

# The 2River View

15.3 (Spring 2011)



New Poems by Jose Angel Araguz, Jennifer Atkinson  
L. S. Bassen, Andy Cox, David Harris Ebenbach  
Charles Fishman, Dan O'Brien, Susan Azar Porterfield  
David Salner, Anna Lowe Weber



# The **2**River **V**iew

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**Cover Image**

*Eaten* © 2011 by Jackie Skrzynski

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*Underpass* © 2011 by Jackie Skrzynski



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Jennifer Atkinson

## **Canticle of Hours**

Drizzle and dawn intermittent: a produce truck grunts and whines  
its way up.

Crows, pre-echoes, *cronk-cronk* from the bell tower: all four lift off just  
before the noon toll.

Rain, unburdened, gives way to late sun: laughter spills from the  
school's opened windows.

Cracks in the glaze, flaws in the stained-blue light: the splash and  
warble of pouring wine.

Moonlight as if through a door left ajar: the high-pitched tick of a  
watch on the nightstand.

Jennifer Atkinson

## **Canticle of Hunger**

They say she neither ate nor drank;  
Or she lived on music, seven notes so rich in overtones

She couldn't, having swallowed them, consume a cherry more;  
Or seven angels brought her seven bites — full moons turned  
edgewise,

Disks as thin as an egg-white glaze;  
Or she fed on manna that filled her mouth like spun sugar, manna

Dropped from the beaks of birds, one taste at each of the seven hours  
Or she took back her seven times seven pleas, gnawing and gnawing  
the gristle,

Until regret, regret, regret turned to honey in her mouth.

Jennifer Atkinson

## **Canticle of Magdalene and the Lamp**

*for Rene Char and George La Tours*

She feels your eyes like a blind man's fingers touch her contours,  
the features of her face.

She has mused at the lantern for years, waiting, listening to the flame  
contend with a draft, a gust, a calm . . .

The skull rests in her lap like a baby, heavy, anonymous, mysterious  
as a newborn.

It is she herself who unbuttons her blouse, who vacates her alcove and  
opens her hands to you, to whoever comes and then departs.

She stands, pushes the chair flush with the table, and follows you,  
barefoot, treading too lightly to register a sound. Her hair, by now  
tangled and coarse, harbors moths and spiders and the smell of  
scorched milk.

Jose Angel Araguz

## Hansel to his muse

I do not know why  
I give the earth these phrases,  
Sounds, thoughts,  
All broken off in pieces  
That trail behind

Do I expect to find my way,  
To look back and have it all  
Come together, or will I see  
That I have led myself into darkness

Listen — each footstep  
Cackles with the words  
Of twigs and dry leaves

Hold me, sister,  
And tell me when we are almost there,  
When everything behind us disappears,  
When home is what we walk towards

And these words are the sun  
Cracking through branches,  
The forest dissolving  
In light.

Jose Angel Araguz

## **Street Performer**

Blink and you become a child,  
Beholden to your eyes to tell the truth.

If seeing is believing, then God has been painted gold  
And caught mid-step, yawning in New Orleans.

Blink again, and a nostril flares,  
A stray hair needles into the sky.

A dollar bill falls into the cup at His feet; a camera flashes,  
The sound like chewing gum smacked between teeth.

Bright arms land at His side like birds;  
Somebody yells: Get a real job!

We are all witness to something of the second coming  
In those slumped shoulders smoldering with light.

When we shake hands, He calls me brother and leaves gold  
Glinting off my skin like flames seething to ash.

L. S. Bassen

## April Accident

Someone today will get the awful news  
I saw as I walked across the highway overpass  
en route to the library. Below, one firetruck  
angled, closing a lane. The ambulance drove away,  
lights flashing, but silent, no sirens announcing,  
and on the grassy incline on its back splayed a car.  
I slowed and O Jesus, someone just died there,  
I knew. My body halted. Five firemen, two cops,  
the crew from the upended flatbed,  
another firetruck; a line of orange cones outlined  
the scene. Three lanes down to two, no matter  
for so few cars this cloudless mid-April midday  
of white dogwoods opening, daffodils  
and hyacinths, glowing forsythia  
like the trees going green. How could  
it happen on this flawless day? I rushed to the library,  
returned books, and had to write this down.  
But by the time I returned to the overpass,  
the cones, the cops, the trucks and car were gone,  
as if I had imagined it all.

