

# The 2River View

15.2 (Winter 2011)



*Female Cardinal* © 2011 by Robin Brown

new poems by

Allen Edwin Butt, Melissa Castillo-Garsow

Jessica DeWent, Richard Garcia, Cindy R. Goff

Nina Lindsay, Pamela Manasco, John Mann, Greg Nicholl

Nick Ripatrazzone, Richard Schiffman, William Stratton



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*Cindy R. Goff*

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*The 2River View, 15.2 (Winter 2011)*

Richard Schiffman

## Whiteout

The rooftops are white, the sidewalks vanilla-frosted,  
the slush-cup clouds, albino river, fresh-laundered bluffs,  
water towers capped in woolen white fedoras, bolls of steam,  
an opalescent sky, seagulls knifing whitely by the levitating  
bridge,  
a corpse lain out on morning's gurney, the sun, a wan, white  
moon  
of itself, and from the dough-dull air a squall of listless flakes  
flicks  
crystal dust upon my greying cranium—within which a candle  
gutters:  
I call it *my mind*. There is nothing in it but wraiths in bone-white  
ghost suits:  
I call them *my thoughts*. I call them *spooks and shades*, white on  
white, invisible  
but for two fire-engine eyes, but for two coruscating coals  
burning holes  
through a spectral sheet of cerebration. I call this fire *my life*, I  
call it *desire*  
scanning, scanning the snow for that one sole smudge of blood:  
I call it  
*God's blood*. I call it *the world, my love, my lover*. Where has she  
gone?  
Wherever has she gone?

*Allen Edwin Butt*

**In**

If God makes clarity  
it must decay. Blur shot with  
sawed-off splendor momentarily  
conceives of God again.

Example: one plain simile  
in Greek, translated poorly  
makes a rope into a camel, such  
that we must wonder

what the English-speaking God knows  
about needles: but it gets your  
attention. I get sleepy & I say  
it's late: not mannerism

(which anyway should not be  
a pejorative) but eye raised  
on "experience," lodged in a nutshell, keeping  
time with claw-marks

on the wall. Don't be surprised,  
then, if a story surfaces.  
Stories are another thing that God  
approves of, & the proof is

Once upon a time there stood  
a castle, from which one could smell,  
at every hour of the day,  
the preparations for a meal of boiled

*Allen Edwin Butt*

cabbage—but the cabbage never  
finished boiling. The king & queen  
at last became impatient (nobles  
do) & asked how long

they had to wait, for even  
kings & queens need nourishment.  
The cooks (who had the whole time  
kept the meager menu secret, letting

their employers think that quail  
& lamb awaited them) apologized,  
prepared & gave excuses, said  
Not yet. Until the king & queen

began to rhapsodize upon the topic,  
had described the meal that they  
approached as curves approach an asymptote  
in such detail (complete

with thick béarnaise sauce, fatty  
cuts of meat, sliced peppers once as fat  
as the bosom of a wet nurse)—in such  
detail that they could really taste it.

It helped that cabbage doesn't  
smell like much, but really  
didn't matter, since the king & queen  
did not exist & also couldn't smell.

*Melissa Castillo-Garsow*

## **The Memory of Family Lobster**

The sand beneath your fingernails.  
The crunch in your teeth.  
The sun.

*No sé si aún me recuerdas.*

They call orchard beach  
chocha beach because it smells  
of sex and pot and unflattering bikinis.  
But one day I tethered my desires to the  
Ocean. Anchored dreams to *va y ven de*  
*Corrientes oscuras*.

Eating ceviche en Tecomán,  
Listening to the laughter of the waves,  
Getting stung by jellyfish at rockaway—  
My brother and I ran  
away on beaches  
*ocultándonos en el espuma*  
and he would foam anger.

But it was her fault.  
One summer in the depths of the gulf  
my father fished me out of the ocean  
by my ears. It hurt when he yelled.  
Like this orchard  
Could grow not oranges  
But *maracuyá*  
Like being there meant mountains.

*Jessica DeWent*

## **Road Trip**

You brushed off  
my freckles  
and held them  
in the palm  
of your hand,  
and rearranged them  
on my forearm, mapping  
every place  
we had whispered about  
visiting but hadn't—  
that new job,  
the mortgage—  
the Alamo, Sumter,  
Savannah,  
and the  
veins of ancient  
blackwater rivers,  
Edisto, Waccamaw.

