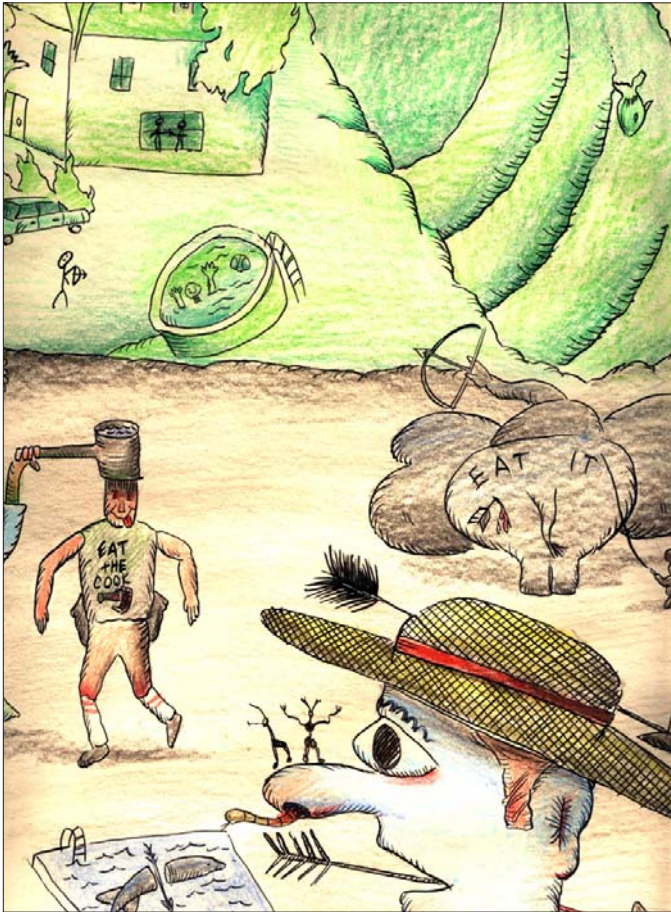


The 2River View

(10.4) Summer 2006



Strange Horizons © 2006 by Don Swartzentruber

New Poems By
Lauren K. Alleyne, Maureen Alsop
Kevin Conder, Mike Coughlin, Joellen Craft
Mark Cunningham, Jeannine Hall Gailey
Zachary Greenwald, Phoebe North, Stephanie Smith

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

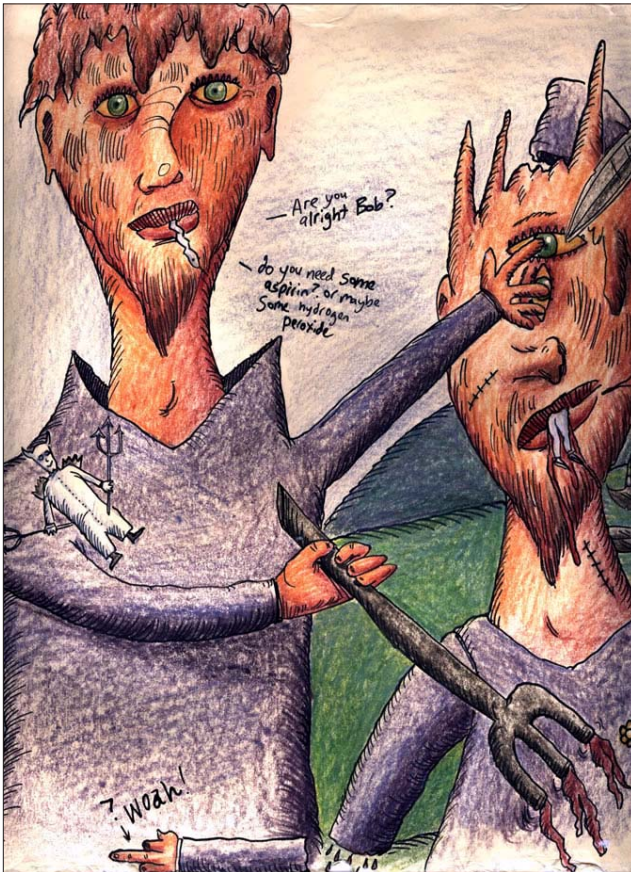
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Laureen K. Alleyne

