

The 2River View

5.4 (Summer 2001)



Longhouse © 2001 by Mark Flowers

NEW POEMS by John Amen, Michelle Cameron, Glenda Cooper, Jeffrey Ewing, Raymond Farr, Kris Kahn, Anne Kellas, Rebecca Lu Kiernan, Tom Sheehan, George Wallace

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Richard Long, Editor

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John Amen

Reclamation

I held fire and ice in one hand
and witnessed neither sleeping;
walked to the swollen river,
after the rain ended,
and painted myself with mud.

Gored by the horn of the bull,
I bled on wet moss,
offered my breath to the stones.

You should have seen me,
mother, on those red hills,
singing as I tore down fences.

Wisdom, like the wind, came in gusts.

John Amen

Ghosts of Spring

The day the dogwood blooms,
my own soil erupts with withered vine,
leaves as brittle as an ancient scroll.

In the heart of the rose,
my mother is dying,
each unfurling petal
cradling in its red palm
her last muffled scream.

My father convulses
in the stamen of the iris.

Each year kudzu rampages,
wielding its spear of breath,
its infallible verse,
the death rattle of my elders.

The monster of May
shakes its fragile crib,
learns to walk
in the gauntlet of the dead.

Michelle Cameron

Dreams Noir 2-5

She fell into the net
from heights unimagined.
The blind man brightened
for an instant, then ducked
his head, not to see
the rape taking place before
his darkened lenses.

The plane taxied
down the highway
amid early evening
Cairo traffic, dodging the cars.
We balanced on the roof,
waited for the road to clear,
the cliffs of the Nile
dangerously close.

The statue was made
from Rice Crispy squares and tall
Japaned umbrellas, gleaming
with cream frosting.

Is it any wonder that I cannot sleep?
Flushed with fertility radiating
from my body, I twist, turn,
peel off my clothing—my flesh
bubbles in the dank night air.

Michelle Cameron

Diner, Untitled

He remembers how the mists rose,
bringing her to see it for the first time,
how the dawning in her eyes,
quick veiled, like the rolling of the fog,

how she ducked her head,
almost hurt—but fast recovering—
ran her hand along the chrome
and polished metal and thought
of what to say.

She was soon the beating heart
of the place, the cheer that rose up,
as the springed door shuttled
the early morning men in and out.
Matching her soft-soled tread
to the rhythm of the clock,
she could pour fast or gracious,
smiling over the mothers and their
small indulgent second cup.

In time, she took her smile
from the perk, met the sun
as it rose above the shining silver
bullet of a building, rested only
in that soft, lazy hour
between the lunchtime trade
and the early bird suppers.
Counting out the days
in pancakes and lemon pies,
wearing thin as the pastel pink uniform,
dismissing the blue skies that chased
dream haze beyond the swinging doors.

Glenda Cooper

After the Diagnosis

This morning: the doctor's quiet words.
Now, I sweep the old oak floor, calmed
by the knowledge that here, in my kitchen,
I control when and where the dust will lie.

A web has been spun across the abyss
where the ceiling cornices converge;
the brown spider sits
in the center, waiting

for the vibrating visitations
of the unlucky. Yesterday,
I would have raised the broom,
swept away that small breath.

Glenda Cooper

Unearthed in Jiahu, Henan Province

A flute, the hollowed bone from a wing
of a red-crowned crane, nine millennia

after burial beside the musician. Today,
it will be played again, its long caesura

ended. I wonder at the wingless choice
of tune, *Xiao Bia Ca*, "The Little Cabbage,"

rooted, earthbound. Once, I watched
the dance ceremony of cranes:

two birds bowing claret-red heads, wings
half-extended like folded fields of snow, leapt

into the salty air. Now, a loamy melody lifts
in flight across nine thousand years—

seven notes of its one octave waver, finally find
the current, as we, who listen, soar into the past.

