

The 2River View

16.4 (Summer 2012)



Summer Produce Stand: County Road A, Illinois

new poems by
S. L. Alderton, Deborah Bacharach, Carrie Causey
Andrew Cox, Dustin Hellberg, Kimberly Horne
Norman Lock, Anthony Opal, Peter Street
Sue Brannan Walker, Amy Wright

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Deborah Bacharach

Out of Town

I sit on the damp grass at Grendel's
and eat while the bums sleep
stretched out in their blue coats
the way I sleep in parks when I am foreign,
walking in desolate places
exhausted beyond fear.

I came down Stromboli, the sky
a bowl of stars, fire erupting
behind my hunched back.
I was so cold trespassing
in vineyards, tripping
on stones I couldn't see.

Now the airports have cubicles
where I could pay and forget
my body is an animal
lying on the ground so close
so close I am afraid
one will wake and I will want
to offer my unfinished meal.

S. L. Alderton

The Last Gas Station in Iowa

Wind sweeps the parking lot so hard
she can almost see it.

Beside the smeared concrete building,
one gray van alone with the pumps.

Dust mingles with cloud
in the milky glass of air.

If houses are lit across the highway,
if wind turbines turn, white in the gray,

she cannot see them.
A kind of terror presses upon her

(or would if she felt
anything but cold):

a fear of loneliness exposed
to the wind,

of these empty places where rain darkens the sky
but does not fall.

As she crosses the asphalt
toward the brink of cloud, it seems

that the van could roll a little further
and fall off the end of the world.

S. L. Alderton

The Stillborn Speech

the words are hot within me.
they struggle and kick
in my throat, in my blood.
they are trying to break out
into the light,
into your eyes,
but fear ever wraps its dark cords around
my larynx,
my tongue,
and strangles the words, keeps them hidden,
dark, still.

it hurts me to keep in the words,
to clamp my teeth upon them,
to press my lips tight,
yet always I press:
for I fear what they will become
in your eyes,
in the light.

I press until I am sick with the words,
choked with the words,
and your eyes,
still-dark,
haunt me.

I need a sword,
two-edged and Caesarian,
to cut the words out,
for in me there is no strength
to bring them forth.

Carrie Causey

Girl Playing Dead

Young again, the throat painted with one dry coat,
at the balcony with a conch shell, nakedly,
through the house upstairs, to behold her
or to have her gallop again as she used to
at all angles. To have her get up and walk!
Warmth without heat, piercing at the ends
under the carpet, the light on me a kindness.
What was she? Now cool as the cat's head
lying in the carpet, on my back, they will ask,
Oh my children! when they find my body
cut with softness and spears and knots,
for my mourners, for my little ones, this thing
held loose in my palm is an heirloom,
Mom's tomato pin cushion through one hand
(skin you can shine a flashlight through)
and the heart beating, and the lizard's skin.
I have to roll my jaunty skeleton in dust
just to play dead.

Carrie Causey

One Dream of Purgatory

After you die,
you have not gone far enough.
Each time you try to rip down
the curtain, it will not
pull free, attached,
god knows where
to the top of an egg-like dome, some crown
of the fabric you lean against now,
slumping, arms crossed
at your chest.
Others, passing by, say:
you take yourself
way too seriously.
Haven't you tried flying?
Or haunting an ex?
Try taking four steps
backward
in a dark room
and see if the form of skin
does not unfasten.
Trail like flashlight light.
This is the only way
to get to the other side,
The way sperm
penetrates,
the way the change machine
only takes
clean dollar bills.
Think smooth
they tell you,
waving between the veil.
Think magician, sleight.
Think ghost.

