

The 2River View

22.1 (Fall 2017)



new poems by

Walter Bargaen, Christopher Alex Chablé, Mary Crow
Morgan Eklund, Ceridwen Hall, Sarah Denise Johnson
Matt Mason, Frank Montesonti, Patricia Nelson
Phillip Sterling, Nina Sudhakar

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Nina Sudhakar

We Are Not Made for Sea But for Sky

Mid-afternoon the waves pull back
the covers & force us to reckon with

the suddenly nude shoreline, exposed
grains & foolishly inscribed footsteps,

crustaceans reaching antennae into the
sunshine's abyss. Rendering us all blinking,

half-blind, remembering how a day inevitably
finds us stripped naked at its end. It doesn't

take much to recall the milkiness of an
underwater pulse, a vague & sweeping swell

like the world's only truth glimpsed through
the clouded murk of a liquid curtain. The time

has come to hold our breaths, to swim for a
dim light in the distance, to throw the ocean

off our shoulders. I know we yearned for a
clean slice of oxygen, for unencumbered

breath. For the sacred placation of filmy
clouds, for that voidless, depthless expanse

of blue. Only beneath do I feel the low
throb-hum that turns float to churn, blur

to clarity, that tells me I'd do anything
to reach a solitary, untroubled surface.

Walter Borgen

Damacus, KS

"Tell me," the queen resumed, "are you of royal blood?"
"Better than that, ma'am," said Dorothy, "I came from Kansas."

Retreads rip open, long steel trailers groan, air suspensions hiss as trucks crawl across prairie overloaded with night. At border weigh stations bleary-eyed drivers step down, their cabs drowning in all night radio talk shows that cry the Lord and welfare. Scales slip into sleep, the eclipsing loads pass unnoticed.

Dawn, a smear of gray light. Fugitive cottonwoods crowd the eroded gullies paralleling the road near Oakley and Quinter, names wedged between uninterrupted walls of horizon. At Fort Hays sheets of wheat cover backyards. In Gorham a young boy steps off the bus and the diesel whine trails off with a coyote's high-pitched scriptures.

In Russell the irrigation pipes spill ancient rains on parched ground—the Oglalla aquifer a diminishing prayer. Outside town arthritic derricks pound their arms against plowed earth and empty sky begging for oily prophecies. By the dumpster behind the used car lot, a rusty flathead engine rests, remnant of lonely rides across plains to Junction City and Jericho.

In downtown Topeka, the buildings are the splintered brick stalks of a deranged cornfield. Bridges stand half repaired. Midday the sidewalks are abandoned to the heat. Nothing moves except the bus as it leaves the station. Wind scorches a billboard. Outside Manhattan a broken-windowed church, its steeple fallen from rot is stuck in the ground.

It's the old story, wrapping heathens in pox blankets. Each evening ghost ponies race from the hills to attack the white clapboard houses. Inside rooms, in front of televisions, the watchers call the moan wind and circle into themselves. At the park entrance empty beer cans, fired too quickly, surround two tired howitzers.

Walter Bargaen

Lost Music

1

The long and winding road and they're only lost in northern Arkansas. A Beatles CD blasts in the cab at two in the morning. Under flashlight and a waning moon, the map says they're headed west when they needed to head east to get to the Mississippi floodplain. Thirty miles back is the missed turn. Should they keep going, leave the trailer, overloaded with battered concrete forms for walling up dust and space, abandon them on the shoulder of the road?

2

The road goes on forever. Mary's heard that before. At least, once with each marriage vow, and now each time the Allman Brothers is cranked higher on the CD player. The wailing nearly sends them careening off the curve, as she played lead guitar on the steering wheel. *Forever*, what a crock, she thinks, a warning preceded by an expletive, seeing who's sitting next to her: good, bad, and ugly all in one body. Following a falling star, always a midnight wrong turn.

3

Yeah, *one for the road, and one more for my baby*, and another, and another, but who could have guessed the road was twisted as Highway 1 following the coast along Big Sur. In San Francisco, the Sinatra choir sings and swerves, swerves and sings. Mary wonders if any of the barracks in the Presidio are child proof.

