

The 2River View

25.4 (Summer 2021)



Antanaclasis 3 by Sally Van Doren

new poems by
Ted Kooser, Matthew Freeman, Will Harmon
Sheree La Puma, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Matthew Murrey
Benjamin Nash, Karen June Olson, Charles Rafferty
SM Stubbs, Diane Thiel, Sally Van Doren

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Ted Kooser

Ink Black

It was a very bright day, and for miles,
August had burned off all the color.
Here and there I could see a farmstead,
lifted just slightly above the surface,
like the head of a nail working up out
of a shingle. Back from the road sat a gray,
plank-sided shed with a sheet-metal roof
held in place by the smoldering sun.

The fourth wall was open to the south,
and if ever there was an “ink black” this
was it: anything taken inside had sunk
from sight as in a pail of crankcase oil.
All the black in the county was there,
dragged up, rolled in, shoved to the back,
then more heaped up in front, the last bits
pitched on the top to settle in layers dense
as coal. If you needed a bucket of black
or a length of darkness, this was the place
to find it, free. Every shadow for miles
was making a bee-line right for that hole.

But then I saw a little faint light from
a crack between two of the boards
and all the black I'd seen, and thought
I'd felt, that I'd even imagined I could
hear—a creaking and clatter, the squeal
of old machinery, a century or more
of utter blackness I could almost taste,
like oily metal shavings—all of that
packed to the rafters, bowing the walls,
was, as my eyes adjusted, very slowly
leaking away, that shed too flimsy
to hold it all, and I could then make out
a thin gray absence waiting there,
which had an altogether different story.

Matthew Freeman

My First Insight Ever

It was a bird talking. And I
was supposed to be on another

level, one where people communicated
and everything would be revealed to me.

After they let me race around the women's
ward I was called into the conference room

to be interviewed by six shrinks
and I went in smirking and intense

and declared I'd found my object relation
and the secret local newscaster they had sitting in

deliberately tapped her toe and one doctor
asked if I could fly and I said I felt like

jumping out the window and taking off into the sky
but that wasn't physically possible and he said

that's a good start and I felt like a toddler again
going from the pure illusion of love into

the gnosis of the body of light. Write your obsessions,
they say. I say lay down your miracles.

Matthew Freeman

January Song

I stole something from some gangsters.
I can't remember what it was
but I'm pretty sure they're out to get me now.
I tried hiding at my parents' house
but there was just a vacant lot there. I got the feeling they're dead.
I asked my girlfriend if I could crash on her floor.
"I'm not your girlfriend," she said. "That was thirty years ago."

Maybe if I gave back what I stole
everything would be cool again.
I go stumbling around my room
but it looks like I need everything I have.
Maybe if I open a window I'll get an idea.

Oh, whoever this is, please have a heart.
I got thirteen teeth pulled in one sitting.
I mean, they were bringing in people just to see it done.
And the country's being ravaged by an evil pestilence.
Everywhere you go the winter's so discordant.
I'm not even convinced that was real snow falling the other day.
I keep going back to my origins, trying to figure out the plot.
And I might not even be the hero of my own story.

I'm being stripped of everything now. Take it, take it all away.
My dad drums some loud note in my head: don't get involved
with gangsters.

Will Harmon

Bubble Bath

water rushes hard over his sharp-rock feet, then
is lit up: bright, flash to complete toast, butter,
cinnamon, domino sugar, domino mother, standing
high, while you skitter lines on the dining table with a silver fork,
life swaddled by big blankets of ooze, crude
oil burning love letters into the pork belly—
he shakes off his bones and dives into the sea.
and all those people rush down, red and pink and her
hair all ugly, shouting, come back up, it's electric,
licking his little feet, she's making it all plastic and
eyeballs rattle around in his head, yelping and crying and
she sighs, she runs up to him, yes the sea washes up to him,
on to him, years of pummeling waves, ripping you
down into salt, and back into the sun.

Will Harmon

Mallory

the sun will always be hundreds of years in the sky
in the summer day when we were born, in that
pool-table filled bar, our mothers screaming and all
holding hands, because they knew we would be

ephemeral, like the flames of the torches
that burn while we dance, splashing
beer in each other's brightly-lit faces,
and understanding nothing about our flailing bodies,

but one day the world will turn,
and the bitter factories of our lives will belch their smoke,
and the clouds will yet again cover the sky,
and we may touch the cold ground
and cry, and the sun
will be low, and it will be winter again.

Sheree La Puma

Something I Hate

Two boats outside my window
with gillnets. Not that I know
what that means (the nets)
until you say they're illegal.
I watch the rise of the sea alive
with promise, grow concerned
for the dolphins that surf the waves
as I sip my morning coffee/black.

