

The 2River View

6.1 (Fall 2001)



Peppers as Medusa © 2001 by David Zvanut

new poems by
Wendy Carlisle, Laura Hartman
Romana Iorga, Elizabeth Knapp
Ann Neuser Lederer, Walt McDonald
Mark Melton, Allan Peterson
Matthew Schmeer, Leonore Wilson

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

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Richard Long, Editor

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Orders

When Aunt Lou strolled out onto 16th Avenue barefoot,
past the blooming guavas, through their gardens, imagining herself
invisible in her housecoat, as in a magic cloak, the neighbors

read their papers silently in front of mute TVs
while she shambled out of her own hush, her vocabulary
narrowed to a wrinkled forehead. Fifty years before, her fiancé

withdrew into Bolivia's jungly silence, emptied his conversation
into Holy Orders while, on the home front, she wrote
advertising copy for brassieres, before and during the great war

that robbed so many men of something good to say. Then redeployed
to Opa Locka, volunteered for the Red Cross, wrote essays
under a kumquat tree that dropped its sour harvest at her feet.

Then learned Castilian Spanish, kept her discipline confined to morning
Mass and novels, was alert to words until November when her cortex
came undone and her intent fell through into some jungle,

Padre, Jesus, ayuda me, a last reflex before she looked away,
sweetly knit her hands and ambled out beyond
the poison Oleanders into murmuring air without her shoes. And we,

as witnesses to great conversions stand, struck dumb, to watch,
stare after her like barefoot idiots, robbed of our speech.

The Horse We Rode In On

The theme you play at the start of a number is the territory
and what comes after
Which may have very little to do with it is the adventure.

—Ornett Coleman

A boring car trip ended near the ocean where tongues of pine lick the dusty glass, and mice, upholstery tacks, buttons & lint, vie for a room with a view, and the cracked music on the radio growls cocktail lounge, double scotch. We made the slick drive from home all the while feeling the humidity exhale on our necks, dissecting the map and counting motorcycle cops. Only yesterday the mare died in the palmetto scrub. We dragged her stiffening body behind the tractor with a chain while her side made a shallow furrow in the field and iridescent horseflies danced over her hooves, then drove away while the old man who interferes with fillies dug her grave.

We were at Stuckey's eating Peanut Patties when he buried her too shallow. We were at the rest stop when he put on his prison suit, pressed a knife of gin under his ribs and wound himself up like a cheap travel clock. We were investigating a Manta Ray when the mare's foreleg jumped up through the sod for the dog's high tea. This morning we lay plates on the gritty planks as if the Grand Duchess had just been crowned, as if this were the normal two weeks in seaweed dodging men-o-war, ammonia ready in the car. We sucked up the time and temperature, rifled the Almanac and issues of *Guns and Ammo* left behind by Mr. R & R intent on hunting animals off this back porch where we sat, tipped-back, our eyes closed to animals, ignoring the old man, who ticked for days in his tobacco-stained house all the time wondering how to find a new wife.

Wendy Carlisle

On Andromeda

They know all about us on Andromeda.

—Denis Johnson

No matter how sly we are, how coy, how our bicycles rust on their racks, our tires release their radial cables, our cars sit in various garages without being started up gathering pollen dust while we travel to work through tunnels, buy our groceries on-line; no matter if we never answer the phone, don't own a beeper, do nothing more than act the fool, pick our celestial noses and beat our dogs, they see us.

Sirrah, Almak and Mirach watch. We are their daytime TV. *All my young and restless generally hospitalized children*, they murmur, as we flagellate and fancy step under our handmade aluminum hats. They find us funnier than Perseus holding the Gorgon's head, our world is their Galaxy Drive-in, the most distant visible, most risible, of entertainments.

We have no allies on the worlds of the Chained Maiden, only Andromedans observing our affairs. *Earth: The Movie*, they chuckle as we roll across two million light years, insignificant photons, neither wave nor particle, learning too slowly, then going away.

Laura Hartman

talk about the weather

i have torn my heart out of my own body and
held it beating in my hands
to study it, to understand why
yet it will reveal nothing and just keeps on beating
stubbornly
even after being poked and squeezed rudely
even after i stomp on it.
my body seems to be more cooperative
lending me a sense of rhythm, of everyday life
when my mind acts like a scratched record.
i hide my blood wet hands when you call
and we talk about the weather.

