

2RV

22.3 (Winter 2019)

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

2River
www.2River.org
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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

ISSN 1536-2086
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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.



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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).

Kathleen Hellen
To "whosoever believeth"
... stunningly ... beautiful ... action

Michael Mark
I Like When the Serial Killer
Making the Bed

Douglas Nordfors
Detail Study
Prime Dream

Karen June Olson
Awakened
Living Midair

J. J. Starr
Cheater Box
On Sunday Morning, Church Bells

Nancy Takacs
Accident
Light Box



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.

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.

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 //

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Douglas Nordfors

Prime Dream

For months, I haven’t seen a sunset. For months, I’ve seen the sun 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.

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
waving, 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.

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.

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.

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.*

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.