

The 2River View

7.3 (Spring 2003)



NEW POEMS BY

Nick Antosca, Bob Craig

Nicole Cartwright Denison, Candy Gourlay

Vicki Hudspith, Erin Lambert, Kenneth Pobo

Shelly Reed, Charles P. Ries, Cheryl Snell

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Contributors

Nick Antosca is a junior at Yale. His poems and fiction have appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Antietam Review*, *The Paumanok Review*, *Stirring*, *Red River Review*, and *Three Candles*.

Nicole Cartwright Denison lives on a trout farm in the mountains of western North Carolina, and teaches writing in Sylva, North Carolina. Her work has appeared or is due to appear online in *The Adirondack Review* and *canwehaveourballback*; and in print in *Frontage Road* and *Sequoia Review*.

Bob Craig teaches multicultural education and philosophy at the University of Houston. He has published nearly 120 articles, a few books, plus a number of poems. He lives with his wife, two children, and three cats.

Candy Gourlay is the 2003 winner of the Kota Press Anthology Competition. Her poetry, prose and essays have appeared in an assortment of print and online publications including *Jack*, *Megaera*, *Niedergasse*, and *Side Reality*.

Vicki Hudspith is President of the Board of Directors of The Poetry Project Thin New York City, and the author of *White and Nervous* and *Limousine Dreams*. Her spoken word CD, *URBAN VOODOO*, available from Small Press Distribution, features percussionist Daniel Freedman.

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The Milk Blood Landscape

A million sighs subside
and ingots of silence lie stacked miles high
in an island warehouse,

while the proud sea wanes and heaves
on all sides, its pale vitreous waves poignant with the brine
of dissolved ideas and delirium.

And a million bridal smiles are dyed
the icy shade of nuclei which have died, wilted, dried
to tiny ring-like husks inside amoeba cadavers,

because brides die easily and eventually,
or they devolve into humanoid husks that flake away
like silent, desiccated seahorse corpses, weightless.

But smiles and minds that sigh are dissected,
sliced like ripe tomatoes or eyes and delivered liquefied in frost-clawed vials
to neatly dressed
androgynous buyers.

The Milk Blood Landscape

The limes that I sliced for dinner
are rough-skinned and dry by now,
and you are chapped eyes and a raw, red mouth
sulking by the pallid curtains, coughing.

Outside our open window
the evening is ethereal and strange,
opaque with sugary rain,
eerie with the pale vestige
of a sun half-drowned in the horizon.

And as the anxious dusk thickens,
glittering with rain,
a summer darkness descends
to saturate starved flesh,
bathing drained, albino bodies with blue-white luminescence
that hums and whispers and mumbles with sleepy erotic energy.

The October rustle of dry leaves
inside my limbs and torso
is nightmare-inspiring.
And as I rise from languid shadows
and glide to you, I see myself described
like a fiction in your eyes;
and outside in the charred twilight,
snow is drifting down.
The seasons have gone insane.

Nick Antosca

And I approach you with hungry caution,
but I'm lost and cagey when faced
with the twin blue fires and the memories of lies
in your easily-bruised face.
Dirty tears fall accusingly
and dry slowly as our dinner goes cold,
and your cobalt eyes are flushed with hurt and lust,
while a blizzard of ash and static snarls at the window.

Bob Craig

Lord Byron

I

When the time came
Like it always does
Came, that is, with respectability
Abhorrence or latitude
It just came
Just like that.

There had been highlights
Like on tues. after mon. night football
Or lights high on a branch
Outside someone's house on Xmas.

There it was.

Our vast inner circle
Could perhaps circle
Around it
We could all have worried faces
And faceless expressions
Or we could comply with someone's
Rigorous ethical standards.

The implication was quite clear
When the time came
Like your earrings
Hardly painted onward toward lunch
Or your lips without make-up.

That this time was up, too
When he tried to cash in
Like a check waiting inside a drawer
About a job he had not yet left.

There it was.

II

What was really troubling
Like wash that never seems to get done
Was less theoretical than real

Conflict of interest
And self-promotion
Were mentioned
So we can't be content
Without the contention
That surpasses knowledge.

This didn't.

Of course when you woke I watched
And when you watched I woke
Like the consciousness of something unconscious
Without the rouge or lipstick:

That dirt is problematic:
Be it in your hair
Or implicit in a chest-thumping subtitle
Like being in perpetual communion
With muses or hackers.

Everyone
And I do mean everything
Got the message and stepped down
Out of my life and times
And except for the stunning drop
Of my pants
Everything
And i do mean everyone
Hardly registered.

