

The **2R**iver **V**iew

13.2 (Winter 2009)



Winter Wolf: Watching & Waiting © Liz Amini-Holmes

New poems by David Appelbaum, Michelle Askin
Laurel Bastian, Tony Colella, Andy Cox, Ori Fienberg
Rebecca Givens, Taylor Graham, Gregory Lawless
Richard Sederstrom, Harriot West

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Michelle Askin

A Memory of Everything Begins

Before raping her, he drew them a bath where he let in roosters and a story of him and his wife losing the baby back to her birth mother on the reservation — *Six months clean and you would not think this woman was a user. Her jeans, her rock n roll t-shirt were ripped, yes, but she was soft ... hands on the child as the elder sang a blessing.* And throughout the fucking to lumber trucks, welfare bank casino crowds, and remembering how he said the tribal band had no rights to decide at first, just the state, that he felt like a kidnapper — she asked again and again, *how soft?* Until she knew the mother's mouth: that heroin, meth, crack cocaine — she thought would be gross, tart powder. Not sweet, not the compost's oranges stuck to rotted fish, all night new birds were finding.

David Applebaum

Caucus

Seventeen crows
they caucused there
like pros
around a possum corpse
& I, the eighteenth
came in fog
that once clung aimlessly
to dry brush
& inkstone
as one of Buddha's sermons
but that earnest parley
pressed me to give the habit up
for a say
in what mattered,
my heart,
for what sliver
what gasp of air
makes difference enough
between the still-life
& this real death
this morsel before us
if it isn't who
gets first taste
& who last?

David Applebaum

Serpentine

I found a flattened coil
cheap belt metal
from a wasp waist

& that day tried
in an effort
to relate to
the young snake
held the musky head
in my mouth
& tasted

what the oak was
a forked tongue in heaven
where the road
slithered by a black desert
how God gleamed
or the devil
& every face of stone
knew my sleek belly
for what the race
was

& I ripped
with pure motion
a wrist
beneath the great being
who naming me
watched & prayed
& I marveled
at the fear & loathing of
his warm veins
& his love
for me
those contraries
that sentience
you are

Laurel Bastian

Climbing Agnes Martin's Grid

Everything is stairs. Start at
the waxed floor, hardwood planks
fit with care to dovetail.

All stairs lead to eaves. White rungs
like teeth, like symphonies. Math of stars
and progress, they lead,

I weep the parlor, they lead, in time
our hearts are birds are mandolins.
The quality of air is gong.

One white shoe. One white and kidskin
infant. The childish knees press on
past clouds. Look down-

our beings are followed across mirrors
of water by a fleet of shallow boats.
Each boat filled with lilies.

The altitude has dropped my name.
Where are they sending our bodies?
Small as ants. The flat oar

dipping like a spoon. Twelve o'clock
and all's well at the last rung.
Rise. Wave. Drawing

the swimmers' motion out of its glittering
limbs. Step into the step into
grass made of light,

veins of light, the blind-gold crest of space.
Bless and shed the serviceable bones.
In grace, release the stern.

Laurel Bastian

Stars Shut Down

Even the men concerned only
with numbers are afraid
of the sudden dark.
Twelve hours of light each day
was dependable. These days
it's three and dropping.
The religious think
apocalypse. The pragmatic
carry Maglights. Farmers
nap in dead fields.

We who have been traveling
methodically, the mortar and pestle
of our legs going up and down
driveways with petitions, tinctures,
watches for sale inside our lapels
are at a loss. Evening encroaches at lunch.
Neighbors draw their shutters
and latch the gate.

At dusk, we start our hunt
for the missing: suits
or silver girls with strollers,
the man who left at five a.m.
with a bucket of worms.

Soon there will be only one
shot-glass of light.

Someone is calling the errand boy,
the boy with the original apple.
Someone gives himself up to his
shadow, who goes flat
to the black river to swim.
Someone sifts through alleys
for a bit of sea glass, a shoe, random
exhibits of us shedding our kind,
snapshot, map, key.

