

The 2River View

7.1 (Fall 2002)



Seeds for the Famished © 2002 by Oliver Curran

New poems by Gabriel Arquilevich, Adrienne Banks
Wendy Carlisle, James Grinwis, Vicki Hudspith, Marlene Lintzer
Walt McDonald, Rochelle Ratner, John Sweet, David Wright

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Richard Long, Editor

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Dorothy, After

North, South, East, West who could ever keep them straight?
I, for one, barely remember to pick up the dry cleaning.
Why did I think it would be a good thing to click my heels?

Football and baseball, soccer and swimming—dates as hard to remember
as witches' names. These days, I'm a whirlpool carpool, strong enough
to lift a house, spin it around with someone in it drinking Margaritas
and set it down in some other county, not a dry county,
a county with a nice cocktail lounge made of yellow bricks,
and a well-dressed businessman settled in the corner booth.

So what if the bartender is under five feet tall?
So what if the booth is behind red curtains?

I might go right up to that man—even up to his room
and never complain if he talked to me all night in aphorisms,
but only protest when it was over and he showed me how to get home.

Cinematic

1. *About The Set*

The stars on the patio overlooking the river cost
thousands of dollars
but I can't complain, I have you under the *ristras*,

drinking margaritas from
those wide glasses with saguaro stems
and I'm almost holding your arm

while your animal smell burns in my head
until I have to move
so I step you along the footpath, the trees vivid

with last light, the Tower Life building,
argoned in green while vacationers rattle those Cornhusker hats
with the yellow ears that suggest

boozy picnics, past lives
and toss off one-liners, wild under the shower
of pearl bulbs lighting up in the cypress

like ribs in an umbrella, extras jubilant
on the *vaperetti*, Texas-drunks in tan Stetsons,
Conjunto like I planned it. So what

if you're a San Antonio hero who bowls
on Sunday while the dressed-up city prays.
I have to admit how little

I expect: neon, tequila,
the mostly-cinematic dusk dissolved
to close-up: two faces, the fading light.

2. *Another B Movie*

On this reel: the desperate sunset, twinkle lights, a tracking shot along the manipulated river:

In the Excelsior Bar the accordion is a staggered heartbeat. The man who is not a hero grinds away on the dance floor. His face is buried in his partner's neck. His movements are always a little off the beat.

These are images designed to show how the man keeps his heart out of the rhythm, out of the strings of peppers, the bullfight posters, the Jose Cuervo, keeps it safe from the neon and limes.

In the next reel: the man is on the riverbank, drunk, wearing a ten-gallon hat, talking about spares and strikes. On the soundtrack: the beating of a perpetual tourist heart.

The film clarifies what happened in the Tex-Mex bar.

3. *The Poem That Should Have Been A Movie*

If it were a movie, the poem would be a show-off.

If it were a movie, the poem could picture lovers breathing.

If it were a movie, the poem might imagine how a heart hides out.

But the poem sadly knew it was a poem. Far away from the original dance floor, it ground its hips to Tejano music in some seedy dive. It two-stepped with a cast of cinematic Mexicans, loose women and misfits, then got drunk and sloppy and wandered out alone to the sidewalk where it lit up a cigarette. Later it strolled down to the water dressed in a modified suit of lights. The poem ended the evening with a boy from a family of bowlers. Only the accordion player noticed.

Gabriel Arquilevich

Apology to My Son, Eight Months in the Womb

I sent the thought of you tumbling when I knew.
There were calls like a newsroom
and nothing I could do: I could wander,
do what I do, but not without your hazy truth

rounding out my view, tenting my nights
as you inch your way up
like the water in your sister's tub, like the Legos
your brother's putting together.

I spent the summer shaking you loose,
watering every newborn
blade and dry patch hardened into clay,
into the life I had zipped up and called a family.

By now you must be hearing
our muffled kitchen voices
designating your trundle bed, singing
non words and naming you.

The way death ends, you begin,
and I'm still trying to find my way to you,
to welcome you home
at the end of our dark tunnels.