Mysterion

1

Instantly
The panorama of buildings
Sky
Water
Trees
Acquired a sense of intrinsic rightness

Shedding
A remarkably unshakable
Assumption
Preconception
Precognition:

That I am separated from you by a skin suit.

There is not a single type of awareness
No *on* or *off* signal
Nothing controlled by a switch,
While everything recedes from view
In the wake of such encounters.

2

It all can turn sour
Complete with loss
Or obliteration of space/time
Like a temporal-lobe seizure
jump-starting the journey,

Or a mental error
Probing logical thinking,

Like a random thing not being connected
Or not having ultimate meaning.

3

Fantasy-prone
Generating vivid visual images
Like a dissociator who readily forgets

Sensations of floating
Flying
Being separate and alone

A limitless sea
Sounds as colors
Enormous mental calm

A visual flight
A fall through air
A jump into an opening in the earth

Feeling dizzy
Overcome by change
Pressed down by the weight of Presence

Like *big*
When applied to a fly
Not an elephant

Or *great*
When applied to excitement
Or disgust

Nonconceptual thinking
Discussed in words

The discovery of a larger reality
Even brokered by tens of billions of brain cells
Is a useful fiction.

4

The sky
And the river
Were just as blue
As before
The trees
just as green
The buildings
Just as gray
And dingy.

Nicole Cartwright Denison

Poem for Wendy Bishop When I Am Struggling

standing far from the tower

I fling gifts upward—
my skin packaged tightly around
tenure and the ache of composition

slowly, she begins, becomes, unfolds me

eating away the blue-black cancers of rhetoric and theory
lapping the marrow of doubt and
slurping the last flow of a bleeding heart
she grins wicked with the sharp tongue
and the even teeth of a critic, a stoic,
an ancient citizenry
waiting to stone me,
unpaged, unlined
shoved to the margins

of life
and writing

alone in a classroom of ivy
and gaping mouths,
orbs
left gurgling and choking on
words they cannot write

Nicole Cartwright Denison

White Cross on Highway 441

a blonde stretch of Georgia highway
pierces Jenny's left breast
as the brain stem feels the hairs rise
and the recognition of *hot* begins

incidentally, the receptors welcome pain
only a husband is allowed to give

grinding asphalt into a slack mouth
making spittle of tar and blood

she is left writing her life on a blacktop,
constantly erased by exhaust

Autumn's Cool Judgment

And they will hate you, you know,
pronounced with such tenderness,
sanity's ears listened twice
to make sure they heard correctly.
Salvation's face, not quite
what eyes had expected to find
through lengthening shadows.
They were vipers. Coiled

and small, perhaps even yellow;
smooth stones sunk into flesh
just below insinuation's brow.
What to make of it?
Caution en route to a place
where you bludgeon the foolish,
hang them with rope
before autumn's cool judgment.

Forgiveness, a conclusion
leaving words undecided.
Cigarette, a weapon to damage
Lungs' persistence. *I will smoke
myself to death, if it kills me,*
cauliflower existence: *knowing* bears
no resemblance to comprehension.
Life is bad, we agree, as if we don't care.

Pieces of Agony

Reason pays attention with one ear.
Small voices want to speak
with thick lips; want to plead, like men
on death row, for their lives.
They pilfer strength from weary sinew
I am so sorry. Please believe me.
It was never my intention to cause pain,
emerges stinking like yesterday's vomit
on a road trip. Crawls then, slowly
off misery's face, as if it is a clot
surfacing from treachery's scab.
Sorry is something you say when you
accidentally kick a dog, or knock a bucket,
Sitting in silence, an imbecile urinating
in shame's underwear, I think, Yes,
it's what you say if you forget a name,
or step on someone's shoe.
Onion skins of complexity carve
letters into wooden air between us.
It wants to write itself into meat of memory.
What is a word? Frailty's use of language
becomes a demonstration of emotion,
a piece of agony waiting for rain to fall,
to bleed darkness down windowpanes.

