

# 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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Nick Antosca

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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

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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

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## 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

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**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

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### **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

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## **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

## 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

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### **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

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### **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

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**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.

### **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



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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](http://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](http://www.2River.org).

# 2RV

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