

# The 2River View

23.2 (Winter 2019)



new poems by

Sally Albiso, Devon Balwit,  
Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal, Renee Emerson  
Howie Good, Kathleen Hellen, Michael Mark  
Douglas Nordfors, Karen June Olson  
J. J. Starr, Nancy Takacs



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*The 2River View, 23.2 (Winter 2019)*

Sally Albiso

## Genesis

A late snowstorm,  
an unexpected chill.  
Hours of circling in place,  
of nosing windows like dogs.  
How we might tongue joy  
but conserve heat, the power out.  
Headlamps light our faces,  
worn between the eyes  
like phylacteries.  
Clocks flash twelve,  
a tribal count no matter the hour.  
The woodstove ticks  
and we play Scrabble  
though few synonyms  
for this hush. *Brittle*  
would be most accurate.  
How solidity is illusion  
and time splinters like bone.  
If I steal your lowest rib,  
will I become another woman?  
One who never shivers.  
Who knows all the words for sorrow  
yet wins.

Devon Balwit

## gaslighting

the accusations come regularly as trains //  
there must be a terminal if there is track //  
the banging must be mechanical /  
couldn't possibly be fists //  
Shostakovich paced his lobby  
night after night / suitcase in hand /  
awaiting arrest // he didn't want  
to be taken in sleep // I prefer  
not to be taken at all / to remain  
a point from which I might proceed  
in any direction // my enemies  
want me monochrome / restricted in palette //  
like Procrustes / they seek to fit me  
to their headboard // I advocate  
for the in between / for this *and* that /  
they want an end to me // period //



Devon Balwit

## Halcyon Days: A Golden Shovel

Death just hangs around while you wait for it to be  
night then wait for it to be morning. Every day  
you've said good-bye a little.  
*Lucia Berlin*

When they come for you, you think of death,  
yet theirs are small fists, just  
enough to bloody, to free one flap of lip that hangs  
as you do, slinking so as not to be seen. Around  
the dinner table, you keep your head down, wolfing while  
your folks bicker. They don't notice you,  
swollen and furious. You wait  
until you reach maximum invisibility, then exit, homing for  
the bunker of your room, where you wait out your youth. It  
takes forever to get to  
the next level of suffering, to be  
raised from the dead. At night  
you whisper both sides of the conversation, then  
peer through cracked blinds. You wait  
on tenterhooks for novelty. For  
you as for all *untermenschen*, dawn leers red threat. It  
blares, *Be wary*. You ready yourself to  
hug walls, strategize to be  
alive at 3:30, at midnight, tomorrow morning.  
Distractedly, your mother wishes you a good day, every  
good-bye the same dusting of sugar. One day  
they'll knock and hand over your body. You've  
dreamed her look, the satisfying shock, said  
it will make the good-bye  
worth it. You bite back a sob. You die a  
little.

*Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal*

## **Behind the Clouds**

This afternoon  
the sun has come and gone

and the clouds keep possession  
of its face. I wonder if  
the evening stars will be

missing behind the clouds.  
I want to tell the clouds  
to be gone or to get out of the way.

I want to wrap my hands  
around them so badly

without hurting them.  
As time goes by

I see a little bit of the sky  
beginning its candlelit procession  
as the clouds part.

This evening the stars  
have come out to shine.

*Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal*

## **Being the Moon**

The moon looks like a handless clock.  
Beside my dresser the mechanical  
clock thinks that is nonsense though  
it would not mind being the moon

instead of a clock. The white pill in  
the sky, the white eye, shining bright.  
The mechanical clock ticks and tocks  
and rejoices in the idea of being the moon.

One hand stops and then the other.  
It finds the door and floats to the sky.  
Next to the moon, two clocks ticking

above. It offers the moon the big hand  
or the small hand. The moon thinks it  
is nonsense. It feels like being blue.

Renee Emerson

## **"She'll see things before they happen"**

What the midwife said when Mary McLeod Bethune  
was born with both eyes open

She saw black women walking  
through a door marked "enter  
to learn." When a spider  
built a web across it, they saved  
the multiplication table of her  
weaving, slipped in through the side.

Turns out everyone wanted a spot  
on those dirt floors. She saw no seats  
saved, each color as good as another.  
She saw classes taught from top  
of a barrel, students at cardboard boxes  
writing their names with their own  
fingernails. When men in hoods  
came, filing by like teeth in a drunk's mouth,  
she kept her eyes open and the girls stood up  
in a row for another lesson, while the cross  
screamed *fire* from the front lawn.

