

# The 2River View

12.1 (2007)



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New poems by Ingrid Chung, Michelle Bitting  
Michael Flanagan, Ellen Kombiyil, Robert Nazarene  
Amy Pence, Lynne Potts, Terry Savoie, Sarah Sorenson  
Anne Whitehouse, Erica Wright



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*Ingrid Chung*

### **Hunting Grounds for the Lost**

Mr. M once told me about how the  
white men had whipped him until stars  
shot out of his open back and he had chewed off his  
bottom lip. When he collapsed,  
he said he had seen it, the sublime. It was like  
a moon with a mouth and it swallowed you  
up to form your tears into marbles  
and keep you warm.

I searched for it in the thorn bushes,  
the loving biting thorn bushes.  
Fancy being this way,  
scrounging the wood for the abstract—I watched  
a flower die from loneliness and a mother make love  
to her son among raspberries.  
My skin was cut; I love the gossamer of pus,  
yellow to the touch.

Now I sit upon my breakdown— (my fingers  
are dead you know and as  
they fall into the  
damp  
soil they point to the sky)  
reeking  
of Buddhist incense and hurricane salt.

*Michelle Bitting*

### **Washed in Flame**

*And no one can still recognize the woman washed in flame  
for whom, of all her joys, burnt pearls in ashes is the sum  
of what remains.*

—*Abraham Sutzkever*

*She makes a matchstick of her finger,  
dunks the tip in Bombshell Red,  
then her lips are two flickers.  
In the shadows of her ears: smoldering  
flowers. Draws a smoky line  
between lid and lash and dashes out—  
at the crowded rear of the oncologist's elevator:  
one last fanning of her mahogany skirt.*

*Don't try to follow the logic,  
this need for ritual preening, seduction.  
Whether the doctor's even aware  
of silk swishing between her legs.  
It's pointless, futile as asking why  
her cells' crooked kindling, the gathered  
deadwood, amass their morbid camp  
deep in her body's core.*

*Just remember the pretty Polish girl,  
pinching her cheeks for the German soldier.  
Zierpuppe, he said, lifting her onto the truck.  
As if it mattered her eyes were two hazelnuts,  
her skin: beaded milk. So lovely, so worth saving,  
am I not? And he, head cocked, smiling,  
pretending not to know  
what awaited her, further on up the road.*

*Michelle Bitting*

### **Soft Red Skirt**

That's what she wore, followed his wolf-shaped  
face up the mountain path—Summer, the swelter  
of eucalyptus, lavender, dilating every cell.

Was it curiosity brought her here, the subtle growl  
inside his laugh? Between them, a quarter century years'  
difference and two pair of eyes rife with off-kilter craving?

Maybe the way he preferred she lead, parting  
milkweed, beach burr, thistle, along the switchback,  
the better to view her shifting rump as they gobbled the trail,

reminding her of that Easter at her parents',  
bending to pull lamb from the oven,  
her flowered dress hiking up, father in the corner

with his cronies, their secret, murmured words:  
*sweet flesh young* singeing the air, making  
her cringe, years later, at any sudden scent of rosemary.

Her soft red insides closing then,  
opened now, with this man's hand on her ass,  
key to the body's cabin. The quandary odd,

familiar, like that tale by the Brothers Grimm  
about the poodle made to eat flaming coal—  
the nourishment it took from its blistering fare,

muzzle dipping in to relish what burned in the tasting—  
each time, the tongue left bruised and blackened.