L. S. Bassen

## Double Dutch

The big girls know the ropes  
how to swing them to the beat  
you have to feel in your knees  
and when to spring and sway.

Then you're *in*, all at sea  
scudding the breaking waves  
buoyed by the song the big girls sing.  
When you're grown you can't remember  
the words, but the rhythm is written  
in your bones. Now,  
when you see little girls double dutch,  
you navigate not only the grace  
of getting in, but also the tack of getting out  
without foundering, which matters now.

Andrew Cox

## **Exclamation Point**

These two people were bushwhacked by a business arrangement. At 3 a.m. the tables on the restaurant patio danced a waltz without a witness. The church wondered why the room filled with people. Someone says to someone else we had better play it cool.

Block parties everywhere bring together those who should not be collected. The girl's shell collection waits in a box in the attic for her return. Going solo abandoned this man as he sat in his cubicle. The way she walks transformed the way he lived.

Who would have thought the father-in-law the dust would own the road. Who would have thought these two people's shoes would say hello. A ring will somehow become a dress and a chance meeting.

Uncertainty shakes hands with its two brothers here today and lost. One more sentence before we arrive then the exclamation point. The door opens and then they sit down to meet the new man in her life.

Andrew Cox

## Goodbye

With lipstick and clear skin the daughters let you put them to the right of everything. To the left mothers fall off the map. You could feel outrage but what comes is the inward weather. Even mothers with blond hair leave behind their umbrellas.

A boy woos a girl while the shirts in the closet feel left behind. One word at a time the man finds under rocks what he wants to say. Someone you know is sick and you don't know it. Dead ends kiss the clues so they won't know where to take us.

When someone says everything is going to be ok a caterpillar eats another leaf. Birds perched on bats wonder why the belts don't match the shoes. On most days the weather refuses our kickbacks and bribes.

You can rhyme Mexico with go but it won't help the dictionary give us what we need. A mom meant every word she said but she's lost the urge to speak. No one understands why the word goodbye has fled with such speed.

David Harris Ebenbach

## **Shabbat Comes Over West Philadelphia**

Shabbat comes over West Philadelphia on quiet wings. As the sun heads off into the higher numbers, up from Center City comes the night. Street lights hum on. Cars click slowly into spots on this block or the next while someone stretches out on a bench in Clark Park, the ongoing sound of the basketball not a rhythm but a cadence. Dinner time comes to kitchen after kitchen. People go in to their food and television, and those who come out again take to the steps for an evening of nothing much. They watch that nothing much. It never gets all the way dark here, the light is the orange grease they pop corn in at the movie theater, but it's dark enough that faces go over to further and further shadow. Buses and trolleys. It all continues, slower and slower, until the only things moving are the raccoons, the stray cats, the young men unable to rest. One kid gets dropped at home very late. Out of the car, up the porch steps to the front door. The sound of keys loud on a stilled street. He goes in without having noticed Shabbat moving down Osage Avenue. He wouldn't know how to find the sound of angels within the sound of traffic remote on another street, the buzz of the streetlight, the cadence of the heart. But he will.

David Harris Ebenbach

## Space

all around this house, these  
many white walls. Out back

the gray swingset fit for a child  
of no size, and at the edge

of the far front yard the highway  
carries its occasional traffic.

The sky is on every side of everything.

The horizon is the shuddering  
of train track, the shuddering

of a line that in the middle  
of the night feels all too close —

but in the day it shows us  
how far we are from anything.

Charles Fishman

## Burying Lenin

*The corpse of Lenin returned from its annual touch-up  
this month with a bandage on the right thumb.*

— Susan Sachs, *Newsday* (April 14, 1997)

They keep burying Lenin in Moscow but  
his embalmed corpse refuses to cooperate

How well this mummy has been preserved  
yet how fragile it seems now: digit by digit  
it breaks

The hammer-and-sickle flag no longer flies  
in the red sky of the capital the *Internationale*

no longer marches — dark-booted phantom —  
in the nation's heart Lenin's body lies on its back  
in a black suit

but where is the famous worker's cap that he waved —  
delighting the people — and which Vladimir Ilyich

clasped expertly between his enlightened fingers  
and the imperious thumb? They have buried  
the thumb

and have designs on the fist But Lenin's body lies  
in Red Square in its coppery tomb: it is here

that the Red Army swore to defend the Motherland  
and here that Hitler's *Wehrmacht* froze in Moscow snow  
This is where

the Pioneer children in red bandanas took their oaths  
where the cosmonauts saluted before rocketing into space.

