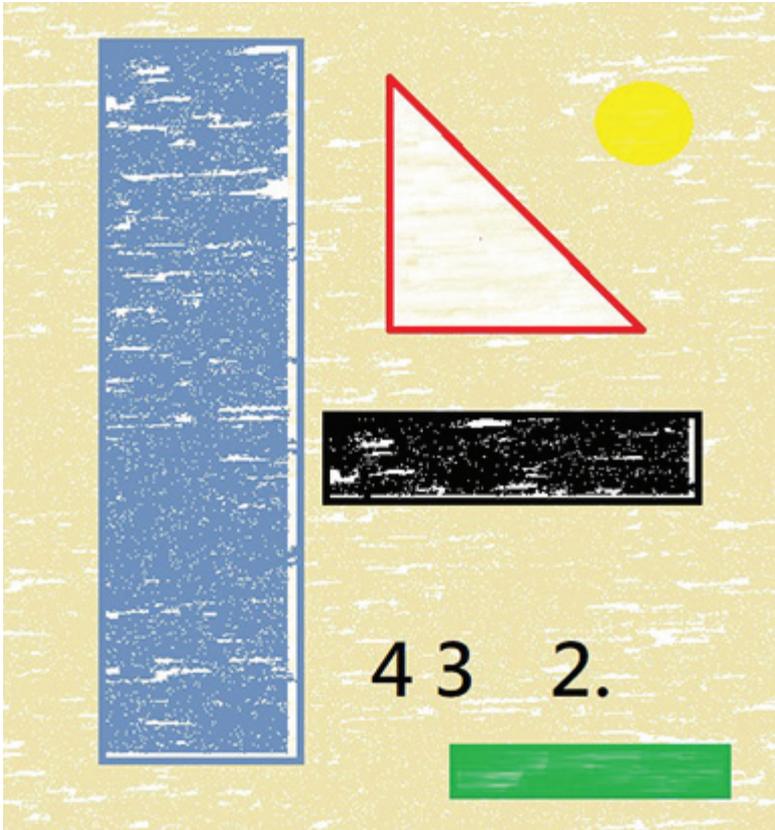


The 2River View

26.1 (Fall 2021)



new poems by

John Amen, Deborah Bacharach, Marisa P. Clark

Jessica Conley, R. L. Farr, Phil Goldstein

Daniel Edward Moore, Eric Nelson, Naomi Shihab Nye

Matthew Scultz, Nancy White, Jianqing Zheng

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ISSN 1536-2086

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The Women All Wore Black Dresses

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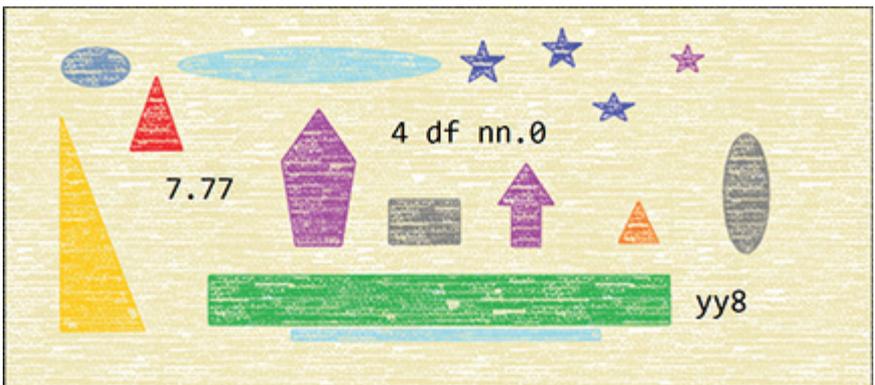
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John Amen

To Find You Like That

The angel asked if you were ready to go,
& you said that you wanted to stay a bit longer
with the red lilies in the rock garden.
You wanted to play your horn in the bleeding petals,
in the long, hairy vines,
you wanted to wait & see
if anyone would show up to delay your performance.
It's time, the angel said, impatient
as you paced a straight line back & forth
by the red lilies in the rock garden.
& that's where I found you in the morning,
after coffee & newspapers,
after I'd convinced myself I was worthless,
I'd convinced myself I was a god,
to walk into the red lilies in the rock garden
& find you like that,
fuck to find you like that.