In the end, they knew their Latin  
conjugations; in the end, they could  
say the pledge to this country  
with their hands over their hearts  
in a language the trustees, the men,  
wouldn't recognize, not even for half credit.

*Renee Emerson*

## **When My Third Daughter Is Born Brown-Eyed, I Dream of Amy Carmichael**

She's wearing shades and a sari,  
a Dohnavur orphan's hand  
clasped in each of her own.

She doesn't want your offering plates,  
your missional knitting circles,  
your watery (color of her sister's eyes)  
faith. Too smooth, doesn't pierce  
the soul, she says, like faith is a whiskey  
or a German beer and she is sending it back  
for something stronger.

Brown-eyed girl who once prayed  
for blue eyes like her sisters,  
saw children naked in temples  
and stole them back one by one,  
made them her daughters and her sons.

Amma, mother, crossed an ocean  
(deep as her sister's eyes) for starvation,  
to be bed-ridden, to adopt a thousand  
brown-eyed children.

So third born daughter,  
when you find yourself praying  
for what you can never have,  
think of orphans looking into eyes  
the color of their own.

*Howie Good*

## **Mortal Thoughts**

### *1 Death's Little Apprentice*

gets down on the floor  
and fits himself somewhat awkwardly

into the chalk outline of a body,  
but after just a minute or so,

struggles back up to his feet,  
dusts off the seat of his pants,

and stands there sort of trembling,  
a flash of lightning made of shadow.

### *2 Rehearsals for Extinction*

Once a week, every week, skip in front  
of a moving train, or swallow a near fatal  
overdose of pills, maybe hang yourself  
for some seconds from a ceiling hook,  
or experimentally slide a razor blade  
across a vein, maybe bite down hard  
on the muzzle of a gun, or at least notice  
those don't look like normal clouds up there,  
but angels with blood on their sneakers.

### 3 *The Colonel of the Dead*

after flexing  
his cramped fingers,

records your name  
in black ink  
on black paper,

then lies back  
with a weary sigh  
on a sun chair,

pink high tops  
crossed at the ankles.

*Kathleen Hellen*

## **To “whosoever believeth”**

Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore

Sleep in it, walk on it

each cemetery is a carpet  
woven for protection against cold, a pattern—  
eye, script, the head of a bird. The night dyed in sunsets

each cemetery is a garden where we sin, the death committed  
in a paradise of elms and vaulted hills reconciled with  
obelisks, a stone finger pointing to the heavens

a continuum where bronze Endymion in rigid, greens  
beside the slaver’s “Patty” and the other orphaned  
to the ragged wind, a carved dog at her feet, still loyal

each cemetery has the ouija’s “talking board”  
spelling mortal, immortal



*Kathleen Hellen*

**... stunningly ... beautiful ... action ...**

It started with the trespass of his room,  
involved a broom,  
that knocked into his chest  
of drawers that triggered the effect  
sometimes predicted, and for which  
I know I'll never be forgiven. A sequence  
of events upsetting swimmer, bowling lad,  
the golden boy poised to kick—they lurched  
in convoy, triggering the dislocations, fractured  
heads. I watched the fall of trophies—plated, stiff  
guardians—not sudden death ... the skull flexes,  
bone lays thick in tissue until membranous spaces  
fill ... running interference.

Michael Mark

## I Like When the Serial Killer

in the movie is a good family man,  
a slightly over-attentive dad who gets flustered  
helping his kids with their grade school  
homework at the fold-out kitchen table  
each night and they make fun of him, call  
him Mr. Gooney, because he fears his answers  
are all wrong and he doesn't want to hurt  
their futures and his wife wants to crawl  
inside him, gushes how he's more patient  
with the kids than she is and nobody  
in the whole world knows her man  
with the gentlest little bunny heart.  
What would she do if something happened  
to him? She looks up with her watery  
Christ-lighted eyes and begs, *please don't die first,  
kill me first, be merciful*. Instantly he knows  
how and where and with what. *But what about  
the kids?* he whispers. She grabs him close,  
wraps her legs around him while the children  
do their math and spelling. *I don't care, kill them too.*

Michael Mark

## Making The Bed

She folds my polos, sleeves  
winged-back, soft belly out,

eases each on top  
of the other, palms soothe

creases, massage colors. Hugging  
the warm clothes close, I lead us

upstairs, breathing their soapy breath.  
*Don't crush them*, she warns.

