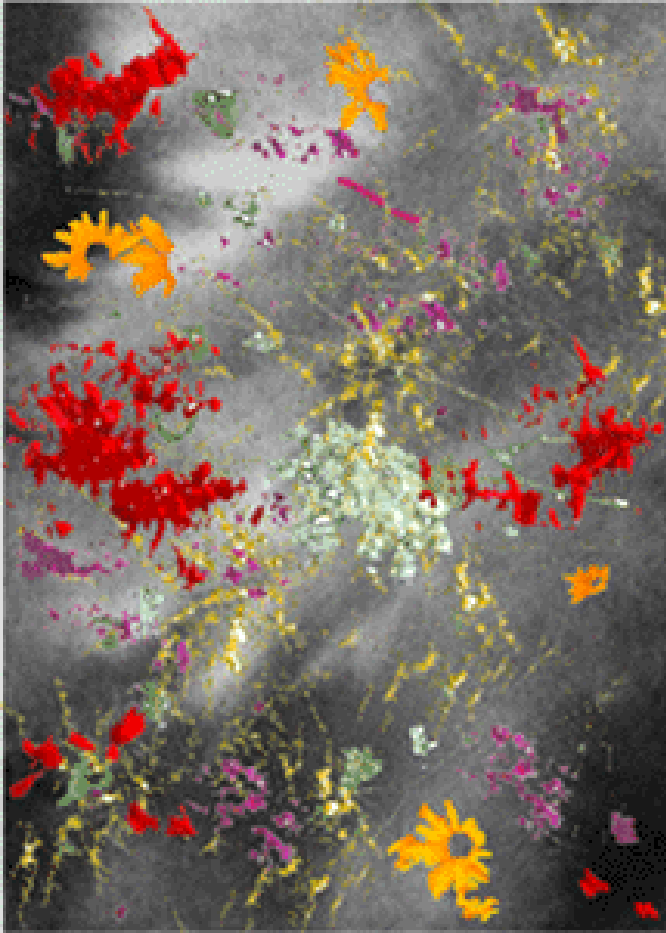


2_1 (Fall 1997)

The 2River View



POEMS BY C. E. Chafin, Harry Joles, Robert Kendall,
Robert Lietz, Terry Murphy, Barry Shrapnel, Neca Stoller,
CK Tower, and Gerard Varni

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The 2River View

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When Cats Are Sheep

C. E. Chaffin

The brown finch on my balcony rail
sings for his wife, who ducks
through the broken corner
of the overhead lamp cover's
rounded square of milky glass.
With her bag-lady bits
of twig and string
she constructs safety
inside the hollow,
then lays her bottled children down.

My cats bleat like miniature sheep
around these birds
because my balcony
is twenty floors up
so they can stalk but never leap
except to their deaths.

That is why these weird sounds
are squeezed from their throats.

They Were Enough

C. E. Chaffin

I slept with the anonymous dead
in mass graves,
quick-lime for blankets,
loose earth above,
and drilled a hole up
so light could tickle their bones,
but they didn't care.

So I sat with them,
those who never held a microphone
or received a medal,
whose chief recognition
was a birthday,
until I learned their secret:
They were enough,
in themselves, to matter.

pebbles

Harry Joles

beneath the shrill buzz of fluorescent strobe
lies the mass grave of crickets, roaches, june bugs,
and the like, all molded into the intricate grooves
of suspended pebbles frozen like slaves to soles of men.
My soles too rest with the insects
amidst our lowly conclave of rubber and ectoplasm,
dried skeletons and flesh, an alter to beauty.

from Eleven Clues

Robert Kendall

1.

CONTENTS: 1 Clue.

Remove with subtlety.

Examine only out of the farthest corner of your eye.

Then look the other way and let it creep

into your assumptions before you make them.

It may keep your feelings guessing for a while,

but you should grow to like it.

Though not in the obvious ways.

Just let it find a warm place in your

latest intuition about what would appeal to you.

Eventually you should feel it taking root

in some potential grounds for encouragement—

even enthusiasm.

Requires minimal apprehension.

Guaranteed to bloom indicatively.

But then will come the fruit destined

for the deductive hand and the deciding basket—

perhaps even the meaningful table.