In the car, somewhere in Tennessee,  
you study my arm-map,  
creating freckle-highways  
that run wild over this  
great land.  
And we are  
—always—  
as this: making our way  
between the only two real things,  
Biloxi and Asheville,  
life and death,  
and for years  
we forget  
there has ever been  
an atlas.

*Richard Garcia*

## **The Duration**

Nothing much happened during the duration. But a child did say the word duration until its meaning disappeared. Cream puffs reigned supreme. Baked Alaska was big during the duration. We thought it would be a kind of interlude, but technically, it could have been forever. Snowdrifts were also popular. Something white, like laundry, hovered over the land. In a darkened circus tent, a hobo clown tried to sweep a circle of light into a dustpan. It was the duration. The way it eluded the broom. The way he could never quite sweep it up as it contracted, becoming smaller and smaller.

*Richard Garcia*

## **The Aftermath**

The aftermath arrived uninvited, without retinue or precedent. Gray sunlight was gradually suspended. Stars formed in cliques, giggling, carrying on. Cosmic rays continued to probe unabated, as the aftermath remained uninvited. Several numbers piled on the couch, but added up to nothing. Blame the aftermath. Single-windowed souls were admitted, some bringing gifts of pomade. Tiny sandwiches were served, each of related interest. Low-grade voluptuousness eventually passed into sleep. The aftermath sat in a corner. No one spoke to it. The nerve.

*Cindy R. Goff*

## **The First Twinkle of Death**

If I run fast enough  
when I die  
I can become a kite—  
an armless ghost with renewed wit.  
I will finally appreciate  
the rareness of this divided earth  
because I will have no throat.

I'll fly over Christmas Eve  
packed with Catholics doing pirouettes for Mary.  
I'll fly over the geometry of Greece  
dotted with temples and ancient nudity.  
I'll fly over a sky burial in Tibet  
crowded with buzzards  
filled to the brim with human femurs and eyeballs.

I'll fly past news satellites  
and the moon with its American flag and golf balls.  
I'll make faces at the camera on Mars.  
But I won't get trapped in any orbit—  
I'll keep moving forward  
because the fun of being dead  
is in the flying.

*Cindy R. Goff*

### **Pleasant Pirate**

A million hearts roll in  
on the waves,  
knock into each other on the beach.  
There are Nazi hearts, sparrow hearts,  
elk hearts, dancer hearts,  
Swedish hearts—  
None of them beat in time.

In the afternoon,  
a dead pirate kisses my shoulder.  
His skin is delicate  
like a blue corsage from 1927  
flattened in a family bible.  
But even in this state of decay  
he is a wonderful swimmer.  
He has come from the mermaid cemetery  
to teach me how to read  
the good-byes tattooed on every heart.  
He stuffs a pillow with seals—  
I sleep  
while they pull me all the way to Nantucket.

In the evening,  
I see him far down the beach  
but the closer I get  
the smaller he becomes  
until he jumps into a shampoo bottle  
and is carried away on the waves.  
I'm too scared to jump in  
and swim after him  
so he just laughs and waves goodbye.

*Nina Lindsay*

## **Dark**

In the thick pitch of early winter morning  
cold rain streams invisibly from sky to ground.  
In such darkness, does it even matter  
where it's going, whether in thick ropes or  
fat drops, whether it touches this end  
of town or the other, whether it is late or early,  
whether laced with honey or poison,  
just that it's with us—and the dreams  
all huddled silently on the bed, spines  
and feathers, anxieties and desires given  
form but unseeable, uncountable—each of us  
listening for something, all of us  
here, listening to the rain.

*Nina Lindsay*

## **Passage**

The dream explains  
my dream to me—

a four-legged fowl  
with silken fur

tries to sell me  
my greatest desire

in exchange for the smallest  
I have in my pocket.

It is a coin  
worn so smooth

by touch  
I can't read it.

The dream stops  
as I hand it over—

the dream and I both  
gaze at it

both touching it—  
it doesn't even gleam

in the ominous winter  
sun of all my dreams,

it is so tarnished.

*Pamela Manasco*

## **Anatomica**

Here, where your fingertips brushed  
tissue hardened from a fish hook,  
some neuron fired—oh.

Golden, this light tunnels,  
purple ropes slide  
down the spine,  
a jolt to start a harbor's lights  
to blinking.