Jeffrey Ewing

The Sturgeon

The heat came suddenly, like a threat, turning the sky white
And raising dust devils from the furrows,
Dropped onto the slough, licked into the tules,
And began draining the green from the buffalo grass and the
star thistles.

The raw, pawed mud of the pasture hardened instantly
Under the Angus bull's belly, the cupped hoof prints
Suddenly as substantial as Mexican pots,
Empty jars in the shape of luck.

It touched everything at once, a thorough, sapping change
Spreading through the world, or this part at least,
This small enveined island where the chittering sounds of
pumps

Starting up called back and forth like cicadas presaging the
dry to come.

Almost tangible it fell over the shoulder of the levee and
into the water,

Spread like a slick, and touched by chance the back of the
sturgeon

That chose now to rise for the first time in three days
From the monk's cell of its blind mud-burrow.

He felt it on his back immediately, searing in its contrast,
A sharp "thwack" like a knife blade on his scales, tickling like
death,
And the dead sky blinding in its emptiness that was so
unlike that other emptiness,
His emptiness, that he carried with him from the bottom like
a gift.
He flicked his tail and stirred a wake across the surface of
the slough,
Watching the wave shards as they fled and then returned,
tentative as ants,
To lick against him again, to tempt him with the promise of
the surface,
The brightness of the hook, the certainty of the gaff.

Jeffrey Ewing

Sestina Near Sunset

Near sunset a dog lopes home
looking back over its shoulder
toward the dying sky
the light of the new night
igniting before it its own shadow
like a clock winding itself.

It is sometimes not the thing itself
but its inversion that brings us nearest home,
not the family gathered on the lawn but its canted shadow—
the arm outstretched, the hand clasped desperately to
shoulder,
inseparable and false as the night
that falls like batsong from the trilling sky,

So that whatever else descends from that same sky
inevitably also draws unto itself
the sour knowledge that in this night
in this home
the crying shoulder
has lost to the mercury of light and shadow.

Retrieve then the book from the shadow
thrown by the sideboard edged with sky,
let the light falling over your shoulder
collect and pool until time itself
is utterly at home
and careless in the familiar, dog-eared night.

Invite it in, the raveling night,
steep in its shadow
render far from home
the billeted sky
into something not itself
and ignore the cold seeping into your neck and shoulder.

It is not, I'm afraid, the same shoulder
that could once shovel or row all night,
or wounded could heal itself
and carry effortlessly into shadow
the full heft of the sky
before ferrying at last the long line of children home.

Home, though—it may help to know—
is not only there, in that book,
in that coming night;
it is also here, in the earned arc of this new shoulder
falling at last into shadow
rounded and worn into perfection
like the sky itself.

Raymond Farr

Back Roads to Macon

I'm driving to Macon from Fort Walton Beach
but I could be anyone going anywhere,
and it seems pointless to consider the map
tucked in my glove box.

At the moment my life is predestined—
the highways, the coffee, the girl who serves it,
who smiles sincerely in a truck stop near Tifton,
as if peace of mind didn't roll past her
like the clean cut Georgia Highway Patrol.
Her name being Clare in case you're curious.
I was, and asked, though I don't know why
seeing as how we'll never meet again.
Her name drifts from my lips—gas fumes
rising from the pump which evaporate even now.
And because a man churns through his past
no matter how much it hurts, everything I abandon
waits for me in Macon. So I lag and look around
as though this scraggy farmland could reveal
something of comfort if I'm just patient enough
but I feel more like a stranger than ever
and keep moving, pushing towards Macon,
thinking I can run from the devil
or fool him with a change of scenery. Cruising
through Cordele I spot a blessing,
a hand-painted sign nailed to a mailbox:
Whatever your destination, thank God you arrive.