Heartbroken

People seem to think they know
everything about poison oak,
about runaway horses and floating balloons;

what about nosebleeds
at recreation parks
or some dying animal on a Thursday afternoon?

You see, the day was long
and full of dragons
sweeping over the cobwebbed moon,

(I would have run that beagle over
if I could, lingering
in the dark barns, in the wet country)

and I want the time I held you
cloudlessly, your original
eyes, your hands.

I could continue in this aching horizon
or dismiss you as one
thumps on the sun with a hammer.

Cervical Biopsy

after the malignant cells removed,
in my dreams
the only way for a man
to touch a woman
is to carve the bad parts out
the gray rot meat out,
a fish fillet,
as if the only proper way
for a man and woman to meet
is at the cervix with razorblade

it is easy to catch
the tongue by the hook.
the little private fish
sick at the mouth of me,
death will make it well.

but I remember when
my first fish was filleted
her opal scales cold
choke mouth drowning
gills fanning
and I remember the trauma
of finding the belly full
the blade blink
the blood and egg stream
rinse clear with such rush
the fish eggs. flesh baubles. perfect.
flush downstream.

the bad parts carved out

Rickets in Winter

the Pakistani man
at the roast beef deli
recalls his first woman,
bought cheap.
lifting a perfume bulge,
he did not know where to put it.
he did not know
what to do
with so much of a woman

I dream of a Pakistani prostitute.
I wake up to another soupy evening,
winter opening up her legs
peeling thigh from thigh
revealing never-ending
dark, dank, bloat.
the long night of winter's legs sprawled,
she opens up, a willing whore.
I mourn the sun,
for what to do
with so much whore.
I hump it idly.
we make crazy eyes at one another
in the maddened winter ward,
our tongues made of snake meat,
our fingers probing a dark stench.

Chihuahua

It's the greatest desert in North America
as well as the smallest canine ever.
I was hiking the rim of it and when
it belched a dust storm curled out of
the fathoms. At home, I spend hours
sifting through newsprint,
and folding magazine articles
into paper animals. Chihuahuas
are buoyant in desert environments,
almost like fennec fox—
however, I don't know what the word means.
It could mean *smudge*, or *ice*,
or *moonstone*; something particular
about the desert. Here,
the snow rocks off the shingles
and hits the sidewalk like a belt of teeth.
Sheepdogs and Samoyds fit the north
like oil fits crankshafts, but they don't
smell as such. Out of a blizzard,
they're huge, ambulatory skunk cabbages.
When the rain goes out of itself it leaves
wind or snow. Dust goes somewhere fast
then nowhere. Tracks in sand
sigh like ice-worms in spring. I was hiking
the rim of the Chihuahuan desert.
I'm not adapted to this environment.
A coyote glued herself to the shade
of a chulla plant. It's like nailing
a needle with a toothpick. She stared
and opened her mouth. The dust storm
billowed somewhere south and missed us.
The silence fell like a sac of water.
Each step you lose some water.

Configuration of Crumbs

The cold heaps of other mountains,
antelopes brushing the sky...
When they're through eating
they remember the minds
they have done damage to.
In the distance, mountains
furl and unfurl. They hold
warm, inexpugnable depths,
soothing unreflective things,
such as what you feel at dawn,
adjusting your alarm clock, determined
to have french fries for breakfast.
This is new, you have never done this,
and believe it will be a way
to make the irregular firm.
This is all new for me, the man
is thinking. The man is thinking
that if he possessed a baguette
he'd bash it over the dismalness
and remember all kinds of bread.
Because of all the crazy things.
Because there seems no escaping
the frustrated house. It's red,
jammed with leaves, and when
you pluck a leaf you will be like
the way you plucked it, nobody seeing
your way through to where you're going.
The way we're going is somehow up
though one wouldn't notice it as such.

