

The 2River View

8.2 (Winter 2004)



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New Poems by
Wendy Taylor Carlisle • Jefferson Carter
Mike Chasar • Mark Cunningham • Garin Cycholl
Stewart Florsheim • Elisabeth Hamilton
Jesse Lee Kercheval • Jeffrey Little
Sarah Miller

The **2River** **View**

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Contributors

Wendy Taylor Carlisle lives in East Texas. Her first collection, *Reading Berryman to the Dog*, was published by Jacaranda Press in 2000. In October 2004, her chapbook *After Happily Ever After* appeared at 2River.

Jefferson Carter teaches composition and poetry writing at Pima Community College. His fifth chapbook, *Homemade Arrows*, was published in 2001 by Red Felt Publishing, and he has had work in *Carolina Quarterly*, *CrossConnect*, and *Salt River Review*.

Mike Chasar is currently completing his PhD in English at the University of Iowa. Poems of his have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *The Formalist*. He has also reviewed widely for a number of publications including *American Book Review*, *Dayton Daily News*, *Kansas City Star*, and *Rain Taxi*.

Mark Cunningham holds an MFA from the University of Virginia. Poems of his have appeared in *The Prose Poem: An International Journal* and *Quarterly West*. You can read a longer selection of his poems on parts of the body at Mudlark.

Garin Cycholl teaches writing and literature at the University of Illinois—Chicago, where he also co-edits *Near South*. His recent work appears in *Mudlark*, *blue sky review*, *Chicago Review*, and *The Muse Apprentice Guild*. Some of his collaborative work with Chicago poet Bill Allegrezza recently appeared or will appear with *Textbase* and *Tin Lustre Mobile*. *Blue Mound to 161*, his book-length poem on geological and historical displacements in Southern Illinois, will be available from Pavement Saw Press in 2004.

Stewart Florsheim has poetry in *DoubleTake*, *Seattle Review*, and *Slipstream*. His poetry is also included in the anthologies *Unsettling America: Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary American Poetry*, *Bittersweet Legacy*, and *And What Rough Beast*. He is the editor of *Ghosts of the Holocaust*, an anthology of poetry by children of Holocaust survivors.

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Honey

*Stones came at her like bees to candy
And sweet redheaded harlot that she was
She screamed out, "I never, I never."*

Anne Sexton

The redhead thinks about losing
what she never had—his hands, those

curious bears—thinks of the invisible
inverse, a sweet universe, where
he could love her and bless desire.

He never—

She craves the ravaged plane of his chest, his skin
its pores and wrinkles, the bees of its shivering,

its strange, familiar smells. The redhead runs
counter to public opinion, turns
for comfort to the desert, to honey, to carved stone,

moves away from the village to escape—
over her shoulder, the first rock. She picks it up—

I never. We never. Never....

Jefferson Carter

The Mummy

Wrapped in my blue & white striped
100% Egyptian cotton bed sheet
I skulk in the vestibule. What a word—
ves.ti.bule, the last syllable
like breathing on a mirror. I overheard
two girls laughing about their teacher
arrested taking out the garbage
in his underwear. I say more power
to him. I'll say to those girls the night
I catch them, have a little mercy.
Mercy, a word that sounds
like someone swallowing flowers.

Rubbers

My eighteen-year-old asks if I'd be
uncomfortable buying him condoms.
No problem, my inner adult answers.
My inner jerk wants to add, as long
as you're not going to use them.
I'm face to face with the fruit
& flower of late capitalism, an entire wall
of prophylactics—Trojans, Avanti,
Durex, Inspiral, fifteen different brands,
red & silver & gold boxes. I forgot to ask
what kind he wants—Extended Pleasure,
Ultra-sensitive Ribbed, Studded Texture,
Magnum Shared Sensation or, God forbid!
Lifestyle Luscious Flavors. I shut
my eyes & fumble a box off its hook
the way people used to shut their eyes
& open the Bible to a random passage.
How little I know about my son.
I remember sitting in bed beside my first love,
quaking, our hands like wood, waiting
for the call from the doctor's office.