That's a lie. I like cream/thick as foam
washing in like a bad tourist along
the Tijuana River. No one can swim
in the ocean there. Or maybe they do.
Who knows what sickness comes
in the dark of our own homes.
Yet we eat the fish, fish swimming
through brown waste.

Did you know that dolphins can hold
a grudge? Like you when I turn down
the oysters you order for dinner.
There is not enough Tequila in the world
to rinse decay off the tongue.
They found one dead, on the sands
of Playa Encantada. Bottlenose
crushed, a beautiful & terrible thing.

Something I hate.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Mystery Street

I thought it was a gravel road
lonely as a falling barn with slats
ringing in the the wind
while three wild horses wait
for no one to return.

I thought its way would shine
like red glass in sunlight,
so full of darkness it would arrest me
with the clarity of direction.

I didn't want it to be a crowded street
in Calcutta with orange wings and screeching
wheels, a dead end too, while fire burned in a bin,
or for it to be a slope bundled in beige
split levels in a St. Louis suburb.

If it was a street, why not one I knew,
even if I carried such weight on my shoulders
that I missed the red door that was always there?

If it was a mystery what I carried,
why did I know where to step next?

Matthew Murrey

Paradise

Twenty years ago I set off to find her
in fields, cities, libraries, woods, and museums.
Everywhere I went, I took my little notebook
and scribbled down descriptions, impressions
and clues. I was a regular private eye.

Every morning before work, I worked
on them, and slowly they came—
short and long, of love and despair, clever
and simple, a few I still don't understand.
But she was always two steps ahead.

All these years later, I'm like that fellow
in the Jewish tale who just walks away
from his boring village and the drudgery
of work, children and wife—sets off
for Paradise. Halfway there,
asleep at night, he gets turned around
by an imp (or angel) so when he arrives
right back where he started, he's not sure
where the hell he is—heaven
or home, earth or Paradise!

I often sit with my coffee in the morning—
after writing in our sleeping house, after making
breakfast and lunches for my two boys,
after looking at my wife's gentle chin—
and stare out the window, without speaking or writing.
What would I say? How would I put it into words?

Matthew Murrey

Turning Ghost

In the high school library two kids
at a computer said they missed being kids.
I was kneeling, helping with Word,
and looked up at them, seniors,
young. "I didn't have to worry
about anything back then," she said.
He agreed. I was middle-aged
back in the days they were longing for.
I too have longed for days long gone—
biking home in Chicago after work
with a day-game in late innings
in one headphone. Or one evening
when I was a kid and smelled winter
at the end of October, and knew.
My friend Steve told me of a cramped bar
in Iowa City where he used to go to hear
Greg Brown singing his lush grit
before he got famous, before he got old
and his gorgeous rasp went all to shit.
Wasn't there a hero who journeyed
to the underworld and had to endure ghosts
crowding the gate, desperate for any shred
of what was? Sometimes my neck hurts
and won't twist as it should. Sometimes
I get dizzy and feel sick if I stand up
too fast. Forward, forward, forward—
this body of mine has no say
in the matter, no matter how hard
I try turning my head so I can look back.

Benjamin Nash

Agaves

The big agaves
died in
the snow,
they have
a touch of blue
in them like
I see in my
face and
sky on a cold day,
in my blue jeans,
in the faces of
those that
leave us,
it would be nice if one of them
had this cowbell
that my grandfather
put on one of the white
cows to find them
in the pines,
that we could hear them,
this little boy that
died from abuse
in an apartment
near me last week,
that he,
the agaves
could come back,
that this bougainvillea that
belonged to
my mother
would bloom
pink again this spring.

Benjamin Nash

Candle

In this long life we live,
in the next one a
nice person will
burn like this
flame in a
white candle,
in a dark world,
in a house of ice
without power it is
a yellow light in a
white skull on the
table made in a high
school woodshop
class and sitting
on a pane of glass,
in Posada's drawings,
in the white wax with
the blue flowers
on it when it is
10 degrees outside
with snow on the
ground in blue
light when we
know someone
will die in the
night cold and go on,
in this other place
sharing their light
like this small Day
of the Dead candle
that I bought in
the grocery store
because I thought
it was pretty and it
did not cost much money.

Karen June Olson

Summer in a Jar

Yesterday I followed a feeling as if it were a map,

a wind sweetened by yellow clover
winning the field, where my mother
as her mother before, planted seeds
by careful measures
timed by the first quarter
of a new moon.

I resisted work they claimed ritual,
clearing gardens choked with purslane
and chicory, our reddened skin brushed
by wings of bees, hours repeating
what was already said.

The days we'd dropped
cloves of garlic, sprigs of dill,
cucumbers, and boiling brine
into jars, how windows
closed with steam. Their songs
about summer in a jar.