*Jealous?* I wink.  
One by one, I tuck each

into its cedar bed.  
We move to ours.

Four corners of the sheet raised in four fists, we step back.  
Without counting—we have this down after 41 years –

flap twice, three times, out—then up.  
The whiteness canopies above,

hangs motionless,  
like a great sea creature, breaching.

I wait all week for this.

*Douglas Nordfors*

## **Detail Study**

I've been reduced to life, specifically  
to a human shape  
worn down,  
and now  
I can say I want  
to watch the sun like a hawk or a falcon or an astronomer  
wavering, unbidden,  
toward solar shores breaking the system  
of waves  
of light,

an astronomer  
with ten or five bare  
fingers treading the steps  
of the air like a doctor or a lawyer or a carpenter,  
welcome only  
to the initial pinnacle of the sky,  
as a falcon,  
like a telescope removing itself  
from an eye, turns back, trying to decide  
who I've become,

and settles on  
my gloved wrist.

*Douglas Nordfors*

## **Prime Dream**

For months, I haven't seen a sunset.  
For months, I've seen the sun  
begin to fall. A horizon  
hovers over this womb  
with its nine moons  
orbiting around  
eight fingernails, mine  
if the sun sees me  
sink or swoon.

I know, already, what it means to ascend  
depleted into  
being and  
nonbeing. Rubbing into, just  
that simple idea,  
engenders salt water and cracked lips,  
yet simply slipping  
on a patch of ice presupposes caution,  
the motion of evasion.

This womb must go down past the depth  
from which it rose,  
and if I desire to see, within  
the sun's cycle,  
a rose  
or a cyclamen,  
this womb  
must go without me.

*Karen June Olson*

## **Awakened**

We hiked along a gray summit trail  
where wild grass was slapped flat  
from winter's rough hands.

The trails were easy, even without compass  
we found our way, yet oddly, redbud trees  
lit the dead woods with a color of discomfort.

We had walked miles, circled hidden groves  
that clung to their dried fruits, admired those unwilling  
to drop summer's bounty.

We managed to avoid certain dangers—  
(yes, the path was uneven), it was the edge  
of things, a ledge or trail's end we shied from.

In the weeds a painter set an easel and brushed  
a slice of moon into his sky. We wondered  
if it was waxing or waning, or if that even mattered.

As we walked toward the forest edge a red-tailed hawk  
swooped our caps. From the whoosh of wings, small birds  
scattered like dry leaves. We crouched. We waited, disquieted.

Hundreds of peepers were silenced by the movements  
of the hawk. When danger passed, the soundscape re-emerged:  
the drill of a woodpecker, the trilling of frogs,

all rose higher into a full chorus, the marsh rippled  
with life. We stood, talked of temple bells,  
crisp and sure, the hands that held them,

and how they ring  
and ring  
and ring.

*Karen June Olson*

## **Living Midair**

Our hotel was built to hang  
off cliffs with an overlook  
above the Adriatic. We'd traveled  
far, managed the Rome airport,  
rented a Volvo, and driven unknown—  
two tourists passing through dark mouths  
of mountains on roads that coiled  
to the sea. It was late to entertain  
fear. Hadn't we always lived midair?

That night we sat on a veranda,  
our glasses clinked a cheer or two  
and we noticed the moon rise  
from the water as waves  
seemed to give the needed lift  
and curled around its bright edges.

You pointed to the illuminated cliffs,  
and past,  
where waves and wind carved  
limestone, created cracks  
and fissures. Rocks serve  
witness to the sea,  
tall ships and drowned sailors,  
eras of pleasure and plunder. We overheard  
the repeated beating and wash,  
the moan of polished stones,  
as if rocks spoke straight into our faces.

J. J. Starr

## **Cheater Box**

Upon the screen her vertebral bend, a fear enlarged my heart

Did it not make the little part grow forth as a branch, skip its lip  
Menu of her body, small plates & dinner service, the little fork  
If I made a menu, it could be very eaten, a fresh & holy bread

But we wanted the mouth put out before it frenzied me  
despoiled

So says the gentle man, *instead turn hands to churning cream*  
*Be temperate, show you are wrought whole from good seed*  
*& know the owner of your body, the kingdom of His hand*

Given over, my soul waggled on, endured me this ugly thing

It's a noble anger, father  
I made & soothed



*J. J. Starr*

## **On Sunday Morning, Church Bells**

January sleek gray sky, the clouds diffuse  
the sun to one dull eye, & my body quiet  
with goat milk skin, makes a slim seed  
in thin sheets and cotton bedspread.