Forgiving The Desert

If only I could spend an afternoon
With summer in my lungs
If only I could rebuild my city
Under a canopy of trees

Instead of listening to horns of war
Bagpipes blowing for the fallen
Autumn has seen days beautiful as ball gowns
Hang in shreds

If only I could admit
That the idea of cranberry sauce
Fills me with fear and weakness
Perhaps I could hold the face of worry

While you sleep
Behind the curtain of your eyes
In a heap of bountiful isolation
Which is gone when you look at me

If only the russet autumn
Could point
With the abundant lips
And fingers of seasons

I am no longer able
To speak my native language
Use only the barbarous invectives
Of polite society

Which reduce my heart
Shrunken upon
The seed of love
Oh if I could open the sky

The desert sand would fly
We would eat again
Behind sighs and it would be so simple
To know you

Weapons thrown down
Pushing back dry heat
Forgiving the desert for a lack of trees
But I live among the lace remains of metal and glass

Carry particles of emptied air
Every cloudy day into the sun
If only
I were no longer petty

I could heal the world and cure myself
Shaking harshness from the clouds
If only rocks of sugar
Could sweeten the bitter sea

Vicki Hudspith

The Inebriation Of Salt

You rapped your cigar against my knuckles
I watched tobacco
Drop against my hand and vowed
Never to say anything against a man's cigar

Or compare the smoke
Of one against another for they are all fragrant
In the tropical evening where moisture
And scent are damp varieties of kisses

Are equal
To evening breezes
Against
The backs of my knees

This is
The inebriation of salt
To be true
It has to be said

You wanted me to be in love
So you could see how it looked
Could catch its fragrance
As it left my skin

In ever widening circles
Of your dissatisfaction
From thunder I learn about rain
And by sweltering I adapt to heat

I am compelled by autumn
To dwell in the created months
While the biology of misbehavior
Will forget you

Working like an eraser
To perform a shadow puppetry
On my heart
And the signature, your sigh

Father At The Ocean

mother's charm is standing alongside
the beach looks lovely in midwinter
and father brought us in the large
white truck
after airing out the dangerous tires and
giving an impromptu
physics assemblyline soliloquy
on the separated treads
clawing like
supportive cats the packed sand

and thinking of Einstein's simplicity. if we could
not fall through
every single crevice presented
opened and God's gifted then we
would end up in the very same place
that we have do not
begin
from

handle it softly

is the measure of dialogue. or
the lemon-olive twist
of dialogue. or
father's wine glass bearing
odd city names
spilling along the
saccharine buckskin
little fingerprints
of summering in the Crimea
or drinking
oil from neareast bazaars. lighting a cigarette
with

dramatic green

oh.

throwing colored paper and loudness at irreverent
gulls lining
the poor wood pier
and seaglass only becomes pretty after
barricading itself from pinpointed eagle sands driven
by the motioning of seismic waters;
a tumbler for precious stones

and father
gave away
the white
truck for
a horse but
the horse
would not
heed him;

so we are here. and the wine has fermented enough
mother uses it for vinegar when she is cooking Italian
dishes

rarely as
it is

Marlene von Lintzer

The Grave Robber's Monologue

they

are the

best company

*and that is why his hand is stuffed in
an ancient pocket where the buttons
have clinked against
the marble floor*

*long away since
he was a child*

and long since
and long since brazen things have fallen away as well.
it quivered about the
last autumn trees to find the
living asleep in comparative
silence towards
the crash among leaf and
field by tiny mice
and

wide awake night birds

but comfort stands at
the woolen-eyed sentinels
by the heavy gates. and the
November out of doors
is more along the lines
of wood smoke

along the ice laden boughs of
elastic birch trees the ash clings
because
all atmosphere was once the carbon
dioxide of inhaling plants
the impurity traced of oxygen and
that the couplets arranged less and less

while
still worthwhile: the familiar cufflinks. a cameo
brooch. an emerald pin.

they sift underneath their opened eyes

and

*like marbles fallen they
shatter china against the temple
floors.*

it is nice lifting a hand to be among

those who are not

waiting any longer

Another Montana Dawn

Crows squawk across the valley at dawn.
Other couples snuggled in sleeping bags
may blink and linger in sleep. Crouched beside
this rented tent, breathing Montana pine,
we wonder if crows cawed yesterday at dawn
before the lodge fire drove us stumbling outside

in the dark, the crackle of burning walls,
the siren shrill enough to scare the bears.
Millions of decades, glaciers scoured the peaks,
a month to build a lodge, an hour to burn it down.
Last century is history, a millennium
hardly a scar on forty miles of forest.