Deborah Bacharach

My Inner Punk Rock Skateboarder Stands in Front of Rothko

In the crack
I exist. You've seen me.
You know I am a fist.
When I refuse to be naked,
I will be put up against the wall.

If I roll the word shit
around in my mouth if I suck
on it, chew on it, I will at least not care
it's killing me. I wish
I could disappear into the black
marks that become the frame
of faces that maybe if I could
keep pushing back far enough
become human. My body the only truth
my body the only way to tag
I have lived with love.
I am plummeting.

Deborah Bacharach

The Quilter at 86

I stitch each shallow breath
through a bitter haze.
I will piece together Pluto's true colors,
those triumphant shorelines of jagged ice,
when my good
heart again glistens.

When I was a child, seaswept,
Father wrestled me back from the undertow,
promised me to Water Lillies.
I lived golden then.

May the calm
across the waters bind
my edges. Against what
unnames me, Pluto, Monet,
Father remain.

Marisa P. Clark

Whole Cloth

I believed love was a long, bright thread,
stitching skin to tender skin, pushing through
the calloused places, binding us in untold
ways. Love laced me into a fabric—a soft
garment or a quilt, comfortable and warm—
where I was integral, larger than a lone self.
I believed us so well-sewn we showed a seamless
face, a cloth woven whole. With wear came
tear, stains appeared, and durable material
thinned to gauze—then a rip, a rent, a hole,
entangled shreds. Love should not end
dull and frayed beyond all recognition
and repair, nor should it begin with design,
a knot, a needle, and a trail of bloody
puncture wounds. What connects one person
to another escapes me now. I believed I was
a long, bright thread. Smooth. Strong.
Enough to make love last.

Marisa P. Clark

Wolf Moon

When my mother called, I was eating
good spaghetti with a friend

at a humble restaurant. I silenced
the phone. I didn't want bad news

to end my fickle appetite. At home,
I checked the message. My father was

still alive. I packed black: cashmere sweater,
dress pants, good shoes. Returned

my mother's call. Made reservations
for the next night in Carlsbad. The next morning

he died. I went to work, met my students
for the first classes of the new semester,

then drove south as the moon rose, full
and huge, reminding me of nothing

so much as my father's bald head
gleaming in the sun.

Jessica Conley

The Women All Wore Black Dresses

The women all wore black dresses
and wide-brimmed black hats with bouquets,
netting, and silk bows. Some chickens sit
on their laps, others are grasped
more tightly, black and white-rippled
feathers jutting between women's fingers.
If it were not a photograph, in a moment,
the women in the front row would stand,
birds scattering in false flight.
On the bottom corner,
written in cursive, Hen Party 1937—
it's one of those old family photographs;
there's no one left who knows,
so my mother and I make up their stories:

That's Lara smoothing the wreath of dark
feathers at her chicken's neck, and great-aunt
Julia with the Orpington is mid-story,
telling Phyllis's sister about her broody hen.
Phyllis (who was almost late because she
was looking for her crocheted gloves)
describes how she dunks her hen
in cold water to make it abandon its nest.
My mother and I like this reunion
with family we never knew we lost. They wear
subtle smiles, glad to be known, mud
and feathers about their skirts. In the back,
two boys, slouched and squinting, sit atop
a fence, waiting for something to be over.

R. L. Farr

Oh, Child, You are Bird

Are wing are flight

& lift

You are shell & empty egg

When the fledgling leaves
When the nestling has caught
the hawk's eye

Is talon & soar

Is grasping clutch

If you miss each night's sky
Your sheltering home

Now boy
Now son

You are nest & twig
Down & feather

You are seduced by skies I cannot bear
to know

Now beak & claw

Phil Goldstein

The Sound of Blood Flowing Through Me

to my beloved

The trees drip leaves from their mouths,
goldenrod, oxblood, apricot, ruby. They fall
like snow as we crunch our way higher.

