

The 2River View

8.3 (Spring 2004)



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new poems by
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ISSN 1536 2086

Contents

Evelyn Posamentier

Heinz Rosenberg on the Platform

Iris Alkalay

Marine Biologist

Voices

Priscilla Atkins

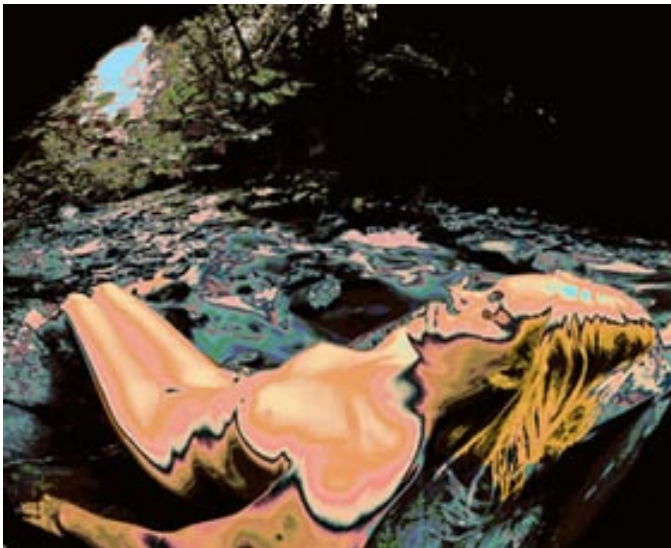
Death Wish in Idlewood

Tree Peony

Mark DeCarteret

Identification

Tour



Paul Dickey

Coming Home to See Dad

Family Farm Tomorrow at Public Auction

Pat Hegnauer

The Pains of April

The Prize

Clay Matthews

Tunes from a Washboard

Where a Poem Meets Its Maker

Dan Mummert

Coffee Break in Geyersville

Portrait of the Artist as Weathervane

Amy Pence

Helix

The Unsaid

Kami Westhoff

Monday Deaths

Still Dying

Heinz Rosenberg on the Platform

Late at Night

went out again in history
looking for grandfather, asking for
grandmother, really just any clues
at all.

in a footnote i meet
heinz rosenberg of hamburg
who saw grandmother & grandfather
(he said so)
arrive in the minsk ghetto
in december of '41.

this is when i stop the film
say i've had enough, befriend the future:
their grandchildren shimmer at the end
of the century.

i take the footnote north
from vienna with that train to minsk.
heinz rosenberg is on the platform
witnessing.

of the trains that came, he says, that one
was the worst. all elderly, these jews, in shock.
any food brought with them was seized
at the station, eight days in transit.

their faces remember him & visit him
in hollow dreams down the years.
they rely on him, who else but
this heinz rosenberg of hamburg

to tell how he saw us?

Outreach

there is a portrait of heinz rosenberg that hangs
at the holocaust museum website, an identity photo
to match the man i met in a footnote, the boy
from hamburg deported to minsk in '41
just weeks before grandmother & grandfather.
the youngest of three, he could be my uncle.
arriving in minsk, he said, i saw guards
throwing loaves of bread into open cattle cars
full of soviet POWs. as the starving men fought
over the food, german guards shot at them.
i then realized we were never going to return.
you can visit heinz rosenberg by following
the holocaust museum's outreach link.

Arrival

heinz rosenberg was at the platform
when your train pulled in.
meine güte, tell me it isn't true.
finding this out i am learning my name
for the first time.
what is the low moan of 1,000
old jews? in forty below
zero? in a winter
that broke records. in the winter
of my grandparents. let them
have that.

heinz rosenberg on the platform.
this was the train that left vienna
on november 28, 1941.
eight days in transit.
i consider time travel.
want to touch grandmother's
skin, her fine cheek, a face
with a memory of mine &
all future possibility.
i will be with you forever.
promise me you will feel no pain.

Marine Biologist

In the dim blue-green midwater red appears black.
None notice the pink tail of dawn. None wish the skipping disc of
moon
would dip deeper. Or that its sunken stone would glow among the
lampfish.

In the shifting fields of black foam
the spilled map of stars wriggles with krill.
Beneath the surface
silvered children watch the light slowly drown.
In their blurred world stasis sways; the hot stars are softened
blossoms.

