

# 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*

## **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.

Jill Roberts is a high school senior at the Branson School in San Francisco. Her work has appeared in *Blotterature Literary Magazine*.

Jonathan Scruggs grew up in South Carolina and Vermont. After receiving his Master's in Philosophy from Boston College, he moved to Waco, Texas, where he works as a librarian, poet, and fiction writer.

Rebecca A. Spears is the author of *The Bright Obvious* (Finishing Line). Her work is published in *Barrow Street*, *Calyx*, *TriQuarterly*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere.

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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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