Ash Wednesday

This is where the journey begins: at the end
of a thumb blackened: imprinted: set apart:
sacrificial: hairshirted: *mea culpa* & I'm sorry,
Lord, so sorry: surrender: reconciliation: a pact:
the body reviled: the body denied: the body
transformed to holy hunger: the temple
sealed for a necessary restoration: gutted:
these the stripes: this the desert: the constant
question/confession: despair: this is where
the journey begins: on the knees: suppliant:
eyes desperately shut: *give me a sign*:
& is this even prayer: I mourn a simpler faith:
the mustard seed: the certainty of ashes: mass
the sun piercing the window: its stained glass

Laureen K. Alleyne

Fear and Trembling

After Kierkegaard

And there are many ways to come undone
—some more exquisite than others. Ask Eve,
she will tell you apple-lust unwrapped her
left her cold and with a word for *shiver*.
Lot's wife is witness that a backward glance
is enough—nostalgia pillared her. But,
I imagine the somewhat greater deeds:
picture the Red Sea unstitched like a braid;
the lion's den, its many hungry mouths;
Isaac's bewildered screams: *why, daddy, why?*
And what terrible choice to peel back doubt
like a bandage, without question or lack
to say *Here am I*, to renounce relief:
step in, seize the knife, and to know belief.

Laureen K. Alleyne

Veneration

It is the simple, the small, kindly acts
that show us: Veronica's thoughtful cloth,
its imprint of sweat, blood & silent thanks;
Simon of Cyrene's grudging aid, his wrath
resigned to the need of a criminal;
A common thief's dying, ready defense;
John's empathic hand, slipped into the small
of Mary's back as she stands stoic, tense
before the hoisted body of her son.

We did not recognize you for our God
—our first fault. But even worse was the one
which with ease nailed an innocent to wood.

I kneel in surrender to your mystery;
I kiss your pain, your bleeding, human knee.

Maureen Alsop

Apparition Wren

The trill, quivering as the sun crosses
over the half-stretched sound, comes
to quiet now. It's what you've always been:
a little bird shifting past. The felled fruit
lies ripe & wasted in the cherry orchard
marking the place where a very old woman sensed
your nimble rise. She would not know
the careless stint of tilted wing. She kept loving you
as simply as you loved the expectant air. Darkness
gathers in the grass—she rests on her knees
pronouncing your imprint as prayer,
and discovers late your voice
of stone. She sees it is better now
your dappled song grown
shameless & empty inside the mouth.

Maureen Alsop

Dovecote Ephemera

Along the gold hem of her dress, edges
where the silk frayed, a flock of birds swung—

It was a distance
she long carried out of gladness,
a nothingness—the illimitable horizon. Soon

the buzz on the radio boomed with a smattering
of tiny voices. A flap of wing lifted
in her throat. A spasm emptied her name into the forecast,

and memory assigned speechlessness
to grief. Threadbare birds

fell away into the hills—as untouchable
as grace. She swayed on the stoop
like the delicate tracing of eyes

over paper scraps. Stepping forth, she heard a flurry
of calm and, at last, a spill of birds—no longer trapped
by the borrowed vacancy of her body.

Kevin Conder

crossfire

the demons touch gently at first, sifting through who is who in the darkness, finding me wrapping their arms tightly about my chest so I can only breath in faint, rapid gasps their claws sink into the clefts between my ribs and I taste the iron under their nails, residue from working lucifer's mercury mines they squeeze and squeeze but my ribs are too strong for them to break

under a thundersky a man comes next to me his face blank with after-sex calm he offers to send my demons away I tip my hat to him at least they're my demons, I don't own much else I limp off toward Tombstone, demons in tow, to finish the task of burying my wife, to finish the task of throwing one last handful of dirt on her coffin, to finish the task and ride out past the preacher, always to the west, always westward ho, toward the rumor of a great raging sea, where a man can lose himself in the scattered San Francisco sun and never have to look at his shadow for too long a time

Kevin Conder

leaving

cut holes in wrists and feet so that
the sun can shine through my limbs drive
a pencil into my side between
the second and third ribs

so that the sun comes into my soul
nights walking the sodden streets
my winter jacket's hood raised as
a great venomless cobra

I have no venom
I have no blood
nothing left to bleed
I cross the seas at night

my legs telescoping rods
to the sea beds
stirring clouds of the
dead and powdered