*Michael A. Flanagan*

**hospital block**

afternoons when i was a little  
kid, in the street with friends,  
throwing a football, or tossing  
a baseball, the ambulance  
would race down the block,  
lights on, engine roaring, i'd  
try and see inside, i always  
thought my father might be  
in there, on a stretcher, sick  
and dying, if i knew he was  
at home, i'd watch, fingers  
crossed, waiting until they  
passed by our house,  
maybe it was just living  
on that block, where it was  
a constant thing, sometimes  
two or three an hour, maybe  
it was my father, he didn't  
lead a clean life, always with  
a cigarette hanging out of  
his mouth, always with a  
drink in his hand, at night,  
lying in bed, i'd hear the  
siren, the lights reflecting  
off my bedroom wall, i'd  
wonder if they were  
coming to us, wonder  
if, finally, tragedy was  
at hand, that thing i  
seemed always to be  
waiting for, holding my  
breath, fastened to the  
noise, the turning lights,  
until they were gone

*Michael A. Flanagan*

**inching away**

silence like a last breath,  
my footsteps on the brown  
floor, late hour clocks,  
cat's walking tired drive-  
ways, this house on my  
head, these debts in my  
ear, tell me, what do  
we do with our days?  
can you get hold of one  
thing that would truly  
add meaning to the next  
hour of your life? there  
are children i see every-  
day, they're all new,  
where it's heading  
we can tell them, but  
what's the good in that?  
from my window i stare  
at a tree limb set against  
a dark sky, i watch the  
dull light of a lamp post,  
i'm thinking about  
traveling, no luggage,  
a bottle of beer be-  
tween my legs, an old  
car down an empty  
road, inching away

*Ellen Kombiyil*

**Excerpt from Vincent Van Gogh's Journal, Saint-Remy 1889**

*(with four lines adapted from Letters to Theo)*

I can't get it down—exactly how I feel  
when I see the cypresses. Oh, the colors  
are there, stark, arranged like music.  
I paint canvas after canvas  
hoping the metal band won't tighten  
around my head.

I want to paint the time I walked with Theo  
down the Rijswijk Road and we drank milk  
at the mill after the rain. I'd paint it all green  
but then how to express what goes unseen,  
the taste of milk when I could drink absinthe,  
the sound of rain?

I paint roses instead. The canvas  
holds them for eternity, not one more  
petal will drop against pale green.  
Then this morning I saw the country  
fresh again and full of flowers. What more  
I could have done.

*Ellen Kombiyil*

### **Persephone's Letter to Demeter**

Dear Mother, I have grown pale, my hair  
brittle, my fingers like icicles.  
I have only myself to blame.  
It would have been easy to plan  
my escape, to toss accusations like bones,  
to hypnotize Cerberus with a song,  
to switch his water with a drink from Lethe,  
to induce sleep with a potion.  
But I have grown numb to this place.

I tried not to stare at the fruit  
which shone like rubies on the golden platter.  
It beckoned me, promised remembrance,  
the earth's warmth after a long winter thaw.  
When my teeth split the seeds and their juice  
startled my mouth, I felt blood again  
flush my brow. I remembered thunder, picking  
a flower, the yawning, swallowing ground—  
the fruit wasn't sweet; it tasted like erasure.

Robert Nazarene

### **Cry, Baby**

When I drove to the post office  
I got something I didn't want.  
When I went to the doctor  
I got something I didn't want, too.  
The brakes on my car  
made a sound something like  
metal grinding on metal.  
That had to be something  
I didn't want.  
My girlfriend & I had a fight.  
Late that night I got a phone call:  
connected to a boot.  
What did she want from me?  
I wanted something:  
a drink, to get lost. That,  
I got, my first in fifteen years.  
That week, my mother &  
father died 24 hours apart.  
That was really something:  
bone cancer & Parkinson's.  
I was shook.  
They hadn't seen one another  
for 20 years. They hated  
each other. I think.  
It was something or other.  
I turned into a walking  
*Help Wanted* ad, a *Lost*  
& \_\_\_\_\_ ad. Mom & Dad  
always wanted the best from me,  
for me. Or something. Somethings  
run in my family.

*Robert Nazarene*

### **Monster**

The blackboard clung to the wall as if to save itself from the abyss. Light, wove its way in—but seldom out—from the tall glass windows. One-by-one or in little cliques my classmates, no, the others— took their seats at each oak-lidded desk. Little acorns. The tile floor gleamed. In its reflection I watched my mind race like flash cards, felt the ache in my belly. Earlier that morning, Mother and Father had quarreled at the breakfast table. Quarreled is such a polite word. Neat. Not like the warm, fetid mess pooling in my seat, then running the length of my brand new pant legs.

