

# The 2River View

17.1 (Fall 2012)



New poems by  
Joe Benevento, Mariela Griffor, April Clark Honaker  
Suzanne Kehm, Sandra Kolankiewicz, Molly Kugel Merkner  
Tyler Mills, James B. Nicola, Liza Porter  
James Robison, Miriam Sagan, Virginia Smith



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James B. Nicola

## The Uses of Spite

We take the spring for granted.

My uncle was so truculent  
he eked out another twenty-five years  
beyond his date with cancer  
in spite of the pain.  
He refused to miss *a minute of the party*  
until the party, from kindness, let him go.  
In his case, I would say, the spite was good.

One spring, it will be us.  
And which of us will be awake to see  
the sense in eking a century  
and spit at imminent ends and say:

*Another spring (o god), another tick.  
The bluebird's gone. He's staying south.  
The laurels have surprised us by not blooming this year, here,  
And the croaks of frogs are getting softer, softer. . . ?*

O World, be like my uncle. Be truculent! Stay!

*Joe Benevento*

## **After Finding Out I Looked Just Like a Disney Villain**

to my son's friend Mason,  
who needed to write an essay on something  
from his childhood most frightening,  
which was me, with my "long, thin face"  
like Snow White's stepmother or Scar,

my large, piercing, dark eyes, the black  
and white beard, deep voice and "that thick  
New York accent," as out of place here  
as poor little Mason might have been, nightmarishly  
lost on the mean streets of Queens, where I once lurked.

How am I supposed to show  
my frightening face any more in this small  
town, wondering which present tykes  
and toddlers I'm terrifying, which easy laugh  
might be mistaken for a diabolical guffaw?

How can I venture to the playground,  
the pre-school, Wal-Mart, even, with my pretty  
little princess Margaret, knowing the other children  
are thanking their fairy godmothers  
not to have been cursed with such a sire?

My four children know better; seventeen year old  
Joey laughed long over what Mason confessed.  
Still, maybe I should just stay inside,  
in what will have to pass for a castle,  
so I can hoard my true, inner beauty only for them,

like some dragon guarded treasure.



*Joe Benevento*

## **After We Stopped Eating at Tudor's Deli**

because the eighteen to twenty I spent three times weekly  
for the two piece chicken lunch with three sides  
was money better left unspent, especially since  
all that friendly food was rolling me  
towards rotundity at a steady clip.

My best friend Lucy, who managed to stay pretty  
svelte despite the catfish with sides she favored,  
still acknowledged the wisdom of my reasoning,  
though she also knew its consequences: it's never  
been the same between us since, a bag lunch

no substitute for the steady pleasure  
of a good, warm meal. Still today I miss  
the barbecue baked beans, the Watergate  
salad's marshmallowy green, the conspiracy  
between me and Lucy while we both ordered dessert

on top of too much lunch already,  
she some cherry cheesecake, me  
a chocolate brownie bigger than my hand,  
with its genius blend of cakey and chewy,  
or sometimes an ice cream cone

reminding me of earlier still,  
when Jim Thomas and I each decided  
to try the triple scoop option, three different flavors  
perched precariously on cones we leisurely licked  
through a long summer's lunch, heedless of the time ahead,

Jim Thomas dead, Lucy crunching rice cakes in my office.

*Mariela Griffor*

## **Number 7**

For the son I never had, I lend some green tears in this land  
For the son I never had I share some fuchsias opening.  
No matter wherever he is I bathe him and make his skin glide  
No matter whatever language he speaks I read a lullaby when I  
put him to sleep.

for the son I never had I share some lilacs in Spring  
For the son I never had I dwelt on in misery every night  
No matter what good news the world strikes I could see sweet  
skin and closed eyes

No matter mine and my husband's sins are forgiven by the  
creator, my sorrow never heals

For the son I never had I share some red roses from my yard  
For the son I never had I chant this dark song tonight  
No matter we have crossed the oceans in search of peace,  
No matter what we did to forget, he stands more alive than ever  
on the other side

For the son I never had I share cactus in my dark head  
For the son I never had Oh God have mercy on me.

*Mariela Griffor*

## **The Friends I Loved and Left Behind**

After Elizabeth Bishop

A farewell to a dear friend is never enough.  
We must bring him flowers, songs with  
spinning words and good wishes.  
We must bring a shadowy thought  
of love that make us both happy.

