

# The 2River View

7.1 (Fall 2002)



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**New poems by** Gabriel Arquilevich, Adrienne Banks  
Wendy Carlisle, James Grinwis, Vicki Hudspith, Marlene Lintzer  
Walt McDonald, Rochelle Ratner, John Sweet, David Wright



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Richard Long, Editor

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**Dorothy, After**

North, South, East, West who could ever keep them straight?  
I, for one, barely remember to pick up the dry cleaning.  
Why did I think it would be a good thing to click my heels?

Football and baseball, soccer and swimming—dates as hard to remember  
as witches' names. These days, I'm a whirlpool carpool, strong enough  
to lift a house, spin it around with someone in it drinking Margaritas  
and set it down in some other county, not a dry county,  
a county with a nice cocktail lounge made of yellow bricks,  
and a well-dressed businessman settled in the corner booth.

So what if the bartender is under five feet tall?  
So what if the booth is behind red curtains?

I might go right up to that man—even up to his room  
and never complain if he talked to me all night in aphorisms,  
but only protest when it was over and he showed me how to get home.

## Cinematic

### 1. *About The Set*

The stars on the patio overlooking the river cost  
thousands of dollars  
but I can't complain, I have you under the *ristras*,

drinking margaritas from  
those wide glasses with saguaro stems  
and I'm almost holding your arm

while your animal smell burns in my head  
until I have to move  
so I step you along the footpath, the trees vivid

with last light, the Tower Life building,  
argoned in green while vacationers rattle those Cornhusker hats  
with the yellow ears that suggest

boozy picnics, past lives  
and toss off one-liners, wild under the shower  
of pearl bulbs lighting up in the cypress

like ribs in an umbrella, extras jubilant  
on the *vaperetti*, Texas-drunks in tan Stetsons,  
*Conjunto* like I planned it. So what

if you're a San Antonio hero who bowls  
on Sunday while the dressed-up city prays.  
I have to admit how little

I expect: neon, tequila,  
the mostly-cinematic dusk dissolved  
to close-up: two faces, the fading light.



## 2. *Another B Movie*

On this reel: the desperate sunset, twinkle lights, a tracking shot along the manipulated river:

In the Excelsior Bar the accordion is a staggered heartbeat. The man who is not a hero grinds away on the dance floor. His face is buried in his partner's neck. His movements are always a little off the beat.

These are images designed to show how the man keeps his heart out of the rhythm, out of the strings of peppers, the bullfight posters, the Jose Cuervo, keeps it safe from the neon and limes.

In the next reel: the man is on the riverbank, drunk, wearing a ten-gallon hat, talking about spares and strikes. On the soundtrack: the beating of a perpetual tourist heart.

The film clarifies what happened in the Tex-Mex bar.

## 3. *The Poem That Should Have Been A Movie*

If it were a movie, the poem would be a show-off.

If it were a movie, the poem could picture lovers breathing.

If it were a movie, the poem might imagine how a heart hides out.

But the poem sadly knew it was a poem. Far away from the original dance floor, it ground its hips to Tejano music in some seedy dive. It two-stepped with a cast of cinematic Mexicans, loose women and misfits, then got drunk and sloppy and wandered out alone to the sidewalk where it lit up a cigarette. Later it strolled down to the water dressed in a modified suit of lights. The poem ended the evening with a boy from a family of bowlers. Only the accordion player noticed.

Gabriel Arquilevich

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### **Apology to My Son, Eight Months in the Womb**

I sent the thought of you tumbling when I knew.  
There were calls like a newsroom  
and nothing I could do: I could wander,  
do what I do, but not without your hazy truth

rounding out my view, tenting my nights  
as you inch your way up  
like the water in your sister's tub, like the Legos  
your brother's putting together.

I spent the summer shaking you loose,  
watering every newborn  
blade and dry patch hardened into clay,  
into the life I had zipped up and called a family.

By now you must be hearing  
our muffled kitchen voices  
designating your trundle bed, singing  
non words and naming you.

The way death ends, you begin,  
and I'm still trying to find my way to you,  
to welcome you home  
at the end of our dark tunnels.

## Heartbroken

People seem to think they know  
everything about poison oak,  
about runaway horses and floating balloons;

what about nosebleeds  
at recreation parks  
or some dying animal on a Thursday afternoon?

