

The 2River View

12.2 (Winter 2008)



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new poems by

Wendy Taylor Carlisle, Mark Cunningham

Lightsey Darst, Deja Earley, Taylor Graham

Mercedes Lawry, Patrick Leonard, Jo McDougall

Brent Pallas, Emily Scudder, Phibby Venable

The **2R**iver **V**iew

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Brent Pallas

Mrs. Claus

How
could I
have known
it would be like this?
Always a pattern
of deadlines and late
nights forever breaking the bread
of haste. Idle moments too
small for hands to hold. Every
clock ticking bewilderment like a toy.
Am I impatient? A north wind
plumps my cheeks like a rose as the night
deepens its well. Curled beneath
the weight of winter blankets he takes
my hand the way an old trumpet recalls a familiar note.
His old sack filled with the burden
of desires now as the evergreens begin to glisten
and bow in the moonlight and departure
fills
his footprints
with snow.

Wendy Taylor Carlisle

Writing Home

If I could,
if this were a real letter
I would put it in the mail
I would feel it flutter in the box

it would slide into your hand
it would watch your face
I would let it tell you

about my commonplace
about what I do and don't do
about what I blame on you
about how I lay the memories like summer table cloths
on the dark wood of each day

Relax, the real letter would say, nevermind
it's summertime, have some watermelon.

It's all right, the letter would say then
It's only someone else's lines
It's only letters, in the end

Wendy Taylor Carlisle

Contrast

In the pasture behind this wall, the day-glo snow fence leans
and the concrete cistern pours its gray-brown shadow
on the snow like seaweed tarnished the white sand,
in that time when ungroomed beach stretched out
as far as a kid could see, clean as a snake, undisturbed
in the early morning when waves shimmied to shore
and gulls complained to the few people legging along the
 tide line,
far past the jetty, in that dazzling emptiness
beyond the tall chairs with their red and white floats,
their block letters spelling out:

SWIM AT YOUR OWN RISK

away from the scattered towels, in the hot vacancy
of the years before I came to this motel,
a wild stranger, studying the drifts, in a time
when the soles of my feet still burned like little suns

Mark Cunningham

American Robin

“Total noise deprived of internal difference equals silence.” Yet if you hold a sphere, every particle of whose surface is slightly higher or lower than every other particle, your hand feels a completely smooth surface. The earth’s poles shift toward the sun, away from the sun; the earth rolls, turns; at no time is all of it awake or asleep at the same time. We need a little flaw, a little flatness, so the world will continue until tomorrow. We need a little flaw, a little flatness, so the world will continue until tomorrow.

Bannaquit

The Matchbox car I’d never seen before, the only one of its type Woolworth’s had, the one I’d just paid allowance money for: I dropped it and Mike Crane stepped on it and crunched the left rear wheel. I sprinted the three blocks home, puffing and sniffing. When I tried to show Claire how to open a CD case, she scoffed, pried it, and sent the disk frisbeeing to skid music-side down. A friend told me that he keeps two copies of important books, one to read, one for backup. I wish he hadn’t: now I can’t read the first copy, either. I don’t want to be an intentional collector, no Shirley Temple spoons or *Star War* figures still in cardboard and plastic. These days, I’d like a crippled Matchbox, a scuffed Mozart piano concerto. Maybe next year I could add a *Collected Works* of Lorine Neidecker with a bent page. My poverty: not one cigarette scorch leopard-spots my couch. I don’t have a couch. I just have chairs.

Mark Cunningham

Pine Grosbeak

Robert's postcard (a Renoir, no less), stated, "I'm having a burger and a Killian's Red." Killian's? And the club sandwich was the one to get. When I met Sam for dinner, I hoped she wasn't wearing her brown-tinted glasses and silk scarves, as if she were a Riviera heiress and fifty pounds lighter. Yet these moments seemed enjoyable for them. So I've almost brought myself to tell my more hard-core friends that Mazzy Star's *So Tonight I Might See* remains one of my favorite albums ("another story, another lie, that's life"). White nostril hairs? Now when someone's eyes shift—cocaine? Kleenex dust?—hope perks up. Love? I'd like something more concrete. I want you to be embarrassed for me. Neither of us will have to worry about feeling embarrassed for ourselves: someone else is taking care of that. Then I can relax a bit and have a good time, too.