Today, we'll hate to leave this tent
half buried in snow without coffee at dawn,
no matter how many grizzlies waddle by,
steep peaks as far as we can see, no breeze,
McDonald Lake a ten-mile slick, a thousand geese
rising like hosannas, now and forever wild.

Walt McDonald

In a San Juan Mountain Cabin

Rocks tumble down the sluice all day,
racket like mustangs clattering past the cabin.
In mountains, get used to it or get out.
After midnight, not many rocks wash past,

the day's snowmelt already downriver
at Silverton, by now. Runoff at night
is a swish over stones too big to be budged.
Lights out, crawl under covers, let bears

take the slopes, let elk and deer bed down,
let coyotes and mountain lions take charge.
Spring's much too short to miss. Let summer come,
and floods, rocks topple and block the sluice,

let snowcapped peaks go bald by August.
Let late weeds grow for picas nibbling
above 10,000 feet, silent, ears twitching
for hawks and weasels fast as cats.

As It Happens

And what if she called the minute she got home? What if she decided not to go to the bathroom first, or called before undressing and getting comfortable? You would have answered, wouldn't you? You would have kissed your separate receivers (hers dark green, yours beige) goodnight. And what if she didn't have a key? Oh, we all know that dreaded sound on the phone, that heavy breathing.

Moving Out

That first day she realized she could breathe outside; it wasn't as hot as she expected, surely better than her cramped apartment with its wet plaster smell. She felt close to her widowed aunt's stories of whole families on porches. So she stayed out longer than planned. The second day she brought a book to the park, then two books. She picked up a book somebody left there. She started bringing along an umbrella, her make-believe parasol. She brought a sweater in case it got chilly, then a coat in case it got cold. She dressed in layers. She ate dinner outside, and breakfast. The breeze in the park was such a relief still. In December she moved to the church steps, the large sheltered alcove near the door, and she doesn't even believe in God.

John Sweet

discussing fear while thinking of a poem by leonard cirino

driving east
through a small town where
a man has murdered five children
with a hammer

where the days grow shorter
but the sky is still blue
and streaked with jet exhaust and
i have been thinking about the myth
of the american minotaur

i have been thinking about
the approaching winter
when this woman next to me asks
what my biggest fear is
and i turn to her beautiful profile and say
*my son dying before he
turns fifty*

and she nods and asks
what else?
and i say
my son dying after he turns fifty
and what i miss the most out here are
the hills

the sense that
there is more to this life than
man-made objects turning slowly
to dust

the air heavy not with screams
but with the
absence of laughter

John Sweet

unfinished scenes from a burning world

nothing definite
this time

a woman
from my hometown
who kisses her husband
on a clean september afternoon
then vanishes

her van found
on a country road near
her house

her small blurred smile
in the newspaper
exactly one year later

and my son laughs with joy
when i pick him up at the sitter's
and my wife smiles as we
walk in the back door

i feel no guilt

i lay no blame

these small moments
are too precious to stain
with the blood of an
unknown future

David Wright

Looking at Roadside Bluestem Before Leaving Decatur

1.

A littered gully fills with tire carcasses, beer bottles, a bed of random gravel,
and two nailed pieces of green painted two by four.

The air tastes thick, too heavy with factory drafts-
burnt rubber, roasted soybeans, yeast, and corn distilled to nectar.

God we love what they send on the wind,
what we leave in the gullies,
what they leave in our pockets,
what they leave in our lungs.