Tony Colella

More Than You Can Know

I am more than a man. I am going to be a doctor. I am respectable. I don't dance. My hair is Peter Pan's. I fuck other men. My parents were never married.

I am more than human. I am a medical student in the emergency room. I wear a white jacket with a nametag. I have a scar in the middle of my left thigh. My scrubs are blue, or green. I don't like the color pink. I spent a week with each parent before being traded. I don't tell the truth. I don't trust.

I am more than you think. I don't get emotional. I am walled. I can crack a man's chest. I don't care about blood. A suicide can code in front of me and I can forget. My left leg has been impaled by a thirty-six-inch piece of rebar. I liked the hospital. I like hospitals. I don't always use a condom. My mom wouldn't let my father take me for six months after the fall.

I am more than this. I glow, except at the old ladies with cancer. I remembered the suicide girl the next day. I first intubated a year ago. My suicide girl was seventeen, colorless, with blue lips. I don't like sports. I paid for school myself, and with loans. I've done nine central lines. I have never loved in a relationship.

I am more. I like heights, even though I fell onto the rebar. I like men, even though they all want sex, to be fucked, and nothing more. I like hospitals, even when I toss onto the sidewalk because my suicide girl is too pale, too small, too me. I'd like to find love, even though I just started an ex on the cocktail. I like my parents, when I remember the smell of almond oil on my mom's pillow.

I would like there to be more. I will begin my residency in July. I threw myself off half a building when I was eleven. I failed where the colorless girl succeeded. I am eighty thousand dollars in debt. I like helping people. There's nothing more.

Tony Colella

Pornos

The men are molding me around something I've already molded myself.

They're convincing. I believe them. It's all private. They're molding me around my doorknob. Around the legs of my tripod. Into and under and through the sheets, from above and below, side face-front ass-back. They mold the Play-Doh thought, rolled long wiggled around cut up mashed again.

So private. It's all so private.

The blinds are shut, my room is dark. They mold me into the bed until I'm a part of it not them, changed with the sheets for a color that better matches the tanned walls. They all say the same things, ass lips cock, good good great. They've molded me well, their choice.

I'm theirs maybe an hour. It's quiet here, and private. It's all so private.

Andy Cox

Halloween

Premise: *All elephants are self-aware.*

Elephants at the Bronx zoo recognize themselves in an 8 x 8 foot mirror. A female named Babe uses her trunk to touch a red dot that the keepers painted on her forehead.

Premise: *All dead people are not self-aware.*

Ghosts do not exist but little sweet goblins inhabit our hearts and homes.

Conclusion: *All elephants are not dead people.*

Therefore the leaves are yellow and orange and the wind elaborates October 31 while the elephants at the Bronx zoo join “the cognitive elite.” Therefore the little goblins skip through the wind-swept streets not knowing why these houses are haunted, houses not haunted by ghosts.

Andy Cox

Underpinnings

1.) Down the long hallway are muffled voices of grownups. So long now since I wanted to go to such murmurs and eavesdrop, to overhear what I am not supposed to hear: the unimpressed women the overeager men. The grownups will not go home. The grownups do not know I am listening. The grownups do not know anything

2.) That dog was nothing to me...Cats are just charged particles ... I'm making this up as I go along ... I tried to mimic any number of people none of whom I admired ... Most pandered to the present tense at the wedding ... Good cheer earned the right to its underpinnings ... We lived in the weather it did not live in us ... Someone died ... An 11 year-old girl cannot contain her happiness...

3.) A man's tag says blank: a blank sign informs no one, who drives by with a blank face, who turns the wheel onto the blank street no one knows his mind being blank. Half of half of half and so on until you arrive at the smallest half: half for you and half for me. Cut ten in half. Five is a magic number because someone told me so. This man is half a man his blank name tag says so.