We must convince the ghost that dances  
around his grave to be kind to our friend.  
He did so much.  
He did plant a tree and had a son.  
He did in part save his country.

The worst time, I thought, was to leave  
one of the friends behind,  
there in the dried mountain  
his heart was destroyed, his eyes open.  
How can we write poems after that?

The friends I loved and left made signs  
with their fingers in the fading skies.  
They left me here in a brown earth  
so I can weep a red spot that leads  
to a hollow moon faced to the sky.

*April Clark Honaker*

**ode to belly**

this is an ode  
to belly  
because stomach just won't do  
this is an ode  
to that fireball burning  
buried in the shelter of my ribs  
to the belated pain  
of a thrust too deep  
to a latent word  
a lesson  
born of swallowed pain  
a scar  
that seams an emptiness  
exploded on my life  
this is an ode  
to raw-ality  
to my love hormones  
and your survival hormones  
to that meeting place in sighblurspace  
where facebook and match.com  
finally diss-i-pate  
this is an ode  
to stretch marks  
to pain-noirs  
and dead-end roads  
this is an ode  
to va ant bellies  
and blank notecards  
this is a broken round  
stroked  
    cryptically  
    into  
        aphasia

*April Clark Honaker*

## **seeing hooks**

a trusting fish  
hasn't learned to see hooks  
in shimmering worms  
though she's been warned and wounded  
before many a fisherman  
have admired her big mouth  
and glistening body  
as she's preyed carelessly  
on jesus bugs  
did you know mature male jesus bugs  
could mate 30 times a day  
if they could pin down  
30 females  
because the females resist  
males use hooked antennae  
to grab their lovers by the eyes  
being eye-locked makes them easy prey  
especially to the quick strike  
of a thrusting fish  
a trusting fish thinks nothing  
of consequences  
she likes to graze the light and air  
unable to breathe  
it makes her feel new every time  
she'll be caught and thrown back  
caught and thrown back  
caught and thrown back  
but for now  
she's a trusting fish  
who'll never know  
when the next worm she tastes  
will transform  
and finally eat her

*Suzanne Kehm*

## **Anno Domini**

Mary's been so close to God  
They've shared their blood. One body, as they say  
But now she lives in exile. He has new obligations,  
Hasn't called in years. Still, when his heart beats,  
She can confuse it with her own. But now she does the dishes  
Listens to the radio on the way to Hy Vee

Surely there's been some mistake, for here she is  
loading the dishwasher and matching up the socks  
He had the hard job. So why this backache for a spoon,  
This endless missing stripe, the same ten lost solids?

A soldier on the radio was trained. He could smell fear  
He learned a special vigilance. A creak or click or whir  
Could cost the lives of all his friends. Coming home,  
He could not shake the stealth of watching out for death.  
He could not make himself behave.

*Whose life depends on washing dishes?*

*Who gets saved when you take out your trash?*

*Suzanne Kehm*

## **Mary's Children**

Have all learned to use the potty  
Rachael isn't catching on.  
Mary worries about Rachel  
Who is fascinated with the dead  
The flat silhouette of squirrel left on the road  
The eviscerated bunny, guts shining beside the peonies  
The bright-shelled beetle gone still behind the window screen

Rachel squats for a closer look at each fresh kill  
Yesterday, a robin, not yet flown, maggots threatening  
Cheerfully she recounts the list of those demised  
For any passing stranger.  
Mary wonders how all this will go down  
When the men start writing gospels

The golden haired girl, stiff-armed on her potty,  
Contemplates a spider web  
Mary missed at Hanukah,  
when last she cleaned.  
"Mamma, look," Rachel calls, pointing.  
Mary cringes. Another corpse.  
Daddy long legs, a pale lump  
Delicate pumping legs gone still  
"What?" Mary sighs, but what does she expect?  
A miracle?

"See?" the child says, all eyes and certainty  
"That bug's life went right out of his body."