Vicki Hudspith

A Chance To Turn Away the Silence

In this grammar
I am the keeper of a tiny fist

A wand to wave
Against a fury of verbs

It is mine
To witness
Fallen trees
Scramble light

Your inheritance of rage is bigger than my own
At last I seem almost reasonable

I guide you through spears of nouns
Constraints of style that seek to change you

You say your anger is the anti venom
In the bite of polite afternoons

I say it is
The mother tongue
A dialectic
Where death visits

Leaving us
Advanced upon by streams of chance

A vocabulary occurs
Built on fixed conversation

If we stop
We lose
The dialogue

An invitation to the dance
A chance
To turn away the silence

Vicki Hudspith

Your Flawless Speech

Sunset
Measures darkness
By moving shade

Glances of metaphors
Their creaseless hands bear disregard for grace
In a world filled with its own emptiness

Grief, a tomb of inexpensive luxuries
Level with ground like water
Runs itself dry

A new emblem, flawless devotion
Is worn above
Unnecessary objects

Wasted gestures
Matching shoes and handbags
Out of date, left to rot in closets

I am cast into the mouth of dreamless sleep
An aftertaste of radios
Watches, computers and cell phones
In a swath of melting autumn
Is an energetic surge
Loved as much as dawn

To know spices
Is to know a fever of continents
An opaque river courses

As if it were still a welcome place
This is how I will call to you
Hold you close, fear you

Your name, which I could never pronounce
I know better than my own
Have committed to memory your flawless speech

Squeezed into a living museum
Of verbs
Domestic and foreign

Erin Lambert

Eleventh Complaint

Even the buttons on her coat are anchored
And her ribbon feels wrong for the party,
But she goes out in the dark

Aimless, her dog takes
To hanging on her sleeve
And swallows,

From mental rafters,
Fly straight through bombs
In their fit of light;

*Gone thirty birthdays
Still nothing's special
In this month without a moon.*

Then she returns through the dark, asking
Why her house must blend
With snow so well

As she walks by these winters,
Walking always too far

Erin Lambert

The Parents Beneath the Pavement

We found the boy behind a garbage can
walking circles in the rain while looking down on himself.
Air left his lips in clouds thick as fence post.

With his foot, he broke his face
into a swarm of ripples
until he drained the puddle of himself.

He left without caring to notice us.
We don't sleep on streets, kissing
the pavement, so dead to this world.

Kenneth Pobo

Aunt Katy Sits

Aunt Katy
or Catherine as she prefers
but nobody calls her that
sulks in the big gold

chair while Aunt Ruth
chatters about her days
with Warren who left her
for his secretary but
years before they lived
in style in Highland Park

Katy won't smile
politely
having lived
on a Wisconsin farm
with a man
who preferred his mother

she has only
the gold
chair's arm
and a silence
that could set
a fire.

Transplanting Red Cosmos

Up

they come in four days,
among the first sprouters,
quickly outgrow
a clear plastic greenhouse,
send out lacy leaves. Clumsy
fingers transplant them into
peat pots. They

topple! Damping off. Those
that remain can't take sun,
can't stay in the basement—
one by one I toss seedlings
into the trash.
No fluted blossoms
this summer.

Spring knocks
at the window—

I don't know how to tell her.

Shelly Reed

a hoarse voice in an envelope

your first book arrived today
with a cover curious
as the tumbleweed of beard hinting,
hair wild as clouds
the day we shot java
and geometrically correct sandwiches
through an afternoon
long on chemistry,
shy on time and the comforts
of familiarity.

i keep setting it aside,
not certain I want to know you
or discover, coincidentally,
i bear slender resemblance
to Hanoli the barwench,
or possibly, your real-life consort.

Five Thorns for an Unnamed Beast

1.

You're the cigarette I lit
in a life when I smoked;
the night I almost put my soul
up for sale, tasseled and oiled.

2

You're the crop that failed
religiously, year after year,
replanting itself on my land
where something else wanted to grow.

3

You're the fur I could not wear
when snow rearranged my bones.
I painted a hearth over my wall,
stood shivering in its reds and golds.

4

You're the illness turned epidemic,
the syringe loaded not with cure,
but a mutating virus injected
in a vein, long collapsed.

5

I'm the smoke suffocating you,
the searing flame metaphor,
the earth opening my wound
to receive your cremains.

Plumbing for Salvation

I felt the vulnerability women must feel when visiting the OB/GYN. Legs wide open and buck naked. My vas deferens were being snipped and soldered shut. A procedure, that would liberate me from spreading ill conceived seed in fertile thighs.

Ever heard of the Church of The Later Day Saints? the cheery vas deferen snipping urologist asked.

Well, generally I have. But specifically I haven't. I mean, I'm not really practicing any one religion at the moment. I could feel his heart skip a beat.

Well then, as long as I've got your attention, let me tell you a little bit about it.