Ori Fienberg

Fair Passage

The cave, they said, led not to hell, because it did not have the dusty dryness of the caves in the village. Nor did it ascend into mountains, weaving its way towards hazy angels. Instead they believed it to be a direct passage to a man's heart.

The cave was kept open. Children often played around the outside and the few who ventured within described comfortable warmth and a moist rumbling.

Conflating other adages every evening women would toss in savory baked goods and small sweet fruits, and though they were unclear exactly whose heart the passage in the cave reached, in the morning the food was always gone.

Ori Fienberg

Flotsam

The mattress is going out to sea; it is the last to go. It waited so long on the sand dunes in the wind that the blankets got twisted and itchy and stiff with salt. They headed up the beach to the road, and huddled together, before being saved by a truck heading inland.

The end tables had tumbled, as best two cubes can, crushing sand castles and shells, polishing sea glass, and disrupting the chattered contemplations of sea gulls, before belly-flopping into the water. Their contents: k-y jelly, a diaphragm, scrunched clusters of unused Kleenex, a few photos, spare change, dead erasers on pencil stubs, and melted kisses, all are lost without their home and sink into the shallows.

When all the rest have gone the mattress glides down the beach and into the shallows where it rides indecisively back and forth on the tide. The water laps gently at the floral print and splashes over the top, pooling in twin molds.

Rebecca Givens

Battery

The Oracle has come and gone, parceled away to more interesting stories. In his absence, patients are monitored for signs of progress.

Patient S. has her test for reading. One word per card, she's asked:
What does this say?

Below are the written words and her responses:

For	S. reads
Boy	Bottle
Hat	Decision
Scarf	Scorpion
Mother	Mortar
Mama	Wake up
Cry	Carriage
Sad	Soapy
Sob	Sob
Table	Tortoise
Love	Longer
Laugh	Loggerhead
Use	You
You	Yosemite
Father	Freezer
Air	I don't know

Assess it well: in the mind of this woman, how did one word cross another, become a shade, a different animal?

More training in reading will be needed, the clinician writes, to bring her utterances under voluntary control.

Rebecca Givens

Portrait of S.

The left side of her brain was affected;
she called the doctor and the doctor said, *No more monkeys
jumping on the train.*

The train of what, she thought, of dairy, of thought itself?

There are countries where only farms exist, where the unweeded
gardens fill with ladybugs. Whole areas
you could drive past, seeing
fields as clear bubbles without sound.

No one has words here, just noises; their voices shiver and rock.

The dog's asleep, the cat continues moaning,
and all the plants settle in their spines.
The green book of their flowering opens,
leaves laid out in sets of two and three.

*What about the veins, they must be trouble?
What about the origami birds?*

Taylor Graham

Hunter's Moon

over a windblown waste of desert
between cliff walls and dropoff to the river,
where I'm searching for a man
I never heard of
before the dawn briefing. Search
without a clue, not a whiff
of human scent. Cold as November
without Thanksgiving.
Cold as fossils between one geologic age
and the next that buries it.
I pitch my tent, the flash-
flood line above my head, a storm
predicted for tomorrow.
But tonight, the sky is a riddle
of stars. moon about to rise.
What could they tell me
of a missing hiker —
his place or mine in the layers
of time?

Taylor Graham

In the Search and Rescue Museum

Here's the Portico of Missing Persons
open-air to the worst of weather. Best viewed
at 2 a.m. when woken from sweet
sleep by phone or pager.

Exhibit: the Flash-flood Victim
splayed like a muddy mannequin
swept off Broadway.
The Dumpster Child they found

in the landfill. The Hanging Man
who noosed himself to a good
stout tree. The Desperate Housewife
whose aim was bad but

good enough to end her. Marriage
isn't always happy-ever, witness
the Bride in pieces
at the bottom of a granite fall.

There are others in this aisle I wander
fast asleep in dreams
and wake up wondering
which one of the so-many missing

I missed.