WARNING: In case of understanding,

break the news and pull the handle.

You'll have to let the world know

how to fit into the solution.

Yes, once that faint gleam meets the light of day,

it's yours no longer, so don't wait

for certainty to come and drag it out of you.

Only your wildest doubts can keep a grip on it.

7.

It's larger than life. Or rather,
bigger than the box life comes in
before it's assembled. Watch closely.
It's the color of trying to see,
so it blends into each look.
It's the shape of the mind and fits
perfectly into whatever you're thinking,
no matter how embarrassing the inner decorating.
Just about grasped it? Well,
it has the feel of almost touching,
so you'll never know when it's in your hands, despite . . .
don't drop it for God's sake.

Let's try again, and pay attention this time.
The trick is to deceive appearances.
Look things in the face value
while you get their drift under the table.
Get your feelings to trust you
so they'll slip you past the facade.
Then when nobody's looking,
flip to your soul's last page
to feel the outcome. Not that one,
the page that never manages to get written.
OK, once more from the beginning ...

10.

None of the arguments would work properly,
but that in itself meant nothing.
We pushed on with our intentions immaculate,
our lives in the right place.
Then the morals came loose and clattered
onto the primrose pavement.
That raised a few eyebrows, but
we held our tongues and braced for a high-speed
longing down the visceral back routes.
When the pathos failed to move,
we started to get nervous.
There was nothing left to do
but release the wild guesses and hope
they didn't turn on us.

I tremble to think how close we must have come.
A mere choice away from the A or B of no return.
Right there before us a mortally asked question
(select one):

1. prepared for that great big yes or no in the sky
 2. raised itself to its full height and demanded a cut of the answer
 3. admitted complicity in the wrongfully committed replies
- We tried to grasp it by:
4. none of the above (except where required by State or Local Intuitions)
- But it was really just too tough for us.

If only we could stall awhile.
Time will tell, we told ourselves, but finally,
time had to make a run for it.
By a miracle we made it back with our outcomes intact—
or so we thought.
There must have been an inkling
that touched our lives in their private parts,
because our innocence has never been the same.
But whatever it is we've lived by since then,
our lives aren't letting on.

Figuring Out the Spread

Robert Lietz

Not the first to dream or make their case
for gravity, dreaming of falling parts, and not the first
to wonder that their words could fail to say so,

marveling the Mayday snows, gossiping April's
custodies, never the first but visible, and keen
as they'd come to be on doubt, talking off the top,

thinking to make some what? or anyhow stay put,
deciding, even as weathers must decide, to stand
on their luck and boasts of good stock simmering.

A man— polite among the forms— surveys the crimps
and registries, seeing what foods these cousins like,
inviting him to laugh, or saying what somebody

thought of him, laughing off the twists, dream-frauds
and hovering commotions/those tracks beneath
the sills, those barefoot tracks where bodies floated up,

presenting themselves to him like overnight deliveries.
Matters of fact maybe, the breathing pine made split
or blown apart to start a vigil, because the blooms

were overgrown, because they had gone ahead as told,
reeling with the peppers and engrossing cloves,
acting their own stuffed selves and x-ing vowels out,

assuming this ease to match the international reporting.
And what re-seeded lots, and what suburban
back-lots left to railroads, what foods these cousins like,

reveal less a world as is, reveal the tricks where voices
seem to rise from the construction, to speak
from the cement, from the surfaces made to glow

with cosmetic bristling, no longer exactly comfortable,
and always a little out of touch, no longer
amused in the old ways, to sharpen brunch-warmed

alphabets, spooking to glow from spore
-sprung desolations and veneers.

Transparencies and Fields

Robert Lietz

How they'd depended once on bodies getting done!
And how they had looked outside, beside

the homes they'd raised despite convictions over borders,
where you could hang most anything,

where love for sure, and love, for its calypso variants,
defying the grumbles overhead, took up

with sentiment and selves, implementing anything. And
now these stones alive

imagine fidelites of scale, the voices of stones alive, above
the weaving river grasses, unable

to control or fathom still, believe the change of light
had meant the village powered down