I cross the African plains
and stop in the middle of the Nairobi
where man was born, where herds of wildebeest stare at me
where a great old silver lion pisses on my feet

how far does a man need to wander from himself
voice from an ancient lake burned away
beneath the grass plains same voice of hope
in the face of a disastrous life

tomorrow I will be someone else
tomorrow I will be someone else
and forget you my love
my love forget you

Mike Coughlin

In Mid Sentence

and me nursing a fat lip.
and you sucking on a slice of watermelon.
and B.B. King on the radio.
and us in your grandmother's convertible.
and the North River slicing in and out
 of thick August woods.
and the glove compartment full of Dexatrim
 and cotton swabs.
and a suitcase crammed with road maps
 and motel towels.
and a cocktail napkin covered with people
 to look up in Chicago.
and Amtrak tickets sticking out of
 your J.C. Penny purse.
and my wallet holding less than
 one-week's pay.
and the sweet love of Jesus
 dangling on a wooden crucifix
 from our rearview mirror.

Mike Coughlin

Prayer For An El Salvadorian Wedding

(Winters, California)

Something tells me
that the man on the wooden cross
of the Holy Mission Church,
the Mexi-Cali Jesus, is a purer spirit,
a harder working savior,
than the ghost who governed the alter
of my boyhood New England parish.

And something also tells me
(as the mariachi trumpets fill-up
this 1912 chapel) that this is the sacred house
in which the Messiah of the Revelations
will return:

And He shall tear open the flesh of the earth.
And He shall raise the bones of the dead.
And He shall pour God's fury in the mouths
of beasts and false prophets....

And just as the guitars and violins
of these men dressed in black
burst forth with the rhythm
of a ruined third-world, the re-conquering
Christ will reclaim His kingdom
screaming pure and bloody murder
at what's been done
in His blessed name

Joellen Craft

Out Running

Hot enough to taste
the air, something rotten, and the swell

of cut grass in my throat. By the log pile,
my urine soaked into the gravel. Dust covers

me, like the roadside
detritus, the severed claw absurdly clenched,
the tampon wrapped in plastic: dry,
waiting. There's yelling. It's two girls

bent over a porch rail.

What?

They yell again. What?

Don't stop, keep running.

OK.

One holds a rounded little
girl pot belly. One who turns

away will soon be lovely. Their kiddie pool
will take too long to fill, will,
abandoned, brim and trickle:

that all small bodies
could be filled and filled—
when empty, flipped
to cover bald dirt.

Joellen Craft

Raccoon Decapitated Near Drainage Ditch

The blue blood hammers in my ears, then bubbles
thick into the dust. Stars poked in the broken
shell horizon spray above my head

as it rolls to rest, facing East.
The red taillights blink away.

There's silence
for the first time, and no breath, just the twin suns
of an oncoming truck breaking

over the rounded hillock
of my body. There, by the ditch, its honest
browns light up, now bronze, now amber, gold.

At once the full clean glory rushes past...

Mark Cunningham

2

You open V-8, unzip your pants with your own two hands. It might be more fun with a little help. Then you learn that one plus one equals three. Or one-half. Knowledge: a stalk with two leaves puts them out one hundred eighty degrees from each other. When the fruit comes, slice it open. Inside lie many seeds. Or the pit. Maybe one is perfection, but you weren't paying enough attention. You don't even know if that idea came from the left or the right side of your brain.

41

They're often interchangeable, forty and forty-two. You don't discover this until you reach forty-two, but already you've gathered that Ali Baba's forty thieves or Moses's forty days on the mountain are approximate terms meaning "a lot" and "a time of preparing and maturing." The turning point comes when you find Buster Keaton's attempts to plug a boat leaking below the water line not hilarious but horrifying. Now no advertisements notice when you walk through the mall. Each summer is hotter than the last, and even in winter you go weeks without seeing your own breath.

Mark Cunningham

B

Chromosomes line up: a tuck furrows. Lips cut breath, separate. Thousands clot Times Square; a ball slips down a poll; another year vanishes. Vertigo is never a fear of heights: it's getting sucked into the hard draw of insignificance. Try to hold. Your tongue presses a blackberry until seeds grit into your gums. You clench the tartness for three breaths, six. Then the pull through the stomach and colon grips.

