all

Television

Holly Day

takes a second, eyes drop in drunken
concentration on shadows playing
in the corner
and up again. He's there
through white noise static

too many memories:
are you
hey, are you
yeah, you're all right

in another part of my body
a bad movie takes place
I don't connect your fingers
to a face

City

Holly Day

I am dying, here, among the dayglo silhouettes
whose eyes have turned inward, gone gray—
I can feel my brain going digital
falling in with the metronome hive mind
of The City.

The night clouds glow orange outside my window
where a billion streetlights have put out the stars
mushroom houses sprout tiny in the shadows
of concrete gods, fingers tearing down the sky
above The City.

Dark Doorway, Red World

Richard Fein

Detoured from the most direct route,
stopped for red under the expressway
in a factory district deserted at night,
except for that lady
in red shorts, a red wig, red lips, rouged cheeks,
and breasts straining against a red halter.
She leaned next to the proverbial lamppost.
Leaned, and I waited supposedly for the light to
turn green.
She waited. I waited. She waited.
In a dark doorway up ahead,
one lit cigarette etched a red pattern against the
black.
She approached; the flaming ash was her prod.

I was angry that she needed a prod.
I was afraid of the cabal signaled by the fiery
semaphore;
I was drawn to its red glow.
I bolted past the traffic light still frozen in red.
I bolted past her.
She eyed me as a hungry lioness eyes an escaping
gazelle.
And in a dark doorway,
one spark lit the ground.
A point of light in a shadowy everywhere.
A pale red ash brighter than a dying star.

Porcine Principle

Richard Fein

Love and trust were carefully fostered,
and her security seemed lifelong, and it was.
I'm talking about hogs, this sow specifically,
one of the cleverer of the cleverest mammals.
Well fed and watered, patted, never struck,
but none of this was for free.
All part of the bargain, a fair one at that.
Payment became due.
Hind legs trussed and hoisted heavenward,
an upside down ascension.
A revelation of disillusionment occurred,
if it occurred at all,
when the blade gleamed sharp against her belly.
If sorrow stung then it lasted for only the length of a
squeal.
Hold on to fantasies,
the longer they're held, the shorter the grief.
But not to worry, I'm only talking about hogs.

Temporary Breasts

Elise M. McClellan

When I was young breasts
were admirable like my Aunt.
She called them "Bosoms."

From the pool she took me to pee,
the bathroom full of wet people.
In the same stall, desuited, nude
she laughed as I covered my lack.
Her breasts big as my head
attractive, asbestos white
as she put sunscreen on my freckled shoulders.

Her breasts are gone now.
They look like smooth bowls
full with fat from her stomach.
She shows us, Mom and I,
in the Hospital.
Breasts absent of nodes, nipples
she insist her husband won't miss.

Holding them she praises Modern
Technology for cheating the same death
as her mother, my Grandmother,

who did not have these options.

It's not that I hate having them,
breasts,
their intimate space craving infinity.
I carry them in bras

I carry them for the mouths
of my children I carry them
fearing lumps hard with
the passion of death,

other lumps,
that are not nipples.
I carry them invisible.
I anticipate their absence.
I carry them greedily,
jealously, temporarily
because every woman in my family
has lived
to die
without them.

SexSong Resurrection

Elise M. McClellan

I had always wanted to make love
in a church a god's home,

a color book catacomb of prism glass
and bead-eyes saints.
Not just with anyone but
with you.

We were walking, talking one morning
our bodies filling with the pagan pangs
of sex. The church was between mass.

Empty.
We went in.

In rich intricate litanies we
rolled our tongues like prayer.

your palms, seeping psalms,
sang through my hair,
our bare skins incensed.

My legs fell from the ceiling
like angels while from everywhere

the windows stared with Jesusfriends.
And the Virgin, eyes lowered to her toes,
where a snake spat apples.

The stained light painted your back.
I wanted to believe,

as we fell on our knees in a sea of pews,
that we were consummating something.

SexDead PaleSong

Elise M. McClellan

There were sheets as I remember,
enough to fill any house with phantoms.
We slept over ghost after ghost,
creaking the bed, rattling chains.
We were trans-parents.

our children never were,
but seemed to be. no matter how
we booed or moaned,

we were alone. As you billowed into me,
my legs split over stairs of air.