*Sandra Kolankiewicz*

### **In a Thousand Words or Less**

Every blue-eyed, brown aired man is a liar—  
like this Nature Boy driving his five  
speed to the mountains and never  
once rolling down the windows  
once he gets there, bald tires  
gliding the crowded two-  
lane highway, looking

for a place wide enough to turn around until my  
gaze empties out his streaked window.  
Space meets space, creates a void  
mountains can't fill, trees can't  
cover. When I reach to  
them, I smell

their colors changing to rust, the moth who chooses  
headlights, sucked over the top, hurtling  
with no sense of direction to crash  
out of breath on the wet  
highway.



*Sandra Kolankiewicz*

## **Route 80 to Jackson Hole**

I pound my heels against the dash  
and squeeze my thighs together.  
I can't ask you to stop  
at one of these lost stations  
without feeling dirty.

You slide us along the highway,  
boot on the gas,  
a cruel child unable to give up the game  
another is a afraid to play

The high tension poles filing past on the plains  
like markers of our silence  
know the truth: we are strangers.

Even the guise of friendship is frozen  
in this Wyoming basin,  
hungering in the snow beside the road  
like the starving elk that I keep pointing to  
and you can never see.

*Molly Kugel Merkner*

## **Afterlives**

Her hands absorb the soapy water.  
It quells her foggy views through an aged  
kitchen window, those night silhouettes: row of  
pine, that flowering pink tree, Kwanzan  
but weeping like Shidarezakura, she never learned

the name for the cherry tree without  
fruit, but it looked like the two of these.  
Photographs of Tokyo or the mountain,  
Yoshino-Yama, covered in trees.  
She could still hear one son crying in a bassinette for

milk while her oldest son lay dying  
in the family room, the familiar couch,  
the rust-colored, chevron afghan covered him.  
The daughters looked like the blossoms near  
the castle town of Hirosaki, fragile, drifting.

It was enough to still hear them all,  
the way the sprinklers startled her, rain on  
her sandals, the tended sidewalk, manicured  
for the old robed in their dark rentals.

*Molly Kugel Merkner*

**April 18, 1995**

Days you remember, don't vanish—  
they instead go the way of ghosts.  
Hours can float like that, the way aspen  
leaves shiver and twine when a cold  
front bustles through an autumn town,  
these mouse sails seem to brace in wind,  
wrinkle their noses as though they know  
what you know, wary citron veins.

We can break off this way, like driftwood.  
Afternoon walk, Galway by Salthill,  
wading into pebbled rock, your boat shoes  
perched as I failed at skipped stones; tapas bar,  
dim arches, catacombs, candled tables into a grove.  
A proposal could turn-up again,  
afloat in the zone of spring tides, waiting for the sea.  
So long after, that wooden year could be found lodged  
in a pool beneath igneous rock and goose barnacles,  
outside the Puget Sound.

Later, somewhere in the plains of Cheyenne,  
loping about between the sage brush,  
then higher than the cottonwoods, near stratus and dutiful mist.  
A wren's wing brushes past a lewd word,  
but he manages balance, bears weight  
on his tail feathers, the rudder steers  
his course through billowing blue verbiage,  
those clouds once vows, gasps, apologies,  
shutter some first, before drifting toward  
condensation.

*Tyler Mills*

## **Aiolos and the Bag of Winds**

*And I endured it and waited, and hiding my face I lay down*  
The Odyssey (X)

When language fails, there is sound,  
wind chimes  
and the rustling of potted ferns

growing near the screen door.  
On this porch after school, I cared for a child  
found in an empty factory,

her new father in the garden  
among sugar snap peas rubbing together,  
glimmering as though moving in rain.

Upstairs, the doll-sized nightgowns  
were folded into squares  
like canvas sails

pressed closed. I'd try to calm her.  
She'd open her eyes, just aware of my voice,  
the way my sister turns her head

to the car window, to Main Street's  
orange words on signs,  
the heavy trees spreading night around us.

She slides off her thumb ring, rubbing it,  
balancing the silver circle  
on one jean kneecap, the comb of her hand

behind an ear. My voice comes  
from another place.  
The parking lot is dim, ordered, and quiet.

