

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

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Cover
Bird Funeral © 2006 by Megan Karlen

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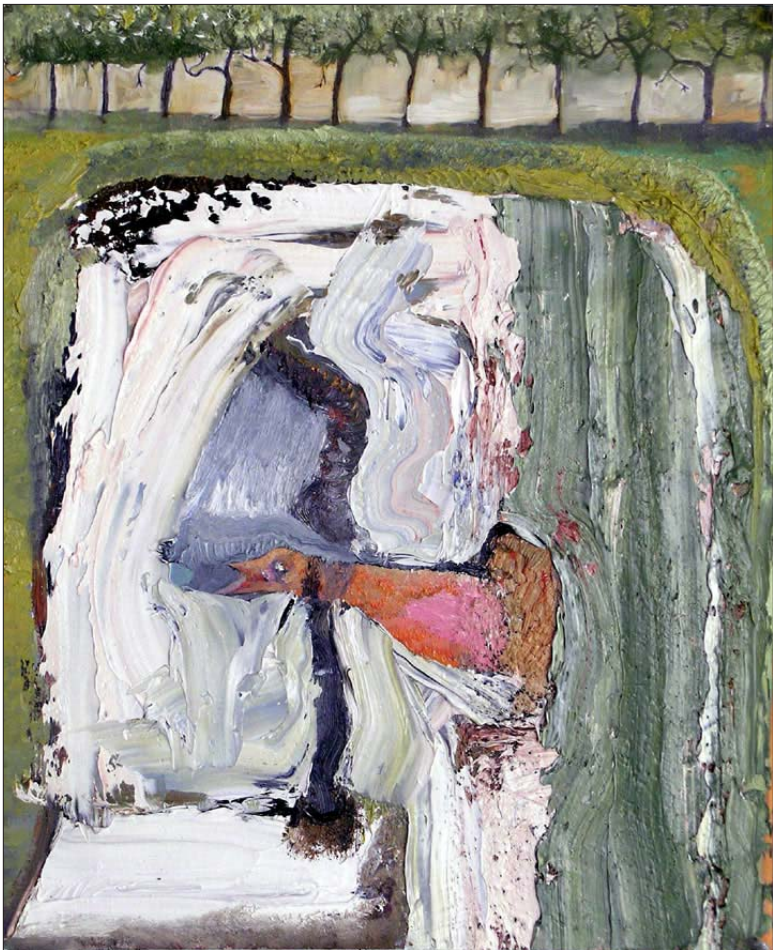
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John Allman

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 your 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.

Richard Long
www.2River.org

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