Nor Ark in Cornland

1. The Big D

It's drought here in Cornland, brown and dry.
The carrots are nothing

but stumped nubs,
and even the flowers are losing their vowels.

Glad-ee-oh-la: it's pointless to bundle them up.
And you should see the corn

not even good for tamales
seven feet high but bone-brown from tassel to ear,

acres of hazard. Dire. Ire. It's down to the agri-wire.
And don't even mention the F word:

Geesh.
The Prez is due to arrive, deem us doomed, declare

a disaster, dum-de-dum, den depart, dig? Dis, though,
is our land. We dig it

and dude, the dryness is deep
but damn if we're givin' it up. These are our fields, man,

de cornstalks are people. From the porch, their tassels
could well be thousands of hands

raised together
ready to carry me out toward a brown sun.

2. A Natural Trust

In the steel-like field I stood when the thunder hit
and the sky split.

 All day, way in the West,
the storm-clouds pressed (my heart, my chest)

less East than up but nevertheless a moveable feast,
a blessing, rest.

 In the steel-like field I stood
when the first drops hit. I felt the sun submit

and the first explicit drops commit to the dust,
a sudden, almost illicit

 but nevertheless
natural trust. In the steel-like field I stood when

-why not?-it was off with my shirt. (What
could it hurt,

 this bare-chested man and his
parched dirt?) Then belt and boots. Then the wide-

open arms, the stalk of a waist and tousseled hair
as if (again)

 I'd discovered my roots on the farm,
as if I'd found it was myself which held me there.

3. Lakeland

Things is mainly painful since the rain-that slow
seducing handshake,

the shiver and chill,

the welcome-home turned downpour, then drenching,

then out-and-out drowning. But what pouting lips
they were (I think they were),

what lush kiss,

what drops (I thought they were drops) which the crops

in their raised beds let linger trickle down and bathe.

What purr, pour,

what ease, (oh oh remember please),

what tassel-turning tryst through the unteased corn. . . .

But then the flood. Mud. Crud. My acres ached,
my tomatoes, man,

were drowned at the stake.

Cornland, by morning, was nothing but lake.

4. *No Ark in Cornland*

Does the sludge hold a grudge? Half manure,
I'm sure
 there's something more pure,
but maybe, after the rain, I'm not the best one to judge.

My tires won't budge. The farmhouse roof is leaking.
My business is swamped
 literally speaking.
There is no ark in Cornland; nothing I've got will float.

When I stand, this morning, knee-deep in the land,
it's clear that no Noah is here,
 and everything's moat.
I'm not in the two-by-two's. I'm not of the saved.

I'm of the stranded, unhanded, the over-demanded.
I figured I done my time,
 I figured I paid my dues,
but I'm still sittin' here singin'

just sittin' here sittin' here sittin' here singin' the blues.

5. *Drying Is an Art*

Drying is an art, like everything else. The corn?
Re-born.

The drowned ground
is sound. The long-lost crops I really thought

the rain had got are found, and the sun I fought
is back, and hot.

This seems
my lot in life-does it not?-to court the sun

while I'm getting rain, then to pray for rain
when the sun's come back

and we're drying again.
I've died and dried and prayed and paid and when

I think I've got the old pat drown part my heat
is downed or I'm stuck

with the heart of doubt.
Is it so pointless? To harvest and hold, to have

and not, to dig and dam in time of plenty or drought?
It's a living it is,

a politic body, love, an art.
Breathe in. Now. Hold. It. And breathe it out.

14

You look at the printer, hear the voice say, *check*. You don't, then comes the *bing* and the hunt for paper. As you approach the intersection, you decide to pay the phone bill before going to the florist. On your way back, you slow to 10 m.p.h. while the policeman directs traffic around the ambulance. . . . It's not that you don't know what's happening as it happens: part of you knows, but doesn't explain right away. Does that make you nervous? Held out flat, palm down, your hand wobbles. This means *not really*.