Here, my knee, the skin peeled  
away on concrete, and patched itself  
as quickly. Here

a cast iron skillet burned. Here  
a freckle met another: my body's  
latitude. Have you ever  
seen this whole skin, the stretch  
of muscle underneath?

When the doctors saw you open, pump your heart  
with intimate fingers, that is called cracking the chest.

We are so breakable. See this knot  
above my back, the small  
curve between & above  
my hips: they drew a needle  
through the skin & bone,  
and with a soft pop pulled out marrow.

See here, my underneath of bone  
was broken. Now kiss the ends,  
fused nub of calcified cage.

We do this to our hearts before  
we wake—we grow a thorn cage  
all around.

*Pamela Manasco*

## **String Theory**

From our bed, sheet-slanted light bends,  
curious and slender.  
My toes, your shins,  
the blankets' shedding noise, we say  
adagio and pucker the sheets as we breathe.  
For hours, only half asleep, we curl  
around the mattress; we will never  
understand it, how the winter winds  
spin tiny worlds in order,  
they will tell us nothing  
of the spine by which we find them  
tethered. Ice spirals on our windows,  
scratching with its nails andante, andantino  
as the smallest slice of sunrise comes.  
And it's no secret that my heart lies  
in the stars; among the nebulae expanding  
I could spread and crackle open,  
my soul a clam shell, unhinging.  
All that light, such formless  
motion, the dark matter that multiplies  
itself and tears further the seam  
of the universe and says the things I  
can't say: how I love the stars, I loathe  
the stars, the empty spaces between  
them and the rooms I break  
into slowly, closing doors in darkness,  
biting off the threads that tie us nearer.

Driving home tonight I'll hit a butterfly  
and watch it smear a wet mark on the wind  
shield, fleck of yellow dust.

*John Mann*

## **Go Toward the Sunset**

Bratislava is not on our list,  
said the woman who ran  
the tour. Said the woman who  
counted the lives. Said the  
lives one by one. They all fall  
down the chute of the real.  
More than you can count.  
Now the ants march across  
his cupboard one by one.  
It doesn't matter what the  
forecast is. Thunderheads blow  
up every day or not. You must  
embark. The tide rises under  
your boat. They are setting up  
colored flags on the other side.  
They are preparing a welcome  
for those on the guest list.

*John Mann*

## **Join the Visigoths**

They were the only ones who offered arms repair as part of the package. He'd had bad luck with the cylinder on the .44 cap and ball. It physically fell out of the pistol. Of course, severance pay was death. Those guys never cleaned their beards. Banquets were gross. Vomit the currency of communion. They spoke a language of grunts. Once you became their friend they were on you like tight jeans. He didn't get the women. Ironic smirks and outright guffaws. He assumed manhood was always in question. The men circled them like wary fish. Who knows what happened at night, in the tents. Nobody ever talked inside those skins.

*Greg Nicholl*

## **How Quickly It Is Done**

It is a ditch,  
a dead end of broken cane  
and thistle  
where a boy pokes a dog with a stick  
its nose covered in flies.

Its neck stiff.  
The body still pliable.

He knows its name,  
has seen his brothers smear blackberries  
into the white fur.

He is a boy.  
The dog is nothing more than dead.

Seven cigarette butts  
litter the ground, one lined with lipstick,  
beer bottle caps and matches.

He wonders how it died:  
the gash above the eye, wound below the ribs,  
each a sign.

It is nothing more than dead.

*Greg Nicholl*

At dinner he watched his father  
remove the spine of a fish,  
each delicate bone intact.

A simple act.  
Lifted. Transferred to a plate  
then taken away.

The way a hand comes down,  
sudden. How quickly  
it is done.

And when he slipped beneath the bath  
he held his breath,  
watched light through water and knew  
the way we see things  
before we die.

*Nick Ripatrazone*

## **She Had No Tongue**

An onion snow in March: white  
filmed thin between the pines,  
flakes melted moist beneath our palms.  
Our hands were hot. Our mouths  
were not. She stopped talking at noon  
but spoke with her fingers, pointed  
the way across the bleached forest  
and I followed. We stopped  
at a leaning bundle of snow plants,  
blossomed pink-red. Honeyed,  
even up here so high, air dead  
and dry. I kneeled to touch  
but she said no; finally, a word.  
I tugged one from the root.  
I would steal life from them  
to coax a voice from her lips.