Charles Fishman

## **Finding Hitler's Head**

*Darker than you*, it says,  
without speaking, *Darker  
than you*, nor will it blink  
first or shift its gaze,  
no matter how long  
you stare.

As far as the head's concerned,  
you aren't there and will not be;  
it disregards your sudden burst  
of speed and the creaking gears  
of eternity's ship suddenly  
breaking.

Dan O'Brien

## The Firecracker

was just waiting  
for me, water  
-logged and fractured  
beside a box  
of matches on  
the windowsill  
that looked out on  
our suddenly  
profuse backyard;  
in the house where  
nobody spoke,  
with a mother  
that could never  
shut up: I slid

open the slim  
box, fingered out  
a wooden stick  
and struck the head  
then passed the wet  
wick through until  
that mute wick flared  
to life. And popped  
beneath my hand  
as the glass thread  
slipped in between  
my ears. I ran

outside, Mother  
behind me, How  
could you do this  
to us? How could

I answer when  
I couldn't hear  
a word she said

anymore?

Dan O'Brien

## The Worm

Alone in the boat  
with you, rowing out  
into the lake. Take  
the Styrofoam cup  
and with my fingers  
dig through the fecal  
loam. For night crawlers.  
Blood suckers. His cold  
striated, mucoid  
skin, pink bulbous band  
like a prepuce. You  
show me how to hold  
the naked tangling  
thread, then push the barbed  
hook through. Once, then twice  
till my bait's a balled  
crucifix of dirt.  
Don't be a faggot,  
you say as you cast  
your line out. I drop  
the live worm between  
my bare knees, puncture  
his middle, watch his  
hermaphroditic  
tail flipping blind. Ooze  
spotting the wood grain  
green. Then casting out  
my loose loop, I see  
the innocent worm  
disappear beneath  
that rhythmic lozenge  
of sunlight. Such grace  
when the hook comes back  
clean. One time I left  
the worms on their hooks  
and smiled when I saw  
you searching our house  
for the source of all  
that smell of death.



Susan Azar Porterfield

**April 7, 2:46 p.m.**

How I got here, I'm not sure,  
this woodsy house, cellarless, with the snoring  
cat on the couchback behind my head. It's raining. Literally,  
I could cry. I'm grateful here and now  
for my bare legs, bare feet, the undraped kitchen panes. I'm in love  
with the tiny, blind worms who will wash in through walls,  
adrift and confused, knowing best what the body can feel. Above all,  
this unfilled air.

But this is too dramatic,  
yes? Can I just say, then,  
I'm not unaware that there's sorrow and searing pain  
most everywhere in the world today.

David Salner

## **Gulf Coast Near Tampa**

He cuts a chunk of squid with a scarred knife-blade  
stained almost brown, stabs the bait,  
threads the hook through the jelly-like meat,  
whips the line far out in the channel,  
tells me he's just signed up. A breeze comes in  
from thunderheads on the Gulf, and a bank of clouds  
trails up the river, smoke-like, from the mouth  
to the icy springs. Rough water  
flattens around our two lines.  
Watch out for yourself, I say.  
Watch out for yourself when you get over there.

David Salner

### Three Straight Days

After another storm passes through,  
and the parking lot is a lake of rain,  
I kneel on my stoop and look at the trees  
crowding over the roof line with the sleek  
clarity of water on needles and leaves.  
It's been raining for three straight days  
and it's wet in the garden, wet in the fields.  
Rain coats the lilies, the iris spikes,  
shines on the tiny azalea twigs. Further up,  
rhododendron hide under wet aspen leaves.

I'm an old man, praising summer rain,  
how it blesses the bones. When I was a boy,  
I ran where the creek water flooded the field,  
out in the field where the creek water rolled,  
I ran with my pants rolled up to my knees.

Anna Lowe Weber

## **A Man Dies in the South. A Widow Mourns**

She was reluctant to claim the paltry moment of loss as her own. Didn't want any of it — the dark automobiles, blunt-nosed sharks drifting down the highway as the youngest grandchildren waved to nothing from the tinted windows like small-town pageant queens. She didn't want the ash-soft spot on her wrist he had not grabbed, had not clutched (what strength was there for that?) but had merely stroked with his thumb, lightly, mindlessly, the way one might rub a stone as a worried habit.