Your lungs must thrill with the proximity of that old source—
They mimic its breathing, eroding bone with their tidal pull.
But beneath its unguarded surface how they want,
borrowed air staling in two pink rooms
oxygen cresting throat-high with those insistent hooves,
with that familiar noise.

Voices

Our voices are in love with each other.
By this I don't mean the words they use to describe what they
already know
But the voices we were born with
The ones that first howled as if to break into that great light.
These are the voices I mean.

Our voices have learned each other's flight patterns
Out of gender they match pitch not unlike two swallows
trailing each other wing upon wing through the air.
This is what our voices do, and sometimes I forget to listen for their
words,
those poor imitators of what our voices already know: the naming of
things,
the way I tell you I have never been so afraid, so happy, once I've
said it.

Death Wish in Idlewild

Off the main road, I float down
to where asphalt ends.
Trails of moss-covered cabins flicker
through October trees,
and lopsided signs whisper florid names
down overgrown lanes:
DuBois, Desire, Fleur-de-Lis.

Later, I learn in the twenties
this was a resort for African Americans,
that the collapsing lakeside
veranda once shaded the likes of
Sarah Vaughn, T. Bone Walker,
Della Reese.

Now, there's only a watery sun's
false spotlight slitting clouds
over birch and maple,
golden tracks of fork-footed sassafras.
Something sighs in trees behind me;
at every crossroad, I choose the darker path.

I am so lost I wonder if I'll find my way
back. And who would care? I long to drift
down dusk until motor, lungs, dirt path roll
to a languorous stop, and the ghost eyes
peering out between loose shingles
blink just once to mark my passing.

Tree Peony

The Japanese woman
from down the street
knocks on my parents' door:
long black hair
shawling her shoulders,
she bows deeply,
offers my grieving mother
an enormous pink gift.

Ragged-edged,
crêped, each silky
petal rolls out like a wave, rises,
translucent,
aspiring to the invisible;
a dozen yellow threads—prayerful,
centered—are holding
the world together.

Later, I find a vase,
set the slender branch
on my mother's dresser.
That night, lying quietly
in her place
on the double bed,
she hears notes—one high,
one low, one singing.

Identification

The hawk does its best killing
in mid-flight, in clear sight of the sun.
After grooming its chest
it's been known to divide up the survivors:
those with bulk, those with conscience,
and those who have always remained
in the throes of indigestion.
Mores snores from emergency,
its windows streaming with casualties.
Nowadays we're conversing with shadows
when once we wrenched our heads from the ground
and took the wind to our hearts
with the savvy of those who had once
lent their bones to the storming of heaven.

Tour

After long days of trying
to report on the ruins
we've managed only
a few lines on metal and dust
then the skull's airy psalm—
those moments coming
closest to peace on which
all of our summoning rides,
where we wonder how
we'll fill in this space
in which nothing will settle?
The little that's left behind
deliberates, looking for things
to be lit from within,
some evidence of a breeze.

Until someone adopts a guide's
voice as if standing at the edge
of some canyon speaking only
of the constant of river and rock
and the last of any gods captured
falling down to their knees.

Coming Home to See Dad

His fields are still, full of the sorrow of sparrows,
A few migratory birds winter in the windbreaks.
They know how snow will melt and move on.
The land is not warm enough yet for a population.

In a summer sun once, we broke up field clods.
My youth spoke silly—*Dad, dirt clumps
are like clogged sentences*. I only said it once,
later heard the hired hands in the haylofts

laughing. Dad had his own way about folks
and things. He respected every tool. Everything
inhabited its own place. God took care of fools.
His pencil stub calculated the very hour to plant.

Last October, Dad and I together sowed the green,
winter wheat. In what would be my eighty acres,
images became metaphors, twisted and twined.
His hands worried, imagined this land as mine.

Family Farm Tomorrow at Public Auction

In the realty office, charcoal lines stood guard over the orange farm. Driving home, he squinted at the artist's pencil rendering, recognized each tree, each of his brothers.

Ghosts with family resemblances inhabit the shadows, abandoned cars, tractors, once boys explored along snow fences. The sky counted on for years disappears.

His wife turns off the switch to their room. In darkness, his eyes learn again to see: the curves of the heritage bedpost he might be able to afford to buy back.

He listens to creaks and groans of a lonely house in bad weather, soon to become haunted. He thinks about all that may happen tomorrow. She spreads a comforter,

slips into their bed a last time. All being, they wear no stitch of clothing but time.