101

You have only two hands. That's a cliché. You are not a computer. That's a new cliché. Cycles are starting to repeat; does that make them clichés? This is not a stand-in for experience blurred beyond individual meaning—this is experience itself blurred beyond individual meaning. *Cancer fever*. Lacan says that the unconscious mind is present only where it ceases. So the same will be true of the conscious mind? You know this: you can draw a self-portrait using only an eraser.

Jeannine Hall Gailey

Crane Wife

My husband, you have forgotten
how many bolts of cloth I wove for you,
the children I bore you, the nights
I lay by your side to warm you.

When you were poor, you gave all you had
to buy the life of a white crane.
You loved her then. And when
I came to you dressed in white,

you did not recognize me.
You agreed to be my husband, and all I asked
was for you not to look at me bathing,
when my true nature might be revealed.

(You would wake up with feathered
remnants on your hands and face,
rinsing them with cold water. Was this
a dream, you wondered.)

You have asked for more,
you have opened the closet door;
I flew away, a crane who had given you
her white glory, and you knew the cloth

to be the sacrifice of my own skin, my feather coat.
A thousand cranes descended on your hut,
crying with betrayal. You searched all of Japan for me
until you found a lake of cranes, those white ciphers,

cried your goodbyes, useless, now, with age.
You had the gift of my wings, knew the lift
of flight and the gentle neck. Now, old man,
remember, when you watch a flash in the sky,

remember me, remember

Jeannine Hall Gailey

The Princess Who Loved Insects

In the brief, beeless January sunlight
I climb, bareheaded, through the trees
to find a nest of caterpillars, fuzzy and striped
that I hide in my kimono sleeves.

My mother wails in the darkened house
because I won't shave my eyebrows
or blacken my teeth, am not anxious
about the sun. My father shakes his head, and sighs.

Other girls dance with the butterflies
who flutter through the gardens, brilliant,
but they fear the silkworms' writhing,
who weave their clothing, silent.

In the sea a red dragon dances. No one sees
but me and my tiny allies.
I know each summer my feet grow
longer and more brown

as I watch the pupae harden,
split and glisten—
as I, too, wait to be wrapped, stilled,
in layers of silk.

Zachary Greenwald

To return to what I was saying—

*You are indulgent, your mother thinks, to waste
each day on the doctor's couch?*

The anti-heartbreak.

When her lower jaw began to protrude at a young age
I would have—had I been born—

done something for her.

If just to curb the physical anguish
of her bite. Awry
years before the surgery.

Let it go—

the somatizing tendency.

*There is already a lifetime of room
(to feel)
in the mind.*

—where else could she have discovered
her solid objects.
Focused on her single things.

Zachary Greenwald

The Sleepwalker's Wife

Trying to crack a can of tuna against a bowl, stirring
a bay leaf in a broth

of iced tea mix, or searing baloney,
I watched him cook while he slept.

His midnight chopping—
onions brought him to tears like anyone else, I told him—

was a gift, a rare biological talent.
His knife's blind seesawing

was not precise
and mostly added grooves to the marble island.

But he never slipped
or cut anything living. His eyes

were both staring and void,
each lid a woozy aperture

through which he must have seen
on some level—as the experts say—

what he was looking for.
To watch him make something awake

was not so different. The night he left,
I looked at the sink and cleaned

a few dishes for the encore supper.
How I must have slept through the bounce in our bed

as he got to his feet. The garage lifting into the world.
My oven full of rice burning.

Phoebe North

conjunct of Miletus and Front Street

he took you from the mountain and shouldn't
you be grateful, not searching those four corners
of the finished basement apartment,
leaving silent indentations on the soggy carpet,
dancing across the linoleum while he is office-gone.
he leaves you bundles of babies breath
every evening and though once you were courted
by bowed worshipers he tells you not to look
and you still don't.

tell him that it was your sisters who wove
those beads of suspicion through you,
made you search closets for old journals,
rolled joints and let them burn, lighting
bullet holes in paper, blistering those words
he'd never let slip even when sleeping.
it's too late. you've spilled the oil,
left marks in the shape of your fingers and toes
and he's stretched his wings and already gone
through the gasping window.

Phoebe North

Eulogy I: Dulcinea

It starts the way all stories
start: the frenzy
in the kitchen,
the overturned Quaker
chair, the torn upholstery,

the skin on her lips
chapped and peeling,
the raspberry mark
at the base of her throat
a mirror of my own. They
were all in love with her.
I thought I might be missing
something.