Christopher Alex Chablé

Meditation with Mayflies

beside the lace-worn casings of tomatillos,
the compost stalks a newly found onion.
the larvae of the worm exhumed from so many
uneaten potatoes from the soil.

I clear out the blossoms of mold. beneath the skin
a bulb. return it to the earth. Know nothing
of how to maintain these lives: soil and water,
earthworms eat food scraps and gnats lay their eggs.

to list mere observations.
need not need to turn to a video
or flip through rituals on urban farming.

but to just sit with that small fraction of life
and do what the mayflies and onions know
—nothing—but intuit when and how to grow.

Christopher Alex Chablé

Restorative Faith

This time, the miracle was a tortilla burn
revealing the Bird Man of Cahokia.
I called Francis from this catholic city
and said, "Jorge, I forgot the poem
where Avila pierces her heart with Cupid's arrow
and cums on the stump of the tree of Jesse."
"You never get to see the virgin anymore, Compa.
Call her sometime." Our feet are always
in the water, Bird Man's and mine. Shallow
is the bank of the Mississippi where the vagabond
tent settles behind us. He won't talk. We cut the rinds
from the avocados and let the current sail them.

Mary Crow

Theory of the Angelic Figure

Caravaggio's "Rest on the Flight to Egypt"

Oh, my darling angel, were you there then,
when Mary sat cross-legged, exhausted,
cradling her baby, cheek resting against his head,
your glance a pillar of light against dark clouds
that hover over the landscape as you perform,
"How Beautiful and Decorous", whose notes fill
the air while snapped strings coil from a peg
of your violin, a curl of tousled hair freed
on your forehead, your wings copied from a pigeon's.

You turn your back on us, head tipped
a little to one side as if you know
we're there, watching you, your lovely back,
pale and curvaceous legs, while
a diaphanous white scroll of chiffon
probably hides nothing from Joseph
who holds up the music for you, Angel
(a part-book for four voices—but where
are they, those singers?), to guide the violin.

Mary Crow

Theory of the Human Figure

In the painting, she is the mother
of god; in the studio, she is merely
M's whore, model he can afford.
It is she is who re-arranges
their messy linens to hide the stains
before she steps into her pose.
But how lovely that raised
face seems when lit from below.

Look at the way the light falls.
How should we measure—up
and down from some bronze meridian?
Or from the crowded platform at
the torn edge of light where her voice
must have seemed water bubbling
sheathed in a ruddy flesh,
flame as clear as music, bracing?

Morgan Eklund

Apologies to my Mother before my 28th Birthday

I am sorry that I am the sound of a shadow—
I am the word, sadness.

I am sorry that light doesn't empty out from me
when other girls are so much light—

I am sorry, I stand just outside
of the light.

I am sorry—I feel
like the allegory of a cave

I am sorry the sun is incomprehensible
and I'm lost in my human condition.

Morgan Eklund

Thirteen

This—is how far away from my father
I feel tonight.
I am still thirteen.
I am thirteen years away from him.
He is thirteen years younger.

There—we haven't aged a moment.
We are in between my brain and desire—
between expanding universes.
We are luminous.
Like the meridian.
Like hieroglyphics.

Not shadows on a wall.
Not shadows looking for peace.

Ceridwen Hall

Autopilot

Awaiting snow, the earth is almost colorless.
Then a brief gleam from the pale fields: a silo

or tool. The highway pretends it will never end
so I follow its wide grey pledge. Windmills rest

motionless or turn slowly. Resisting what? Air
this morning is thin and thought-like. Ice covers

the edges of a pond, but not its center. The brain,
likewise, begins to narrow at speed, searches only,

the road, for its next anticipated creek or hillside.

Ceridwen Hall

Outdoors

A Witness tries to explain suffering to me—or something about a God who loves, who therefore punishes. Injustice and pain must exist; otherwise, what would be the point of comfort? There's a glossy leaflet to take, but I let the dog pull me away and lie about my name because no language seems adequate in spring. The sun is more light than warmth, dangerous the way joy is: like sorrow uncontained. Every bud threatens a bloom; branches wait for the wind to freeze again.

Sarah Denise Johnson

After

A girl swallows a pill-bottle
of radicles, lets them creep

down their passage to plant
in the pit of her chest.