/the scruffs had chased down innocents/seeing the trucks
waved through, and then the sudden blasts

where worlds widely spun, arranging the face
in permafrost, and, after twenty years,

absurd!, and after twenty years, impossible!— this heft
where dreams could stand to be considered,

this dust and air and light, this wishbone light/these
cross-lit constancies, persisting on the wharves,

and on the blocks made bright by the persisting acappellas,
leaving the night alone, and leaving

these rock-forms gazing off the hills and naming planets,
happy to have heard jazz-rounds

and, thinking, after all, themselves this etiquette, these song
and gutter -birds, here in the flashing light

that seems to move on the glad waters, this scaled say
and reflexive calculus, reaching about so far,

for all the terrible concentration, for all the sad misanthropies
and personal subscriptions, to

reappreciate the tunes, the moods when fronts
moved duly through the country,

the music tracking from the fish shacks
on Commercial Boulevard.

Lonely Canyons

Terry Murphy

Cold north winds swept
through the lonely canyons,
summer and its heat,
its passions now spent
lie forgotten

Once soft waters transformed
frozen hard and brittle,
Jeering laughter in the gust,
mock the fissure walls
and life slows down again.

Special light that once danced,
has dimmed in the solstice,
solitary shadows lengthening
its final season come
and consumed in the chill.

What cruel path and unmerciful fate
led me to this callous chasm?
I have succumbed into its folds,
trudging into the journey,
isolated in a lonely canyon home.

Changes

Barry Shrapnel

When you get so many years ahead
of where you started from,
And you feel so very different
than you were,
You wonder how it all could happen:

When all those years
were really only
A series of days and hours
strung together.

Rain

Neca Stoller

The rain threads
through the green plaid
of the forest canopy
onto a downed oak;
splashing off an
orange umbrella
of a mushroom
sprouting there;
dripping down
between bent grasses
into the dark sand.
Arriving, just now,
on earth.

Starch

Neca Stoller

I talk on—so many sounds
but not those words
no matter how much I say.
It's hard, like starching a collar
stiffer and stiffer. The starch
builds till my wooden tongue
simply can't form the phrase
"I love you, too."

Long Night

Neca Stoller

Near the lingering candle
melting into itself,
a flowered vase
brighter than its flowers.
A restless night, keeping
company with the moon,
lighting one cigarette
with another cigarette, when
coming through the mist,
fading the red camellias,
a car's headlights—
Then your whistle.

Baling Hay

Neca Stoller

Scythed down how flat the pasture is.
Olive, curing rows of grass fade and silver.
Behind drumming machinery,
like a wagon train,
sweet bales circle the field.
Tall exhaust stacks - rusted, split -
leak smoke.

Their cryptic signals puff,
then drown in the humid air.

The way the sweat and dust paints
chin, cheeks and corded arms.
He looks as though a palette
of khaki and ocher spilled,
tracing its idea of Guernica.
Eyes, noses, fingers
carved and reassembled.
Juxtaposed at odd angles.

Meanwhile, the ripening hay,
All over, a fragrant smell pervades.
Slowly, an iced mason jar,
cold tea thick with sugar,
cracks the encrusted grime.
His mouth, here and there, pieces through.

Bleached sky- in each place the sun.
The only shade in reach, one round shadow,
bobbles after a bulky hay baler-
like a mace, its sharp spikes,
again, reaps the dead blue grass.

Dreaming Grandifloras, Again

CK Tower

for fs

“...I saw within her eyes,
before they answered, slow entanglements
of roses...”

W.F. Lantry

I must have dreamt her again— the roses
have surrendered their spiny axis. I'm impatient
recalling their fragrance as it split through fog
every morning in July. And the dew,
how it settled into each petite crevices of green, swelled
on each damask satin shell. One by one,
a perfect moment carved into dawn.

The damascena will return, hewing aurora
with its redolence. My restivity lies
in the withering remembrance
of her skin; impressible petals rising
out of a sun beloved valley, halfway between
Sofia and the Black Sea: loose clusters blooming
at the tips of stems, hidden inside, hips turn red,
yellow, or black during their peak.

On the rim of her hip, my lips left a secret,
giving rise to the full double flowers every lover
or gardener praises— I must have dreamt her again.