Our starchy skins grew threadbare
where we loved. I knew where you had been,
beloved.

As we shook side to side and sighed,
the earth parted around us in moist piles.
As the piles grew deeper with a damper love,
I still held on. I still hold on.
You haunt me like the dead haunt God.

the closet

Terrie Mollohan and Andrew Warfield

i have a skeleton in my closet.
actually, i have several.
i collect them.
my mother,
her mother,
sister,
baby brother...

the closet goes on forever.
and sometimes, when i'm inside,
with the door locked,
i like to run my hands up
and down the long
white femurs, my fingers in and out
the nose holes, and peep
through mother's pelvic arch.
i love my skeletons.

out there, it's so hard to be alive.
here in the closet,
i am not afraid to die.

I don't know
what it is
that's out there, really.
other mothers
with knives for fingers
foul kisses
in the half light...

anyway, it's not like it is
in here, safe and warm
among the household linen
and the bones.

Ceremony

Terrie Mollohan and Andrew Warfield

Mother. It's time.
I've lain too long
in the belly of your bones.
I have become a cuttlefish.

I am
the rustle in cypress grove,
moonlight in the garden, the
first time.

the shadows the rattle
the ancient dance
the women with painted breasts
the owl's talon, buried deep in
the altar cloth
the wine
the holy water
and the circle.

Prosperine's strange lament.
The voices of Job. And Revelation.
The Priest and the Bride,
and now I know
what a whore prays in secret.

I need your prayers,
Mother. Soft bone-food
I eat, I drink,
I suck them dry.

Widow Song

Andrew Warfield and Terrie Mollohan

Forty days now, and no rain.
Forty nights.
It feels like forty years.

It comes of loving rain too much, I know.

I might have been content with something else,
something other...
fallen in love
with fire and wind...
worshipped the sun...

But everything in me is water—
my eyes, my heart, my mouth, my skin.
I cannot be still,
I cannot be dry, and quiet

like the afternoon.
I am liquid.

I imagine.
And in my dream, the sky is darker
than it has ever been before.
It will break, now.
It will rumble and shake,
and I will lie down to let
the first drop fall to my face.

I will begin, again.
I will flow back into
the rain.

The Diocesan Cemetery

Paul J. Sampson

New Orleans 1995

The dead here lie eye-level with the living
Filed away in labeled pigeonholes.
I read the carving, look for Uncle Jim.
I can't find a stone that says his name
Among the voodoo scratches on the dead's front doors.

Chicago 1945

The night he died, eight hundred miles away,
My mother, holding the black phone, wrote down
What Western Union said: Jim Dying Can't Last Night.
(And five words more for the same price;
I remember only these.) We wept, she packed
And rode the old I.C., the Casey Jones main line,
To put him in the grave I couldn't find.

New Orleans 1928

Jim and Sammy, friends, both hot telegraphers,
Worked the Morse wires, rattling their black Underwoods
As fast as those New York hacks could clack it out,
Tapping back in their fluent fists: Send
With your other foot a while! They were the best
At their dying trade, and Jim had pretty sisters.
One of them, my mother, buried Jim
Young and Sammy old, both their hearts worn down.

New Orleans 1995

Mine too, a little, and here a little more
In this tourist-haunted graveyard where I search
Eroding stones for Mother's maiden name.
A lively storm blows through, emphatic whacks
Of summer lightning crack and sizzle. We
Make tracks for shelter. Briefly rain spits down.
I draw my dead about me like a shawl.

Midterm Exam: Medieval Aesthetics

Paul J. Sampson

Q. Name the three aspects of beauty and give three examples of each.

A. Integritas, Consonantia, Claritas
Wholeness, Harmony, Clarity

These three are whole:

A note of music

An uncaught trout

A single stone

These three are harmonious:

The breath of two sleepers

The colors of wood and flame

The pull of muscle on bone.

And these are clear:

Bird song over water

Light lancing from waves

The edge of the moon.