She told me the gods
favored drunks
and children and the
chemical equation
for transmuting base
metals into golds,

one shoelace dragging
behind her across the crimson
shag carpet; she was an even,
could only take swallows in two,
eight, or fourteen.

When she took off
her stocking I could see
the ghost moth on her ankle.
Not a sparrow or a butterfly
but those white wings
pressed to the hot glass
of a bare light.

Stephanie Smith

Dream of Mending

Last night I dreamt a live horse fell to pieces,
slowly, from my arms to the dusty ground.

It was all clean breaks, a puzzle of marrow
and red, with a strain of the neck toward sky.

And he had the steam-white blaze of the stallion
I once wished for on pink candles and smoke.

But he was not mine. And soon I woke, worried
my dog was ill—connecting dane to horse

as usual. Yet he was, and your car broke down
on the way home from my place, that same night.

In another dream I might have grappled
with stirrups, reins and fled, moved like lightning

from vet to mechanic. Those broken haunches
mended like the finest liquid bronze.

Stephanie Smith

St. Fiacre (Retablos)

Patron saint for gardens cab drivers tile
and box makers Fiber optic flashes
of life after six seventy AD
Like comets just now burning out maybe
an inch or light year off Orion's belt
With the touch of spade to soil
Toppling bushes mighty trees digging trenches
You are a meteor leaving craters to smoke
Like my mother once moist gloves in the garden

II

Morning glory impatiens four o'clocks
When younger my favorite flowers
like the dresses I even in school had to wear
were showy and dodge balls are drawn to lace
pink hearts and white tights like snails to beer
The front yard was my Sunday school
Ape the bed growing the strongest mint
Your ability to heal better than or imbuing
the aloe planted at the foot of my steps

III

That plant will not grow its ring as I'd hoped
around the umbrella tree but instead
climbs up drain pipes walks the steps.
When I look I can see you light streak
bundled among deeper purple leaves
And now outside the hands of God I planted
are cupped to catch the rain drops gild the veins
feed the parched galaxy of summertime roots
fingertips poised as though about to dig recreate

The 2River View, 10.4 (Summer 2006)

Authors

Lauren K. Alleyne is a recent graduate of the MFA program at Cornell University. Her work has appeared in the *The Banyan Review*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *The Hampden-Sydney Review*, and is forthcoming in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* and *New Writing*.

Maureen Alsop is the poetry curator at the Palm Springs Art Museum. Her poems have appeared or are pending in *Adirondack Review*, *Arsenic Lobster*, *Cider Press Review*, *88*, *Texas Review*, and *Typo*.

Kevin Conder is the author of two books: *Learning to Scream* and *The Yellow Earth*. His poetry has appeared in *The North American Review* and *The Pedestal*, among others. Conder holds a MFA in creative writing from the University of Arizona.



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Mike Coughlin lives in Northern California. As an east coast transplant and a fan of the Boston Red Sox, he will never forgive Johnny Damon for signing with the New York Yankees.

Joellen Craft graduated from Oberlin College and now lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she is the pastry chef for a neighborhood restaurant. She hopes to buy a car and leave New York before her five-year reunion rolls around.

Mark Cunningham lives near Charlottesville, Virginia. His poems in this issue of *2RV* come from a manuscript of poems on numbers and letters, currently titled *Primer*. Other poems have appeared in *The Potomac* and *Rhino*; a larger selection of poems on parts of the body appears in *Mudlark*.

Jeannine Hall Gailey has had poems in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Evansville Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Verse Daily*. Her first book of poetry, *Becoming the Villainess*, is available from Steel Toe Books; and her chapbook, *Female Comic Book Superheroes*, is available from Pudding House Press.

Zachary Greenwald will graduate in May 2007 from New York University, where he has been awarded the Thomas Wolfe Prize for Poetry.

Phoebe North lives in suburban New Jersey. Several of her poems appear in *Burning Leaf* and *Stirring*. She recently scored her first seven-letter word—sillier—in Scrabble.

Stephanie Smith is an MFA graduate from the University of Miami. Her work has appeared in the *Cimarron Review*, *Gulfstream*, and elsewhere.

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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 initially appear on-line and later in print.

Richard Long
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