

The 2River View

23.1 (Fall 2018)



Tree in the Sonoran Desert

new poems by
Maggie Hess, Erin Carlyle, Clare Chu,
Mark Conway, Caitlin Ferguson, Sandra Kolankiewicz
Josie Levin, Mark Prudowsky, Jill Roberts
Jonathan Scruggs, Rebecca A. Spears,

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in the first bird



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Maggie Hess

I find my Sleeping body

I find her with poems in her hand.
I peel them back
and kiss her forehead,
throw a spread over her fat belly,
too many chocolate chips—not pregnant.

Then I steal her music by lamplight.
I jot down the lyrical treasures she was worried she'd lose.
I blow out her candle.
Let her rest her beauty.
I seal her thoughts in mason jars in a parallel world.

It is a tundra universe.
But I'm used to it.
So I ride my polar bear
off into her horizon.
And when she wakes I'm gone.

Erin Carlyle

Burn in Reverse

In the mirror of the fire
we watched your father's house

burn backwards until your childhood
came back and we could smell

fresh paint. Your father sat beside
the child-you younger and tired

from work. Every beer he ever drank
filled up his cup, and all of the dogs

you buried came up from the ground—
skin to fur they lived again. When

the haunt of your mother cast
her pall over the kitchen, we watched

and waited to see you hide in a cabinet,
or behind the sofa—the hair your sister

pulled out of your head put back,
and then when you were finally a baby

we realized that there was something before you
here—a house before its lover,

and your father and mother fell away
back to their own separate selves.

Erin Carlyle

This is Post Apocalypse

You are tender when you say to me:
pull this bone out of my body. I ask

if I keep it will it make me, bone
to bone, like you? You cast me out

with the trash, and I will
get this bone appraised—take it

to pawn. My will feet move one
in front of the other. My head,

as it should be, downcast,
See the bone in my hand, and know

I'm yours. I will get nothing for
my journey—won't be worth it.

I am on a mission to stick
this bone inside me.

I lay down on the asphalt
Road, and listen to the distant men—

are they yelling my name? I pull
my skin to the side where I want

you, and I whisper a story—
my father was once a tree.

Clare Chu

27359

Until 1913 when the practice was abolished,
prisoners in Lisbon Prison had to wear a hood
whenever they were in a communal space.

I lost my name, became a number,
was given a hood to wear.

Obliterated by the absence of light,
I confront you from within.

You do not know where to look—
yet you cannot look away.

You are crushed by my face
concealed in the darkness.

All you can imagine is your own face.

There is a sameness in my world
in the space where shadow meets light,
where light meets shadow.

There is a pause in penetrating a minute,
I do not know where to look—
reality laps at the edges of my life.

I feel suffocated. I am in a hood,
beside a hood, overlooking a hood.
I am a hood.

Clare Chu

The Raincoat

Once I could dance on a blade of grass,
my feet could melt stone—

now I am pinned down by earthbound clouds.
I thought I had eternity all buttoned up,

then you borrowed my raincoat, wore it daily,
left it billowing in the wind.

In its pockets I hid the bullets I took for you,
tendrils of time I lost, knowledge shucked along the way.

The shelter of my freedom.
Before the rain came, I tried to call out,

but my throat was stuffed with ash,
in that moment I knew—

dying of fright is an actual thing.

Mark Conway

in the disease that is ending

no one told him
his chemo would make him clairvoyant
at least in predicting
small changes of light
he saw the phases of his children
darken after weeks at the seaside—
took pleasure
in the glow that hung
in the air of the sterilized bedroom
the hot days spooling off
of their aggregate skin

he watched them / amazed—
not at how fast
the sun left their faces
but how easily
they let it go