Laura Hartman

the rising song

last night's dreaming
a cold sun that lays over the land
this morning blue smears left shining
on the swell of the earth
swift creek
seasons tumble down the length of my body
blood on my thighs and
a crow swings flapping
to the height of a pine tree

Romana Iorga

The Road

Just above the road there was
this pale hand waving at me.
Dust and ashes rose in the sun.
The trees seemed to be in winter.
Their long, crooked limbs poked
into my eyes. I stepped
on patches of ice. It could
have been cotton, hardened
to disguise its proverbial softness.
No slipping, I told myself. This
road is long but it will end.
I followed the dry spikes of the fence.
I felt almost happy.

Talcfundi

Talcfundi likes to close windows.
When it rains outside
he shuts them tight.
He keeps the sun in a bottle
under his bed.
This is the time
he pulls out the cork.
He lets his prisoner slam
its body on wooden shutters.
When it snows, Talcfundi
shuts the windows even tighter.
Two rows of hinges
buckle into the world,
rust until spring.
Talcfundi is a weather-wise-man.
He's got his private sun
and nothing can harm him.
He knows the advantages
of being at home.

Graftings

I.

after Tomas Tranströmer

Treble of noon. Light like a piano concerto
falling through C. The beautiful slag of ocean.

Mirrors crawl from the sand. On their knees.
The arm of a white sail waves to the shore.

We live at the edge of a word like Sirens
on the rock-face drowning whales.

Horizon bars the distance. The blister of Jupiter
rising through heat. Its chorus of frail moons.

Sound is a lighthouse on a faraway island.
The dark hull of the world drifts farther away.

II.

after Osip Mandelstam

This is the sound of night sputtering through reeds.
This is the empty cradle of dawn. This is the candle

cast over our graves. These are our wings,
our silences. This is the broken spindle of song.

A man knocks lightly on Death's door.
Nothing answers, nothing breathes.

Wide avenues fill with light. Engulf him.
Shadows on the clock tower breed.

This is the path the man's footsteps have taken.
Follow, dark angel, wherever they lead....

III.

(The Death of a Monarch)

Someone pours honey down a long well.
Shadowy thunder, O night's cavalry.

Footfalls on the palace floor.
Many flights up, the body is washed, wrapped,
brought down.

A nation begins its slow unfolding.
A mountainside chiseled in light.

Through the arches of doorways,
the low dirges begin, prayer beads of amber
and balm.

IV.

Waking, the seabed at my door.
Come to me, greedy silence.

Let your small brain crowd my room.
Let your strings hold, still as a harp's.

I opened the mystery of my life,
and turned each of its fibrous pages.

It smelled of wood-smoke, ransom.
Now, flushed apricot, oval

of my looking glass, my memory,
be as the Pacific. Be endlessly.

Bits of Advice

From afar, before budding,
the trees' bones looked identical.

Fingering the nubs,
the expert told a better story.

*Too late, he said, for the Wild Cherry,
a messy one anyway,
creature of birds spitting stones
from atop old fences.*

Then, he taught the sweet names
of others: *Hickory, Sugar Maple, Mulberry,*
and the sources of their stresses.

For days I peered upwards,
eyes opened to sights
I had never noticed:
Topping, splitting, improper pruning
by electric company workers,
and other horrors.

I saw similarities everywhere:
Pulling back blankets,
counting every rib....
(How the skin, thin as a handkerchief,
rolls over the bones....)
Tenderly, tenderly, reaching
into a bedsore the exact size of a fist.
Glimpsing into the body's caverns,
sinews and scaffolds.

Ann Neuser Lederer

Weep No More

I leave your room empty.

—Thomas Merton

It is threat enough to sever
all pink, fresh tendons in advance,
to yank out your own tongue.

Midwinter, in Michigan, even
the hugest lakes freeze over.
You can walk on the moon of their surfaces.
You can drive your truck out to the center.

One night late, I wandered
between waters, in fog.
Suddenly, whirls of red lights,
muffled sirens: The rescuers
once again were pulling
someone out of the ice.

The twists of blue pain as flesh thaws.
The alive winds leaping over craters.

Even a veil, wound snug over ears
in the double walled cloister,
is no longer adequate.