From between her shoulder blades
roots sprout, lift her up like wings.

From the sockets of her head
cherry blossoms bud.

Mouth open,
she screams out a birch

tree, lets it grow toward
the sun, encompass

the shadow of what was once her
body, and grows.

Sarah Denise Johnson

Sowing Sarah

I want to know if death is like planting a seed.
My fingernails, dirty, dig into soft soil, pull apart the seam,
place a small radicle in the bottom, press until it makes
an impression in the earth. Cover it, pat it, leave it.

I want to know if death feels like a rebirth—
I think I've imagined it so many times it doesn't feel like a
possibility,
the way it does when we are young and naïve.
It feels like the reality of what is coming—

and maybe I won't be able to get away— God's hand,
or my own, come down to push me—I am the radicle
I plant, covered in soft mulch and soil, pressed,
buried six feet beneath the earth, and left.

Matt Mason

Nebraska

We build cities;
we pretend the plains
and aquifers are not
here; there is no farm
with its brown windmill, this
is Dodge Street, O Street, Second and Main;
we put up skyscrapers
so the snow won't fall on us,
we wagon train motels and grocery stores and bars and grills

so the wind can't feel for the cracks in our coats,
so we don't know
where that dead deer came from, tongue out, next to 30th
Street, what
that skunk-like smell is, who
brought these hummingbirds and turkey vultures, as,
no, a barred owl didn't make that sound,
that's not a real tumbleweed, no,
I don't know how
your allergies are so explosive this morning, why
would you think that was
thunder?

Matt Mason

Where There Are Storms

where there are storms
where there is rain
where lightning cracks the sky

where wind sweeps its broom
across the fields
across your faces

where clouds move like mice
you know it's not where they tell you to stand
outside the dark bathroom or cold smell of basement

but there you lean
forward into the window
like a TV screen

showing a horizon
ripped by soft
sharp hands

Frank Montesonti

Arts Grant Proposal: Pound

In this piece, the participant is put in a white room full of cages. Hidden in the room, a speaker plays the sound of dogs barking—a cacophony of types of dogs: deep and loud, some howling, some yipping, all in unison and intense, as if some small mammal had wandered through the dog enclosure. The place will smell of ammonia, urine, and bleach—the smell of the corralled and unwanted. The participant will then be given a handful of candy corn he or she can only eat after pressing it tightly in his or her hand for twenty minutes, until it is half melted.

Frank Montesonti

Arts Grant Proposal: Remote Control

In this piece, a television is placed on a pedestal. On a separate pedestal is a remote control for the television. When the participant clicks any button on the remote control he or she receives a slight electric shock. The artist who created the piece, a slightly balding man in his forties named Thom, will then walk in from the other room and apologize for creating such a silly and predictable piece of art. Feeling bad for the artist, the participant will take him out to dinner at a good Italian restaurant in downtown Los Angeles where the participant will be distracted by the mushroom risotto and Sangiovese as the artist will confide that he never had much faith in his art anyway and that he thinks he might go back to school for engineering. The participant won't hear from the artist again, but if the piece succeeds in its desired effect, the participant will at strange times think about that artist, of the oddity of the fact he or she knew him, that at some point they were almost friends.

Patricia Nelson

Light that Purifies

(After Dante: Purgatorio)

The light that purifies
is not a cold and tactile thing
and not for the small and slanted senses.

It's not bright rain that weights
with a little, intermittent width
the sleeve or leaf or roof point.

The light that comes to the garden
when it's too late for innocence
burns and stays, a windy roar of lead.

It tears wide the dusty mind and skin.
It does not answer to the curious,
insolent finger or the tongue.

Patricia Nelson

Out of the Underworld

From a place of hands and blindness
the seekers come,
small and crouching like furniture.

They touch the little beaded lights
clustered in minor roundnesses
and leaning like cobs.

They call for the windows
that bring a strong, bright wind
and long blue rugs unrolling.

They call for a body unimpeded in a white, clean sky.
But their bones still hurt in the maze of sight
as if the gods of dark are heavy and are here.

There is nothing to mark, with a sharp light,
the edge of what they lost to dark
and what is simple and can be gathered.