Raymond Farr

Compromise in Eden

On my visit to the Fountain of Youth
in sleepy St. Augustine, I sipped from a cup
hoping like everyone to be renewed,
then paused on the trail leading back to the parking lot
and stared at the lush marshland lagoon
where the first Spanish ships quietly anchored.
I stood there, the sun heating the moist Florida air,
and couldn't help imagining
what those Spanish explorers experienced.
They named it Florida—*pascua florida*.
It must have seemed Edenic.
Part garden. Part still-unwritten poem.
And given a choice: wading ashore in spring 1512,
or walking ghost-like through this tourist-trap,
I yearned for the former.
I wanted to be anyone but who I've become.
I realized that De Leon's men, who must have longed,
like me, to be transformed,
took refuge in this steamy marsh,
exchanging desires they could never satisfy
for land grants and titles of deed.

Kris Kahn

the aggregations / of the body

the aggregations
of the body sliding in
to collectiveness—

should i call them breasts
well if so they are
shells of concrete, pure
slabs that scratch & scrape
like wool against the skin.

(it seemed his body was made of circles
just around & around again
cup of the concave, pillar of the convex.)

in the corners of the room
deep in the reaches where the candle
and television lights do not fall
a tribe of unclothed men
watch unexoneratingly,

(he fell over his own body, too curvy
for the darkness, too spherical
to be contained within four walls)

four-poster bed like the ocean mottled
after some shipwreck, beached bodies
bundled in bedsheets.

it is in the flickering on but never off (some
times suspended) that
their sexed eyes stare out pair by lurid pair
reminding us of infallibility or even
of just mere falling, yes of falling—

these exlovers like portents
fishy beady eyes & all
red glowing but quarantined
there where we've left them
in the corner
in the past.

we are surprised by the waves they stir up.
we are surprised that the light reaches them at all.

Kris Kahn

reading outloud, in oolong

we say things like
Mister why aren't you in bed yet
or better still:

you'll have to sleep
alone again
tonight. i'm going out.

sunday mornings i make tea
& retreat back to bed.
i read. right now i'm in the middle
of a post-modern dirge
from the point-of-view of a warchild cancer victim,
of course on her deathbed. experiment
al. i read it to you out loud in between
sips of oolong. without
fail you'll
fall asleep.

i am counting on my fingers:

how many times
i've fallen asleep pill-induced
& imagined you
reading me
to sleep. you'd be reading
Proust or some
thing french most likely

the words (& then
between us

the sun as it comes
over this horizon
line is dappled & greened.

the change is inevitable. the
reds spiral round
then claim
the lavender. the sun
literally does
sink ... it is night now ... effortlessly into the

night we watched the city
fifteen stories below
& rented videos & smoked way
too much hash ...

i am sighing now &

there are dreams
of Proust, of Meursault. i
seem to remember you once before
on a night when i was
actually sleeping, on a night when

i Rose & put the kettle on.
the night still
crusted in your eye
corners, the stove not
familiar, your

skin still wet under my finger
nails. i called you

Jove & you answered.)

never cease to amaze me.
there are trees over
hanging your language
when you read me to sleep love, the

tendrils transcribed,
the lovers we each had
before
never echoed. never paralleled
those bedtime lulls. i'm sure
your sonnet now
would be appropriate—you can
sing me bored to sleep
for your literature
will not soothe me
nor will your embrace any more.

i'll hear you. i'll listen

to some song of yours from afar
instead.

Anne Kellas

Easter, Two Poems

I.

Past all the sleeping gardens,
all the stopped clocks,
past quiet lanes, along a tree-lined route
coming down, down from the mountain
our car a missile as it glides on—past your home

its lights out in the dawn, car-windows wet with dew
and no one there to see us passing over.
Are your doorways crossed? Are ours?
What kind of light will penetrate your hall?
Your thoughts are quiet as you sleep.

High above, the sky's windows
allow a tracery of cloud to slip through.
*Just a little folding of the hands a little sleep,
and poverty will come upon you like a curse.*
Your sleeping garden cannot wake without you.