Gregory Lawless

Elsewhere

Today, we climbed out of the desert, from a base of hard pan, up jags of rock.

On the other side we saw the low sweep of basin, studded with juniper, and a few bushes in meek flower.

Beyond that, our city, curtained in smog.

In truth, I never thought about thirst.

And I never suffered a vision, though my friends claimed, many times, to see some strange machine, aloft, over the horizon at night, darting between stars.

They built fires to it, recited poems to it, and they talked, whenever possible, about what I couldn't see.

It felt like forever. How each day I staggered through tent flaps to conspiracies of dunes, and otherworldly weather, until even the broken clay of my father's vineyards was no comfort to me.

Nor the raven cages and chained leopards in the markets, the hot curses of the merchants.

Still, I can sleep. While, perhaps, an invisible vessel circles above me, charting my dreams.

What it can make of those, I don't know.

But if it has come here from elsewhere, and if it plans to return there, then it must go home with a story to tell.

Personally, I wish it well, sailing home, as it will, through illimitable sky.

And while I wonder if my dreams are valid cargo for such a trip, I know from my travels that nothing real will help.

Gregory Lawless

Toledo

My money hurt.
— Heather McHugh

Years ago I roamed
the streets of Toledo
with one coin in my pocket,
which I would never spend
but roast with matches
and toss onto the sidewalk
and slink back
to watch somebody burn
their fingers as they bent
to snatch it. One day a man
with a president
seared onto his thumb
lit a cigar from the bar stool
next to mine. He flashed
his scar and showed
me, holding the backward print
to a tiny fold out
mirror, the year this coin
was minted, and where,
and he told me
what he would do to me
if he found me, and
how much it was worth.

Richard Sederstrom

Cactus Wren

I think I might have stopped
smoking sooner had it not been
for the one-legged cactus wren.

I escaped to this neighborhood
desert park to inhale a couple
of Camels, not for the solitude

in the sun, or out of it mostly,
or to watch swirls of smoke
drift off in almost no breeze.

I did not hide in the desert only
to skip out on the daily clamor
of equable survival, but to watch

the cactus wren hop, one-legged
on the spindle ghost of the other,
keeping in such nearly perfect

balance from one hidden seed
to the next that the missing leg
supported him like a genie,

like the genie inside that keeps
lungs pumping anyway and brings
us to its senses sometimes.

Richard Sederstrom

I'm Not Telling

I know how the peacock found its way
into the north woods. It landed here.
But that's beside too many points.
Besides, I'm not telling — mostly me.
It's enough that, high in that red pine
the black peacock roosts, at least until
we leave and he builds enough courage
to fly back into the deep forest.
I have heard peacocks cry in the city
in the desert, shrilly suburban.
But back there, in the distance
of dense undergrowth, when he cries
he cries. The night fills with his
distant quiet pain, a dying pain.
He is Abelard, and all else is Eloise.
I know how that is too, but I'm not
telling — anyone, certainly not me.

Harriot West

The Boy with Pale Green Skin

Once I loved a boy with pale green skin. I sat across the table from him in a linguistics seminar where I tried to keep my mind on Chomsky's colorless green ideas but I kept staring at the boy. Bewitched by his phosphorescent glow, I found myself adrift in an underwater grotto, swimming with schools of blue and yellow fish through fields of undulating kelp to the deep-sea palace of my Mer-Prince.

I ran into him this morning when I was buying sushi. He's a wine salesman. Married with two children and a dark blue Volvo. It turns out he was allergic to wheat. He stopped eating crackers and his skin lost all its luminescence.

Some Things I Know

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs his wife and I eat fish tacos and wonder if there will be enough leftovers for dinner.

Upstairs a man is dying while across town passengers mill about the Amtrak station in ninety-degree heat, waiting for the northbound train, the one that is always late.

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs his sister kneels on the living room floor and pins together pieces of a patchwork quilt.