You see, the day was long  
and full of dragons  
sweeping over the cobwebbed moon,

(I would have run that beagle over  
if I could, lingering  
in the dark barns, in the wet country)

and I want the time I held you  
cloudlessly, your original  
eyes, your hands.

I could continue in this aching horizon  
or dismiss you as one  
thumps on the sun with a hammer.

## **Cervical Biopsy**

after the malignant cells removed,  
in my dreams  
the only way for a man  
to touch a woman  
is to carve the bad parts out  
the gray rot meat out,  
a fish fillet,  
as if the only proper way  
for a man and woman to meet  
is at the cervix with razorblade

it is easy to catch  
the tongue by the hook.  
the little private fish  
sick at the mouth of me,  
death will make it well.

but I remember when  
my first fish was filleted  
her opal scales cold  
choke mouth drowning  
gills fanning  
and I remember the trauma  
of finding the belly full  
the blade blink  
the blood and egg stream  
rinse clear with such rush  
the fish eggs. flesh baubles. perfect.  
flush downstream.

the bad parts carved out

### **Rickets in Winter**

the Pakistani man  
at the roast beef deli  
recalls his first woman,  
bought cheap.  
lifting a perfume bulge,  
he did not know where to put it.  
he did not know  
what to do  
with so much of a woman

I dream of a Pakistani prostitute.  
I wake up to another soupy evening,  
winter opening up her legs  
peeling thigh from thigh  
revealing never-ending  
dark, dank, bloat.  
the long night of winter's legs sprawled,  
she opens up, a willing whore.  
I mourn the sun,  
for what to do  
with so much whore.  
I hump it idly.  
we make crazy eyes at one another  
in the maddened winter ward,  
our tongues made of snake meat,  
our fingers probing a dark stench.

## Chihuahua

It's the greatest desert in North America  
as well as the smallest canine ever.  
I was hiking the rim of it and when  
it belched a dust storm curled out of  
the fathoms. At home, I spend hours  
sifting through newsprint,  
and folding magazine articles  
into paper animals. Chihuahuas  
are buoyant in desert environments,  
almost like fennec fox—  
however, I don't know what the word means.  
It could mean *smudge*, or *ice*,  
or *moonstone*; something particular  
about the desert. Here,  
the snow rocks off the shingles  
and hits the sidewalk like a belt of teeth.  
Sheepdogs and Samoyds fit the north  
like oil fits crankshafts, but they don't  
smell as such. Out of a blizzard,  
they're huge, ambulatory skunk cabbages.  
When the rain goes out of itself it leaves  
wind or snow. Dust goes somewhere fast  
then nowhere. Tracks in sand  
sigh like ice-worms in spring. I was hiking  
the rim of the Chihuahuan desert.  
I'm not adapted to this environment.  
A coyote glued herself to the shade  
of a chulla plant. It's like nailing  
a needle with a toothpick. She stared  
and opened her mouth. The dust storm  
billowed somewhere south and missed us.  
The silence fell like a sac of water.  
Each step you lose some water.

### **Configuration of Crumbs**

The cold heaps of other mountains,  
antelopes brushing the sky...  
When they're through eating  
they remember the minds  
they have done damage to.  
In the distance, mountains  
furl and unfurl. They hold  
warm, inexpugnable depths,  
soothing unreflective things,  
such as what you feel at dawn,  
adjusting your alarm clock, determined  
to have french fries for breakfast.  
This is new, you have never done this,  
and believe it will be a way  
to make the irregular firm.  
This is all new for me, the man  
is thinking. The man is thinking  
that if he possessed a baguette  
he'd bash it over the dismalness  
and remember all kinds of bread.  
Because of all the crazy things.  
Because there seems no escaping  
the frustrated house. It's red,  
jammed with leaves, and when  
you pluck a leaf you will be like  
the way you plucked it, nobody seeing  
your way through to where you're going.  
The way we're going is somehow up  
though one wouldn't notice it as such.