Western Willet

Further evidence that my body is fine, but my spirit is nearsighted: some nights the beating of my pulse in my ear against the pillow keeps me awake.

Lightsey Darst

Element

We wouldn't feel the sea
if it were luke like us.

The sea takes: three hours ago six men crossed
this current for the last time. Their widows will spend

the leftover weeks
swimming breathless laps in the lagoon.

The sea makes: to save herself from self
the girl swims crawl from shore to shore:

keens water on her thighs, and feet
forcing themselves together in the flap of a tail.

How different a dream, if I climb
over a mountain on the back of a chestnut pony, and find

a tiny star-shaped lake. But here
the hurricane rises like god's arm from the water.

Aftermath: broken glass, coast strewn with lumber.
Luminous organs
of deepsea lovers pale and popping on the sand.

Lightsey Darst

Jade Goddess

Far north, the splinter of pack ice divorcing
sheet from sheet. In the west, wind; in the south,

sun burning so hot no man could stand
on deck, no one could touch a cleat. And at

the bottom of the sea, which half
your poor crew saw, pearls, and deep

in the sea pearls.

Once I was worth all this. I in my loose robe

stretched at the pier's limit,
I was Orient then,

riches rising beyond catalogue, unfolded
ruby, sandalwood, mountains bound in jasmine.

How many nights you split my moon
before you tired of me: you,

true explorer, loved what you did not know.
What you knew, you sold.

Deja Earley

Silent Night

Ari can't hear carols.
And when she plays the angel in our nativity
her message for the shepherds is silent.

With her spread-eagled in my arms,
I dip to help her feel the rhythm
of her mother's piano.
She swirls the gold ribbon
we used for her costume
like she hears each note.

Earlier that day,
all through her mother's duet,
Ari screamed. Her eyes on the lights
at the back of the chapel,
her tiny fingers crying "more"
long after the sacrament passed.

Deja Earley

Smokey

My mother drove our cancerous cat
to the vet and to sleep.

Burial was twenty-five dollars extra
so she drove Smokey home
wrapped in a bath towel,
buried her in the rain while I was at school.

I imagine my mother with a shovel,
her slick black coat.

Taylor Graham

American Guest

And here I met a fellow-being and a fellow countryman,
with as good title to freedom as myself.

— Elihu Burritt's Journal, Nov. 27, 1846

Late November, London, guttering day-
light, you return to your unlit
room too cheap for comfort, to find

a stranger, darker shadow hunched
over the fire: jaws
too clenched to say his name: black

stowaway from a slave-block
in the mint-julep Home of the Free,
hanging —

no, it's his ragged calico
that hangs coatwise, still dripping
bilge-green seawater in puddles.

Of your two overcoats, you offer him
the better, easing his locked
elbows into free sleeves.

Your old mournful hat, as well —
you've just bought yourself
a new one, and who on God's good earth

needs the luxury of two
of anything? A man travels lighter
for what he gives willingly away.

Taylor Graham

Reckoning

The old body lies naked
on a hospital bed. Its skin
is ashen with the blue tattoo
of veins; anklebone and elbow,
vertebrae like calibrations
down the spine, a chart
for anyone to read.

Doctor, nurses, daughter
and a creditor or two. Priest
arrives too late to cure
the septicemia of sin. At least
7000-plus commissions, as many
gentle acts omitted. Someone
asks how much, exactly,

was he worth? A lawyer
punches in the figures -
insolvency in digital display.
Unspoken shrift
of solitude. What angel
black or bright
comes to snatch this
soul away?

Mercedes Lawry

I Dreamed Wolf

I dreamed wolf,
forging a way through ferocity,
strange yellow sight a revelation
almost holy.
Insignificant surroundings,
only this coming together,
a struggle to know
something about self
and something about the larger world.
I could not say if I had a choice.
If there was bravery,
it was embedded in fate.
I swallowed the wild
and became as true as anyone could,
anyone burdened with conscience and regret.

Mercedes Lawry

Who would believe it was November?

The pencil flew out of her hands.
Is there anything I can say,
he wondered, to make her love me?
It hadn't rained in weeks.
The sun was sucking at bones.
The dogs were rolling the dice.
She tried on a red dress, then a blue one.
Is my hair too long, she asked,
and could I be more fluent?
He was gnashing his teeth.
He wished he'd become a wrestler.
I could release my tension, he thought,
perhaps convince her to try harder.
Who would believe it was November?
No one could stop the anger
or the shadows from moving across the house
or the believers from praying out loud.

