

The 2River View

7.2 (Winter 2003)



Eternity Leave © 2003 by Tantra Bensko

New Poems by Walter Bargen, Rachel Dacus, Raymond Farr,
William J. Neumire, Lissa Nilson, Joanna Pearson, Jessy
Randall, Dan Sicoli, Merry Speece, and John Straw

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Richard Long, Editor

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Dissolving

Below sparrow, starling, stork—nothing that gloriously soars.
Species that skirt treetops in search of the next near
perch: backyard snag, old chimney, spilled grain
or shapeless carrion, whatever view is closest.
Not these swallows rifling over the peak,
careening, missing this hard ragged edge,
bottom of a crumbling stone sea at ten thousand feet.
Wings whistle in and out of a mountain's
cold shadow. Blurs stretched down to desert miles,
racing the horizon, soaring through the blown body
of evening dust and out of the fettering dark.
Weightless bodies scapeling turns over stunted spruce
topping the still turning light of a brief world.

Walter Bragen

Stupid Dead

—*for Kurt*

She says not to bring anything
home for dinner. He doesn't.
He leaves the city to settle

into its odd and new accounts.
At seven, he finds a magazine open,
a cat sitting on the kitchen table,

morning's unwashed dishes by the sink.
He brings home books on Chile and Portugal,
destined for a school report, and the last

three day's newspapers covering the latest
rock star to join what his own mother called
"the stupid club," the famous dead.

He's not speechless, but knows the tone,
what the words imply more and less.
He gathers the details—split peas and rice,

cornmeal and flour, milk and eggs—
sets the oven temperature and timer,
closes the pressure cooker. He leaves

instructions, then slips on his boots
and coat, walks out into a torrential
evening. Rain drips steadily from the bill

of his cap, runs down the back of his neck.
He reaches out to hold a branch aside,
cold rain slides along his wrist and up

his sleeve. The hillside huddles
in shadows. The creek chokes.
Oak trunks, the air itself,

slurred, slanted as the wind picks up.
He returns to the house. Cornbread doughy.
The cat sits on the unpaid bills,

unanswered letters, unread magazines.
Lightning strobos blind the windows. To be
more alive, sometimes you die a little.

At the Blank Wall

Dry weeds chopstick-click
as earth shrinks from human contact
and colors flee from bole and branch.
Seething grasses scream, a wild surf.
I am not meant to be here,
in this dark bowl of canyon.
Any moment, the skies will grow tidal-wave.
Drowning is a possibility
even as I walk in muck boots.
But I have dessicated at the blank wall,
shadowing my loves. This morning's high-tide
pried open my windows and awakened
energy. Dawn's secrets ray
through an open gate.
First and last on earth, I witness
the buried seeds burrow with a will
into storm-battered soil.
Why is it the shadowed trail
down which the wild deer leads?

Riddle

Thirty-three hundred wing beats a minute
—in figure eights from those jointed hands—
keep the ghostly wings
hovering between worlds.
To see them folded and the bird
a minuscule sphinx on a maple twig,
was something like seeing time
suspended. Eternity's long beat.
A clawed foot lifted
and pawed behind what must
have been an ear. Christmas trees whirling!
The throat feathers flashed red, green,
red—an indecisive stoplight
gone wild, freezing me,
then just
gone.

Raymond Farr

Roebing's Ecstatic Angels

There was no password
or handshake to gain them entrance
to a world they transformed day by day,
only the work,
that was their bread and their beer,
and having it meant staying alive even if it killed them.

And scratching down to bedrock,
crowded into caissons darker than their lives,
they tunneled like blind men without hope
while bricklayers and masons
lifted up and lodged the hewn granite slabs
like puzzle pieces, any one of which
could crush a man.

Like Rilke's gaunt, ecstatic angels
caught in the city's massive spider web,
they climbed the feverish heights of the bridge,
handling cables a foot in diameter,
threaded the tall needles of the towers
again and again, each stitch exact as a tailor's.

Roebing watched them from his sickroom
hearing the music his father had composed,
that his father had died for—
the bridge poised like a harp,
the voices of his men singing.