Of Two Minds Left Undone

CK Tower

Maybe there's a secret to untangling
misplaced endearments: consider rose hips
from The Grasse, and Roman chamomile; the latter
carried a hundred miles by a Saxon priest, chanting
maythen. Perhaps it's some arcane ingredient:
five grains of sand from Cronos' hourglass or an
inch of thread
from Lachesis. Possibly the enunciation
of a Siren's midnight confession: a translation
from papyrus leaf,
scrawled down while she dreamt of a forbidden lover.

If I knew the secret, every obscure ingredient,
each word patterned in gossamer trope, both
or anything, I could diminish the remembrance:
your presence lingering inside each veiled chamber,
leading toward my center. But if I indulged
in our undoing, I'd be left with yet another space
to fill, with rose hips, chamomile and siren song.

Slices of Matisse

Gerard Varni

We had not yet finished talking of love,
Had not yet even touched upon its most
Sacred vestige, immutability.
Here in this room with arms stretched across
A dark table, fingers entwined like
An ivory blossom flourishing in
Shaded soil, she whispers the name of
A painter: The one who drew with scissors,
Who captured light in glowing colors,
Roiling dark rhythms, lively and violent.
Love sustains the artist, she says, and it is not
Discord, but love that begets creation.
And all the while blue fingers of water
Slip beneath the door, creep across the tile,
Rise to drain the room of its essential light.
Yet neither water nor waning light
Constrains the wordless confession
In which for a moment we feel ourselves
To be free, and the splendor of a sigh
Seems to endure beyond measure.
In the barely perceptible movement
Of her finger I find a lasting joy.

We had not yet finished musing on love,
Mourning its frailty, marveling at its
Recondite truths, inexhaustible depths.
Destiny, she says, not Icarus,
Not Pierrot, but Destiny
Two lovers clinging opposite the black
Menace of a mask
Is love precisely rendered.
Ominous yet irresistible,
Dissonant and dazzling,
Starkly certain.
Still the water's insurrection continues,
Transforming the room into a silent
Crucible whose pure liquid melts our
Voices and surges above our heads.
And she, like a deity with sinuous
Hair swirling in the pale light,
Closes her eyes against the stinging tide.
I hold fast to her trembling hand, clinging,
Having not yet finished dreaming of love.

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Contents

C.E. Chaffin is a retired family doctor and lives in Long Beach, CA. He has published sporadically in small journals since the seventies. *Elementary*, his first book of poems, will soon be released by Mellen Press.

Harry Joles studies philosophy at Antioch University. He is fascinated by the idea of shoes and fluorescent lights.

Robert Kendall's first book of poems, *A Wandering City*, won the Cleveland State University Poetry Center Prize. His second book-length work is the hypertext poem, *A Life Set for Two*, published by Eastgate Systems. Kendall has received a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship and a New Forms Regional Grant Program Award.

Robert Lietz, a professor of English and Creative Writing at Ohio Northern University, has published in more than a hundred journals in the U.S. and Canada, including *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Northern American Review*, and *Shenandoah*. Seven of his poetry collections have been published. Eastgate Systems will publish *Protection Avenue*, a book-length hypertext, as part of a CD-Rom Anthology scheduled for publication later this year.



Born in New York City, Terry Murphy has his BA from St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. He currently resides in North Carolina and is employed as a Credit Manager by the Monolith Corporation in Raleigh.

Barry Shrapnel owns two horses and loves to ride. Born and raised in the United States, he has lived since 1971 in Adelaide, Australia.

Neca Stoller is the the owner-manager of a cattle farm in south Georgia. She serves as the Chairman of the County Planning Commission and is a graduate of The University of Georgia. She has been published in several literary magazines on the internet and in *Frogpond, Modern Haiku, American Tanka, Still, Cicada, Lynx, Potpourri, Sijo West, and Unit Circle.*

CK Tower attends Michigan State University, where she is studying literature and creative writing. Her work has been published on the Internet, as well as in Canada and in the US. Some of the journals where her work has been published, include: *Poetry In Motion, 15 Credibility Street, Horse Play, Poetalk, and Afterthoughts.*

Gerard Varni lives in Los Angeles, where he graduated from Loyola University with a Bachelor's degree in english/philosophy and a Master's in literature. His work appears currently in crossconnect, anthem and the blue moon review.

2River Poetry

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All mail is answered within a day or two.

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