## **Forgiving The Desert**

If only I could spend an afternoon  
With summer in my lungs  
If only I could rebuild my city  
Under a canopy of trees

Instead of listening to horns of war  
Bagpipes blowing for the fallen  
Autumn has seen days beautiful as ball gowns  
Hang in shreds

If only I could admit  
That the idea of cranberry sauce  
Fills me with fear and weakness  
Perhaps I could hold the face of worry

While you sleep  
Behind the curtain of your eyes  
In a heap of bountiful isolation  
Which is gone when you look at me

If only the russet autumn  
Could point  
With the abundant lips  
And fingers of seasons

I am no longer able  
To speak my native language  
Use only the barbarous invectives  
Of polite society

Which reduce my heart  
Shrunken upon  
The seed of love  
Oh if I could open the sky



The desert sand would fly  
We would eat again  
Behind sighs and it would be so simple  
To know you

Weapons thrown down  
Pushing back dry heat  
Forgiving the desert for a lack of trees  
But I live among the lace remains of metal and glass

Carry particles of emptied air  
Every cloudy day into the sun  
If only  
I were no longer petty

I could heal the world and cure myself  
Shaking harshness from the clouds  
If only rocks of sugar  
Could sweeten the bitter sea

Vicki Hudspith

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### **The Inebriation Of Salt**

You rapped your cigar against my knuckles  
I watched tobacco  
Drop against my hand and vowed  
Never to say anything against a man's cigar

Or compare the smoke  
Of one against another for they are all fragrant  
In the tropical evening where moisture  
And scent are damp varieties of kisses

Are equal  
To evening breezes  
Against  
The backs of my knees

This is  
The inebriation of salt  
To be true  
It has to be said

You wanted me to be in love  
So you could see how it looked  
Could catch its fragrance  
As it left my skin

In ever widening circles  
Of your dissatisfaction  
From thunder I learn about rain  
And by sweltering I adapt to heat

I am compelled by autumn  
To dwell in the created months  
While the biology of misbehavior  
Will forget you

Working like an eraser  
To perform a shadow puppetry  
On my heart  
And the signature, your sigh

**Father At The Ocean**

mother's charm is standing alongside  
*the beach looks lovely in midwinter*  
and father brought us in the large  
white truck  
after airing out the dangerous tires and  
giving an impromptu  
physics assemblyline soliloquy  
on the separated treads  
clawing like  
supportive cats the packed sand

and thinking of Einstein's simplicity. if we could  
not fall through  
every single crevice presented  
opened and God's gifted then we  
would end up in the very same place  
that we have do not  
begin  
from

*handle it softly*

is the measure of dialogue. or  
the lemon-olive twist  
of dialogue. or  
father's wine glass bearing  
odd city names  
spilling along the  
saccharine buckskin  
little fingerprints  
of summering in the Crimea  
or drinking  
oil from neareast bazaars. lighting a cigarette  
with  
  
dramatic green

oh.

throwing colored paper and loudness at irreverent  
gulls lining  
the poor wood pier  
and seaglass only becomes pretty after  
barricading itself from pinpointed eagle sands driven  
by the motioning of seismic waters;  
a tumbler for precious stones

and father  
gave away  
the white  
truck for  
a horse but  
the horse  
would not  
heed him;

so we are here. and the wine has fermented enough  
mother uses it for vinegar when she is cooking Italian  
dishes

rarely as  
it is

### The Grave Robber's Monologue

*they*

*are the*

*best company*

*and that is why his hand is stuffed in  
an ancient pocket where the buttons  
have clinked against  
the marble floor*

*long away since  
he was a child*

and long since  
and long since brazen things have fallen away as well.  
it quivered about the  
last autumn trees to find the  
living asleep in comparative  
silence towards  
the crash among leaf and  
field by tiny mice  
and

wide awake night birds

but comfort stands at  
the woolen-eyed sentinels  
by the heavy gates. and the  
November out of doors  
is more along the lines  
of wood smoke

along the ice laden boughs of  
elastic birch trees the ash clings  
because  
all atmosphere was once the carbon  
dioxide of inhaling plants  
the impurity traced of oxygen and  
that the couplets arranged less and less

while  
still worthwhile: the familiar cufflinks. a cameo  
brooch. an emerald pin.