Upstairs a man is dying while on television a woman in a pink dress decides to buy a vowel.

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs my friend is struggling to remember her husband as he was. Not this man who pushes her away when she tries to help him roll over in bed or turns his face to the wall and refuses to speak to her.

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs I blame the man for my friend's grief and wonder why he can't die with a bit of grace.

Harriot West

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs his grandson stares at the bronze statue of a naked woman. Surreptitiously he rubs his finger across her nipples and traces a line to her navel.

Upstairs a man is dying while two thousand miles away a son is angry with a father who never lent him money to buy a house.

Upstairs a man is dying while next door a neighbor wonders if a slab of frozen meatloaf is an okay way to say, "I love you. I care."

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs his wife worries about the smell of death that permeates the house. She walks from room to room with an atomizer until the smell of cedar mingles with the smell of shit and dirty linens.

Upstairs a man is dying while across the street a woman is harvesting lavender. The air is filled with the sound of her shears and the smell of bruised stalks ready to be bundled and hung in the attic.

Upstairs a man is dying while downstairs sunshine passes through Venetian blinds, illuminating dust motes in a shaft of light.

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Contributors

David Appelbaum is a hiker and biker, the past editor of *Parabola Magazine*, and publisher of Codhill Press. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Commonweal*, *Dogzplot*, and *Verse Daily*.

Michelle Askin holds an MFA in Creative Writing from West Virginia University. Her work has appeared in *Obsessed with Pipework*, *The Oyez Review*, *The Sierra Nevada College Review*, *Sub-Lit*, and elsewhere. She lives and works in an intentional community in British Columbia, supporting adults with disabilities.

Laurel Bastian has work in *Cream City Review*, *Margie*, and *Nimrod*; and was a finalist for the Ruth Lilly Fellowship. Bastian teaches a creative writing workshop for writers in prison and is finishing an MFA in Madison, Wisconsin.

Tony Colella graduated with a BA in English from Northern Arizona University in December 2008. This is his first publication.



Winter Wolf: Dying © Liz Amini-Holmes

Andy Cox lives in University City, Missouri. Poems of his appear in *Gulf Coast*, *The Laurel Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *River Styx*, *Sentence*, and *Witness*, among others. *The Equation That Explains Everything* has been a finalist in the Four Way Books Intro prize and the Elixir Press poetry prize.

Ori Fienberg is founder and captain of the NWP Bowling Kings in the Lone Tree Men's League. His work appears in *Diagram*, *McSweeney's Online Tendency*, and *Slurve Magazine*.

Rebecca Givens has new work published or forthcoming in *The Adirondack Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and *Verse Daily*. She currently lives in Boston and teaches at Grub Street.

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada. Her poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere; and she's included in *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University, 2004).

Gregory Lawless is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in publications such as *Best of the Net 2007*, *Blood Orange Review*, and *The Cortland Review*. *I Thought I Was New Here* is forthcoming in 2009 from BlazeVOX. He teaches literature and writing at Suffolk University in Boston.

Richard Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico and in the North Woods of Minnesota. He has been a regular contributor to *Big Muddy*, *Saint Anthony Messenger*, and *The Talking Stick*; and has appeared in *Haruah*, *Passager*, *Plainsongs*, *Tar Wolf Review*, and *The Tule Review*.

Harriot West lives in the Pacific Northwest. Her poetry has appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies, including *Ekphrasis*, *flashquake*, *Modern Haiku*, and *New Resonance 5: Emerging Voices in English Language Haiku*.

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About

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View*, occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series, and podcasting from Muddy Bank, the 2River Blog. Please visit www.2River.org to read the submission guidelines.

About the Artist

Paintings by Liz Amini-Holmes have been exhibited at the MTV corporate offices in New York City and at cafes, bookstores, and galleries throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The paintings here are from a work in progress entitled *Winter Wolf*.

Richard Long
Editor

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