Andrew Cox

From Me Far Off, with Others All Too Near

Shakespeare, sonnet 61

Too much excitement for one day wonders where
That laughing is coming from and when an afternoon nap
Will come home from its morning of secret errands

Far off a briefcase walks into a solid state building
And let's the elevator take it up to the floor
Where what waits has an extra Y chromosome

Others all too near are on their way to meet
Long hair and a pierced nose for an afternoon of fun
Where clothes have a life of their own

And now the shoes and purse swallow the pill
That makes everything OK while the gold chain
Places a bet on who has the whitest teeth

Laughter saunters up the street confident that no one
Knows where it's been or what it's been doing

Andrew Cox

Lilies that Fester Smell Far Worse than Weeds

Shakespeare, sonnet 94

Small talk found itself without a date
And everyone is disappointed in slow dances
Yet the music had all these ducks in a row
And the fake waterfall dumps its load over the cliff
The tattoos on ankles and diamonds in pierced ears
Rode to the party in limousines with black windows
While small talk stays in with home movies
And an urge to think about what happened

So this is where I take you somewhere different
Somewhere where the looming above your head
Presses down until you wonder what it is
You are supposed to hold up and why you care
And how it is small talk came to the forefront
Of everything you believed went wrong

Dustin Hellberg

Loki

look how earth fills earth
imperfectly and leaves these:

a cipher miscued, a tree
shook with angels, a rotting

tooth and is how the dead
are carried, with chord and branch,

like a swallow's wing when
diving quick and then

breaking back up, the arc
and flight making with a body's

swiftness and appurtenance
an instance and a deception,

an aphasia of such grace
we thought it was our lives

Dustin Hellberg

Usufruct

New Mexico, your simple panorama of corrugated metal roofs blossoming in the evening over the poverty of what must be everyone in the state, I was drowning in you. And on the day I shored up and left, the man I'd given three of seven cigarettes to gave me an eagle feather from his hat, and said the great spirit watches over good souls, and he was a holy man, a Navajo shaman, and I am just this ludicrous person whose heart is sometimes seen for what it's worth, with its holes and threadbare mouth suckling some imagined bride, never believing these words matter or can transform one rock to bread or a woman, or will drain wine from the side of a golden idol, and scare away the vulture eating my entrails balanced on its horns.

Kimberly Horne

Summer With Father In A Small Town

My sister and I always choose to sit
in the bed of my father's truck
with his German shepherd, King,

who bounds from side to side growling.
We love King more than our father
because King is handsome and loyal

and we can tell that King loves us.
Last summer, our father found him
behind the Quick-Stop he manages.

A wire hanger jabbed through his ear,
King was bleeding under our father's
truck. We know all about our father's

history of rescuing animals, his ability
to bring plants back from the dead.
We know he speeds through crosswords

with a pen, does thousand-piece puzzles
in a matter of hours and we would like him
if that was all we knew. I love the wind

stripping my hair from my face, the truck's
faded blue paint, how the hump
over the tire makes the perfect seat

to see everything from—my sister smiling,
King switching sides, people looking after
us as we pass, thinking

what a beautiful dog, what happy children.

Kimberly Horne

West Texas, 3 PM

The blind caves on Reed's Plateau
look like yesterday's caves, the sky yesterday's, the wind
not from here anyway. Loneliness holds my hand
and we watch the Texas sage blooming
in its own sweet time,

everything talking to itself about
subjects less selfish,

the finches, busy in the present tense,
building nests out of breakage,
all the commando centipedes
crossing the road one more time even if it kills them,
the rattler sleeping, always sleeping.

It's all enough to make one miss Alabama,
the embrace of humidity, the death grip of kudzu.

Norman Lock

2nd Alphabet of Shadows

Visited in his sickroom by his own unquiet history, William DeVries remembered how, years before in Cirebon, an aboriginal light whose atoms' origin was the birth of the Hindu gods had fallen like someone exhausted by a journey into a darkened room and with that light were shadows cast by a shadow-master's puppets (warrants of unseen demons and divinities). A rude soldier, then, sent against the Portuguese, DeVries' only thought had been for a Javanese girl sitting on a jute mat, her head bent as though abashed by the shade of Arjuna, handsome companion to the Lord Krishna. Now in Haarlem, the Dutchman was once again in that theater of shadows. Calling for paper and pen with which to write his testament, he soon lost himself in inky letters like someone who has entered woods emptied of all light.