Tyler Mills

## Telemachos

There is a sound—a fist? I see the man  
in my mind wearing a sweatshirt,  
his hood pulled over a red hat.  
Orange sun moves over cars,  
warms the under-skin of clouds, rests somewhere

on the roof of a carwash like a paper disk  
I had cut with red-handled scissors as the solar eclipse  
collected noon into a shadow  
among the gray trees outside, beyond our desks.  
Stravinsky (from his writings) dreamed of a young girl,

her erratic hands grabbing nothing,  
wrapping the air in scarves around her neck.  
I drive down the highway sparking with hubcaps  
in the animal flight of plastic bags—here, ambulances  
shriek every few minutes. I pull into a gas station,

wipe bird smears off my window with some paper.  
Pump fumes smell like greasy hamburgers.  
*Your hair, your hair is red.* The man is behind me,  
his pale eyes smoothing my shoulders,  
drawing a cold line under my T-shirt.

*Your hair is red in the sun.* No. Sky  
bands the nearby Dollar Store window;  
feeling followed, behind some junky trees I see a crane  
lifting from the concrete, gold, the way a harp  
unfolds in an orchestra—not a wing, but a thin wild sail.

*Liza Porter*

## **Far Line**

after Philip Levine

In twilight, on a road, we stop,  
hearts beating like mad, the rabbit  
in her frightened hesitation, ears cocked,  
behind a wood slat fence.

She hears something I am deaf to.  
I notice the dusk, the telephone  
wire, its buzz, the way the sun  
burns hotter when it steps past the far line.

She hears everything I long for—  
birds rustling leaves, singing. Maybe  
secret words from the first star  
in the almost dark sky.

The part of me that can see one star at a time  
goes with her when she flees. The rest—  
my fear, the night, my stubborn silent  
envy—stays here, with me.

*Liza Porter*

## **Urgent Care**

His face twitches as the nurse tries to find a vein.  
Three strikes you're out, he says under meds, under pain,  
under his breath. Blood tests ordered, IV ports  
into skin, into the thin tube of a dried out vein.  
How long did you shoot drugs? she asks, pulling on  
gloves now, avoiding his blue eyes. The rubber hose  
bulges his upper arm as she probes. He twitches  
twice this time. I don't think we need to talk about that  
right now, he says, polite as hell, twelve steps embedded  
in his worn out soul, needle marks up and down  
his suntanned arms. She finally finds a spot on top  
of his right hand and the red milk flows. Three glass vials fill up  
slow  
with secrets of his life, all those sweet street drugs,  
all that rust, all that crash and stop, all those microscopic drops  
of wasted desire.

*James Robison*

## **Crisis in August**

First the purple storm, low and close,  
over the jade Gulf, darkened the wind.  
Chest deep, I watched the curving fins  
Of dolphins making love, cutting twin wakes  
close, but a galaxy away.  
In vines spidered over white dunes,  
beach flowers bloomed, pale lilac as a scent  
in memory. Flying dinosaurs,  
a bomber squad of pelicans glide  
over the ruffles of dropping tide.  
Dark sky. What does this world need with me?  
Garbagemen climb atop their violent truck,  
to drag ripe mangoes from a tree,  
but can't get the higher fruit three stories up,  
mauve, profoundly sweet, above the hedges. These will fall  
to split: useless golden wedges. Persimmon flowers  
fiercely decorate thin leaves. All's complete.  
Round leaves brown under the sea-grape tree.  
What does this world need with me?



*James Robison*

## **Muscovy Ducks**

On wet ground from the shower spray  
for washing off sand in the sea-grape's shade,  
Muscovy ducks talk. Their walk's a sway  
webby and arthritical. They sleep all day.  
They're Brazilian, shabby and fat,  
gross, with black rubber feet,  
red wattle wax around eyes and beaks.  
They wait. They drink from the showers and eat from trash.  
In late summer they gulp the marble sized grapes,  
which ripen to ruby, dot the grass and bake,  
rot, ferment.  
The ducks get high and  
brash and flare their wings,  
Green-black or white,  
lucky quonky drunken things.

*Miriam Sagan*

## **Housewifely**

*for Kath*

I've seen them, these haunted storefronts  
from Rejkvik to Salida, Colorado  
dusty and empty, or sometimes  
hung with a lace curtain and a NO TRESPASSING sign,  
not even the flicker of a cat  
although once a collection of miniature hot air balloons  
fashioned out of used light bulbs  
dangled on fishline.  
The glass panes are smeared  
and the vacancy  
seems waiting for an installation  
as if snow  
might fall from the ceiling.