Is this legal? I wondered. *Doing the Lord's work during office hours. Preaching salvation to men who'd just surrendered their balls in hopes of sexual liberation?* I turned my gaze toward the table with the surgical scissors, forceps, and cotton gauze.

The handsome urologist chattered on. I listened. I asked questions. I was ready to go all the way. I would win my family tree a free pass to the promised land. I became weak. I was compliant. My standards receded. I told lies to appease him into thinking he'd landed me. I did what I had to do.

As I arose from the Conversion Table I realized I had been set free by a doctor who sterilized guys while offering them a clear shot at heaven. God *does* work in mysterious ways.

Seed of Greatness

(Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 2/7/03)

Some thought of him as a throw back to the Cretaceous Period. A yellow belly bottom dweller who in the midst of spring's spawning season could leap like a porpoise.

We tagged him in Lake Winnebago in 1978 and named him Mike. He swam down the Fox River, over 14 dams and locks and into the Great Lakes. Mike was to Sturgeons what Christopher Columbus was to Italy. The outsider, astronaut, citizen philosopher who followed his own stream.

Washing up on Sandusky Bay in Lake Erie, Mike was ignominiously found dead on arrival in the grip of a commercial fishing net. Wisconsin/Ohio wildlife authorities concluded his death was the result of spawning stress at 100 years of age. He had wandered nearly 400 miles as the crow flies from a lake his species was never known to leave.

God bless fish like Mike, or men like Mike, or reptiles like Mike. For out of the million aberrant matings and progeny they produce, a few mutant seeds grow wilder than the rest. Seeds that carry the promise of leading a flock, a school, or a human race out of their pond and into a vast uncharted sea.

Cheryl Snell

Epithalamion

Your voice pooled around my common senses.
I pulled white silk through my brass ring,
dropping hints at your pigeon-toed feet.

A pulse jumped under my blue-veined skin.
A mosaic of pain broke out like war.

At the rehearsal, Mother in her flatline calm
bombed our drinks with cherries
and posted a curse above the published banns.

We sat there glumly, holding back her hands.

Before this devolves into a narrative of hindsight—
your heart grows numb, the kids burn down the halfway house—
you should know I've come prepared: keys jammed
between my knuckles, a map of alternatives on the dash.

Right beside the rigid Mary. Right under your lucky dice.

The Lost & Found

Why do you go? She hardly knows you now.

*Last time, she twisted my rings until I noticed
hers were gone. Stolen right out from under her.*

You want me to see you are still needed.
You want me to promise that none of this
will happen to you.

*They make her sit with all the others,
displayed like an open sore. She screams
'at passers-by: Do you know who I am?'*

With your mind on fire you tell me this:
What do we do with the thing called Hope?

When you dangle by a thread, I'll cut it for you.
I'll do for you what you did for me
on the days you pulled my milk-teeth out,
dragging each one on its pulpy string right through
the first in our lifetime of slamming doors.

Contributors

Erin Lambert holds an MFA from Syracuse University, lives in Queens, and works for the North American regional office of International Baccalaureate in Manhattan. Her current work appears in *Mudlark* and is forthcoming in the Fall 2003 issue of *Fine Madness*.

Kenneth Pobo has a new book of poetry, *Introductions*, being published by Pearl's Book'Em Publisher in September 2003. In 2002, his chapbook *Kenneth Pobo's Greatest Hits* was published by Pudding House Press. Another chapbook, *Open to All*, was the seventh entry in the 2River Chapbook Series.

Shelly Reed has work appearing or scheduled for appearance in *Atomic Petals*, *42Opus*, *Thunder Sandwich*, and *Wilmington Blues*. Her work was featured in the December 2002 issue of *Seeker Magazine* and in the Winter 2002 issue of *Pulp Poetry*. She moonlights as a live, window mannequin.

Charles Ries lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he has recently completed the fictionalized memoir *Riesville*. His second book of poetry, *Monje Malo Speaks English*, was published in January 2003 by Foursep Publications. His poetry and short stories have appeared in



numerous publications, including *Barbaric Yawp*, *The California Quarterly*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Word Riot*.

Cheryl Snell has work in print journals such as *Comstock* and *River Oak*. Her chapbook of poetry, *Flower Half Blown*, was published in 2002 by Finishing Line Press and has been nominated for the Ohioana Book Award in Poetry.

About the Artist

Tantra Bensko is a well published and displayed poet and artist. Much of her work can be seen at www.Tantragarden.com. She lives in the mist of Steamboat Island, Washington.

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 intially online and later in print. Intrested contributors can read the submission guidelines on the 2River site at www.2River.org.

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