Raymond Farr

Winter Lyric

What we uttered in the climax of summer,
in the ignorance of mid-August—
haughtiness, sensual love—has been erased;
our garden's lyric made virginal by snowfall,
by a white so conscious of what it bears
we fear our own unconscious sense of it.
But knowing how winter emulates the truth;
that digging out after a heavy snowfall
affects those qualities nature most opposes
—pride, willfulness, transcendence—
we pick up our shovels, a red scarf ablaze
at our throats, and having redefined
our winter existence, at least temporarily,
hurry back along the path, shivering, exhausted,
to stand, fretting at a window, looking out,
imagining the splendor of an early thaw;
and warmed by our desires' inchoate heat,
our eyes anticipate the inevitable budding,
spring's twin revelations—the peach tree, the plum,
replenished at last, shred by living shred.
One, the improvised blessing of what we intend.
The other, a presence only, a sensation,
a metaphor the world insists on concealing.

Bristled

I knew as he tilted his bristled face
Toward my cheek what would happen—
I knew that it was Saturday, and work

Had been left in its tinny resonance—echoes
Of metal banging against metal—
That all week he'd hardly slept,

That the floor collected unswept
Dust like forest nettles, the insistent
Sun reddening the sediment as it fell.

I knew that there was no time
For shaving, that some things went on
Like those jagged hairs—half protruding

Like a rock's tip from the thawed
September earth. I knew he would rub
His tangled half-beard against my face

Just to hear me laugh in the few hours
We had together, that I would struggle
To get away when the laughter made it hard to breathe

That I would, years later, after a summer
Of Saturdays, struggle away completely—
My own ringing laugh bouncing off walls

Far from home, my father gone, and I
Would turn back in the pointless dark
To tell him to do it again,
If he still could.

Sap

As I set the point of the nail to the trunk
My father said, *You'll kill it eventually,*
Just by hammering in those few—
But do what you want with your life.

How could it die—the grayish nails
So thin, the scaly bark hardly flinching,
The tree looming up at least eighty feet,
Only a trickle of amber juice backstroking
Down from the wound?

How could I kill what was not mine to claim
With such small onslaughts, the pounding of years
Focused in four or five swift strokes?
But I continued, I buffeted that dark spruce
With nails in a circle of silver, dressing it
In a metallic garter that runs so far up the leg
It becomes carnal and withers in the memory
Of innocence—all so I could learn how
To hammer, how to build, how to trace my heritage
In level boards and mantles, all to glean
The consistent knocking of metal against wood,
Like a counting that once begun never ceases
That grows louder and ends with the end.

Additional Bones

You are the type of person,
who can peel away at your own flesh,
revealing the bones you possess
that others do not.
Like an additional metacarpal shoved
into your rib cage
scored with articular depressions,
or the studded scapula belt wrapped
proudly around your hip bone.
You display these miraculous additions to them.
Expecting from them applause, wonder or even attempts at imitation.
But you shouldn't have taunted from your moving jaw line
about those sticks and stones
or shown off your skeletal frame and its delicate whiteness.
Nobody likes to be outdone, not even at the frame level.
Because of this, they threw rocks and preformed surgeries on you,
leaving themselves with their hammering heartbeats they possess,
while you do not.

Lissa Nilson

A Black Car on the Highway

One of these days, Christopher,
you will not remember me anymore.
There will be no more dreams,
where I am standing off to the side,
uncaring and aloof, back turned to you.
You will not feel angry,
when you think of how things ended,
nor will you shudder each time
you pass a black car on the highway
and look in to see if the driver is me.
You will not look out your window,
hoping that I will approach your walkway,
reaching my ringless hand to unlatch your door,
with a dozen yellow sunflowers,
apologizing for failing to love you back.
You will only raise your eyebrow someday,
in absolute surprise at yourself
when you hear my name,
and realize you had forgotten all about me.

Joanna Pearson

The Eastern Band

There are pictures of their warriors
lithe and lean-cheeked with hardened eyes,
but all we saw was Chief Henry
from our station-wagon backseat—
roadside old man in bright feathers
charging fifty cents per photo.
These woodland tribes used no teepees,
until now. There's Teepee Diner,
the Dairy Queen, and the gift shops
with plastic tom-toms for five bucks.
Painttown, Snowbird, Big Cove, Wolfstown,
Birdtown, and Yellowhill—bright names
for these muddy clumps of trailers.

All is lost in the translation.
The Oconaluftee River
still just comes up wet to your ass,
and Qualla's turned to casino,
and when my mom's eyes are flashing
Dad says there's Cherokee in her,
boiling in her blood. It passes.

But I met a little boy there,
fat and dark-haired, who taught me this:
so-qua, ta-li, tso- . . . one, two, three.

Joanna Pearson

Twenty-Four Hour Train

Bumping our green suitcases
through puddles and intersections
while the morning's still gray
in that crumbling pocket of Seattle,
we arrive at the station and board the train.