Walt McDonald

Aunt Molly and the Widow's Peace

Aunt Molly kept her head shaved
after the tumor. Gruff in housecoat
and sandals, she waddled and hugged us,
breasts like water beds, breath like beans

and garlic. My brother called her Hippo
for her missing teeth. Uncle Don was gassed
in the First War, and Molly took up preaching
to heal him—Sister Molly, a harmless widow

who read palms, a medium for red-eyed widows
in black. Aunt Molly cared for the faithful,
the desperate. Both knees went bad, wrenched
when she staggered in a trance, or drunk. In bed

with both legs swollen, she swore the divine
had touched her, though my cousin scoffed
it was wine. When surgery scarred her skull
like Frankenstein's, she waddled, a monster

with bifocals tugged to the tip of her nose.
For weeks, her friend Miss Emily squeezed
papayas and mangos, bathed and changed her
like a baby. We saw them both for months

around the town, holding hands
with strangers, weeping and praising God,
Aunt Molly shouting in a wheelchair,
serene in green and purple turban,

whispering a tremolo spiritual, joined
by frail old couples on park benches,
and men with tattooed fists holding bars
of windows in the county jail.

Walt McDonald

When Out of Doors Seemed Boring

Under the dull eyes of bulls we snorted,
thrusting thumbs from our skulls like horns.
Earl bowed his back, but the bulls ignored him.

They dropped their bony heads to graze,
praying hosanna to weeds that made us sneeze.
We prowled the range for danger, the sun

thundering silence, miles of the same flat horizon.
We envied boys in town who chose up sides for games
or chased each other's girls on bikes.

We studied the thrusting bulls, rattlers striking
at ropes we dangled. We shot rattlers and hawks
with our fathers' rifles and rigged kite wings

for flight. We crashed from lofts into barnyards,
breaking the same monotony of hours.
Now, in tract housing in town, I wonder

how many splendid hawks we shot, how often angels
saved us, how many rattlers crawl from boys
too bored to let them live.

Mark Melton

A Straight Line

That's the one you see
just before dawn, when you've
stayed up all night.

The one that sets fresh murder plans
in action.

The one you watch from across
the ocean like a would-be refugee,
mulling the lead in your shoes.

Mark Melton

Untitled

It's strange that a place still exists
after you've left it.
That street where you got lost at 2 a.m.
is now filled with sunshine, and people
oblivious to your absence.
Someone is walking up the stairs of your hotel,
holding the key to your room in their hand.
Beside the subway entrance a beggar
accosts somebody else for loose change.
Somebody else is chasing their hat
along the embankment. It is a green hat. Green.
A green hat.
At the train station someone is stepping down
onto the platform but no-one notices him arrive.

Ghost Story

We know the occupants. They tell us a true ghost in this world is lost, and any living in your house should be counseled out. But those of the everyday, the spook glimpsed in the coffee pot, the book opening its pages to what you were thinking by itself, the leaf shadows becoming rats on the lawn of the Rhode Island Historical Society, pets switching from one life to another after an owner's exit, or reverse, are this world's, and cherished, just as the apples are not dead but seem so, falling and rotting and suffering wasps in their abdomens striped with night and a sunny day, and carry the idea, or promise of life in death, the way we might replace words with an almost natural equivalent, permission for persimmon, for instance.

Allan Peterson

Dark Companions

A flutter of something far away
a city a star whose own wings interrupt its light
a variation suggesting a dark companion

And here is the kingfisher
dark star itself not fifty yards off flickering
above itself seeing through glitter to the minnow

Yesterday on the anniversary of Nylon
Ganymede was described in new photos
as looking like thin ice

a place where you skate alone at great risk
where you see ghost shapes in the greeny glaze
Below you history is described as panorama

but experienced as single poignancies
discrepancies probably not to be resolved
But I hate to say never

hate to say a feather is like dead hair
to stand back and see less detail than before
I know they have thumbs and fingers

the birds variously interrupting the planets
the cities whose ribs open to the twin tricksters
day and night

I know any minute a thrasher
standing on the frozen birdbath will try drinking
with the gauzy bird beneath it

Matthew W. Schmeer

The Fly

The plate
with the blue rose pattern
is chipped
and still the fly
on its back
in the casement
does not notice
the meat bleeding
and steaming there,
but inches along the glass,
his wings pruned
by the claws
of an indolent cat.