Ω

You made it to the laundry, you made it to the envelopes, but you didn't come close to the peach turnover. The bank statement is fifty cents or fifty dollars off. Always something remains beyond the day's sum of accomplishments. You remembered to ask about the stamps and the photographs, but you hung up before the flight times. This doesn't mean the list of places you have to go is endless. Someone puts an ear to your chest and hears only her own pulse. Water, hydrogen, calcium, carbon: a new set of days begins. This doesn't mean you've budged any closer to eternity.

Garin Cycholl

Midwestern Landscape #11

Landfills for heart chaff have turned into a kind of American
behavior graveyard

Ben Marcus

the river ran a
rack of outdated post-
cards

(how it is to wander onto an abandoned movie set

or leading
a child
by the hand
through a
landscape
some old
slapstick
routine three
seconds prior to
the film's
end pin-
holed and
perpetual light
measured in
violent
percussive
chunks I
focus on air—
composition
by ground
glass

Blue Yodel No. 4

in Joe Ginder's barn, camera's eye
screwed up out of all proportion)

hair fetching light fume-
lit barnwood cold flowers
hung six feet from the
ground gone home gone
home gone
home
gone home (how

the shoulder leans
grieving

2

without these photographs of
you, what record of your being
here? you protest, but how have
these papers, birth records, progress
reports, baptismal certificates,
train schedules, and badly drawn
maps known you as I have?

3

We could go to Rafetown Bridge
or instead jumping open graves by
moonlight the night heron in the
trees six feet from the ground a
film of water, run-off the color of
lye or beer the old man waves his
myrtle branch, asks, what exactly
are you insinuating? long and tall,
we spill a pint of Ginny Crow on
fresh parch marks, ask, Why does
Loretta Lynn always get to play desire?

4

in Charley Sterchi's barn, not
enough light to piss by)

swallows above an eggshell floor and
an open drawer's significance pop
bottles in pieces the calendar in slow
disintegration on the north wall and
now gone monochromatic plums hay
pitched six feet from the ground you
're singing, love is in its rocking chair
love is in its rocking chair (how

the voice leans
grieving

Mr. S

I can still feel him sidling into my wooden seat
carefully to avoid the creaking
while the rest of the class is at work,
but all of us know our tenth-grade math teacher
does this with most of the boys.
He puts one arm around my shoulder and then
with the other he holds my pencil with me,
scratching out the algebra as though this is
the most natural thing to do, our hands
gliding across the page so that even writing X's and Y's
feels like one fluid motion. He stops
for a moment after writing the equal sign and
if I hesitate, he takes the lead,
his round face turning into a smile:
it is as simple as that.

Stewart Florsheim

Once, After Swimming

I was in a shower in the Buena Vista Hotel
standing under my father's penis,
the long flesh over another pouch of flesh
that was surrounded by hair,
the soap and hot water running onto me in rivulets.
It was so unlike my mother's body,
the one I knew better,
the one that released me
only because it was my time.
She used to take me into her bath
while the tub was still filling
and the warm water enveloped us,
sealing off the rest of the world.

Confession

Two years later I can say this.
You were not beautiful then, on the couch
in your parents' condo, in your parents' house,
in the square dark oven of your mother's
den which you made hollow from sitting.
You were not beautiful when you told me
the knife was still where I left it, on
the counter, slightly rusted
and dull. Nor when you tied back
your hair with a scarf and brought
me shorts and tank tops to sleep in,
my period having soiled the underwear
I had on, had had on for three days.
You were not beautiful.
But neither was I.
What was beautiful was
the light I saw when I left the brick
of the hospital, which seemed to
carry the air with it:
cold for August, and bright, and sharp.

Elisabeth Hamilton

Winter, Spring, Afternoon

What I remember
Is mostly dead things. Broken reels of film. Branches
Snapped off from Winter air,
The trees around us hunched like old men
Buried under snow, leaning
On their tired feet
With no children to listen
To their stories.
A drowned squirrel in the Spring:
Its whiskers standing out
As it stood erect at the bottom of the pool,
Waiting patiently.
And me, I was dead, too—
Living with my ghosts.
You stood on the other side
Of our glass-walled house
As we listened to them play
In other rooms—
Music drifting in
As from a tin piano,
Playing out our thoughts.