The children all laughed,  
then headed out to their tidy plots  
of public dirt.

Then, it was only me  
and the janitor, spare and lean like Zeke  
in Dick and Jane.  
Two losers, come to hate one another.  
Mop. Bucket. Mess.  
Them. Me.  
Monster.

Amy Pence

**Above the Baby's Grave**

Were you arboreal                    *In memory*  
before you landed                    *Mildred Phillips, born*  
or just caught                         *in 1910: died*  
in the net of                             *1912: darling we miss thee*  
heavens—

I think of you often                 *Moss in the folds*  
in the trees                             *winged angel—her parents dead but*  
still a baby, still                       *two decades later—*  
with the full ruddy                     *crown of the head*  
limbs of Michelangelo's             *polished smooth*  
Christ: for aren't you                 *like her birth*  
above me now                           *this opening*  
crossing into                             *arching above*  
a mimosa as here                      *the trees, runged around that*  
I weep by your  
grave—aren't you                       *lost*  
every absence in me                   *infant*  
made flesh—                             *core*

Amy Pence

### Demeter Rising From the Couch

The way I heard it:  
a field, brown-eyed  
susans: a child  
in the field, and then  
the rape, the taking down  
to that place: The way  
I feared it was the fall  
of the spirit  
the browning of the eye,  
the girl's entrapment  
in the underworld

Too old to identify  
with Persephone,  
I understand  
Demeter's wintering—  
split from her child almost  
half the time  
powerless in that hollow-  
eyed stare  
back

*She rises  
and goes to  
the mirror—  
hollow-eyed, waiting for  
sounds:  
the door,  
parting car  
shoes off—  
all arrangements  
of modern-day  
custody*

*She rises  
to see how  
her daughter will weather  
the visit:  
curling tight  
a little shell  
hiding or the nameless  
anger flaming  
up in her*

*Lynne Potts*

### **Dairy Maid and Cyclops**

Just as the air had all it could take and knew it, I know when a sky or anyone has had enough and will pour forth verbiage; you do it too and I'm there with my pail to bail you out from under beams in your eye scan to uncover what dalliers do/did while Cyclops slumbered in their craven hunger, that is: rummage through the litter for a stick that won't bend in water, burn it and twist it for insight which doesn't come through; we wish, we wish.

You pail barn milk and off to the house where I keep my one eye on you, a habit acquired, passed on since cave men took to sticks, then paint, which was the end of them as dalliers; took on a wall to break through, clutter of verbs and pronouns too, then who could say what utter nonsense they had for dinner, but I tell you, still hungry.

Now it's me pale, agog not to be confused with Agape who was beginning and end, saw with one eye cave hollows, rummage sales: rusted hoes, milk bottles, eye glass you can't use without switching lenses, even then you'll see verbiage taking over, hunger-talk talk with a switch dipped in water to bend reflections, a shed around the edge, dally lily in vast vase set out to see through, see through and tell, of course.

*Lynne Potts*

### **Lead Weight on a Line**

Yes, I knew it rang but I was receiving off on a tangent as in: here's what the substitute said: carry chalk to the bored: think until bells go off in your head and I said I do not talk under duress, phone lethargic to the ear—absence of silence: how we act or not; a posse came across the mountain once and waited; it was too late; chalk it up to a fact of absence; I'm here in the park, litter and board on the ground, every one around talking in a wiry way at a distance unable to hear.

Inhibited my habit I'm not talking while the waiter asks are you still working on your plate,; well, Lovie, I work but I'd hate to think of my food approached by hammers and chisels, especially oysters ready to slip off the lip of shells found in chalk cliffs hanging like a loose tooth about to be pulled out of oblivion; Oh I know a posse when I see it, ready to ring a string, slam the door and the molar goes flying; then sure, you can't eat or chisel either, all you want is a cotton-wad stint.