In a College Town

Glenda Zumwalt

Up on the hill on the third floor
in a dusty classroom, the young professor
lectures, her hands fly around her face
like small wild birds; they scatter periods,
question marks, and exclamations. She is earnest,
this young woman, and sure as anything. She wants
her class to understand that we can never mean
what we intend to, and if we could, if we
could fix meaning like a butterfly
under glass, we would immediately lose it,
the essence of butterfly being the longing
for flight, then the fluttering of wings
and the musings of breezes.

Her words might not be a puzzle
to the old woman across town, nodding
over an album of curling photographs
nor to the little girl in cowboy boots
dragging a teddy bear and digging worms
with a pointed stick nor to the woman
who turns from a door way and walks
back to her lover, unbuttoning her blouse.

The Girl on the Back Row

Glenda Zumwalt

The second week of classes
the girl on the back row is beginning
to have suspicions: college may be
like the rest of life, a struggle
to keep up, the point lost in a fog
of detail, the matter of fact.
She is the daughter of the hardscrabble South,
this girl, a child of the double negative,
the wrong tense, born of revival and bad faith.
She chews on the end of a strand of wild hair,
watches the teacher pace and gesture, speaking
in tongues, tries to imagine a thesis.

When the bell rings, she dashes, a whirlwind
of boots and jeans, to a rusted out Mustang, rides
wild to her register at Wal Mart, lost in the irony
of "have a nice day." Evenings she goes home
to country music video, hoping to celebrate herself
only to find she has been replaced by women from
Cosmo
the girls of *Mademoiselle* and *Seventeen*. Thumbing
her economics text, she sighs. Her history baffles her.
Her English assignment makes her cry.
She isn't sure who she is in 500 words
no less, but she wants to tell the truth as she knows it.
She knows it as best she can, this sweet daughter,
her cheeks streaked with blue mascara,
of bruised dreams.

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Authors

Brenda Harrison Bell has lived most of her life in her native state Texas. Since 1968 she has taught nineteenth and twentieth century British literature at the institution formerly known as East Texas State, now Texas A&M-Commerce. This is her first appearance in 2River. Other poems are in *Sleepy Tree* and *Sulphur River Literary Review*.

Carol Cross is a poet living in Upstate New York, where she draws inspiration from the landscape and people of the Adirondacks and the Saint Lawrence valley. Her works can be seen in several on-line publications and web sites. She is presently shopping three collections of poetry.

Holly Day lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with her son Wolfgang, two birds, and not enough warm clothing. Her work has most recently appeared in *International Quarterly* and *Old Crow*.

Richard Fein lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He has been widely published, both on the net and in print, including *Kansas Quarterly*, *Mississippi Review*, and *Small Pond*.

Craig Lefebvre is a full-time college student at Naugatuck Valley Community Technical College. He began writing poetry about 3 years ago. He now has his own zine, *7-Bodies*, currently in its third edition.

Elise M. McClellan lives in Mobile, Alabama, where she is working on her first collection of poetry, *SexSongs*. She was nominated for the Pushcart Prize

1996 for her poem, "Lamia Bulimia," in the Redwood Coast anthology *Bite to Eat Place*.

Terrie Mollohan is Graphics Editor for *Moondance: Celebrating Creative Women* and co-facilitator of an internet poetry workshop. She is published in many literary journals such as *Touchstone*, *Poem* and *Amelia*. Late last year she began writing poetry with **Andrew Warfield**, a poet, song-writer and playwright, who also teaches high school near Chicago. He says "he was once a great traveler, but is now resigned to journeys of the mind."

Paul J. Sampson has published pieces on baseball, the interior life of underground comic book artists, and the last brewery in Chicago. For many years, he was a staff member of scientific and technical publications, including *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. He now lives near Terrell, Texas, writing poems and assembling a collection of essays on the personal meaning of flying.

Glenda Zumwalt is a Professor of English at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. She is active in the local humane society and shares her home with five dogs and twelve cats.

2River Poetry

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www.daemen.edu/pages/rlong/tworiver

Past Issues of **The 2River View** are available in pdf format for downloading.

For information about submissions, please send an e-mail message to

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All mail is answered within a day or two.

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