Pat Hegnauer

The Pains of April

This is the Spring ache,
restless tendrils of voiceless words
grown yellow under the rock
resting at the foot of the slope.

The boulder I pushed all winter
like Sisyphus, spending muscle,
exhausted but afraid to rest
and be crushed by the backward
weight of an unchosen burden.

This is the stall between seasons,
the Sun's invasive realignment
confounding boisterous Moon's
prominence in earth's matter.

April argues the tide over walls,
makes my shoulders weak,
my legs too flimsy to exert
brawn for an inert mind, stalled
at the shoots of spindly ideas.

Pat Hegnauer

The Prize

He lifts her easy,
like a new lamb
through the farmhouse door.
Asleep—too much beer,

too much stepping,
too many stories
of crops and the wife
failed and vanished.

He didn't say she's away,
better she's dead.
Muddy boots walk
clean across her rug.

He's weighing the prize
before laying her
on the davenport,
damp bed in the parlor.

Light one lamp
and stoke the fire,
burn the morning chill
off moldy wallboards.

The woman's eyes
are closed to the heat,
her rainy breasts luring
hands holding red curls.

Drizzle weeps on windows.
The night is drenched
in the first of spring,
fog swamps the scene.

The fire and the night
will burn and die
in the faded flower
and stained walls.

Tunes from a Washboard

The morning starts with a question: why spring raindrops feel heavy, heavier than February sleet, heavier even than the weight of my leg on yours in the morning, sweaty and dead as a baby robin thrown from a nest on top of the sign past the exit for the interstate that runs south of here. All I can tell you about water is this: Somewhere in another time at this present moment a woman in a white cotton dress, wet at the edges, and stained on the back with soil, is washing clothes in a stream that moves only fast enough to outrun a six-year old jumping through a green wheat field. All I can tell you about water is this: She stays there all day, until the sun makes her cold, dipping her clothes into the cooling rinse, making silent music over a washboard, her fingers becoming dried apricots, patiently scrubbing stains over her reflection to the oncoming crescendo of slow, April rain.

Where a Poem Meets Its Maker

Be spoiled in the right ways. If your work feels mediocre, if it demeans your spirit, burn it.

Larry Levis in an interview with Michael White

Before anything, know that this is how you'll go:
Highway 61 and we're close enough to smell Memphis,
barbecue, dry rub, paprika and cayenne
mixed with the scent of the Mississippi's roux.

In the back seat of a Cadillac, white leather, silver trim,
heading south and its blues on the radio.
Time is as smooth as a Robert Johnson slide,
a sad whine of steel over the engine's hum,
picked slowly, held onto, felt like howled words.

Outside Clarksdale we'll stop for gasoline,
drink cold beer and burn the roofs of our mouths
on fried chicken until we can't taste
where we came from any more.

And when 61 hits 49, I'll slow the big car down,
drive slow through the lifeless buildings,
the boarded windows. When we park
in the empty lot beside the intersection,
there won't be time for goodbyes.

While you're still inside, stretched across
the car's seat sleeping, I'll douse the carriage top
with gas, light it up and I'm gone,
everything ending in flames, a blues progression
the only suitable sound to take this all away.

Dan Mummert

Coffee Break in Geyserville

Too young to understand, a stream outside
his window tugs at rock life and lichen, picking
at bits of everything it rubs; it harnesses
a sheet of wind, spooling the gray
and wrap-warm kind of morning
until a glossy paralysis is at bay. I watch
the current's flimsy grip,
the organization of ribbons caused
by a fallen stone. You can figure
size by the water's tremor. After a while
change is apparent by the same sore gravity: the day
a friend died naturally and how hampered that was;
objects in his room like shiftless orphans
I took as my own—a hairbrush on his tallboy,
a glass of water, a few cigarettes—like lovers, even
unlikely ones, there are moments of return,
exchange, persistence. The way
we write about our mothers baking,
about growing into mothers, measuring
the ingredients of history, or the way we entertain
forgiveness, all these
surgeries and what they signify—in time
will yield some easy dissolve.

