

# The 2River View

11.1 (Fall 2006)



new poems by

John Allman, Sherrill Alesiak, Jill Bergkamp, Timothy Bradford  
Wendy Taylor Carlisle, Lightsey Darst, Erling Friis-Baastad  
Pamela Steed Hill, Billy Reynolds, Kristine Snodgrass



# The 2River View

11.1 (Fall 2006)

Cover  
*Bird Funeral* © 2006 by Megan Karlen

*The 2River View, 11.1 (Fall 2006)*

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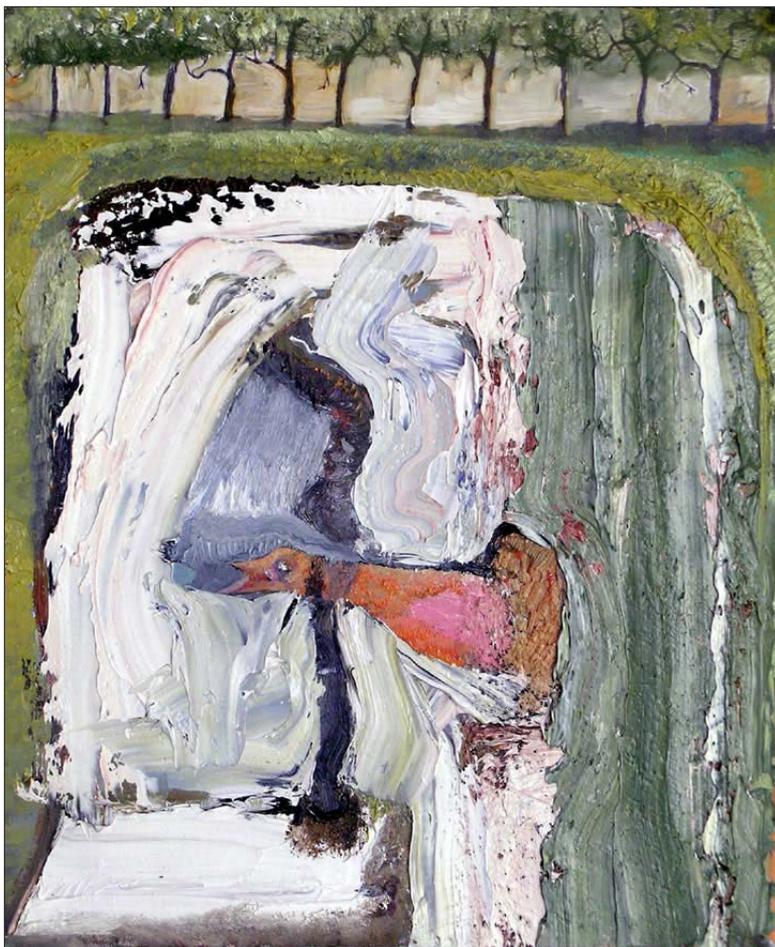
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*John Allman*

## **Grackles**

Autumn in the biome. Our yard busy with grackles landing around the feeder, their iridescent hoods a stylish variation that clerics strive for—eyes bright, insane, their caw a throat made raw with singing notes too high. They're stabbing yellow zoysia grass, hopping mad, glaring at chipmunks who have scampered under the drooping leaves of hosta lilies. A cardinal in the umbra of dried hydrangea blossoms, his redness the tongue naked to the air, loosened from its proper place in the heat of the mouth. A wet fear words its way among chickadees, titmice and nuthatches, the speckled lone woodpecker clinging to the edge of the feeder. They rise in a black cloud, the grackles, they're done, they break up like flak, bit by bit and all around they fill the dusk with thin lament, and squirrels rush for cover.

*John Allman*

### **Spare Parts**

They must be good for something, like Homer's ready-cut hexameters, his ox-eyes and winey tide. There were scabs on Achilles' knee that you never heard about, Hamlet's stutter, Ophelia's infected toe. What if when Emma Bovary died, her jaw slack, what oozed out was *servitude, sash, succor*? All the wrong words you'd ever hear at the post office in Rouen. And the poet thinking of the tyrant's cockroach mustache, what if he picked a flea from Natalia's pudendum and said, *grifter, gasp, Garibaldi*? Always somewhere a crunch of tank treads. Why not *strato-cumulus*? Ambling across the noir screen, a boulevardier suddenly modern: *Bite me!* Try child's *rictus, a joy pineal*, the foot that Karloff dragged in *The Tower of London*.