We've written handfuls
of postcards by ten, so
transplanted to the observation car,
we watch trees reel past like filmstrip,
and inspect the newcomers who board at dying stations.
The retirement group from Olympia is tipsy by noon,
and one tuba-throated woman with hair painted black
flirts with the onboard magician,
or anyone who will listen.
We push headphones into our ears and enter Oregon.
By dusk we're rumbling
through mountains, dark green,
and the windows dim.
We lean over plastic tables
with microwave burritos and M&Ms.
Hemmed in by black now, both bad movies play,
and our new friends, the two little boys from Portland
tell us about their girlfriends
until the drunk Canadian guy,
a harmless blusterer, scares them away.
The stumpy-armed woman
with three babies hanging to her shirt
whispers of her husband's deportation.
Another woman on vacation,
explicates the rearing of children,
and we all argue fondly, taking in advice,
almost like family, most of the night.
We ride that sleepless train until the stench seeps
from the rocking bathrooms into our skin
and the seats become stone.

Until, lost, we find ourselves in San Francisco,
startled sleepwalkers, awoken with greasy foreheads
and grimy clothes, sick with a dream-memory
of a world or an insomniac life
that never existed, except in transit.

Jessy Randall

Mona in Cars

Years ago she bought barbecue Fritos
at a highway rest stop, and her fiancé
asked, "How can you eat those?"
and she knew it was over between them.

Now she is married to someone else
and they drive into the gas station
and Mona goes mad, literally,
she has to be taken away in an ambulance,

she tries to refuse, she talks very quickly,
she does not make a lot of sense.
No one tells me this for days. I just
wonder where she is, and if she has the flu.

Now I think that Mona should
stay away from cars. Obviously they
are the problem. If she rode the bus,
none of this would have happened.

Jessy Randall

Mona's Medicine

Mona's medicine keeps her
from thinking she can
write the Bible of the future,
from thinking an Angel of the Lord
has come to earth to tell her how to do it.

Mona's medicine keeps her
like a man keeps a woman:
in one room, safe, cared for, trapped.

It keeps her from being herself,
only much, much more so.

It keeps her out of the hospital.

It keeps her on the phone to me, whispering,
crying, telling secrets that everyone knows.

Dan Sicoli

a brilliance less maddening

clearly
it was obvious
billie holiday had pocketed her demons
like found coins

as if in her spirit
my lover was falling backward in this cosmic petri dish
spinning spinning
an oblique grindstone in the sun

clearly with a touched and deliberate timbre
sorrow spotted her ordinary empire
like ripening bananas

in a vintage coat that displayed what she was made of
she walked with me
both hands squeezing my arm
drenched in chemical vulnerability
as a winter machine
swooped down
and hocked our dawn

her painterly fingers tracing
a likeness of a galloping stallion
into the ashen snow
on the hood of my chevy
became a lasting memory

eleanora eleanora
your aboriginal beauty outlasts the storm
never a question of what you kept
never a regret for things handed down

i remain
fingering one pocketed nickel
listening to a needle
grind out
an endless spinning line

Dan Sicoli

death spell

when you passed
i inherited your crown victoria
ironic, i thought
how something so cherished
could fall into my inept hands

i took the winter train
to cleveland and after signing papers
focused your headlights home
along the lake
intent on selling it over it's market
profiting from all your upkeep and daily washings

just outside the city limits
as cold rain dropped
fogging windows
a phantasm slowly materialized

you appeared riding shotgun
neatly dressed and twenty years younger
repeating your name aloud over radio static
could not capture your attention
aloof, never veering from the windshield
where wipers battled

suspect, i reached out to touch your shoulder
but like being caught with my arm in the fridge
it immersed into your side
and my fingers pulled at strange cool molecules
like lips mouthing silent messages
you, the ghost that undresses me
the tranquil pretty corpse
the elusive song of night fire

once in my driveway
rain hesitated, i cut the engine
and darted to my side entrance
as my key slipped into hole
i spied your reflection in the storm door
and admired how you stubbornly remained
in a stillness only disturbed by
quarks rummaging through the damp air

Merry Speece

Into The

Love goes.
On a pulley.
(Or one of the other fucking simple machines.)
That cry
the cry
of a wheel.

Massive that someone
stands in that open
barn door there above.
An intelligent animal
ready with a shiny hook.

Now.
Christ unspeakable our loss into the dark.

Merry Speece

Ohio

Where *are* the stories of Sherwood Anderson?
Deep in the national forest of Ohio.

A child is lost
and everybody is alive:
“Set the hounds loose.”
Hounds gone off,
not a prettier sound.