Mark Conway

in the first bird

rain pours down our inner
darkened streets:
my unenlightenment / finally /
nearly done ::
I hear the mind of god
is open to the south
even trees fly
in the wind
and time is on our side —
I heard that
in the scarecrow church—the one that sleeps headdown ::
way above the opened ground
the sun hides inside
a double coat of chrome—

my father came back
inside a bird —
the cardinal sexed in red ::
he chose it
to represent his piety —
we see it move like his wet mouth almost
every night
then fly off at dusk ::
he lets go
a knotted chord of notes
spreads his wings with grace:
all this from
that grief-struck man who once
lumbered on this earth

Caitlin Ferguson

Heroic Ballad

There's a man who pulls a red thread from your lungs
and ties it around your wrist to mark for later
when the light is better to cut. A man
whose five

fingers leave prints so easily, that point
to a bird and it's his bird, that point to a body
and calls it his as if to name things
are to own them as if to own

a body is to meld all the good
parts together and call it monster. There's a
part in this song
where the distortion shows through, where he cuts
through bone,

takes your hand in his, and tells you
about the dream
where he pulls your body from the ocean
and tries to dress
you in his polo shirt, his khakis. It
was morning, sweetheart,

you were so beautiful, he says. You only wanted to steal
his voice box,

his tongue, so you could sing the
low notes. They only listen to those
low notes, how the hero moans. Not how you
wanted to gulp down the sea.

Caitlin Ferguson

Only the Dead Grow Best in the Desert

Today, the sky's all sun and momma strokes the brown of her zucchinis, her snap peas, and cries as if her tears will be enough for her garden to grow.

It's important to have living things, she says, as she rubs mulch under her eyes but it's all dried out. Dust homes in the curve of her ear, the dip of her clavicle, her shirt folds. Once, I saw her laughing under an overhang, mud splattered, dripping. As the sky swelled, she sank still in her body and drowned. But, now, the earth's cracked through like skin in winter. She kneels on a rotten apple, soothes the tomato plants like little crosses.

Sandra Kolankiewicz

Like an Endless Base

He was like being given back my
father after thirty years, the same
disappointment waiting in the wings
as if for some reason I am meant
to find happiness yet in the midst
of misery, see blue skies only
during a funeral, sustain my
self by killing something else. Now I
know to feel joy is possible but
just moment to moment, the backdrop
always shades darker than day appears,
a long note running like an endless
base to aspirations I do not
speak, which float above me, some chorale's
sustained soprano cry, all my dreams
diminished, weakened by tangling real
memory with all that might have been.

Sandra Kolankiewicz

Waiting for Rain

When I look at you across the table,
I wonder what is written on my forehead
that you don't see the pulling in and out
of energy is like the motion of waves
at the shore, dying and creating at
the same time like this laid space between us. A
faint sprinkle teases the parched earth, better
than the downpours we've had, which waste
everything,
send anything of value or evil
to the storm drains and the river where they are
indistinguishable. I don't know how
to meter out wisdom or take only a
bite at a time. In some moments I gorge
while for others I leave a banquet of facts
on the table, happy in ignorance,
off with my preconceptions, most blissful when
oblivious to the obvious. Each
day I conduct a symphony no one can
hear in deep woods following a centaur,
resisting the catcalls and comparisons
until the ground is in ecstasy just
anticipating fulfilment, and here we
go, the first tiny drops growing larger
till they're darkening the dirt and stone the way
artists fills in their pictures, the brush strokes
in need of narration as well if you can't
see them, as marriage must be explained, or
the nature of music described to someone
who has never sung and knows no rhythm.

Josie Levin

Roadkill

When the tire next to my foot
Rolls over a bump in the road
I think of the carcass of an unfortunate
Raccoon or opossum or collection of organs
The curl of the fur and skin
In on itself and away
From crushed bones

As a child I saw bodies on the sides of the road
And imagined them sleeping
Their flattened out skulls
And wrongly bent toes
Delineating their species
The smash faced deer
The half-a-rabbit.
From the land of jackalopes
And unicorns
Their slimy guts, a condition of their entrance
Into my world
Their naps along the sideline, a sacrifice
for me
To see the expanse
Of their mangled bodies