Norman Lock

Alphabet of Negative Numbers

No numbers then to render the day's unraveling—its green and purple raiment turned to rags of sunset; nor were there integers to register lake water's amorous chafing against sand, or sand's noiseless relapse on dunes filigreed by the Gobi moon, or how—on certain nights—a courtesan's dress would fall in a lamp-lit room above the rice merchant's in the imperial city of Cháng'ān at the easternmost end of the Silk Road. Not until two centuries before the Common Era (when Qin Shi Huang was entombed with his funerary army of terracotta) did Fou Gin think to ink on bamboo strips negative quantities pungent with desire—an addition to *Nine Chapters of the Mathematical Art* without which the world thereafter could compute its disintegration as if to a melody played on the pipa (that fretted five-string lute), whose plaintive notes have been left to decay on the autumn evening's air.

Anthony Opal

Fragments

Translated from the *Book of Job*, from the Hebrew

1.

please tell me if you understand
 who decided
what the earth's form would be or who
 stretched the line up
on it and where its bases were
 sunk or who laid
its cornerstone as the morning
 stars sang as one
and all the heavenly beings
 shouted for joy

2.

or who slammed the door on the sea
 when it burst forth
from the womb when i made the clouds
 its outer clothes
and thick darkness its underwear
 and declared this
by setting limits and locks and said
 this far you will
come and no farther and here will
 your proud waves be
stopped

3.

 have you entered the warehouses
of the snow or
 seen the warehouses of the hail
which i have kept
 for times of trouble for the days
of war and battle

4.

what is the way to the place where
the light is kept
or where the east wind is slap-sent
upon the earth
who has cut a channel for those
torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolts
to bring rain on
a land where no one lives this
desert which is
empty of human life only to
satisfy the
wasted desolate land and to
make the ground put
forth grass

5.

and who's the rain's father and who
has given birth
to the drops of dew from whose womb
was the ice made
and who has given birth to the
bright hoarfrost of
heaven who makes the waters hard
like stone and the
face of the deep is frozen

6.

can you knot the chains of the Ple-
iades or untie
the cords of Orion can you
bring forth the stars
in their perfect season or guide
the bear with its
cubs do you know the laws of the
heavens can you
establish their rule on the earth

Peter Street

Hotel Room

for all Night Porters

She cries her memories,
a party girl remembering
her friend she found dead
in a Bolton bathroom

after a night out pissed
and pissed again trying
with every breath and breath
of her body and soul
to stop her going
but couldn't

now one year on
It's the turn of her young apprentice
his first office party
to be pissed and pissed again

slumped over the shower basin
his face flat against the anti-slip ribs
where hundreds of customers have stood

washing whatever down
the plug hole
where his red stomach lining
is now stuck to his face
she sobers up,
stacks her tears behind her

takes control
puts him on his back
and breathes and breathes
him back to life

Peter Street

Another Sideline - 1957

for Thomas Edgar Street

Two shillings
for every dead dog or cat
run over poisoned even shot

would be waiting with heads on
heads off maybe other bits
missing every time

my nine years entered
the fire-hole where sulphur
smacked me in the nose

Dad would clang open the
incinerator door turn
pick up Rover or Tabby

he kept separate from the coal

with a clean cloth
he would first wipe off
any dirt or blood

then giving them a last stroke
he'd throw them in
and I would watch

someone's pet melt into nothing

Sue Brannan Walker

2:55 a.m.

In the long dark deprecating morning, mourning the sad wrinkles of it, the hands wringing time like an aging fricatrice, porthole open, wind blowing through it, rattling bones, bones rattling toward doom, and she was afraid they would break, the long bones, the short ones, the femur, tibia, fibula, broken like promises, like dreams, and there was the wish-bone of the chicken, and Grandpa said if she held it up after she'd nibbled the meat off, it would snap in two, and she couldn't remember if it was the long end of the bone that meant her wish would come true, or the short end she held in her hand, her bony hand holding to what never made any never-mind to start with, and it was in the dark before day, the long dark waiting morning, mourning the loss, and the clock's broken hands.