Approaching fast, one menacing brown cloud
flying in formation.
It's angular and brown in spite of the advancing light
and glides on well below sky level.
I am late, too late as I stumble over all the piled-up
overcoats

outside the entrance to this shelter.
All the houses lie deserted in the ruin of the day
and empty roofs point questions to the sky.
Afterwards, one boy-child lies in silence on a shelf
counting all the bodies in his head.

Ann Kellas

Easter, Two Poems

II.

The square black north came.
It stood there blocking the way.

The only solution is exit
said the child, frightened to its mother.

After the square black north came
no one spoke much.

They dug underground.
re-established the connections of wires with telegraph poles
sent messages ahead and plotted to leave.
Not much could go with them.

The square black north sat on the black hill.
It was collecting things, all the things left behind.

It kept tabs on the population
it knew how much whisky was drunk at each pub.

It related the statistics to letters in the Bible
1 Peter, 3 John, 2 Timothy.

It relegated history to the tides.
It sat on the hill and called out numbers.

People collected payouts regularly at the tills
they knew what they were waiting for,

the big one, the big statistic, the enormous
over-riding factor that was even bigger than Russia

the last wave, the final solution, the end of the universe
the big bang, they were waiting for that.

Then they would be free, they said.
Then they would take their freedom with both hands

and eat it like a sacrament
Then they would care about the Middle East

Then they would feed Ethiopia and share their clothes
then they would be kind to children.

Then they would read their signs and get their signifiers right
then they would be romantic Then they would dare,

They would fly. They would travel electric,
they would travel dangerously.

Then they would turn off their square black north
and face in another direction

then they would say they knew all the time
that this was the answer

that they had just been
waiting.

Rebecca Lu Kiernan

The Resentful Bride

My pet bat sleeps behind a Prussian tapestry
Of *The Resentful Bride* and lives peacefully
In the refrigerator when I am out of town.

I have lost respect for him, becoming so
Suburban, relying on me to catch his mice.

I long to see him emerge during a dinner
Party shrieking, red eyes glaring, wings
Snapping, spiraling in wide, terrifying
Circles, horrifying my dignified guests,
Rolling them up in paralyzed balls like
Any respectable bat would do,

Disheveling my damp cherry hair from its
Tight silver pins, leaving me breathless
And curious

As the first night I penetrated his icy
Cavern, before either of us had known
The dizzying taste of blood.

Spill

You are often 60 seconds, seven words
From ever meeting them at all, having
Turned twice to leave the party, driving
Out of your way to observe a lightning
Struck willow where everything
Would change, something calling you
To watch the gray rain,
Squint at a stained glass window,
Stand long in the impossible silence
Of a swirling street corner,
Dizziness/longing/recognition?
They're always coming at you
With their Norman Rockwellish grins
Translating your map, pointing you to
Home style diners and souvenir shops
Full of stuff you can't get anywhere,
Book stores for your out-of-print tendencies,
Calming you in their sleepy vampire towns,
Touching your arm to raise a vein.
But you're the one in hot pursuit
Brushing sleeves with them,
Meeting their pale eyes unblinkingly,
X-ed out people in your address book,
Sullen photograph of a long suicide love
In your wallet, pulling over to watch
Their mesmeric kaleidoscope leaves,
Steely cobalt lakes and cotton candy pink skies,
Begging to be mercifully
Spilled.

Tom Sheehan

The Lilac Run

For twelve years the lilac
sat still. Each spring I
waited for lavender odors

to uproot the air, carve
a name across an evening,
break subtle barriers.

The last bloom was yours.
When you shook it loose
in the kitchen, wet it,

the square room softened
and wore wings only lilacs
enfranchise. You died too soon.

Purple hosannas leaped today,
up sang the lilac choir
from the twelve year silences.

All night your voice
sounds like perfume
escaping the flask,

sits thick as gun-
powder near wounds
hardly worth healing.

Tom Sheehan

Things that Happen Only if You Watch

A thin maple sprig
keeps bumping against
the package of night
closing like a fist
around it and refuses
to give in.

Loam, the rich nacre
of Earth, bottomland
in an axial thrust,
shoves against a mole
until the mole is
ingested.