We love this scent of money, the dry, paper taste on the backs of our tongues.

We love these old plants while they live

2.

Against blue-purple culms, silk filaments catch backlight.

Against blue but septic skies, forage grass appears from attention and neglect.

The copper colored turkey claw gives the universe the finger.

Fires in the fall smooth the dry horizon but will not flare
to where these seeds, their tender shoots lurk,
buried under prairie,
buried under gullies running over,
buried after frost to rise in April.

We want to love the native grass, taller than a woman, tall as any man.
We want to stay where bluestem roots, gnarled like human nerves,
prosper under blackest dirt,
refuse to wither during winter,
drink from sources purer than the air.

Tending Gardens

1.

He died and left a lovely world of sculpted,
bricked off beds in the backyard, leaky sprinkler
pipes snaking from the house to the boundary

bushes. Peonies, herbs, purple coneflower,
columbine, and mint, mint everywhere.
In the fall I trimmed the lilacs by the drive,

pruned them back to bare, gray branch,
as my mother watched. She didn't know.
I'd never learned. He never said: don't trim

them late or come the spring no purple thing
will scent the wet world. Next year, though,
we wait, without any oracle, and they blossom.

2.

Weekends my wife waters. She weeds.
She comes into the house filthy and free
of burdens. She laughs and sighs and arranges

her tools and says nothing. I suspect her
ornamental grasses hide knowledge,
something wild as pleasure.

When I rake through them in the morning,
I find no small, red fruit pulsing in the soil.
Nothing there to elude my unskilled hands.

I could dig here all day, jealousy dripping
from me like sweat. I could. But fall will come
and silver these tall grasses. We'll see then what lives.

Authors

Gabriel Arquilevich lives in Ojai, California, with his wife and three children. He teaches writing and literature at Ventura College.

Adrienne Banks is fitful and nineteen. She ran away to Spain, lost her accent, and returned home to submit poetry to important literary magazines. She hosts a poetry show at an hour when no one is awake on KJHK Lawrence. Her chapbook is forthcoming from Prospero's Pocket Poets.

Wendy Carlisle lives in East Texas, land of Budweiser and boviculture. She writes poetry to keep herself out of cowboy bars. She has one book of poetry, *Reading Berryman to the Dog* (Jacaranda Press, 2000), and has just finished a chapbook, *Nine Parts Water*.

James Grinwis works as a project editor for an educational research organization in Amherst, Massachusetts. He is a contributing editor for *In Posse Review*.

Vicki Hudspith is President of the Board of Directors of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York City. Her book of poems relating to events surrounding September 11 is *Within The Hour*

(Headwaters/Hudson Press, 2000). Her spoken word CD, *Urban Voodoo*, features the percussionist Daniel Freedman, and is available from Small Press Distribution.

Marlene Lintzer lives in New Jersey, where she was born seventeen years ago.

Walt McDonald has published nineteen collections of poetry and fiction. His latest, *Climbing the Divide*, will be published in 2003 by the University of Notre Dame Press. 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.



Lament of the Land © 2002 by Oliver Curran

Rochelle Ratner is Executive Editor of *American Book Review*. She has written numerous novels and poetry books. She also edited *Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness* (Feminist Press, 2000) which won the Susan Koppelman Award, given by Women's Caucus of the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association. *House and Home* is forthcoming in 2003 from Marsh Hawk Press.

John Sweet lives with his wife and son in rural upstate New York. A second child is due at any time. Sweet's work has appeared, most recently, in *Tryst*, *Iodine*, *Small Spiral Notebook* and the chapbooks *approaching lost* (Via Dolorosa Press) and *mapping the room of murdered children* (Black Hoody Nation).

David Wright has poems in print in *The Christian Century*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, and *Karamu* and on-line in *The Avatar Review* and *3rd Muse*. His two poetry collections are *Lines from the Provinces* (2000) and *A Liturgy for Stones* (October 2002).

About 2River

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

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