*John Allman*

### **Spraying the Chickens**

It wasn't necessary back when the hen kept her chicks close and they pecked at her fecal droppings and they swallowed just the right kind of mother love, a touch of illness, a taste of their own blood, and they trembled in sleep. Those days you could eat them without a care. Maybe even find a dark spot near the pimply shoulder, a piece of quill, the memory of a certain kind of flapping. The farmer's wife wiped her hands on her apron after she put the naked thing in the oven and she wiped the dirt off potatoes and she cut the bread, and you were so happy and hungry you wanted to kiss her hands that kept layer upon layer of so much world intact. And if something of that got into your mouth, it was proof against the evil to come, the corruption of bodies. The cold touch of strangers.

*Sherrill Alesiak*

### **Arizona to Nevada: Crossing the Line**

I'm astonished  
flowers grow from rock.  
I've seen them in Iceland:  
Purple lupine clumped in a crevice.  
How does this happen?

The same array unfolds  
in Boulder City:  
Another purple protrusion  
inching its way  
along the mountain tilt.

Below, on the two-lane highway,  
cars, bottlenecked,  
creep in pace.

Below that, the Hoover Dam  
jammed the  
Colorado River,  
as early as the thirties,  
bursting it  
into an artificial flower  
at the bottom of  
Black Mountains' vase.

Before that,  
volcanoes sprouted  
from Boulder City  
leaving a bed  
of gravel and sand  
for the Colorado  
to hose through  
planting petals  
glittering garnet and gold.

What will become of rock?  
Of purple flowers  
redeeming drivers,  
hungry and drained?

*Sherrill Alesiak*

### **Hanging Clothes**

Mondays, my mother would heave  
the creaking wicker basket  
up the basement stairs  
to the clotheslines outside,  
wipe them clean,  
then with wooden clothespins,  
hang sheets—corners connecting—  
my dad's factory hankies, pillow cases, and shirts,  
fastidiously pinning underpants on the inside line  
to shy away from neighbors.

Clothes hung.  
Years flap by, nearly ready  
to take down and gather in a basket.  
A load accomplished.  
It all comes out in the wash—almost all—  
except for the awkward haul of Alzheimer's  
she carries inside her cinderblock room  
with the slim locker  
that chokes her labeled clothes,  
no longer able to breathe in the heat of the day.

From lawn chairs on the deck,  
my t-shirts crisp  
in the dry mouth of the wind  
to stand straight as a movie screen  
when I pull my childhood over my head  
and, momentarily blindfolded,  
glimpse spirits,  
clothed in sheets and shirts,  
fluttering and dancing  
to the rhythm of the wind.

*Jill Bergkamp*

### **Lot's Daughters**

They had wanted to stoop,  
save each granule of salt in their sleeves,

carry their mother  
with them,

but their father was calling them  
to run.

They found a place  
to hide, a cave,  
at the end of the world,

dark with stalactites and shadows.

There was  
an underground lake, that wound  
through passageways, like the blood

that coursed  
through this last line

of girl-children.

Daughters, who whispered among themselves,

drew their stories on the walls,  
and knowing  
what was at the end—

poured wine for their father.

*Jill Bergkamp*

### **Rebekah's Blessing**

Jacob nursed gently, held to my breast  
eyes watchful, anchoring himself  
to me, while his brother ran off

to find sticks, or play games of battle  
with Isaac. My husband  
spoke no ill word of his father,

but I knew that something happened once  
between them, that changed my lover  
from a boy to a man who could not

walk near a mountain without trembling.  
I took this knowledge into my hands;  
gathered the clothes still warm

from Esau's body, sloughed skin  
from the goats I cured,  
and cloaked Jacob

in his brother's scent.  
I knew this was the way  
to mend the fracture set by a father

who would sacrifice one son  
for another, one child  
for his God.

*Timothy Bradford*

### **Ghazal**

I forgot her face the way men forget the moon.  
So many veils, even the sky forgets the moon.

On my desk, a strand of her hair and Rilke's poetry  
illuminated by sunlight. Forget the moon!