The wind rushes through the trail, a breath
of October that finds its way
into the small spaces between our intertwined fingers.

We are climbing, trudging, stopping, walking together.
There is no one else who knows the rhythm
of the way I hike like you do, no one who knows

I stumble like a klutz on rocks sometimes.
I march ahead at other intervals, jumping over tree roots
buried in a pile of honey-colored foliage.

You chide me, we laugh, we plow on.
There is no one else I would rather be with
at the peak as the breeze licks our cheeks.

There is no one else who knows what it means
for me to reach a summit, any summit, at all. You do.
You know the sound my heart makes
as we take in the view of the valley.

Phil Goldstein

What Wakes a Mother in the Middle of the Night

I have been forced to choose
between my jaw & my tongue, my eyes & my nose.
Which wound will I create in my body?
Which hole will I make permanent & glaring?

Has the sky ever been so much like me?
Out here in the desert, devoid of light pollution,
the Milky Way is a smoky fissure, curling overhead,
a wound in the sky, bleeding light.

What can a mother do to stop her sons
from hurting one another? What can a mother do to unmake
a tear in the side of a continent?
How do you repair that kind of a gash?

Amid the cacti & armadillos, the earth shudders
every time I move. It vomits dirt, the kind shoveled
on a casket after the prayers have been intoned.
The sky will never stop bleeding down.

Daniel Edward Moore

Restoration Cost

Long after ordinary dragged mud through the house
and let the dog lick sweat off his beard as he popped
a can of Old Milwaukee and started watching Bonanza,

there were extraordinary sights and sounds sculpting the
body's clay imagination into something hands might hold,
like a shooting star landing in bed, waking to find your lover

changed into ash being sprinkled from grandchildren's hands
in a garden you both adored. One day the miraculous will not
sound like a babbling brook polluted by lips and their cultural spill.

One day the garbage can on the street will not find its way home.
Those are my boots at the door.
The dog in the window is mine.

Daniel Edward Moore

River All His Words

Ohio's fields raised him like corn
sold down on the corner
where barefoot Amish children
worship dirt with wonder.

At 91, his breath is beatific and
silent as a saint. Grief
in its grandest form
has not summoned my tears.

I know there are memories
the throat would rather swallow,
which is why my tongue will
river all his words.

If Autumn is when graves
ask trees to do their make-up
he'll make me his longest summer.
I will run the lights.

Eric Nelson

Clearing the Air

He's drifting out of the woods, head bowed,
right arm raised and waving slowly,
fingers spread, the way someone in church
reaches for God. About my age, he's dressed
as I am—cargo shorts, t-shirt, low rise hikers—
a version of me approaching me, and I'm touched
to witness his communion, the summer foliage
an eternity of tunnels and arches, sun-mottled

trails scrolling through trees like illuminated script.
As we near each other he smiles a little sheepishly.
Lowers his arm and says Don't worry, I've cleared
the air for you. Now I see he wasn't praying
but shielding his face from webs. On his sleeve
an orb weaver scrambles toward his neck. I don't
tell him. I feel wronged somehow. Not that I care
about the webs or spiders. They'll be back

tomorrow, but floating from the woods that way,
head down, arm up—I wanted a seeker returning
from wandering, answer in hand. Then a branch
snapped me back to me in the woods with the dog
as I am every morning, thinking to-do's, minding
the poison ivy, urging the dog to his business.
No epiphany in sight, no holy whispers in the canopy.
Yet I keep yearning for them, for more, and already
I'm envisioning tonight—spiders stringing the trees
not with sticky traps to wrap prey, but with an array
of harp-like instruments tuned by wind and dew.

Eric Nelson

When Water Is Up To Here with Us

It will rise above us,
roll in great waves
through our houses
stripping beds,

sheets and pillows
drifting off like jellyfish.

It means to unhang
family pictures, lay
them down beside
the drowned,

carry off the bodies,
the pianos, the aquariums.

Then tetra will swim
with walleye,
eels drape
from ceiling fans

and potted plants nestle
in the limbs of maples.