Portrait of the Artist as Weathervane

It seems the cows know something we should, each steady as a sphinx in the pasture, clouds pressing. If it's in their gut, what happened to us—was it a vestige combed out by all this careful sex? My car wheezes in the bend—oil pressure, stray bolt, one of many belts and chains, exhausted. The signs are there, but who's to say... My mechanic claims a car has its ticks like any body does. And other animals go south for their pivotal season. Some sleep it off like a hangover as above and below us, flocks and fishes restructure elsewhere, hardwired in their collective security blankets, past winter's lock and umbrage: getting out of Dodge. With an ear to the earth everyday now, I hear only myself growing louder.

Amy Pence

Helix

Lacquered black

the delicious decorative

bent and turned on

insentient root in me

their necks

harkening back to

the ironwork: latticed

the spine

wttened on balconies all

wound and insular

over the French Quarter

where do the spirals lead

the way coiled:

but to the body's open absence

we see what's held in

mother that swallows: leads me out

and what's kept apart

leads me in

The Unsaid

Of 1963, I remember

little, but the

woman locked in

ice

a sideshow trick

the thick maillot she wore

her lips, faintly blue

beneath the red lipstick

—purple then,

unquiet *or will not*

exhume: the sign

my parents' marriage

The nexus

locked words: infidels

but for this, but for

secrecy

that betrayal

webbed, broad

sticky

an unknown

that you cannot

enter without

fracturing

Monday Deaths

During the day, terror—fans slicing
heads, dishwashers boiling
kittens, the hammer on the
bed—imagine. Mondays
the worst—the day
off from drinking—
death feels like a state I
can do something about.

He sleeps easily, only a sunburn
and a broken nail to dream. He, who
believes everything isn't murder
or rape or death. Silly
man, dreaming man, never wakes
jaw clenched, chips of teeth
choking.

I dream of bits
of bodies I've hidden in
trees or cement. A young woman,
an old man, a new kill to manage.
I'll forget the carved bone
and crushed faces in minutes. But never
the time it takes to convince myself
what I'm not capable of in wake-time.

Tuesday I woke with his hands
considering my throat. It wasn't like
that, but I never thought of him
killing. Now he's a boot
smashing an eyeball, a wire hanger
unmaking.

Still Dying

She takes me
to a house where a woman plants
sycamore seeds under the window. An acacia flowers tight
white and yellow next to my bed.

She leaves to write a new story—a young girl in love
with the pale face, crimsoned lips, hot crisp of consumption.

Under the softness of pain
killers, I create a memory:

Her lying
behind me, wrist pulsing
against my stomach.
Her hair
grows a hundred years in
one night, covers my body,
becomes my skin.

The bed she made is covered with a blanket of fall. Leaves burn
then ash
while I sleep. When I wake the sycamores are tall and bare. Her
story
now a novel on the pillow
beside me.

She reads my tarot, tells me it was a girlchild, to be
born under my sign. She watches my eyes for regret. But I only
consider her crumpling the paper sheet, fingers touching
tiny bits
of me still dying.

Authors

Iris Alkalay is a lawyer, translator, and musician. Articles related to her memoir, *My Father's Three Bulgarias*, are in the University of Pittsburgh's *Bulgarian Scholar's Association Journal* and *Djalt Trud*.

Priscilla Atkins has poems in *The North American Review*, *Pierian Springs*, *Poetry*, and *Southern Humanities Review*.

Mark DeCarteret has poems in *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon Press, 2000) and *Mudlark*. His latest chapbook is *The Great Apology* (Oyster River Press, 2001).

Paul Dickey was widely published in the 1970s. After a 20 year hiatus, he returned to writing with poems at ForPoetry.com and others forthcoming in *Concho River Review*, *Rattle*, and *Sentence*.

Pat Hegnauer has been published in *Adagio Verse Quarterly*, *Crone's Nest*, *Moondance*, and *Wicked Alice*. Her chapbook, *A Few Uncompromised Letters*, was published in the Premier Poets Chapbook series.

Clay Matthews is earning a Ph.D. in creative writing at Oklahoma State—Stillwater. His poems are published or forthcoming in *Big Muddy*, *Eclectica*, *Mudlark*, *Poetry Midwest*, and *storySouth*.

Dan McCormack uses an otomeal box pinhole camera to make 8-by-10 inch negatives. He then develops the negatives, scans them into Photoshop, and colorizes the images by pulling curves into each of the channels. McCormack heads the Photography program at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where he teaches photography and digital media.

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About 2River

Since 1966, 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. Publications appear online at 2River and in print. Writers interested in contributing can read the submission guidelines at www.2River.org.

Richard Long, Editor
2River
March 2004

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