*they sift underneath their opened eyes*

*and*

*like marbles fallen they  
shatter china against the temple  
floors.*

*it is nice lifting a hand to be among*

*those who are not*

*waiting any longer*

### **Another Montana Dawn**

Crows squawk across the valley at dawn.  
Other couples snuggled in sleeping bags  
may blink and linger in sleep. Crouched beside  
this rented tent, breathing Montana pine,  
we wonder if crows cawed yesterday at dawn  
before the lodge fire drove us stumbling outside

in the dark, the crackle of burning walls,  
the siren shrill enough to scare the bears.  
Millions of decades, glaciers scoured the peaks,  
a month to build a lodge, an hour to burn it down.  
Last century is history, a millennium  
hardly a scar on forty miles of forest.

Today, we'll hate to leave this tent  
half buried in snow without coffee at dawn,  
no matter how many grizzlies waddle by,  
steep peaks as far as we can see, no breeze,  
McDonald Lake a ten-mile slick, a thousand geese  
rising like hosannas, now and forever wild.



Walt McDonald

---

### **In a San Juan Mountain Cabin**

Rocks tumble down the sluice all day,  
racket like mustangs clattering past the cabin.  
In mountains, get used to it or get out.  
After midnight, not many rocks wash past,

the day's snowmelt already downriver  
at Silverton, by now. Runoff at night  
is a swish over stones too big to be budged.  
Lights out, crawl under covers, let bears

take the slopes, let elk and deer bed down,  
let coyotes and mountain lions take charge.  
Spring's much too short to miss. Let summer come,  
and floods, rocks topple and block the sluice,

let snowcapped peaks go bald by August.  
Let late weeds grow for picas nibbling  
above 10,000 feet, silent, ears twitching  
for hawks and weasels fast as cats.

### **As It Happens**

And what if she called the minute she got home? What if she decided not to go to the bathroom first, or called before undressing and getting comfortable? You would have answered, wouldn't you? You would have kissed your separate receivers (hers dark green, yours beige) goodnight. And what if she didn't have a key? Oh, we all know that dreaded sound on the phone, that heavy breathing.

## **Moving Out**

That first day she realized she could breathe outside; it wasn't as hot as she expected, surely better than her cramped apartment with its wet plaster smell. She felt close to her widowed aunt's stories of whole families on porches. So she stayed out longer than planned. The second day she brought a book to the park, then two books. She picked up a book somebody left there. She started bringing along an umbrella, her make-believe parasol. She brought a sweater in case it got chilly, then a coat in case it got cold. She dressed in layers. She ate dinner outside, and breakfast. The breeze in the park was such a relief still. In December she moved to the church steps, the large sheltered alcove near the door, and she doesn't even believe in God.

John Sweet

---

**discussing fear while thinking of a poem by leonard cirino**

driving east  
through a small town where  
a man has murdered five children  
with a hammer

where the days grow shorter  
but the sky is still blue  
and streaked with jet exhaust and  
i have been thinking about the myth  
of the american minotaur

i have been thinking about  
the approaching winter  
when this woman next to me asks  
what my biggest fear is  
and i turn to her beautiful profile and say  
*my son dying before he  
turns fifty*

and she nods and asks  
what else?  
and i say  
*my son dying after he turns fifty*  
and what i miss the most out here are  
the hills

the sense that  
there is more to this life than  
man-made objects turning slowly  
to dust

the air heavy not with screams  
but with the  
absence of laughter

John Sweet

---

**unfinished scenes from a burning world**

nothing definite  
this time

a woman  
from my hometown  
who kisses her husband  
on a clean september afternoon  
then vanishes

her van found  
on a country road near  
her house

her small blurred smile  
in the newspaper  
exactly one year later

and my son laughs with joy  
when i pick him up at the sitter's  
and my wife smiles as we  
walk in the back door

i feel no guilt

i lay no blame

these small moments  
are too precious to stain  
with the blood of an  
unknown future

David Wright

---

## Looking at Roadside Bluestem Before Leaving Decatur

1.

A littered gully fills with tire carcasses, beer bottles, a bed of random gravel,  
and two nailed pieces of green painted two by four.

The air tastes thick, too heavy with factory drafts-  
burnt rubber, roasted soybeans, yeast, and corn distilled to nectar.

God we love what they send on the wind,  
what we leave in the gullies,  
what they leave in our pockets,  
what they leave in our lungs.