A grain of sand,
stretching itself,
drives the ocean
back, back, always
back, against the moon
and quahogs.

The green escalator
of a field, dizzily,
frantically late,
throws its goal line
toward my son's feet
in bedlam.

In summer a Bartlett pear
yellow and freckled ripe,
skins itself on the teeth
of an old man immobilizing
a park bench.

The Earth, trying
to get away, drives
its volume into my eyes.
The corneas explode
at impact.

gregoire's journal

rock-strewn island. small black spruce with larch and a few spindly birches. ice only left the bay, he noted, when the brent geese flew in june. but how brilliantly i can recall the frozen snow mass in the morning. we left the fishing station at dawn from moisie to matamec over a field of open water and then on upriver. as he did. awoke with the wolverine. an avalanche of ice. and an indifferent innu guide. have you read how gregoire ascended the river that day against strong currents? reached mitshikamau by mid-morning? so did we. to the place where he made his final journal entry. in all his travels through the country side, he wrote, he had never seen a killing field like this. and wrote no more. shaken, and walking gingerly among all those feathers. like gregoire, we take up the trail from here without further comment. to the place where caribou may still be seen crossing the frozen lake.

George Wallace

her son antinous

her son antinous knew first what the other suitors
could only guess at: there would have been less
trouble if he had left off all this wooing: remained
in his mother's chambers. she was always happiest

when he laid there on the couch drinking wine from
a chalice. admiring the high-roofed countryside they
called home. the light of dawn fell across the portico
on the morning she told me all this. her only son and

what good was he to her now? the sun of attica itself
cannot help she said—pointing out and then with her
hand seeming to erase the valley—political men to see
beyond the bloody field of their own vanities. in the end,

for all his pride, ambition earned antinous an arrow in his
neck. and for her, exile to these bright and widowed halls.

Authors

Poetry and fiction by **John Amen** have appeared in various online and in-print publications, including *Stirring Magazine*, *Wilmington Blues*, and *Sanskrit*. He edits the online literary bi-monthly *The Pedestal Magazine*.

Michelle Cameron recently completed a young adult novel and is now at work on a novella about the .com world. Her poetry has appeared in *Riding the Meridian*, *Niederngasse*, *Mentress Moon*, and *Paterson Literary Review*.

Glenda Cooper currently resides in Dallas, Texas. Her poems have appeared in print publications and online journals, including *Baker Street Irregular*, *Conspire*, *Disquieting Muses*, *Eclectica*, and *Thunder Sandwich*.

In addition to writing poetry, **Jeffrey Ewing** is a playwright, with plays produced in New York and Los Angeles. He lives in Sacramento, California.

Raymond Farr

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Kris Kahn has studied poetry and literature at New School University and Rutgers University. In the past, he has co-edited *drowning*, a collaborative poetry journal, and is now co-editor of *SOMETIMES CITY*.

Anne Kellas has been published most recently in *Moorilla Mosaic: Contemporary Tasmanian Writing*. Her second book, *Isolated States*, is due in September 2001, from Tasmania Cornford Press. She's poetry editor for *Famous Reporter* and *The Write Stuff*.



Rebecca Lu Kiernan is the editor *Gecko*. Her poetry has been published in places such as *MS.*, *Long Shot*, *Idiom 23*, and *Verandah*. A series of her poetry is upcoming in *Asimov's Science Fiction*.

Tom Sheehan appears in *Eastoftheweb*, *New Works Review*, and *Fluid Ink Press*. He is a co-editor of the sold out 2000-copy issue of *A Gathering of Memories, Saugus 1900–2000*.

George Wallace is editor of *Poetrybay*. His sixth chapbook, *Sesquicentennial Suite*, was published in 2000 in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of statehood in California. His poems have recently appeared in *Georgia State Review* and *Rattle*.

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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 first appear online and afterwards in print. Submission guidelines are available at www.2River.org.

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