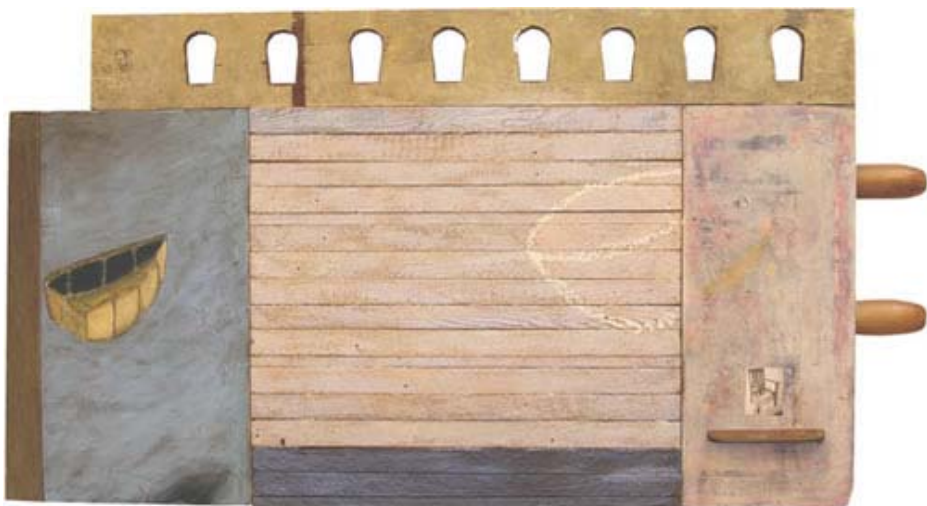


# The 2River View

9.3 (Spring 2005)



*The River Calls* © 2005 by Mark Flowers

new poems by  
Wendy Taylor Carlisle, Jefferson Carter  
M. Chavez, Laylage Courie, Jen Currin  
Paul Dickey, George Freek  
Joy Icayan, Mercedes Lawry  
Nicole Poirier  
M. Lynx Qualey



# The **2River** **View**

9.3 (Spring 2005)

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**Contributors**

*Paul Dickey*

The Consequences of My Actions

*Wendy Taylor Carlisle*

Write

Skin to Skin

*Jefferson Carter*

The Avante Garde

November 2004

*M. Chavez*

The Oldest Profession

Virgin Eyes



*Homage to Mountain Tea Lane* © 2005 by Mark Flowers

*Laylage Courie*

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*Jen Currin*

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*M. Lynx Qualey*

Getting Rid of the Hiccups

The Odds



Paul Dickey

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### **The Consequences of My Actions**

I have one last chance to get salvation. The wife and kids are dressed to go to the church. She claims I neglect her. *You love that mahogany desk more than you do me.* Yes, dear, I am writing this poem. Well, if you must know, I choose to call it a prose poem. I rush out to buy cigarettes and a lottery ticket. I drive up to my own gravesite. Some of the people who knew me are already there, almost crying.

**Write**

Because of rain, your fingers becoming arthritic  
Because of the freeway promising relief  
Because of wiry hair  
Because of the undone coming along behind  
Because of chanting  
Is it possible to choose?  
Because the pain of outliving is a coal in the belly  
Because we are held by the small cut  
and the body is raked by sweat  
Because otherwise swollen lips  
work the hymn  
Because it wipes off the idea of winter  
Because the air is filled with letters



## **Skin to Skin**

Skin cells move to the surface  
as they mature, five layers basale to lucidum,  
ending in the scaly corneum. Surgeons  
must cut through them all to reach in,  
the clock running on an operation  
from the first incision, to the last stitch—  
skin to skin—a whole skin.

A person's loved ones don't know this,  
might have no time to imagine the cut,  
while she lives in wholeness,  
never thinks, *I could die*,  
before she does, the shattering  
so absolute that we, coming along later,  
can only stand dumb  
beside a bridge abutment  
where someone, even this soon,  
has put down bouquets,  
fresh daises, a bunch of silk flowers  
in their glass bottle and tied  
drugstore balloons on the railing,  
a flash to remind us that the skin,  
a membrane, can be callus  
or scab or petal or, in an instant, mist.