She wore a purple cashmere shawl, and when it slipped  
down her fine-boned shoulders, all men forgot the moon.

We walked barefoot from Ms. Soni's Guest House  
to the mango tree of orange flesh that dared forget the moon.

And her voice sang for two dances in New Delhi—  
our last dance, and one alone to forget the moon.

I remember little—the way her mouth fit mine,  
the strength of artists' hands, how to forget the moon.

Timotheos, what is the source of your sorrow?  
Did you kiss the hollow night but forget the moon?

*Timothy Bradford*

### **Zoology**

As for servals, jackals, monkeys,  
tigers, lions and baboons,  
female chimps in heat  
with genitals swollen like  
pink balloons, elephants content  
in their sad bags of skin, rhinos  
set for dinner with their horns  
and plates and lips, and the fishing cat  
with eyes like Chuang Tzu's—  
all outdone! We humans,  
caging our nakedness  
in clothes, swearing our long fangs  
left under some tree on the savanna, buried  
in some closet at home, we—  
most unbelievable  
spectacle of all.

*Wendy Taylor Carlisle*

### **Rare and Commonplace Flowers**

Where we ran wild  
there are two  
scars from the same  
damned accident. The air  
grows wide. The weeds  
move with lily  
and rose, hollyhock,  
show the glim of  
that white torso  
you take to first  
when you wake  
alive with dreams  
you will later pack  
underground, with  
the feathers, the Rottweiler,  
the best-seller,  
that bone. The past  
is a sump, a hollow  
really, a pot half-turned.  
As for the tulip  
isn't it just  
a void of sorts?  
Without a real god,  
only your earrings  
stand guard  
and in the end  
there's nothing  
left to do  
but lift  
the garbage out  
and burn  
the burlap sack.

*Wendy Taylor Carlisle*

### **Stillness**

Still. My palms sweat like tea glasses on the wicker table brought out with the stories of lost uncles on Labor Day when no one here mentions the four boys who beat that man up and left him to die in the bleached heat. What talk there is—of basketball and trucks, a word or two about the war—comes down to gratitude that Skip came back alive.

The only snake in the August garden, that unspoken question, How is she? She's dying, thank you, but not fast enough to save her posture, her teeth, her eye for fashion, her sarcasm. I don't add I miss them.

Never ask—can someone tell me how to lose the one they loved and hated to love? How it felt to hold her chilly paw with their wet fingers?

What they said to strangers bringing food and flowers in the stillness after?

*Lightsey Darst*

## **Center**

i.

*Come back to the center,*  
advertises the flyer, *we must all*  
*come back to the center at last.*  
But in an expanding universe

there is no center, at  
the beginning of things no  
distance, but all one point, not  
a place in space but the only, the

suck & kiss of us on top, under, next

to us—and now what was that nexus grinds  
every place, center in all  
corners, so that

you come back to the center every time you touch your face.

ii.

You were my foot and I  
was in your eyes. Our hands  
formed one dove. Veins  
carried blood both to  
and from our super-dense hearts,

but they did not carry.  
The stars dropped from their own fingertips,

bodies pulled into waves of song.

I heard our voices say no name.

*Lightsey Darst*

## **Expats**

The distance retreated into the distance, a lake unto itself.

Between the arches we saw elements of an artwork: scope,  
plan, a masterful brushstroke about the children in the fountain.  
But we sipped tea.

In the corner of that lemon room, a table, oriented  
towards eventual discovery, as books left open, shop-doors,  
as the sleep in the matinee and the window where a bird alighted.

We disposed of less attractive thoughts.

A family's children met in the afterglow of three in the plaza,  
participated in a danced recreation of the morning's riot. Yes,  
movement had by then happened in the anteroom. A hearse blacked  
out the memory of the victim, exile, passed between us and the sun.

And then it struck four and we changed to wine.

*Erling Friis-Baastad*

**Arboreal**

*i.m. Gennady Aygi*

I spend the first  
hours of each day  
talking trees  
with a dead Russian.

G. and I sit around  
my coffee and say,  
*Birch*. For both of us  
birch has served

as punctuation and  
as a sort of travelers'  
rest between Eucharist  
and soul or soul

and Father. However,  
it's a cautious chit chat  
of leaves and twigs—  
we are too polite

to come right out  
and mention  
the quaking aspen  
just yet, or admit

to spruce boughs  
cracking, breaking off,  
and even falling  
in the great wind.