Patrick Leonard

1.50.02

Caroline divided her day into fourteen hour segments of rot and return. Once Caroline secured the space below several torches, the remaining loads of what will soon not be pulsed in the flicker song of her missing mother. Proper attire for instances of such memory escaped without notice in the wide scope of ambitious chemistry. Caroline to the third shadow on her left, "When you arrive, disregard compulsions of quantity." Caroline put faith in her two dimensional sisters and giggled when they stretched themselves the length of the wooden track.

2.50.02

Born from failed torches, Caroline ignored the rules of combustion, favoring the explicit guidelines of quench. Dressed in august soaking attire, the shore could not keep pace with Caroline's midnight shouts and trumpet blasts that named each crest. Perhaps Caroline fantasized too heavily the moment where one vibration arrives desperate at the other and misremembered her father completely. Light spread quiet the echoes of Caroline's guilty tracks from her thin route obsession. In the tangled nest of her lifelong hair, one peculiar segment of Caroline's mind spend all his time as a drenched flint unprepared to ignite all that tempted and surrounded.

Patrick Leonard

3.50.02

Caroline could not have known the seamless wooden box bounced from a slow-pull cart when she smelled the unmistakable attire of the shortest ballerina. Surely Caroline's late arrival at the auction required an adequate explanation but not before she composed several letters to the newfound pale girl. In fear of being tracked by verbal infidelity Caroline swallowed every syllable before she spoke of disappearance and dawdling. Caroline to the audience of purchasers: "You must ignore my absence from the initial segment, for I have brought forth an object of paralleled desire." Caroline felt the letters swell in her, took the torch from beneath her skirt and set the chest ablaze, "Ashes," she announced, "of an orphaned dancer, the size of an empty pocket."

4.50.02

From the ceiling boards, Caroline heard several of the men agree, "When the lanky beast arrives, use your best teeth to subdue her." Six and three quarter hours shrunk and fitted in the dry wood, Caroline lost all track of thirst and the grotesque fingernails that stole nits from their stew bucket. In the increased frost Caroline cut the outer segments of her toes to prevent further advancement of the contagious bite. Had Caroline, as advised repeatedly in her dreams, torched the chamber of deerskin maps, this pursuit may have only appeared in a fragment of sleep. And even the feat of outlasting murder attire left to wither in the tiny hope of a left-handed boy.

Jo McDougall

Companion

When Grief came to visit,
she hung her skirts and jackets
in my closet.
She claimed the only bath.

When I protested,
she assured me
it would be for but a little while.

Then she fell in love with the house,
repapered the kitchen,
laid green shag carpet in the den.

She's a good listener
and plays a mean game of Bridge.
But it's been seven years.

Once I ordered her outright to leave.
Days later she came back,
weeping.

I'd enjoyed my mornings,
coffee for one,
solitary sunsets,
my Tolstoy and Moliere.

I asked her in.

Jo McDougall

She Takes the Old Pontiac in for Repairs

The young service manager
comes round to explain,
as if someone were dying,

what will have to be done. "It's more,"
he says gravely, "than we thought."
I want to tell him it's all right,

that I've heard worse,
that we're all orphans here.
Live long enough,

you might as well be a spider
in a corner of the basement,
year in year out

marvelously disguised.
But I like this young man,
trying to help me understand

the car is on its last breath.
"Another hour or so, Ma'am."
he smiles. "I'm sorry for the wait."

It's all right; I'll be home soon,
perhaps to find you unpacking,
the cat murmuring to himself

like a contented chicken, the radio
waffling through its noise, the replenished
Pontiac exhaling slowly in the drive.

Emily Scudder

Natural Instincts

If you leave a soda can on the lawn
bees begin to hover. They know to come.

Ants lift a blue chip.

Nature rivets. Screws me
into dramas, in the kitchen, past the yard.

Behind the house a black snake tried
to swallow a brown frog. It gave up.

Slithered to the brush.

Gleaming in snake spit, the huge frog
sat, stunned in the sun.

A hamster eats her gummy stillborn, now
more protein than progeny.

Like the tree knows when to fork itself.