Bell-bottomed and tasseled, the receiver hung a left over after the call to action, not just eating fishy tales the length of the bored, nobody listening until belle weather comes over the mountain, posse putting on airs black as a gap in the stomach wall, nobody caring, nobody caring a bite of hamburger bun, chalky white enough to stint the flow of conversation, wire more or less than possible as an air wave of getting by-by in a basket of triskets, can't be kept or dropped.

*Terry Savoie*

### **Acorn Rain**

Hardened, honey-  
colored acorns  
hammer  
a wrought-iron table  
with a one note, two note  
syncopation, non-

stop, insistent,  
drubbing the roof,  
rolling into gutters,  
pummeling downspouts.  
If only we could get some sleep—  
we think (we

think)—  
in all this racket,  
but all we do  
is get a late-August drumming  
of acorn rain, argumentative,  
keeping us fixed on

the ceiling  
fan & heaven's  
pelting & coded message  
on & on & no  
relief nor any idea  
of ever being set free.

*Terry Savoie*

### **Begging Forgiveness**

I lie on my back, pull  
a light spring  
blanket up & over my head

allowing my toes to breathe, un-  
covering them

so they become lily pads  
waiting for the morning fog to lift  
off Pickerel Lake.

Closing my eyes tightly, I pray  
for forgiveness

as black spots dart  
before me  
like spawning bluegill swimming

in the shallows, circling  
their pebbled, shoreline nests

with eyes wide open  
but vacant as my confessor's eyes  
in his practiced indifference,

while their tails sign  
my absolution.

*Sarah Sorenson*

## **Hansel and Gretel**

### *I. Abandonment*

It was everyone's fault,  
because everyone was hungry.  
So the ditch rats,  
stuffed through the ribs with rejection,  
were spat out whole and pink,  
Slick and wet with the globbed spit  
of farewell; goodbye; good luck!

Given back to the sap of foreign grasses,  
they grappled with the nighttime,  
and lost their names in its darkest bits.

The crumbs were left to bake  
among the ruins of home.  
Eyes vacant; birds throng.

### *II. My First Home*

I learned the rules of attraction  
after the first construction,  
which was spit-shined together  
with colostrum and roe,  
the spiny backs of half-skinned fish,  
and gills stirred into a mother-of-pearl-paste,  
slapped onto ginger walls  
as spackle  
and an embalming glue.

I welded the cages together with  
doves' nests, brine waste.  
The journeying babble of the stream  
carried the suffering downwind  
and out of range.

The snow came in blankets of powdered sugar.

*Sarah Sorenson*

*III. A House of Gingerbread*

How lost is lost, anyway;  
and how gory is the prospect  
of my crystalline lure,  
plunked right down out of the dreary cold  
and released, salivating, into their wildest dreams?

*IV. The Fire / The Homecoming*

No one gets fatter.  
I burn the fire brighter.  
The last legs of twilight dash about  
on walls of yeast and cider.

They trudged home with pockets full  
of my jewels and sugar-glazed glass,  
the smell of my smoke shocked into their skin  
like an atomic blast,

Two silhouette-shadows.  
Back, now, into the thick grease of the everyday,  
the dead eyes of the new mother,  
the creaky hinge of the old father.

They follow the birds back to where it all began,  
without the guidance of the crummy remnants.

Crows and grackles and starlings,  
the beating shame-song of robins' wings

*Ann Whitehead*

**Curse VIII.**

A collision in the park  
between two runners—  
I didn't observe it but heard the cry  
and turned and saw a man on his side  
not moving on the pavement,  
and a woman standing not close but nearby,  
watching him without approaching.

Clutching his elbow,  
he screamed at her to go away  
while she refused,  
her hands folded across her chest,  
her back bent like a question mark.

Some people stopped  
and some kept walking.  
Suddenly he wailed like an animal in pain;  
twisting on his back, he kicked the air,  
writhing while he cursed her.  
She remained where she was  
not leaving or coming closer.

Two teenaged girls exchanged looks  
and hurried past;  
an older man stepped up  
with a cellphone,  
but there was an ambulance  
parked on the Drive.