The large appliances
will float
through doorways
like sea mammals

migrating, following
food, singing to each other.

Naomi Shihab Nye

Everyone Looks Familiar Now

My neighbor asks me to get that strange man out of her house.
Pounds on my door – he's there again, send him away.

That's your man, your husband, you know him, you've been
together 35 years.

She won't be convinced. She wants to go home. Wants her
mother, sisters, everyone

who died. She wants my own mother who's sitting on the couch.
Says she's going to the little house and never coming back. Of
that, she may be right.

We all are. But tonight the young couple on bicycles whizzing
down the block

in the pause between rains could be us, 40 years ago, I swear I
had that shirt.

And the man who trained his dog Henry in the park for months
during the pandemic

was someone kind to me in childhood, someone who always
waved as children rode by,

and the neighbor from Germany just found out she has another
son

she never knew about. Maybe it's you. Who are we all, in the big
picture?

The doctor down the block leaves us music. At Mona's, I drop off
soup. We grew up

in a blur of green hope, so reckless, it's a miracle we made it this
far. When our grandson

says kids are funner than adults, I feel his age, and my sweet dead
father

keeps speaking through him half the time, so how can we live
without being confused?

Just know this. We're not alone and never were. It's okay to
answer to any name.

We came down a long track, then sat there waiting, patient at the
signal.

Every person in every body had something similar going on,
was hungry, impatient, or scared, or broke, and the ones who
were dying

when we were children are still here somewhere, giving us
counsel,

trying to guide us toward the street with an overpass,
and the people inside the train cars are waving their hands.

Matthew Schultz

Parable of the Sublime

We used to ride our bicycles across the Dakotas during the hot summer months, visiting churches our grandfather had designed sometime near the end of the Nineteenth Century. On those long stretches of black highway between Kadoka and Rapid City, Badlands, they say, where the only sound is wind and the only landmark is the horizon, we found God among the bison and the bighorn sheep peering above the tall grasses like black-tailed prairie dogs to see what all the commotion was about. Call it happiness.

Matthew Schultz

Tour de Chateau Midwestern

I have worn a brown stripe into the snow-white lawn
cycling back and forth between the house and woods.

A barred owl eyes this rustwet mud trail wondering
what rough beast now prowls the steady transit of birds

through unkempt garden rows, cogged teeth churning
in time with the steady plunk of quickly melting snow.

We've been indoors for weeks, squirreled away against
this cold now common across town and country, convalescing

our desire to leave home. A voyage out and back again:
pedaling from the door to the creek, the castle to the keep.

Nancy White

Aubade

Bless the slow sharp light of spring
that woke us up early and how I go
through the motions: get up, wash face,
comb hair. Bless dirty clothes, the
small feet, the laces. Bless the bad
breakfast, the too-sweet snack. Bless
coats and arguing about them and seatbelts.
Bless the scary Christian daycare.
The long drive to work. Bless the feeling
that I can't go on. Bless the ugly
concrete buildings and the lawns trampled
by so many feet, seeded every year but
never green and the stairs that reach up
floor after floor. Bless no windows
and the long hall lit by buzzing
fluorescents but still dim. Bless the pine
cleaner and sweat, the door, its tiny window,
the handle that never works. Bless the door
that opens when I push and the step
over that jamb into the cinderblock room.
Bless the desks made of woodpulp and
formaldehyde and plastic laminate
and the phones and the pens and the people
who show up today. Bless the ones
who look up and smile and the ones who do not,
the homework doers and the homework
don'ts and that someone already raised
the blinds and a little sun comes in and that
by the time I get to the front of the room
I have thought of something to say and that
doing this day after day makes a place
where they will say something back
to the dark and the silence
we blessedly come from.

Nancy White

Death Buddy

I want one of those robots
to carry me and feed me
and change my pants and
clean my chin and sing

my favorite song (or hum)
and (if I decide I'm done)
offer twenty ways to die
free of pain. Settings

include Quick, Moderate, and,
for those who want to savor,
Snail. Each hipoldster needs
one, keyed in to their DNA

so even their own kids
can't stop them going
where they want to go.
A pleasant scent will mist

my closing eyes when I provide
my dementia-proof password,
so individual and unhackable
not even Hospice will know.