Josie Levin

What should we call you, now that you've risen from hell

You could call me Persephone
Because of the seeds under my tongue
Or the dandelions
curling in between my toes
After all I've got death
kissing at my feet
In reverence
Of my flowering path

His body is a pyre of devotion
Decaying into my soil
My consumption is a slow erosion

To accept his blossoming sacrifice
Is to sink the jagged roots of my teeth
Into the stretched flesh of his peeling lips

You may call me Persephone
But do not forget what the name entails
Queen of darkness
Tamer of death
Ruling in his stead

Mark Prudowsky

Before Work

Before dawn, before other crews pull up
even my own; before a tailgate drops
and coiled cable, pipe and drills scrape the truck bed
emerge and unpack themselves; before the apron
slung from the waist is weighted: fasteners, driver bits,
meter and tape; before conduit saddles obstacles, saws
wind up and roar; before a compressor kicks the drums of my ear,
I rub a cricked neck, look across the cove. A tanager whistle.
The soft swell of light. The sharp profile of a spruce on the ridge.

Mark Prudowsky

Doing Chores after a Lousy Day at Work

Though hardly a saint I've levered broom under toe kicks, behind the fridge
and in the crack between linoleum and threshold. Down on my knees
with an old flannel sheet, I've scrubbed scuff marks and spatters of coffee
and left the rag to dry on the porch in the sun as my mother does
when she boasts you can eat off her floors. Though hardly the flush

I felt on first base having driven the lead run home, the shining chrome taps,
dusted sills and shirts hung in sunlight I've mastered better today
than the botched morning inspection or the client so miffed by
fingerprints left on her walls she withheld pay, or the slipping transmission
I thought had been fixed by the shop that now won't return my calls.

Jill Roberts

shattered reflection in her mirror

one day,
my lungs will inhale flowers
like swallowing a pill
and i will hold on
tightly and
with shaking hands
you see,
there is a fine line between
dreaming and
mortality
perhaps, if we could fly
we would stop drowning.
all i've ever wanted is
to be wanted
motionless in a bed of roses
thorns buried in a throat of lies
perhaps i'll make an ocean one day.
sometimes i like to pretend
that the world
is a lovely place

Jill Roberts

the absence of your presence beside me

you once tried to explain esoteric love to me/yesterday/i
met a girl who was happy/poems on a mirror/last autumn
i sat on your duvet/she always did enjoy running barefoot/
question: why does the preschool smell of burnt waffles
and weed/say: pointless/one chaotically beautiful human/
the water is still blue today/don't ask me how/she plays
guitar the way a recently incarcerated mother hugs her
child/truth: i am afraid/now the tan body has lost its
kindness/i like to imagine she was forged from flames/
you always did despise grey/i'm fine/more poems/more
mirrors/i forget how small i am/sometimes/my car still
smells like your spilled coffee and mistakes/question:
why did you choose to die/answer: no/i was 10 when i
learned the difference between guilt and regret/sleep
well/darling/i hate when people compare you to the stars/
he keeps yelling "man overboard" but no one is on the
boat/i'm fine/you're fine/i am alive and thus alone/the
caged bird stopped singing for me years ago/where are
you/theory: intimacy is a nightmare/i'm not sure what i
would do without the color yellow/lie: i miss you/come
back/maybe my biggest fear is the horizon/i just want to
be wanted/you would have smiled/you're fine/the mirror is
gone now/and your barefoot feet are broken/like the glass
bottle on the corner of 42nd street/space means farewell/
truth: i am afraid.

Jonathan Scruggs

Ars Poetica after Looking at Andrew Wyeth Prints

You have been in here for a long time.
A room barren of chairs,
and the apple tilted
in the corner is not for eating.

At one end a closed window opens
out onto a tract of tire-scarred earth,
a line of listing fenceposts,
rags of dull grass,

and a slow glimmer of sun
caught in the ice at the lake's rim.
Now and then, a tern, wheeling
over the water.

