

2RV

19.2 (Winter 2015)

The 2River View

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Chain © 2014 by Drew Campbell

new poems by

Randolph Bridgeman, Sarah de Sousa, Mia Eriksson
Joy Laden, Estanislao Lopez, Heidi McKinley
Rajiv Mohabir, Charles Rafferty, Mark Schoenknecht
Sahara Smith, David Wright

2River

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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.

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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 Seascapes, 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).



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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.

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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.

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
sidesrokes 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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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 fist 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

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.