### **The Avant Garde**

My son's legs hurt,  
he can't hike or horse around.  
He sits in front of the TV, icing  
his knees & playing video games.  
Here I'd like to admit  
the personal lyric is dead,  
the lie of the unitary self,  
the poet as sensitive register.  
Signifiers hit the window  
like birds, smearing the glass.  
Yes, the personal lyric is dead  
but life goes on, ignoring  
the avant-garde, the head games  
& bad puns. Anyway, back  
to the bourgeois subject,  
my son's legs, which hurt  
while he directs the wobbly,  
red-caped character that signifies  
himself acting in the world, this  
character that runs everywhere  
instead of walking.



M. Chavez

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### **The Oldest Profession**

She finds it difficult to breathe on all fours,  
she's been hanging  
like christ and her lungs are full.

She spews lust  
at the guests,  
they eat it  
like pigs.

The heat of the spotlight  
has burned her skin  
to papyrus, she draws blood  
back from the vein, writes  
on the wall,  
that she's pretty

and that it ought to be  
worth something.

M. Chavez

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## **Virgin Eyes**

There's nothing to watch but the fields of little girls,  
the flames licking their thighs, melting  
sweet things.

They're falling  
into dirt, onto asphalt.

Sticky, waiting for the kind  
of boy  
who would pick candy  
up off the street and put it in his mouth.

## **When Birds Dream**

When birds dream  
it is of walking.

In their dreams  
in a meadow or a forest or a city  
    (ice floes burlap of desert carefully tilled fields lined  
        with stones)  
    (but never never the sea)  
they put one foot in front of the other for miles.

This lasts all night  
and is always exquisite  
for there is so much detail  
they've never seen.

Awake their breasts pump like bloody hearts  
as they pummel their feathery selves into air.  
So plain and vast the world seems!

The night's pleasure shapes their imagined souls  
as an upright creature  
whose every step proportions the earth  
in its ideal measure  
for progress  
and contemplation.

It dwells  
not in atmosphere not in air  
    (never never in the sea)  
but on earth where birds' souls  
    (they imagine)  
are on two long legs  
released.

## Why People Die

Because we are  
trees and our roots miss them.

poppies pushed from the ground  
with blood smeared on our mouths.

Because there is one river that does not empty into the sea.

Because only with beads of bone strung on sorrow do we pray.

Because doorways are made of  
stone iron gold wood  
and these things come from the ground.

Because habits ( say  
living ) cannot continue.

Because bones must be scattered like clothing  
before we are revealed to the lover.

Because only with ghosts do we speak truthfully  
words accumulating over the mountains of our breast  
wild birds push into the mist invisible flaps  
startle us awake

The dead wring our hearts like dishrags.  
They extinguish the lamps on our porches.  
They feed rain through the screens.  
They stand amidst the shadows of shaken branches.  
They bend like the branches in a gesture of parting.  
They bend as if casting pebbles or bones.  
They mark the path of departure.

Because we must follow them  
stone to scintillant stone.

Jen Currin

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### **The Hand is Equal Parts Healer and Fool**

Three suns rise—  
three pears on the counter.  
I don't care if you are hungry, ghost.  
You don your red pants and shoes,  
anxious to return to your museum.  
But the house no longer shares your blanket.

Your child sneezes seven times  
and opens his eyes,  
reaches for bread.  
I drink flowers.  
We are spirits reduced to gestures.  
We can be sure of nothing—

Your son and I agree,  
we both saw the sun marry the sea.  
Amber eyelids, a velvet curse...  
We need no proof.  
And this exhaustive list of wants  
we can finally burn—



Jen Currin

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## **The Mountain Highway**

My beggar's spirit and I are one.  
We agree to leave  
in the morning.  
About the time the road begins to whine,  
I remember the bottle hidden in the blankets.  
We can't turn back to the year of the dragon  
where two treed men  
might drop their webs over us,  
so we brave the winding path  
to the city of blood dancers.  
We eat nothing, sing to the small dog  
that might be a phantom.  
A blossom in the room of my mind wilts slowly.  
I cannot remember which coin  
is our talisman.  
Near the city gates, we join a masked procession  
of incarcerated gods.  
There is a small chance  
we too will end up whistling.