Jianqing Zheng

A Cheap Thing to Do on a Boring Weekend

Sam waits on the side porch wanting to grab shots of a hummingbird flinging to the nectar feeder, but a tail-wagging squirrel on the pecan tree makes a loud cough as if to disrupt. Sam casts his impatient glance at the noisemaker when a shadow darts to the feeder. Before he can respond the hovering bird shoots away. Shucks! He cups his hands around his mouth to make a hooting sound. The squirrel keeps coughing.

moonrise
the caught fish slips
out of hands

Jianqing Zheng

Memory of Mom's Cat

When the sunset straddles atop the cabin like a red-faced cowboy on a bronco, Tigger scoots in through the cat door, a squirrel clamped between its jaws. It saunters to the den, where mom watches *The Golden Girls*, to show her the prey. "How dare you!" Mom pats her hand on the couch arm. Stunned, Tigger bolts out. In a while, it returns, crouches on the kitchen floor to sniff at its dinner plate. After one lick, it wanders to the den, rubs its arched back against mom's shanks. When mom claps her hands, Tigger leaps onto her laps for a stroke.

Christmas gift
an embroidered cat
for mom

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Contributors

John Amen is the founder and managing editor of *Pedestal Magazine* and the author of *Illusion of an Overwhelm*. His poetry has appeared recently in *American Poetry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and *Prairie Schooner*.

Deborah Bacharach is the author of *Shake and Tremor* and *After I Stop Lying*. She has been published in journals such as *The Carolina Quarterly* and *The Southampton Review*. She is an editor, teacher and tutor in Seattle, Washington.

Marisa P. Clark is a queer writer with prose and poetry appearing or forthcoming in *Cream City Review*, *Nimrod*, *Rust + Moth*, *Shenandoah*, *Texas Review*, and elsewhere. A fiction reader for *New England Review*, she lives in New Mexico.

Jessica Conley teaches at The Steward School in Richmond, Virginia. She has been published in literary magazines such as *Glass Works Magazine* and *The Gordian Review*.

R.L. Farr divides time between binding books, volunteering for the local arts council, editing an online poetry journal, and tending to personal poetry projects.



Phil Goldstein has appeared in *Awakened Voices*, *The Loch Raven Review*, *Qwerty Magazine*, *Rust+Moth*, and elsewhere. *How to Bury a Boy at Sea* is forthcoming from Stillhouse Press.

Daniel Edward Moore has poems forthcoming in *The Adirondack Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Chiron Review*, and elsewhere. He is also the author of *Boys* and *Waxing the Dents*.

Eric Nelson has poems in *The Oxford American*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Sun*, and *Verse Daily*. He lives in Asheville, North Carolina. The most recent of his six poetry collections is *Some Wonder*.

Naomi Shihab Nye is the Young People's Poet Laureate (Poetry Foundation). Her most recent books are *Everything Comes Next: Collected & New Poems*, *Cast Away*, *The Tiny Journalist*, and *Voices in the Air: Poems for Listeners*.

Matthew Schultz is Director of the Writing Center and Adjunct Associate Professor of English at Vassar College. His chapbook, *Parallax*, is forthcoming from 2River this fall, and his prose-poem collection, *Icaros*, is forthcoming from ELJ Editions in May 2022.

Nancy White is the author *Sun, Moon, Salt; Detour*; and *Ask Again Later*. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Beloit Poetry Review*, *New England Review*, and *Ploughshares*. She serves as editor-in-chief at The Word Works and teaches at SUNY—Adirondack.

Jianqing Zheng is the author of *A Way of Looking* (Silverfish Review Press, 2021) and editor of *Conversations with Dana Gioia* (University Press of Mississippi, 2021).

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About the Artist

Thomas Park is a multi-disciplinary artist from Saint Louis, Missouri. A specialty of his the use unusual means to create or generate art, such as, with these pieces, using Windows Paint and some basic colors and textures.

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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ISSN 1536-2086

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