Matthew W. Schmeer

Samhain

In October the cats come home
dragging their tails through mud
and leaves freshly wet with rain.

The Creation of Desire

Suppose there was an eighth day
after God had rested, when he retained some vigor
and without knowing it, out of sheer boredom,
he dreamt of the lascivious:
thought of rumps and necks
and breasts releasing such energy
that the sun in the heavens grew jealous.
Suppose God after rinsing his great shoulders
and shaking his head, said there must be
something beyond me, some wild strength
in matter that rises, swells like the surf,
so that the heart bends in ecstasy,
something that will make the flesh blossom
vibrate, seethe unequivocally, yes
some yearning, deepening in man
so he is pulled out of himself, out of
the thousand threads that hold him fast,
so every fiber of his body
will whinny and shimmer and birth,
something that will lure him back to me
among the wet grasses and
spongy tussocks, some booming
in his breast, some pulsing and thudding
such that he will praise in unrelenting
hallooing, so that he will razzle
the feather of laughter, and gorge on pleasure,
he will detect it everywhere, even in the shadow's
splatter, so audacious will he be with
delirium in each nanosecond of happiness he will
speak in proclamations and so on the eighth day God
invented desire out of the sound of rain
and a man and woman running a bit,
out of lightflecks and spores and
bejangled roots and riffled leaves and in the brightest day alive
henceforth desire came.

World as Church

Just think of the blossoming parsnip, or the button quail as divinity, try to see the rising moon as so or the touch of the iris tongue, also the early hawk as it perches on the black oak or the thin lanky hindquarters of the ant, the matted camellias thundering the porch with petal, discover the small motes of the dried pea, its husk like the cry of the pine cricket, and the dogma of arroyos and snow-melt, the passion of needle grass and berries and mistletoe in December when it reaches out to us with its heady midriff; the world is church, is chapel, altar, blood and body in its soft skin and its fervor, in all the salt-vacancies of the ocean in dawn and dusk, the affirmation of God collects in the russet-headed grass of summer and in the tattered fungi and the fistfuls of snails and sand verbena and the wings of the sycamore; the hedgehog in his hole knows the wisdom of Leviticus, considers passages from Proverbs because his face is always open to the glaze of morning, as is the nude body of the seahorse under the ocean's momentum, everything of earth is the krill of a cathedral, the field and forest anticipates its potential as assuredly as the barn owl crouches to enwrap the vole with its talons, the gospel manifests itself in the facets of light and the falling of water, angels both of them, what more proof do we need that pollen holds reverence and constellations hold transformation, what proof exists at the core of this orb is there for our asking, there like any element, in abiding beauty, the wholeness of the finite fecund for our delight.

Authors

Wendy Carlisle lives in East Texas, land of Budweiser & boviculture. Her book, *Reading Berryman to the Dog*, from Jacaranda Press, is available at Amazon.com, as well as from Spring Church Books, 800-496-1262.

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has recently appeared in *Cross Connect*, *Brevity (Six)*, *The Blue Moon*, and *National Forum*. She works as a hospice nurse.

Walt McDonald has published nineteen collections of poetry and fiction including *All Occasions* (Notre Dame). His poems have been in journals such as *APR*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *First Things*, *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, and *Poetry*. He is the 2001 poet laureate of Texas.

Mark Melton currently resides in Melbourne, Australia, although various fragments of himself have been known to surface in certain parts of Europe and the United States. Apart from writing, he dabbles in web design and edits *3rd Muse Poetry Journal*. His hobbies include playing computer games, procrastinating, and writing about himself in third person.

Allan Peterson has recently published in *The Marlboro Review* and *Three Candles*, with new work forthcoming in *Fine Madness*. He is a recent recipient of fellowships from the Florida Arts Council and the National Endowment of the Arts.

Matthew W. Schmeer edits *Poetry Midwest* and is a Writing Tutor and English instructor at St. Louis Community College. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Crab Creek Review*, *The Hawai'i Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Poetry Motel*, *Potomac Review*, and *Salt Fork Review*.

Leonore Wilson has published in such magazines as *Quarterly West*, *Laurel Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Five Fingers Review*. She teaches creative writing at Napa Valley College.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual writers in the 2River Chapbook Series. All publications first appear online and afterwards in print. Submission guidelines are available at www.2River.org.

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