## **Night Music**

The sky is like a table  
I'm hiding under.  
But it's also made of glass,  
and black clouds fall  
through its cracks.  
Scrawny sparrows peck,  
luckless, in the dead grass,  
and are routed by a swarm of crows,  
who get what they're after.  
Night arrives, it grows dark,  
and the day is lost  
like friends from my youth  
who went places  
with names I can't remember.  
Then a lone star rises,  
Flickering in the thick night:  
It's what we're made of.  
But it sees nothing,  
And it desires nothing,  
and soon it will burn to ashes.  
It doesn't care.  
It's doing what it was meant  
to do. It rises.  
It burns. It flickers.

## **The Persistence of Memory**

The sun is a clock,  
and so is the moon.  
but what about the galaxy,  
the universe? Meanwhile, frenzied  
ladies in diaphanous gowns  
dance with lizards  
in a sunless desert,  
where a skeletal hand,  
rising from the cold sands,  
sways like a pendulum.  
I can remember my father,  
dying, feverish,  
on the edge of a coma,  
constantly repeating  
the name of his first wife,  
dead more than forty years.  
And I still remember  
the ancient cleaning woman  
on her knees in the vestibule,  
spilling ammonia,  
and the reek of disinfectant  
filled the room, choking me  
with its taste of wet ashes,  
burning my nostrils,  
stinging my eyes.

### **Catatonic in Prayer**

The truth is that he's left his body, the raised arm  
the slightly open mouth—that's no longer him.  
He watches his audience from somewhere, smiling  
at how they try to rouse him from sleep.  
But if you stand close enough, you'll hear him  
tell the stories of his years. Once, a flood came  
to engulf him, and tired of running, he merely stood  
and prayed he would float, like the rest of us.  
That's him, prayer granted. No one should feel sorry,  
not you clutching my hand in terror. The truth is—  
he won't hurt us any more than the dishes you left  
in the sink last night, the cracked ceiling waiting  
to fall on our heads, the baby in the background  
we forgot to feed again this morning. And we wonder  
how we can press our skin against each other  
while we dream of the years other people live,  
how the tongue keeps still in the other's mouth  
without knowing it's there. Or how we let cockroaches  
crawl on our bodies even before we've closed our eyes.

The finale is what we wait for—he's dropping his arm  
and the story's over.

Still, I have to accustom myself  
to the air that fills with your fingers slipping  
slowly, that neither of us will notice.

## **In the Mortuary**

She is teaching me how to touch  
the dead body in front of us, trying to peel  
the eyes open. *Look*, she says  
and then presses the scalpel through  
the skin, carefully that not a drop smears  
our hands. No, she won't stain herself with  
me watching. That is not how her art goes.  
Now, she's smiling. Perhaps in another world,  
the corpse is smiling back, twisting his face,  
mocking us both. And then perhaps  
they will dance without moving, to a music  
only they can hear. And she'll feel him  
without touching, as if the slight wrinkle  
of her fingers will wake him, make him breathe  
and his eyes will flicker and he will say,  
*The syringe in my stomach hurts. And why  
is it I'm feeling so cold?* That—or when  
she drops the scalpel, it will fall straight  
to the floor, metal clanging against cold concrete.  
And I will tell her—that's how it sounds,  
a scalpel falling. Remember that. And I too  
will remember that afternoon, how her hair reeked  
of formalin, how everything else reeked of her.

Someday when I'm unafraid, I will tell her,  
*Look, here's what the living can do.*  
And I will cover her ears until every noise  
is drowned and all the world is  
but a fish view. I will stare at her and I will be  
silent. For her, I will be still.

## **Looking at Van Gogh**

Sunflowers drive against the blue.  
Wind forces the stalks back  
into flames. All about power  
on this day of heat and moving air.  
All ripped apart and put back with paint.

How could he know the impossible,  
see it again through brush raking canvas?

He took no care for consequence,  
spent whole days howling  
at the recognition of what flew out  
of his hands and screamed.

Oh, sweet madness, how I'd love to have you in  
for just an interview. To lean  
into your eyes in search of clues.

Now the explanation takes on  
a life of its own as I return  
safely, to bask  
in the wilderness of suns.

### **Nine Botanists Starve in Stalingrad**

The wolf came out of the ice.  
The men diminished slowly, was it  
one at a time? Imagination was the nature  
of their hunger, and then their death.  
The seeds stayed safe, heritage and hope.  
Eventually, wheat, corn, potatoes.  
Science is neither benign nor malignant.  
It goes on without nourishment,  
becoming fields of marvelous green.