The fallen man let loose  
one more scream  
and spread his arms wide  
while medics lifted him  
on a stretcher and evacuated him.  
Not until he was gone  
did she walk away.

*Ann Whitehead*

**Curse XXIV.**

Oh, for the potent substance  
that could heal me from affliction!  
Criticized, I brood and suffer.  
I turn on myself  
and eat out my heart.

From my window I watch  
a tiny silver helicopter,  
like an ornament or a toy,  
heading south  
in a blue-and-white sky.

Whirling gusts pluck  
the last leaves from the trees.  
My mind babbles;  
I am plagued by thoughts.  
How to extract the quiet self,

the one that doesn't speak,  
but writes? Where fidelity  
and honesty are one?  
Say of me, I listened.  
Say of me, I tried to understand.

Yet I made it harder than it had to be,  
afraid of attention,  
unwilling to permit mistakes.  
When laughter could have helped,  
I wouldn't let it.

Let these curses dry up,  
light as leaves, and blow away.  
The struggles are unending.  
They are life itself.  
They have my attention.

*Erica Wright*

### **Fording Calfkiller Creek**

*Our better days are ahead*, but she doesn't hear.  
The dog has tired us in circles.

We chose this leg, said we could stomach the foaming,  
the mean streak, said something about not minding the cold.

And isn't that just like us? I heard of a girl who set out  
to bury her brother, found she couldn't lift him, so lifted

a knife to her body instead. It isn't the same thing at all.  
Now two bodies uninterred.

*Erica Wright*

**The Swelling of a Throat**

The way a dress hangs on a woman  
who's been sick for months,

the way her dress hangs resigned  
to the emergence of bones.

And the man who hauls her bag out  
isn't a lover, but someone she's paid

to deliver her, to leave her  
by the curb. The way I realize all

at once that I've forgotten the details  
of a friend's face or that her face

didn't always scare me.  
Light has torn her skin into fine ripples,

and rest is due. *It's like you said*, she says,  
and I hate her for it.

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### Contributors

Michelle Bitting has work forthcoming or appearing in *Glimmer Train*, *Passages North*, *Poetry Daily*, and elsewhere; and *Blue Laws* forthcoming from Finishing Line Press, December 2007.

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Michael A. Flanagan has poems in many small press periodicals across the country.

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Robert Nazarene is founding editor of *Margie / The American Journal of Poetry* and *MARGIE / Intuit House Poetry* series. In 2006 he published the recipient of the National Book Critics Circle award in poetry. His volume of poems is *Church*.

Amy Pence has poems in *Mudlark* and *Red Booth Review*. In 2003, *2River* published her chapbook *Skin's Dark Night*. The poems in this issue of *2RV* are from her manuscript *Ablaze*, a finalist in many national poetry competitions.

Lynne Potts has read at Poets House, Columbia University, Ear Shot, 440 Gallery in Brooklyn, and Cornelia Street Café. In 2007, a fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Terry Savoie has poems in recent or forthcoming issues of *The Iowa Review* and *The North American Review*. Other poems of his have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Cortland Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Northwest Review*, and *Poetry*.

Sarah Sorenson writes poetry and fiction and has been published in *Eclectica*, *Half Drunk Muse*, *Morpo Review*, *Poetry Motel*, *Stirring*, and *Verse Libre*. She lives in the Deep South.

Anne Whitehouse is the author of *The Surveyor's Hand* and *Fall Love*, as well as short stories, essays, reviews, and feature articles. Her poems in this issue of *2RV* are from the manuscript *Blessings and Curses*.

Erica Wright is the poetry editor at *Guernica* and teaches at the City University of New York. Most recently, she was a semi-finalist for the "Discovery"/The Nation 2007 Poetry Prize.

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### **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. For submission guidelines please visit [www.2River.org](http://www.2River.org).

### **About the Artist**

For over twenty years, Richard Biscayart has taught English as a second language. Biscayart has taught in Taiwan, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Panama, and Japan. He is currently teaching ESL in Milford, Delaware..

**Richard Long, Editor**  
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