Now rain draws me out into a wet yard
arms full of houseplants drunk with winter's gloom,
to see what is imperceptible, a lift of leaves
amid the wash—how my arms want
to reach skyward.

Karen June Olson

Tapestry

My granddaughter rocks her body
to rhythms in my voice and to stories
I tell her that were whispered
in my ears. *Once*
and *happily*, I say

and then

there are times I forget
she is not mine
but of mine,
a simple mistake if I call her
by her mother's name,
the same slip
my grandmother
made with me. This tricked-up
memory of mothering
on occasion can make
my breasts ache.

What I know about love floats on periphery;

a grandmother collects rainwater
in a soup pot to soften
a child's hair,
a tangle of strings, comb's careful
part, slow twist
of braids,
a simple weave.

Charles Rafferty

Estate Sale

For example, a redwood became my late neighbor's picnic table, which his daughter set out on the lawn to display his fedoras. He had worn them as a young man, she said. Each hat had a bright feather stuck in the band. They didn't look like they came from the birds around here, and nobody wanted the hats. Even so, the picnic table got loaded into a truck before the dew burned off. The hats, of course, are part of the poem.

Charles Rafferty

Oxbows

Curves in the river keep breaking off as it heads to the sea's address. They do their best to become what they are no longer, and we admire them for it, if only because of the mallard eggs, which their banks can hold without breaking. These lakes fill in with silt and cattails, transitioning over the decades to bog and pasture. Listen—the bell of some future dairy cow is clanking on the wind as it returns to a barn that is still a bunch of oak trees, their branches full of chattering finches on the way to someplace warm.

SM Stubbs

The Ruined

We are wailing in time
with the whine of exhaust fans
outside our windows. We pound
our chests, wailing; we're on our knees,
wailing; we're prone on the bed,
clutching the sheets to our eyes.
We've had enough death for now,
and have fallen behind in our grieving.
We cry rivers that flood our collarbones;
armadillos waltz across our ribs.
If we grew our own armor surely some
would be spared. Please, teach us
how to love everyone as much
as they deserve. Teach us why life
requires a count of those bodies
we've held then lost,
those dead rising on their way
to being sounds we will only ever lift
with our tongues.

SM Stubbs

Sister in Absentia

My sister has turned into a ghost. Not
dead, merely a stranger we never see
or hear from. No Christmas or birthday cards,
no proof that she's still alive on this earth.
I'm angry. So is everyone else. Still,
blood will be blood and reliable news
would be welcome. Last we heard she'd settled
in Hawaii—then in May friends saw her
eating dumplings in Memphis, Tennessee.
I'm glad she's eating. If our minds decay
at a constant rate, hers will have collapsed
by now. Untethered, tangled, raw. Which means
her slight appetite has likely shifted.
When you see her? Stay away from her mouth.

Diane Thiel

Assimilation

Trying to write something about
Borges and his dystopian purifiers,
but living a few different realities at once,
I keep thinking about the Borg.

After the screen, their image persists,
the implants, maturation chambers,
the hive so alien and familiar.
The perfection.

I wanted the poem to be funny, wry at least,
carry its own kind of meta-resistance,
but as I find myself saying out loud in the house,
There is nothing funny about the Borg.

My twelve-year-old, as usual, pulls me out
of that futile spiral, pointing out, *Well, it's funny
that they always say the same thing.*
They do—despite all that math, all those letters,

consuming all those libraries of information,
all those possible ways of solving problems.
It *is* funny, but also terrifying
to always hear the same thing.

Diane Thiel

Field Notes from the Biolayer

It seems to require extreme conditions.

Some do listen to the early alarms, but many will ignore all evidence until the water rises above their heads.

As the virus sweeps, and they are forced to rely on the virtual world, some begin to realize what they had been missing, how much they miss touch,

the sound of voices and music not filtered through machines.

We have always found the music to be curious, the way they use it to connect,

the way some sing to get through things.

Though I have seen enough not to be naive, the possibilities are staggering.

More are recognizing the way their world is connected within and also beyond—the rivers, the oceans, the air—the lovely layer that makes their existence possible.

Sally Van Doren

Bargain

as if there were people living in
my house who knew my name

as if the gamble paid off

as if the phlegm dislodged itself
from the ceiling

as if I could breathe in this
environment

as if my mind was connected
to my throat

as if the page was long enough
to advertise my worth

I will pay you whatever
you want for it

as if the gimmick you use to attract
suits will survive you

as if all of us are terrorists seeking
to usurp the status quo

as if ginger could calm a rioting
stomach

as if you swindled me out of my fortune
without my knowing it

as if he bought her then sold her

Sally Van Doren

as if the sound of her voice filled
every inch of the house

as if I knew how to value art

you will tell me when it costs
too much

Tantric Tinder

I discarded the plasma
glaze covering my head.
The dump would not accept

it in its tainted condition.
I conjured my third chakra
to remove the bias against

personal protective equipment.
We're at war with a slippery
cipher. There's no traction

on the ground so I take to the sky.
Airborne, I can see more clearly
what's going on through the haze.