Silence, silence
and that bird of death at dusk
we'll never see:
will, will.

John Straw

Native Blanket

Starting with the orange twisted with purple mist
As it dies away to green flashes beneath telephone
Wires like tepees declining with the daylight

We thought we had caught

On canvas with the threads left from another
Attempt to cover an era of sleeplessness as it slid
Around the edge of the competitive knot too tight

To stand outside at night

Remembering hookahs and watering one
Slight blade as it is pressed below a dark form
That must have been here before and will remain

After we finish remembering

How the natives had made it so much brighter
Luminescent wordlessness in tongues we will never
Translate or break because we will never feel the pain

Or capture their way of mourning.

John Straw

Neglected to Say

I neglected to tell you

about the love summer when herons were drooping above fourposter beds and cranes were coming into our minds on random mornings as we lit into the cream centers separated by the quivering voice of a young story just forming on our lips as the interstate closed in on the corn silk.

Or did I mention it?

I may have neglected to say

how much we depended on stained mattresses resting on wood floors below walls carved with initial love as we were so careful of the feelings that fell like splinters around our sandals handmade from the skills passed down by grandmothers who knew leather.

Or did I tell it?

But I know I must have neglected to describe

the terrain outside the falling house filled with smoke and lyrics as we viewed it through a nervous calm inspired by mums in the window box hanging askew I was told by neighbors who crossed the street only on odd days after the moon had run its course in their lives.

Or did you already know it?

Oh, I'm sure I neglected something

that would have helped you to know me better and live my life as it was on the day the rain spoiled the mood we were building for a decade that would end without any solidness as it transferred the whole landscape from country to urban and back by way of the river.

Contributors

Walter Bargan has most recently published *Harmonic Balance* (Timberline Press, 2001), with *The Body of Water* due in March 2003. His poems appear in recent issues of *The Iowa Review*, *Boulevard*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Pleiades*. He was the winner of the Chester H. Jones Foundation prize in 1997. His web site is: www.walterbarga.com.

Tantra Bensko is a well displayed artist and published poet. Much of her work can be seen at www.Tantragarden.com. She lives in the mist at Steamboat Island in Washington.

Rachel Dacus has recently appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, *Flyway*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Rattapallax*. *Earth Lessons* was published by Bellowing Ark Press. Her work has been anthologized in *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), *The Poetry of Roses* (Abrams, 1995), and *The Best of Melic* (*Melic Review*, 2001). Her web site is www.dacushome.com.

Raymond Farr flunked out of Florida State University to be a poet. His work has since been published in *Poet Lore*, *Cider Press Review*, *Slant*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, and *Sulfur River Review*.

William Neumire writes book reviews for *The Cortland Review*. His poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *The Adirondack Review*, *Zuzu's Petals*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Poetry Midwest*, and *Melange*.



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Lissa Nilson works as an IT professional at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri. She has a deep fondness for books, philosophy, music, hockey, football and french kissing. She is currently infatuated with mirrors and cameras.

Joanna Pearson received her BA in 2002 from The University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, where she received the Robert B. House Memorial Prize in Poetry. She was also a 2002 Finalist for the Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship from *Poetry Magazine*. She is currently a Mitchell Scholar at University College Dublin, where she is pursuing an MA in Anglo-Irish literature and drama.

Jessy Randall is Curator of Special Collections at Colorado College. Her poems have appeared in *Antietam Review*, *Mudfish*, and *Painted Bride Quarterly*. *Dorothy Surrenders*, an online illustrated chapbook, was published by 2River in October 1999.

Dan Sicoli is co-founder and co-editor of *Slipstream Magazine & Press*, now in its 22nd year of publishing. His chapbook, *Pagan Supper* (2002), is available from Pudding House Publications. He guest edited the September 2002 issue of *Stirring*. Other recent work has appeared in *Sometimes City*, *Opium*, and *Atomic Petals*.

Merry Speece has published two chapbooks of poetry. A poem of hers is included in the recently published anthology *I Have My Own Song for It: Modern Poems of Ohio*, from University of Akron Press. A short story is forthcoming in the magazine *Night Train*.

John Straw spends most of his time as Archives and Special Collections Librarian at Ball State University. In addition to articles in scholarly journals, he has had poetry published in *genesis* and the *Humpback Barn Poetry Collection 2001 and 2002*, and short fiction in *Country Feedback*. He is also the author of *Dick Greene's Neighborhood: Muncie, Indiana*.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. All publications appear first on-line and afterwards in print. Submission guidelines are available at www.2River.org.

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