*Nick Ripatrazone*

### **Travis or Trent**

or Terry; you misheard his name  
but followed every word of his story.  
Wool hat in the summer tugged  
halfway down his balding pony-tail, he  
explained how he got each license plate  
on the garage wall. He'd be dead  
in less than two months  
but that afternoon, chipped cups  
and board games spread along tables,  
his wife collecting money outside,  
you watched him talk, fingers  
along raised metal, like no end  
exists for this life.

*William Stratton*

## **Grandpa**

*Nothing is a something, it'll suck you dry as the whisper you  
can hardly hear that tells you why. — Chris Smither*

Forty years ago I lost my arm,  
up on the hill to the corn picker,  
walked the mile back to the house  
with my belt around my arm.  
I tied it with my teeth and dialed  
the operator with my good hand,  
but I never felt like I lost anything  
till I put down the bottle  
and picked up the farm again,  
colder, less a few pounds, sober.

It was a long mile, I thought about the hay  
catching fire and tearing through the loft,  
raining down on my heifers the spirit  
of sensation, and I felt my missing hand grip  
that husk for the last time.

Last year my son drove his truck  
into a pond. His last words a thank you  
for the drink his friend poured.  
I never died from feeling the lack  
but I gave unwillingly my son  
to the empty space the booze forms.

I know I have one more in me.  
This past thanksgiving, I asked my grandson  
for one last bottle, scotch. I want to drink it  
on my deathbed, and remember his father.

*William Stratton*

## **My last words**

I have already uttered them, unknowingly,  
though they sit apart now in some disorder  
awaiting the proper moment to unite.

Perhaps already I have poems that contain them,  
a narrative imbedded in something self important  
which on that day I will be ashamed to admit  
is grandiose and wholly insufficient.  
Perhaps I have spoken them on the phone to my mother  
as words barely words, but in a language  
only that bond could pass in understanding;  
or engraved them into some table when I was younger,  
in passion to some cause I can not remember.  
Perhaps I will simply slip on an untied lace  
and the long-awaited words will consist  
of no more than a few vulgarities  
as I float down the stairwell.  
On that distant day perhaps  
I will be inspired beyond what I am now capable of.  
It is no good to speculate.

I hope I will think of some other day  
when those words and I had  
a better time of it, when I sat on the bank  
of some slippery river and watched the water  
dive down the arced stones towards sunset,  
and never once stopping to whisper any farewell.

*The 2River View*, 15.2 (Winter 2011)

## Contributors

Allen Edwin Butt has appeared in *Poetry*, *Venerable Kittens*, and elsewhere. "In" is part of a sequence called *20 Prepositions*, three of which are appearing in Issue 7 of *Peaches & Bats*.

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Jessica DeWent holds a BA in Creative Writing from Grand Valley State University. Currently she works for a fair trade company writing about and researching art from third world countries.

Richard Garcia is the author of *Rancho Notorious* and *The Persistence of Objects*, both from BOA Editions; and the chapbook of prose poems, *Chickenhead* (FootHills Publishing).

Cindy R. Goff holds an MFA from George Mason University. Her poetry has appeared *Exquisite Corpse*, *Ploughshares*, and



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elsewhere. Her books of poems are *Appalachian Flood* (2009) and *The Gods of Greenery* (forthcoming in 2011).

Nina Lindsay is the author of *Today's Special Dish* (Sixteen Rivers Press). Her poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *FENCE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere.

Pamela Manasco is a freelance writer and editor living in the Birmingham, Alabama. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina—Wilmington.

John Mann has appeared most recently in *The Gettysburg Review*. His play—*Mass Destruction, Weapons Of*—was produced by the New World Arts Theatre in Goshen, Indiana, in 2004. His chapbook is *Wyoming* (Finishing Line Press 2008).

Greg Nicholl is an assistant editor at the Johns Hopkins University Press. His poetry has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Natural Bridge*, and elsewhere.

Nick Ripatrazzone has work in *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Esquire*, *The Mississippi Review*, and *West Branch*. *Oblations*, a collection of prose poems, is forthcoming from Gold Wake Press in 2011.

Richard Schiffman has poems appearing or forthcoming in *32 Poems*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry East*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

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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, more recently, blogging and podcasting from Muddy Bank.

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2River  
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# 2 R V

**15.2 (Winter 2011)**

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