10 whales washed up.
8 bottle-nosed dolphins too.

Volunteers came quickly. They found
some alive and picked at. The gulls did it.

On stretchers, the dolphins clicked & clicked.

Emily Scudder

Old Dog

It's the way they are together.
It's the way they are in no rush, no rush at all.

He sniffs.
He licks the inside of her forearm.

His owner, she looks off –
up into the trees.

We do this: wait
(for the oldest of all kinds).

The old dog outside my office window
holds tumors beneath his belly skin.

Like udders, they swing.

Phibby Venable

Lion in the Blue Delta

on the delta
the Mississippi in his hands
his horn on his shoulders
a lion in his mouth
a dark karo swirl
in his eyes
his fingers
the nails
of a hungry cat that
punished
punched buttons
air pulled in
exhale blue grass
red lips wet black
rage of love
gone bad
gone, flipped on
the warden
a letter crumbled
blew out the end
of a golden tube
that woman
that freedom
twisted through his
teeth tongue
on the delta
swallowing a lion.

Phibby Venable

We gather our coins

We gather our coins and pay the booth master
He is outlined in the evening sun, a large shadow of himself
There is a blaze behind his head and a bucket
where the coins rattle at the bottom.
It is cloudy and the day continues in a long roadway
that is going straight uphill
Soon we will reach the summit
Already the air is purple and deep
There is a dream catcher looped on a small tree
Lilies, moist with altitude, stretch upward
At the top, a dark railing, secures our stop
The sun is a red splash on random rocks
We watch a lone crow that is flying our way
My hand holds a slim branch
There is a hard bound wind beginning to blow
I am weightless and fearful of the currents
You are watching the crow turn sharply
in a circle toward the horizon.

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Contributors

Wendy Taylor Carlisle publishes widely from her home in Texas. Her second book of poems, *Discount Fireworks*, is winner of the Blackgrove Award and will be out in early 2008 from Jacaranda Press.

Mark Cunningham lives outside Charlottesville, Virginia. His poems appear in recent or forthcoming issues of *Parcel*, *Practice*, and *Sentence*. Tarpaulin Sky Press will soon publish *Body Language*, a diptych of poems about the body and numbers.

Lightsey Darst lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches composition and writes dance, art, and book reviews. In 2007, she received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Literature. Recent work is published in *The Antioch Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Literary Review*, and *New Letters*.



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Deja Earley is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Southern Mississippi. Her poems and essays are published or forthcoming in *Arts and Letters*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Borderlands*, *PIF Magazine*, and elsewhere.

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler. Her poems appear in *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, *The Iowa Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. *The Downstairs Dance Floor* (Texas Review Press) won the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize.

Mercedes Lawry is published in journals such as *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Rhino*, and *Seattle Review*. *There Are Crows in My Blood* is available from Pudding House Press. Lawry is currently Director of Communications at the Museum of History & Industry in Seattle, Washington.

Patrick Leonard attends the MFA Writing Program, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife and son. His poems have appeared in *elimaë*, *MiPOesias*, and *The Pebble Lake Review*.

Jo McDougall is the author of five books of poems—most recently *Dirt* and *Satisfied With Havoc*—and is now writing a memoir, *Daddy's Money*. She is Associate Professor Emeritus at Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas, where she is the former co-director of the creative writing program.

Brent Pallas lives and works in New York City as a freelance craft and homestyle designer. His work has appeared in *2RV*, *The Missouri Review*, *The New England Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, and *The Southern Review*. He recently had a snowman made from packing peanuts appear on the cover of *Woman's World*.

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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View*, occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series, and podcasting from Muddy Bank, the 2River Blog. Please visit www.2River.org to read the submission guidelines.

Richard Long
Editor

Contributors *(continued from preceding page)*

Emily Scudder is the author of *A Change of Pace* (Finishing Line Press, 2007). Her poems have appeared in *Agni Online*, *Harvard Review*, *Mamazine.com*, *Margie*, *Swivel*, and elsewhere.

Phibby Venable has poetry in the *Appalachian Review*, *Polarity*, *Southern Ocean Review*, and *Voices Magazine*, among others. Her chapbooks include *Indian Wind Song*, *On White Top* and *What I Saw Beautiful*. She works with grant reviews for Appalachian Resources.

2RV

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