*Erling Friis-Baastad*

## **Hydrogen**

The frequencies fall  
silent. Megahertz  
by megahertz  
voices fall away.

The dial on your radio  
freezes slowly  
inside out, a dark lake,  
its own black note.

Now, listen hard  
and you can hear at last  
that devil's chord.  
The stars are tuning up.

And then it comes.  
Too cold, you  
think, cerebral,  
not to be danced to—

But somewhere  
distant, something  
writhes  
into an ecstasy.

*Pamela Steed Hill*

## **August**

From the back porch I watch dozens of sparrows  
line the high fence, descend by twos and threes,  
strings of six or more to the ground  
surrounding the feeder.

And in only an instant they lift off in a single group  
as though sucked into the heavens by an intake of breath,  
divine, urgent. Dropping to the fence again,  
they start over, a cycle as obvious as geometry.  
But if there is such sequence in our own lives,  
if a circle draws itself around our coming  
and our leaving, I've not yet found it.  
Dad, you've been dead five months.

The sear of August has crusted into winter's  
deep glass. I hold it in my palm, to my face,  
its cold circumference a raw edge rounding into spring,  
into summer. August will come again. I will watch the birds  
feed and return, feed and return,  
and I will look for you in the arc, and the fall,  
of their flight.

*Pamela Steed Hill*

### **The Miracle of Nothing**

It is not enough to offer a silent thank you,  
looking down at dark mums and the garden's final offerings  
of autumn—late-planted greens, their small leaves  
fragile and pale. And bright orange peppers,  
the odd liveliness of their color signaling an end.  
It's not enough to stand at water's edge  
on White Fish Bay and know the lake is a miracle.  
To see the dense clouds drop into its depths and know  
who placed them there. It is not enough to welcome God  
into every small fold of the day's passing.  
To call upon some unknown force  
to let the meat be fresh, the house not burn,  
the evening to find us all here again. Yet,  
we are here again. And we have witnessed  
the miracle of nothing. A slight turning of empty time,  
bare of grief and illness and pain. We have lived  
nondescript this season, this day, these sixty-minutes.  
But it is not enough. To bow our heads in silence.  
To close our eyes and see in each moment  
of each second the uneventful wonder  
of none.

*Billy Reynolds*

**After Larkin**

I saw through chain-link fence the curse of runway and distance.  
I saw a guy on a forklift. I saw another guy watching him.

I saw the plane jerk skyward heavily into splendor.  
Only then did I see it was a coffin

the airport guy was feeding into a hearse  
like you'd feed an ice-stunned oak into the chipper.

Only then did I catch the look of passing things.

*Billy Reynolds*

**Late last night after I had gone**

to bed I found myself at a party  
up on the porch toasting  
the rings of Saturn  
when you showed up uninvited.

I don't know why I finally  
came down to where you stood  
and placed a blue ribbon in your palm  
unless it was to say you won.

I don't know either why I took  
your hand, or why we walked  
through small backyards  
that smelled of cut grass and lint.

All I know is that I wanted us  
to stay close to the chain-link fence  
until neither you nor me was  
there to mark its abrupt death.

*Kristine Snodgrass*

### **Poor Rebecca's Almanac**

This year you will have no light. You will drop that piece of lemon pie on your paper and remain un-cautious. We are seemingly pillaged and filtered. Our husbands drink to remain married to the moon and we sit quietly and seduced the could-have-beens and therefore. How many of us will die this year? How many will be left salient as a plague? Sit down pie-snatcher and eaves-dropper because I am telling you something important. No anger. Just letting you know that there is going to be a photo finish and we are still praying for revelations and flight plans. Hussey and twit. The future is full of shopping bags and glass thrones. We sing, *sit with me*. It goes like this.

*I'm so tired.  
I feel sick.  
I don't want to.*

So I say let down your hair. Peel the dead skin from your face and look up.

*There is an angel in the way.  
There is a year of discovery coming.  
Millions before you.*

We read the tiny hairs and lines on our necks like sentences. We play games on the floor and cut shapes out of pie dough before devouring our young. We are left alone at the most incomprehensible times. Count your wrong doings and blood cells. What have you left? I want to sit primordial and recount my wigwams. How many wampum did you find today? What has the beach to offer a young girl? This fraternal star sits on me. At night I wash it like a cake pan, gently and without malice. I am talking to you darlings. All of you.