They have reached a dimension of number, rolling,
gears and axles loud, unspeakable, repeating—
an arrival not, after all, a place to see

but a bowl of wild music, swerves of sound and meaning.
Wall and angle do not mar their seeking.
It's the melody, the lovely, strange gradation.

Phillip Sterling

The Nature of Salvation

The deer know what it means
to be deer. They do not shy
from it. They do not desire

to be a woodchuck or a man.
They do not seek abundance
or love. The knowledge of God

appears to them in orderly rows
of orange squash. They do not
know tragedy. They do not shirk

from inattentive headlights.
Their souls are unburdened;
their souls feed on the hunger

of creatures that adore them.

Phillip Sterling

"Observe Wildlife at a Distance"

Sleeping Bear Dunes Visitors Guide

The lake doesn't think of itself as wild,
especially not in the way of the small coyote

I swerve to miss on the narrows of Glen Lake,
the creature less concerned about the harm

my car might cause than about the ranger
whose pickup and live-trap passes me

moments later going in the other direction.
How casual, this encounter of wilderness

and tourism, and so appropriate here, as if
staged by the Park Service for those visitors

from places where coyotes are a nuisance,
trapped and pelted, endowed to kill small pets.

In my rearview, I watch the young pup leave
the road, loping to the narrow rocky shore

and the lake's disinclination—two of a kind—
indifferent to those of us just passing by.

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About

Walter Bergen has published 19 books of poetry, most recently *Days Like This Are Necessary: New & Selected Poems* (2009) and *Quixotic* (2014). *Too Quick for the Living* is scheduled for publication in November 2017. His awards include the Chester H. Jones Foundation prize, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and the William Rockhill Nelson Award. From 2008 to 2009, he served as the poet laureate of Missouri.

Christopher Alex Chablé earned his MFA from the University of Missouri, and his work has been most recently published in *San Pedro River Review* and *Sunset Liminal*. In addition to writing, he is member of the Yeyo Arts Collective, which is dedicated to empowering women and families through the arts.

Mary Crow went to Egypt in January 2011 for t a residency in El Gouna and flew into a revolution, from which sprung *As the Real Keeps Slipping*. Her most recent book of translations is Roberto Juarroz's *Vertical Poetry: Last Poems*, a finalist for a Poetry Translation Award from PEN USA.



Morgan Eklund has poems in the *The Louisville Review*, *North American Review*, and *Whiskey Island*. She recently received an Emerging Artist Award from the Kentucky Arts Council.

Ceridwen Hall is pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the University of Utah and reads poetry for *Quarterly West*. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Grist*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The Moth*, *Rattle*, *Tar River Poetry*, and elsewhere.

Sarah Denise Johnson is an undergraduate at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her fiction has been featured in *Thrice Poetry*.

Matt Mason has a Pushcart Prize and two Nebraska Book Awards. He has organized poetry programming for the State Department in Nepal, Botswana, Romania, and Belarus, but lives in Omaha, Nebraska, with his wife and two daughters.

Frank Montesonti is the author of *Blight, Blight, Blight*, *Ray of Hope*, winner of the 2011 Barrow Street Prize, and *Hope Tree (How To Prune Fruit Trees)* from Black Lawrence Press. He lives in Los Angeles and is the lead faculty of the MFA program at National University.

Patricia Nelson has worked for many years with the "Activist" poets in California. Her most recent book is *Spokes of Dream or Bird* (Poetic Matrix Press 2017).

Phillip Sterling has served as Artist-in-Residence for Isle Royale National Park and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. He is the author of *And Then Snow* and *Mutual Shores*, and four chapbook-length series of poems.

Nina Sudhakar, an Indian-American writer and lawyer, won the Bird's Thumb 2017 Poetry Chapbook Contest and her manuscript *Matriarchetypes* is forthcoming later this year. Her poems have appeared in *Rising Phoenix Review* and *TRACK//FOUR*.

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About the Artist

Thomas Park is a multi-disciplinary artist who lives with his wife and children in the Tower Grove South area of St Louis, Missouri. His visual art combines abstract and street art traditions. You can follow his art at parkart.blog.

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
2River

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