Nicole Poirier

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## **A Poem for God's Apples**

and these words:

red  
smooth  
*belle fleur de lis*

In her hands  
the stain

a shapely  
perfect fit

that one moment  
everything belonged to her



**Theory this**

What use is language?

There are rituals used by squatters  
in the far North, where evergreens  
are their only weapons against intruders.

Stones fashioned in circles around the pit  
are clues of closure and privacy.

I saw a woman once push smoke  
through her feet, though  
neglecting to ask how she did it,  
I sat on the chopping block just admiring

the perfect way she skinned a bite of fish  
off the stick with only two teeth.

## **Getting Rid of the Hiccups**

Bad relationships. They're like the hiccups—the longer you let them go, the harder they are to stop. Mary understands those poor souls in the Guinness Book of Records, the ones who've been hiccupping for twenty, thirty years. They missed their window. After a year or two, there was no way for them to take a breath.

Karl treads downstairs, scraping a fingernail against his upper teeth. He pauses at the landing and slops his tongue around, then swallows.

Mary focuses on her spinach-flecked spoon. To stop the hiccups, you had to concentrate. You had to close your eyes and imagine that you weren't hiccupping any more.

She closes her eyes.

A full minute later, she opens them. Karl is sitting across from her, a fingernail working between his two front teeth.

## **The Odds**

She was fine. Really. She'd known the odds; known that things hadn't been right from the start. When friends called to say, *God, I am so sorry*, she'd switch the phone to the other ear and say, *Hey* or *Yeah*. Then she'd ask about their kids, their spouses. She'd focus on the blurry wallpaper, her eyes so wide-open they hurt.

In the grocery line, women brightened with smiles. They'd glance at her still-swollen belly and say, *Aw. How many months?*

She never found an answer. She'd just shrug, open-mouthed, and air would rush in over her tongue, almost choking her. It would crash in, holding her mouth open, pushing down to her distended belly. She'd struggle against it, the women's eyes blinking and blinking, before she closed her eyes and swallowed.

## **Contributors**

Wendy Taylor Carlisle lives and works in Texas. Most recently her poems have appeared in *Caesura*, *Ghoti Magazine* and *Unlikely Stories*.

Jefferson Carter is Writing Department Chair for Pima Community College. He's had work in *Barrow Street*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *CrossConnect*, and here at 2River. His sixth chapbook is *Litter Box* (Spork Press).

M. Chavez lives in San Francisco. "So You Want to Be a Stripper" was recently integrated into the play *Pure Gold Baby*, which opened last fall in Portland, Oregon.

Laylage Courie writes, performs, and lives in New York City. She's currently working on a tabletop arrangement for voice and debris based on Wallace Stevens' poem "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery."

Jen Currin has fled the States for Vancouver, where she is a member of the poetry collective *vertigo west*. Recent poems appear in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Mudfish*, and *42opus*.

Paul Dickey last appeared in 2RV in Spring 2004. Since then, his prose poetry and micro-fiction have appeared in *Cue*, *Sentence*, *Wild Strawberries*, and *magazine minima*.

George Freek has poems in *The Chaffin Journal* and *Coal City*. Other publications include *Waiting for Julia* (Playscripts), *Concerto Grosso* (JAC), and *In Stanley's Room* (Aviar).

Joy Icayan lives in the Philippines and is currently taking her undergraduate degree in psychology.

Mercedes Lawry has been publishing poetry for thirty years in journals such as *Crab Creek*, *Fine Madness*, *Mudlark*, *Poetry*, and *Plum Biscuit*. Her awards include those from Artist Trust and the Seattle Arts Commission.

Nicole Poirier is a freelance writer from Saskatchewan. She has other poems scheduled soon for future publication. She is currently writing and editing her first book of poetry.

M. Lynx Qualey fled no apparent persecution in the Midwest for a life in the Middle East, where she writes and wrangles a one-year-old boy. Her prose poems and flash fiction appear in *The Melic Review* and *Smokelong Quarterly*.



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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 first appear on-line, then in print.

Richard Long, Editor  
2River  
March 2005



# 2RV

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2River  
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