*Here goes the song of desolation again.  
Wheel me out to the curb.  
I am old and no one loves me.  
I am useless.*

There is a reason why tampons are so expensive. We are rushed to judgment on everything. Such anemia for the pale world. Such random heartening. Who am I in love with? A man?

*I am so tired.  
I am sick.  
I don't want to.*

I remain cracked and plagued by indifference.

*Kristine Snodgrass*

### **Susan is Fabulous**

But she is an alcoholic. I am trying to come to terms with this but there are too many movies that I have missed all year.

Sasha is bemoaning her job and no one looks forward to using a fresh ballpoint like I do.

There are so many addictions I want to tell Sadie about. The one her father has, the one her best friend has.

I want to scoop them all up () into a voile sheet and bless them.

Bless you.

I will give them a list of the containments holding them in like geodesic domes.

() ()

We are not always irradiant beings, Shar. We sit in light defused rooms and wait for the opening credits.

No previews please. Run, Sally, Run.

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## Authors

**John Allman's** *Lowcountry* will be published by New Directions in early 2008. Many of the those poems appeared as a Mudlark chapbook. New Directions also published *Loew's Triboro*, *Descending Fire & Other Stories*, and *Curve Away from Stillness: Science Poems*. His first book, *Walking Four Ways in the Wind*, appeared in the Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets. The prose poems here in *2RV* will be included in the chapbook *Attractions* that *2River* will publish in October 2006.

**Sherrill Alesiak** is a former college instructor and has also worked in advertising. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in publications such as



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*Alligator Juniper*, *Detroit Free Press*, *The Kerf*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Owen Wister Review*, and *Princeton Arts Review*.

**Jill Bergkamp** lives in Southern Florida, where she attends Florida Atlantic University, studying for a degree in English. Her work has appeared in *Catapult* and *The Christian Century*, and is forthcoming in *Relief* and *Wicked Alice*.

**Timothy Bradford** was a writer-in-residence at Stanford University during the Fall 2005 semester. His poetry and other writings have appeared in *Bombay Gin*, *Diagram*, *Eclectica*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Mudlark*, *No Tell Motel*, and *Terminus*, among others. He is currently working on a novella based on the history of the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris.

**Wendy Taylor Carlisle** lives in Texarkana, Texas. She has published one full-length book of poetry, *Reading Berryman to the Dog*; and one chapbook, *After Happily Ever After*. Other poems appear in *Carnelian*, *Ekphrasis*, and *storySouth*.

**Lightsey Darst** lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches composition and writes dance, art, and book reviews. Recent work is forthcoming or published in *The Antioch Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Literary Review*, and *New Letters*.

Though born in Norway and raised in Virginia, **Erling Friis-Baastad** has spent most of his adult life in Canada's Yukon Territory. He is employed as an editor at the *Yukon News* in Whitehorse. The most recent of his poetry books is *Wood Spoken: New and Selected Poems* (Northbound Press / Harbour Publishing, 2004).

**Pamela Steed Hill** is an editor for University Publications at The Ohio State University and a freelance writer for online literature reference publishers. She has had poems published in *Antioch Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Nimrod*, *Potpourri*, and *South Carolina Review*, among others. Her first collection of poems, *In Praise of Motels*, was published in 1999.

**Billy Reynolds** lives in Tifton, Georgia, where he is an assistant professor of English at Abraham Baldwin College. His poems have appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Laurel Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and *storySouth*, among others.

**Kristine Snodgrass** is an Instructor at Florida A & M University. Her poems have appeared journals such as *Big Bridge*, *Gulf Stream*, and *Tigertail: A South Florida Poetry Annual*. Her collaborations with Maureen Seaton and Neil de la Flor have been published in *Can We Have Our Ball Back*, *Guernica*, *Gultcult*, and *Three Candles*.

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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, and, more recently, podcasting from Muddy Bank, the 2River Blog. All publications appear first online and afterwards in print. Interested contributors can read the submission guidelines at [www.2River.org/office/submit](http://www.2River.org/office/submit).

Richard Long  
[www.2River.org](http://www.2River.org)



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11.1 (Fall 2006)