We love this scent of money, the dry, paper taste on the backs of our tongues.

We love these old plants while they live

2.

Against blue-purple culms, silk filaments catch backlight.

Against blue but septic skies, forage grass appears from attention and neglect.

The copper colored turkey claw gives the universe the finger.

Fires in the fall smooth the dry horizon but will not flare  
to where these seeds, their tender shoots lurk,  
buried under prairie,  
buried under gullies running over,  
buried after frost to rise in April.

We want to love the native grass, taller than a woman, tall as any man.  
We want to stay where bluestem roots, gnarled like human nerves,  
prosper under blackest dirt,  
refuse to wither during winter,  
drink from sources purer than the air.

## Tending Gardens

1.

He died and left a lovely world of sculpted,  
bricked off beds in the backyard, leaky sprinkler  
pipes snaking from the house to the boundary

bushes. Peonies, herbs, purple coneflower,  
columbine, and mint, mint everywhere.  
In the fall I trimmed the lilacs by the drive,

pruned them back to bare, gray branch,  
as my mother watched. She didn't know.  
I'd never learned. He never said: don't trim

them late or come the spring no purple thing  
will scent the wet world. Next year, though,  
we wait, without any oracle, and they blossom.

2.

Weekends my wife waters. She weeds.  
She comes into the house filthy and free  
of burdens. She laughs and sighs and arranges

her tools and says nothing. I suspect her  
ornamental grasses hide knowledge,  
something wild as pleasure.

When I rake through them in the morning,  
I find no small, red fruit pulsing in the soil.  
Nothing there to elude my unskilled hands.

I could dig here all day, jealousy dripping  
from me like sweat. I could. But fall will come  
and silver these tall grasses. We'll see then what lives.

## Authors

**Gabriel Arquilevich** lives in Ojai, California, with his wife and three children. He teaches writing and literature at Ventura College.

**Adrienne Banks** is fitful and nineteen. She ran away to Spain, lost her accent, and returned home to submit poetry to important literary magazines. She hosts a poetry show at an hour when no one is awake on KJHK Lawrence. Her chapbook is forthcoming from Prospero's Pocket Poets.

**Wendy Carlisle** lives in East Texas, land of Budweiser and boviculture. She writes poetry to keep herself out of cowboy bars. She has one book of poetry, *Reading Berryman to the Dog* (Jacaranda Press, 2000), and has just finished a chapbook, *Nine Parts Water*.

**James Grinwis** works as a project editor for an educational research organization in Amherst, Massachusetts. He is a contributing editor for *In Posse Review*.

**Vicki Hudspith** is President of the Board of Directors of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York City. Her book of poems relating to events surrounding September 11 is *Within The Hour* (Headwaters/Hudson Press, 2000). Her spoken word CD, *Urban Voodoo*, features the percussionist Daniel Freedman, and is available from Small Press Distribution.

**Marlene Lintzer** lives in New Jersey, where she was born seventeen years ago.

**Walt McDonald** has published nineteen collections of poetry and fiction. His latest, *Climbing the Divide*, will be published in 2003 by the University of Notre Dame Press. His poems have been in journals such as *APR*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *First Things*, *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, and *Poetry*. He is the 2001 poet laureate of Texas.



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**Rochelle Ratner** is Executive Editor of *American Book Review*. She has written numerous novels and poetry books. She also edited *Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness* (Feminist Press, 2000) which won the Susan Koppelman Award, given by Women's Caucus of the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association. *House and Home* is forthcoming in 2003 from Marsh Hawk Press.

**John Sweet** lives with his wife and son in rural upstate New York. A second child is due at any time. Sweet's work has appeared, most recently, in *Tryst*, *Iodine*, *Small Spiral Notebook* and the chapbooks *approaching lost* (Via Dolorosa Press) and *mapping the room of murdered children* (Black Hoody Nation).

**David Wright** has poems in print in *The Christian Century*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, and *Karamu* and on-line in *The Avatar Review* and *3rd Muse*. His two poetry collections are *Lines from the Provinces* (2000) and *A Liturgy for Stones* (October 2002).

**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 first on-line and afterwards in print. Submission guidelines are available at [www.2River.org](http://www.2River.org).



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