Sue Brannan Walker

Despair

It is not possible to pick it up like a feather fallen to the ground, pick it up like a penny, heads up, or tails, pick it up like a foul rag in the bone-shop of the heart and toss it in the garbage, or even to pick it out of a bin, the one rotten apple, pick it out of the stack of papers, the signature missing, to pick it like a peck of pickled peppers, a pick-ax, one end of the head pointed and the other end with the chisel edge ready to cut through roots; hey na na na na na na, na pick up, pick up, pick up the pieces, pick the meat from the bones, pick the lock, the fruit from the vine, the potatoes from the field; is it not possible to pick the right crowd or handpick the right person picking the chaff from the wheat?

Amy Wright

Cracker Apocalypse

There's nothing left but the Composition teachers and the Bic pens. Day is night everywhere. The crackers are a bunch of soaks and roll on the moss drying out. There are several ways of looking at it—one with hope and the others without. At the green boxes, cracker children hang ten toes off the beds of pickups, which magnifies the feeling of being at the forefront of everything. Behind them, eternity, before them—cracker flash-in-the-pan: innumerable roidy starlings that won't go out.

Amy Wright

Twelve cracker cheerleaders on a bus encounter a band of aliens

Thanks to Sammy G, the only disc jockey of a local radio station, a team of young crackers are called in to be filmed for a believe-it-or-not show on alien sightings, although the girls, who have unbelievably trustworthy faces, have not themselves seen the extra terrestrials. They don short-skirted uniforms bought with candybar sales & gloss their lips w/ Too Faced and Sugared Apricot. When the camera rolls, they point wide-eyed from the windows of a school bus in a Piccadilly parking lot in broad day light —at nothing. Between takes, they laugh and read fortunes to each other from a box of cookies that assure them they are well-liked and everyone will come to their birthday pool party. Each time they take their places at the window, they prepare their expressions, lifting their gazes to the supposed craft's coming. It's ghostly, how you can almost see them, carrying so many crackers like pretty gunshot before them.

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Contributors

S. L. Alderton lives in Aurora, Colorado, where she is pursuing a B.A. in journalism at Metro State College of Denver.

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Carrie Causey holds an MFA from Vanderbilt University. Her work has appeared in *Everyday Genius*, *Ploughshares*, *Plume*, and *Sycamore Review*. *Ear to the Wall* is forthcoming from Ampersand Books.

Andrew Cox is the author of *The Equation that Explains Everything* (BlazeVOX 2010) and the chapbook *Fortune Cookies* (2River 2009). He lives in University City, Missouri, where he edits the *UCity Review*.



Boy on Bike with Windmills: Illinois

Dustin Hellberg, a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, is currently a PhD candidate at *Europäische Universität für Hochstudien*, and he teaches at Yonsei University in Seoul, where he is editing an anthology of Korean poetry in translation and finishing a second novel.

Kimberly Horne lives and teaches in Austin, Texas. Her writing has appeared in *Crab Creek Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*, among others. Her MFA in poetry is from the University of Virginia.

Norman Lock has written novels, short fiction, and stage, radio, and screen plays. He received *The Paris Review's* Aga Kahn Prize and a National Endowment for the Arts' poetry fellowship. His latest books are *Pieces for Small Orchestra & Other Fictions* (Spuyten Duyvil) and *Escher's Journal* (Ravenna Press).

Anthony Opal is poetry editor for *The Economy* and chapbook review editor for *TriQuarterly Online*. His work has appeared in various magazines and journals, including *Boston Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *The Progressive*. He lives in Chicago, where he is a graduate student at Northwestern University and works in the department of Art History.

Peter Street has worked as a gravedigger/exhumer, head chef, youth worker, prison tutor, and war poet during the conflict in Bosnia. He has published five collections of poetry.

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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
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