There was nothing stricken when it was time. No final utterances or gestures. But the walls of the room seemed acutely white, and the large black men who carried him out were kind, she later recalled. They were strong, lifting him like he was nothing. The day was hot for March, and the humidity was something to get lost in. Something to palm as it all went limp.

Anna Lowe Weber

## **Of Course the Dead Are Hungry**

They want one more stab at it, one more go round.  
Even in such a state — their eyes stitched shut, mouths removed.  
Well, not removed. More accurately, bunged up. Caulked.  
Didn't you know?  
Their mouths are filled with grout.

Before the newly-dead wake, the long dead are hard at work,  
filling that gaping hole with a putty that dries alabaster white.  
The ears and nostrils they fill as well, tilting back the heads  
of the newly-dead to funnel the sealant down.  
With their trowels, they smooth the surface  
between plaster and flesh  
so that when the newly-dead wake,  
there is nothing of our world to take in,  
nothing to see or taste or smell.

But their memories betray them,  
and they try to call out for a hint of what they once had.  
Their arms wave and grope, wanting so badly  
to remember the salty warmth  
of flesh going into flesh.

There is nothing to hear, their ears  
plugged up as they are with putty.  
But from within, something still resonates.  
From within, there is the red hum and vibration  
of machinery. There is the dog's high-pitched whine,  
constant and clear. Begging at some toy  
that can't be had.

*The 2River View*, 15.3 (Spring 2011)

## Contributors

**Jose Angel Araguz** was raised in Corpus Christi, Texas, and now lives in Eugene, Oregon. His work has been published in such journals as *The Acentos Review* and *Rattle* and featured in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. New work is forthcoming in *Hanging Loose*.

**Jennifer Atkinson** is the author of three books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Drift Ice*. She teaches in the MFA program at George Mason University in Virginia.

**L.S. Bassen** won the 2009 Atlantic Pacific Press Drama Prize. Currently, three of her novels are serialized at [troubadour21.com](http://troubadour21.com) and [friedfiction.com/](http://friedfiction.com/). She also reads for [electricliterature.com](http://electricliterature.com).

**Andrew Cox** is the author of *The Equation That Explains Everything*, (BlazeVox, 2010), *Fortune Cookies* (2River, 2009) and *Company X* (Wordvirtual.org, 1999). He lives in University City, Missouri, where he edits *The UCity Review*.

**David Harris Ebenbach** teaches Creative Writing at Earlham College. His poetry has appeared in, among other places, *Artful Dodge*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *Mudfish*. His first book of short stories, *Between Camelots* (University of Pittsburgh Press), won the Drue Heinz Literature Prize. [www.davidebenbach.com](http://www.davidebenbach.com).

*Frozen* © 2011 by Jackie Skrzynski



**Charles Fishman** is the author of *The Death Mazurka*, a 1989 American Library Association “Outstanding Book of the Year” that was nominated for the 1990 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. His more recent books include *Chopin’s Piano* (Time Being Books, 2006) and *In the Language of Women*, to be released this spring by Casa de Snapdragon.

**Dan O’Brien**, a former Hodder Fellow at Princeton University, was recently awarded a 2011 residency at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Bellagio Center in Bellagio, Italy. His poems have appeared in *32 Poems*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Margie*, *New South*, *Nimrod*, *storySouth*, and elsewhere.

**Susan Azar Porterfield** has two books of poetry: *In the Garden of Our Spines* (Mayapple Press) and *Beirut Redux* (Finishingline). She is also the editor of *Zen, Poetry, the Art of Lucien Stryk* (Ohio UP).

**David Salner** has worked as an iron ore miner, steelworker, machinist, and general laborer. His second book, *Working Here* (2010), was awarded first prize by Minnesota State University’s Rooster Hill Press. His poetry has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Threepenny Review*.

**Jackie Skrzyński** teaches drawing and painting at Ramapo College of New Jersey. Her art has been exhibited at Ramapo College, The University of Arkansas, Georgia State College and University, and Columbia College. The images here in 2RV are from her series of deer roadkill.

**Anna Lowe Weber** currently lives, teaches, and writes in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in *The Cimarron Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Iowa Review*, among others.

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## **About 2River**

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.

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



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