From the church across the street, steel song  
and wooden echoes clang against the panes  
of glass. I balk the song, the sun, the quiet  
gun that morning makes, yet carefully I rise

& dress & exit the apartment through its  
heavy red door.

A cradle of snow forms at the foot of each  
headstone. Alone along the yard, I read inscriptions  
in marble of children & mothers, whole families  
in a spacious line of teeth. Has this soil long soaked  
all their christening oils? Had---

A car passes, then a crawling freight, I cannot make  
the mass and won't be late. Instead I walk the rows  
and hedges, reading through these faceless stretches  
many lives that were and would have. I watch

the boxcars rolling past, a cast of iron and steel, black  
tanks of gas.

*Nancy Takacs*

## **Accident**

The yellow trees  
say alive, alive.

A neighbor doesn't know I can see him  
peeing on his pyre of leaves

My insurance agent most likely  
won't pick up her phone until noon.

I'm wondering if I should leave the corduroy  
of this couch, and walk the mile  
for a double espresso.

Or pat myself  
on the back like the yoga teacher  
says we should do, after our hardest pose.

Maybe I shouldn't care my old red car  
is smashed into another world.

I've never  
seen this bird here—a stellar's jay  
insisting something I should take to heart,  
his yakking and yakking salty-sweet.

I take from the cracked bowl this ripe peach,  
lift it to my face in rapture, then float back  
into my body.

I want to stay in the house all day  
and read poetry from a time  
when people rowed out in little boats.

*Nancy Takacs*

## **Light Box**

This morning I light  
the rose-scented candle,

switch on the light box  
that casts an alien-like

blue light that can work  
magic under the skin.

My dog whines  
under her bone-print  
blanket in a dream.

My pencil seems  
weightless and silly.

Looking around  
for something to put  
into this poem,

I see the reflection  
in my light box

of some dark flock  
flying and flying behind me.

*The 2River View*, 23.2 (Winter 2019)

## Authors

Sally Albiso has published three chapbooks: *Newsworthy* (Camber Press) and two others from Finishing Line Press: *The Notion of Wings* and *The Fire Eater and the Bearded Lady*. *Moonless Grief* was released by MoonPath Press this spring.

Devon Balwit has published in journals such as *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Grist*, *QU*, *Rattle*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Sugar House Review*, *The Timberline Review*, and *Triggerfish*.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal lives in Los Angeles, where he works in the mental health field. He is the author of several books, including *Songs for Oblivion* (Alternating Current Press), *Peering into the Sun* (Poets Democracy), *Raw Materials* (Pygmy Forest Press), and *Everything is Permitted* (Ten Pages Press).

Renee Emerson has poems in magazines such as *Perspectives*, *Still*, and *Valley Voices*. She is also the author of *Keeping Me Still* (Winter Goose Publishing 2014) and *Threshing Floor* (Jacar Press 2016).



Howie Good is the author of *The Loser's Guide to Street Fighting*, winner of the 2017 Lorien Prize from Thoughtcrime Press; and *Dangerous Acts Starring Unstable Elements*, winner of the 2015 Press Americana Prize for Poetry.

Kathleen Hellen is the author of *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin* (2018), *Umberto's Night*, and two chapbooks, *The Girl Who Loved Mothra* and *Pentimento*.

Michael Mark has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The New York Times*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, *Spillway*, *Sugar House Review*, *The Sun*, *Verse Daily*, and The Poetry Foundation's *American Life in Poetry*.

Douglas Nordfors has published two books of poetry: *Auras* (2008), and *The Fate Motif* (2013), both with Plain View Press. Recent journal publications include *Burnside Review*, *Chariton Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and *The Louisville Review*.

Karen June Olson lives in St. Louis, Missouri. Her poems have appeared here at *2River*, *The Mas Tequila Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *UCity Review*. Her chapbook *Living Midair* is forthcoming (2River, Spring 2019).

J. J. Starr studied at the NYU Creative Writing Program in New York City, where she was a Veterans Writer's Workshop Fellow. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Drunken Boat*, *Juked*, *The Shallow Ends*, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, among others.

Nancy Takacs is a former wilderness instructor who lives in Utah and Wisconsin, where she workshops with writers with early Alzheimer's. *The Worrier* poems received the Juniper Prize for Poetry (2017), and it was the 2018 winner of the *15 Bytes Poetry Book Award*.

*The 2River View*, 23.2 (Winter 2019)

## **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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# 2RV

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