It is not really possible to housekeep this world  
like that time in the apartment on the lake  
when we cleaned and cleaned some kind of fine black dust  
from everything, corners, sheets  
bad-mouthing the previous occupants:  
Artists! And from New York! That explains it!  
until we realized  
this was volcanic,  
an eruption  
that, blowing still, closed airports all over Europe  
and floated like the dust  
of moth wings over our balcony in the white night.

Virginia Smith

**[a protean geography] i**

A woman enters an ocean and stretches,  
grows immense in the swells, bridging coast  
with coast. Is she still

her body? an icon? the sea? Our new definition  
for *water* or *shoreline*: soft salt lift-lilt fall.

Red ribbons an oak branch, becomes a lizard  
skittering over stone, garnet that circles a wrist.  
No, it is blue-

ringed with two clear-facet centers: gannet  
eyes a world stares through, swallowed  
so long ago it is now

impossible to remove. Listen: beneath skin  
the hiss of a thousand cities' glass-rinsed shores,

every step an intention  
not to fall through earth, each face passed  
a handful of questions we keep planting in sand:

*come closer; stay  
distant; I am going somewhere  
you can't follow.*

Planted and watered with sea, we watch sky come  
unpinned and lower its braids to us,  
clasp them round our wrists and begin to climb.

*The 2River View*, 17.1 (Fall 2012)

## Contributors

Joe Benevento teaches at Truman State, where he co-edits *Green Hills Literary Lantern*. His latest of eight books is the chapbook *Tough Guys Don't Write* (Finishing Line Press).

April Clark Honaker lives in Ruston, Louisiana, where she teaches at Louisiana Tech University and serves as Associate Director of the North Central Louisiana Arts Council.

Mariela Griffor is the director of Marick Press. Her books include *Exiliana* (Luna Publications) and *House* (Mayapple Press). Her translation of *Canto General* by Pablo Neruda is forthcoming from Tupelo Press.

Suzanne Kehm received the 2012 Distinguished Artist in Literature from the Nebraska Arts Council. Her work has appeared recently in *The Battered Suitcase* and *The Platte Valley Review*.



Sandra Kolankiewicz has most recently appeared in *Bellingham Review* and *The Cortland Review*. *Turning Inside Out* is available from Black Lawrence Press, and *Blue Eyes Don't Cry* won the 2008 Hackney Literary Award for the novel.

Molly Kugel Merkner teaches at the University of Colorado—Denver and West Chester University. Her poems have appeared most recently in *The Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Poetry East*, and *Subtropics*.

Tyler Mills is the author of *Tongue Lyre* (SIUP 2013), which won the 2011 *Crab Orchard Series in Poetry* First Book Award. She is currently in the PhD program for creative writing at the University of Illinois—Chicago.

James B. Nicola has published in journals such as *Cortland Review* and *Tar River*. His book about the theater, *Playing the Audience*, won a CHOICE Award, and he has also won the Dana Literary Award for poetry.

Liza Porter received the 2009 Mary Ann Campau Memorial Poetry Fellowship from the University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her essay “In Plainview” was listed as a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2006*.

James Robison has won a Whiting Grant, as well as a Rosenthal Foundation Award for his novel *The Illustrator*. A prose poem of his is a winner of the 2013 Pushcart Prizes.

Miriam Sagan is the author of *Map of the Post* (University of New Mexico Press). She founded and directs the creative writing program at Santa Fe Community College. Her blog is Miriam's Well. In 2010, she won the Santa Fe Mayor's award for Excellence in the Arts.

Virginia Smith is an MFA graduate of Northwestern's Creative Writing Program. Her work appears most recently in *Denver Quarterly*, *Moria*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Stirring*.

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### **About the Artist**

Alexandra Eldridge holds a BA in art and literature from Ohio University and has continued her education at Cambridge University, England; Santa Reparata Graphic Workshop in Florence, Italy; Penland College; and most recently The Photographer's Formulary in Montana. She has exhibited in Paris, London, Belgrade, Ljubljana, New York, California, and Santa Fe. Alexandra has been commissioned to paint murals in the Place de Vosges, Paris, and her work has been used for the cover of eight books of poetry.

### **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. Muddy Bank is the 2River blog.

Richard Long, Editor  
2River  
[www.2River.org](http://www.2River.org)



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