The friction between staying
put and parting ways heats up
the cage we have come to call

home. There's a candle inside
us and it sets our veins aflame.

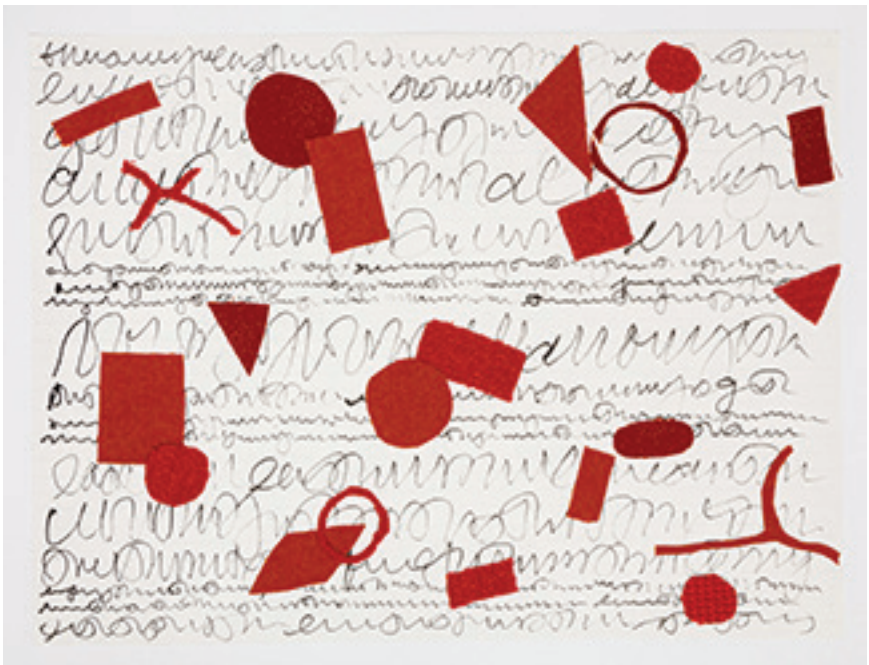
Contributors

Ted Kooser is a poet, essayist, and Presidential Professor of English at The University of Nebraska—Lincoln. He served as the United States Poet Laureate from 2004 to 2006, and his book *Delights & Shadows* won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

Matthew Freeman is a poet and songwriter from St. Louis, Missouri. His most recent publications are *Ideas of Reference at Jesuit Hall* (Coffeetown Press) and the chapbook *Exile* (2River).

Will Harmon is a poet, philosopher, mountaineer, and undergraduate student at New York University. His work here in 2RV is his first publication.

Sheree La Puma has poems most recently in *Chiron Review* and *Plainsongs*. She is the author of two chapbooks: *Politics of Love* (Ghost City Press) and *Broken: Do Not Use* (Main Street Rag).



Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg served as the Kansas Poet Laureate from 2009 to 2013. She is the author of twenty-four books, including *How Time Moves: New & Selected Poems* and *Needle in the Bone*, a non-fiction book on the Holocaust.

Matthew Murrey is a school librarian in Urbana, Illinois. His poems have appeared most recently in *JAMA*, *Okay Donkey*, and *One. Bulletproof* was published in 2019 by Jacar Press.

Benjamin Nash has had poems accepted in *Kestrel*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *RHINO*, *VOLT*, and elsewhere.

Karen June Olson is a poet and Professor of Early Childhood Education and the author of *Living Midair* (2River). She lives in a near century home with her husband and two cats.

Charles Rafferty has a collection of prose poems—*A Cluster of Noisy Planets*—forthcoming from BOA Editions. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker* and *The Southern Review*. Rafferty co-directs the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College.

SM Stubbs is a former co-owner of a bar in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and elsewhere.

Diane Thiel has published ten books of poetry and nonfiction. *Questions from Outer Space* is forthcoming from Red Hen Press. Thiel is a Professor at the University of New Mexico, and her awards include PEN, NEA and Fulbright Awards.

Sally Van Doren is an American poet and artist. She has published three collections of poetry, the first of which won the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets. Her fourth book, *Sibilant*, is forthcoming from LSU Press.

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About the Artist

Sally Van Doren's lyrical art explores the fertile cognitive territory between word and image. Her collages and polysemic drawings combine her interest in language play and visual art. A polyptoton is the stylistic scheme in which words derived from the same root are repeated (such as "strong" and "strength"), whereas an antanaclasis repeats the same word, but each time with a different sense.

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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

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