Jesse Lee Kercheval

Photograph in Black & White

Two girls in cardigans, small sisters holding hands, a pond so still the ducks float like painted birds. Overhead, something grey, not a gull—a kite? The cotton white of clouds. I don't know when this photograph was taken, or even where, but the winter sky makes us shrink, grow younger, standing there.

We are not children anymore.

This is what was, not is. Still, we are standing there, a message in a bottle sent floating through caverns underneath the mountains, winding, spinning clockwise until we land, on the table, in the moment that is now.

Red

Almost nothing that I see
here. Outside the window,
cedars, earth, lake.
The stones that are
the shore, white.
The cabin, palest yellow.

I look again. Inside,
a single apple.
A red and white umbrella.
I step out, startling
a black bird—
on his wing
a streak of red.

So like red to stay that hidden—
flash among the feathers,
blood under the skin.
Except this spring
when I miscarried.
And yesterday, when I drew
a knife across
my thumb
just to see some red again.

Jeffrey Little

beyond the mountains between

jajouka the master musicians the wail from the future of the past
the present inside the past the bringing into accord the spinning
w/out spinning w/out gravity alone
alone & floating somehow
floating w/roots
somehow running deep to the running
the running into roots running into the caverns beyond
the rock beyond jajouka the skins
hanging of a sound
unlike any sound a sound unlike anything
but the sound of morocco of jajouka the master
musicians & the many moroccos beyond the mountains between

still life w/castanets

i.

an iron lung pedaling a stationary bike
on a box of wheat chex, cayenne

ii.

{i used to know what was what. a door
was open / a door was closed. then
duchamp walked clean through a brick
wall carrying his chemistry set
& afterwards even the sun smelled strange.}

iii.

peppers & the really big things to say,
like "america", or "ontological", as if
"mint julep" couldn't cover more ground.

iv.

sheet rock & the vestigial errata of a limb.

v.

that night i used an industrial grade
soap on the dishes,
but i was in trouble here, & i knew it.

Sarah Miller

Epitaph

I buried my sparrow
at the base of an olive tree—
young, green—I hope
the trunk will grow thick,
turn brown, wrinkle, spread
at the roots until my sparrow's bones
break and crumble.

Sarah Miller

Wisconsin Haying

The birdfeeders in the yard hung empty.
This was the first year my grandfather sat
in a chair in his den instead of on a tractor seat
during haying. The first year I learned to stand
on a bouncing wagon bed, to lean over the gap
between baler and wagon, to sling the bales.
I stood with my uncles in the dark maw,
watching the slow creep of the sagging elevator,
learned to stack, cross stack, tight pack
the hay. I crawled over and between my cousins
salting until my face and arms turned green.
We sweated and joked each head shake
helped salt the bales; we raced the baling crews,
unloading faster than they could bring new wagons.
I drove pickup, shuttling full and empty beds.
I carried water. Leather gloves turned wet
in my hands and I reached forward again,
using my weight to pull and toss another bale.
That night, one of the walls of hay collapsed,
falling against the wooden roof beams.
In the morning, my uncles began shoring
and restacking while the wagons for the second field
stood idle. My cousins played cards.
I heard birds calling and finally wandered
down the road to my grandfather's house.
He would be watching the empty road;
someone should tell him, I thought.
Someone needs to let him know.

Contributors

Elisabeth Hamilton holds a BA from Wellesley College and an MA in English Educations from Teachers College at Columbia University.

Jesse Lee Kercheval teaches at the University of Wisconsin where she directs the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. Her poetry appears in *Blue Moon*, *Missouri Review*, *Southern Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Yale Review*.

Jeffrey Little is the author of *The Hotel Sterno* and *The Book of Arcana* (Spout Press). *The Babble Poems* is currently on view at Mudlark. He and his wife are expecting their second child, and have long since given up on sleep.

Sarah Miller is a graduate student and teaching associate at Ohio University. Her poems have appeared in *The Poet's Cut*, and *Hail, Muse!* She is also the editor of *Halfdrunkmuse.com*.



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