You have been in here, and you will be.
The same visions every day. Easy
to sink into yourself, like a plummet
sounding bottomless depths, and dwell there,

easy to become a barren room within
a barren room. But at the window
where the frame meets the sill
a slim gap lies along the edges of paint

and when you put your hand there
you can feel the air
bleeding in—cold, almost
delicious—pressing up the scent

of invisible lilacs.

Jonathan Scruggs

Fall Purge

That was the year for the killing.

The law of grace went slack as stunned muscle,
and our cooped hens fell to near-devouring

their weak, until each narrow back was plucked
bald and flecked with peppery blood. So our father
straddled the coop stump, gripped each feathered neck

and shucked off each beak's tip with clippers.
The summer waxed on, melting all bonds of blood.
July: mother struck father who threw a chair

down the hall. My brother and I stood in the yard,
in rage, listening to the house, listening
to the furniture move, prepared for a killing.

That fall, our father sat the stump again.
The coop wiring cubed him in pervious solitude.
We watched him grip each fear-stiffened muscle

of their necks, then give death, blow on deliberate blow,
to every bird we had. How he would flip a shucked
head into the bucket as the body ran on, wheezing

blood through the cold grass. My brother laughed,
desperately, while my gaze gripped the open throat
of the bucket, slick with spilled life, as if to crush it.

Rebecca A. Spears

A Hanging

He was never home.
He was home one day.
He was insisting the curtain hang
certainly in a certain way.
She could not let that pass,
surely surly. The curtains
she passed by twenty-eight times
each day must hang
in a way that mattered to her.
He hung them anyway, anyhow
the way he wanted them,
the way he didn't want her.
And if she were honest
she didn't want him
who insisted so insistently
on such matters. The curtains
told her she shouldn't stay, hanging
heavy and floral and overdone,
hemming her in, like him—
the curtains an indictment,
the curtains concealing light,
the curtains material witnesses,
so dumb, so damning.

Rebecca A. Spears

And Lucky

What did you call your life before?

The day after the arrow lodged in the wall,
one window fissured, glass splintered underfoot,
you began to think of it as accidental.

And lucky, you said, not to have been there

on the porch, reading the news, when the boy
with the crossbow practiced his form. Lucky
you'd found out what it is to be spared.

After that, the white foursquare on Clark Street

housed your longing to live on that busy street
and let others hurl their cars down the hill
to the main street, as if motion were purpose.

You were anchored in place, content for once

to diaper your babies and hold close your mate,
to see what lived inside that house wanting you,
if not forever, then for that time.

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Authors

Erin Carlyle is the assistant poetry editor at *Mid-American Review* and an MFA candidate at Bowling Green State University. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Dream Pop Press* and *Driftwood Press*, and she is the author of a chapbook from Dancing Girl Press.

Clare Chu has published twelve books and numerous academic articles on Asian art. She collaborates with Hong Kong-based calligraphic and landscape painter Hugh Moss to challenge traditional media boundaries.

Mark Conway's third book of poetry, *rivers of the driftless region*, will be published by Four Way Books in April of 2019. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Boston Review*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *The Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Slate*. He lives in rural Minnesota.



Caitlin Ferguson holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers University—Newark. Her work is forthcoming from *Tar River Poetry* and can be seen on *Toe Good Poetry*.

Maggie Hess has been a Research Assistant for Contemplative Writing since graduating from Beara College in 2012.

Sandra Kolankiewicz has appeared most recently in *Adelaide*, *London Magazine*, and *New World Writing*. Her chapbooks include *Turning Inside Out* (Black Lawrence Press) and *The Way You Will Go* and *Lost in Transition*, both from Finishing Line Press.

Josie Levin has been published in several publications, including the *Circus Literary Magazine*, *Daily Herald Newspaper*, and *Ink & Voices*.

Mark Prudowsky is a retired contractor who now teaches in a community college construction program. He is a graduate of the Warren Wilson MFA program for writers.

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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.

Richard Long, Editor
2River

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