

# The 2River View

13.1 (Fall 2008)



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New poems by  
James Bertolino, Alice Cullina  
Michael A. Flanagan, Jaimie Gusman  
Chera Hodges, Robert Jacoby,  
Thomas David Lisk, Iain Macdonald  
Michael K. Meyers, Nancy Wing, Gerald Yelle



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*noel*

James Bertolino  
*A Kitten's Chance*  
*Salamander Eyes*

Alice Cullina  
*The Questions*  
*Saint Laurence*

Jaimie Gusman  
*Still Life with Nancy Kerrigan*  
*Still Life with John Allyn Smith*

Chera Hodges  
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Thomas David Lisk  
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*Michael A. Flanagan*

**noel**

fifteen, in love for the first time, you've just said good-night, hugged, kissed, hands entwined, the back of your fingers touched her cheek. walking the close, clean blocks toward home, it's dark, late, end of october, the crisp air in your lungs, it feels like life itself. without concern for what eyes might be watching, you jump, touch a brown leaf on a tree limb. full of joy, you begin to run, the air on your face, ears turning red, nose icy numb... you never would have guessed, all the years left to come, and nothing in any of them would ever be quite so perfect as that moment

*James Bertolino*

## **A Kitten's Chance**

When the computer is your only friend,  
and the more your fingers move

the less ground you cover, there may be help  
for you. Don't press hard bones into your eyes.

Don't pry your hinges loose. There's a bridge near  
your neighborhood where something deep opens

and invites you in. Sure you'll come out thinner,  
but your mind will arch like a kitten into

the galactic petting hand, you'll lick  
the sweet raw milk of the universe.

*James Bertolino*

## **Salamander Eyes**

The ceiling fan sliced ghosts  
drawn to see the baby's  
eyes.

They looked like screaming,  
like flaming tires.

In confusion the family lifted rocks,  
seeking answers small and  
convenient to the hand.

The ravens insisted the wrong questions were being asked.

Too late for Dad when they found him  
praying to her shoelace.

Even her zoo cookies tasted  
of dark sugars.

*Alice Cullina*

## The Questions

Eventually I stopped painting heat.  
It is the only way to stop the asking of questions.  
They are discernable—like rain in darkness—  
and it is worse here where the wind blows so  
often, sifting them apart. The questions have  
forgotten heat and yet they remember  
how to speak. Once when I forgot the screen,  
three came into my room. They had nothing  
like the bird testing the walls with a force.  
They were nearly as dangerous, shifting, wrestling,  
trying to taste me. One touched my face. It felt  
like falling asleep in public, or like a stillness.

*Alice Cullina*

### **Saint Laurence**

I was small when we hollowed the cliffs. Cliffs  
like these are salted and languid, and they sometimes

drop near our heads. The seagulls watch them  
without disdain, as if they watched children

in a yard. On the beach we found a dead  
seal but it didn't know. It sat at our bonfire

beside a small cup of grape juice and it changed shapes  
with its hollow. We did not bury it. In two years

it was gone. We were not yet gone, we were like  
the reeds in a childhood drama, ready and soft.

Sometimes my aunt marched and sometimes we held  
our knees with our fingers, cold. Today we found an oval

of grass growing in the ocean. It is greener and  
thick with the urgency.

*Jaimie Gusman*

### **Still life with John Allyn Smith**

How many habits do I have to give up  
before I'm healthy and boring?  
I thought I had until at least 25  
before starting to count everything  
under a patch of grass  
where nobody's missing.  
After Wilma passed  
I had a breast exam  
where a nurse discovered my heart  
murmured like a celebration.  
I felt awfully confused  
about my anatomy when I left.  
What could Berryman have thought  
was worse than ice-hockey  
or a doctor's appointment?  
If I were machine,  
I would malfunction during an EKG.  
I would update myself.  
Do you ever feel that way?  
like you would say yes to anything  
that could read you better than a word?

*Jaimie Gusman*

### **Still life with Nancy Kerrigan**

Hello to the mad heart and the messy heart.  
Hello to the magi and their money aching hats.  
Hello to the magic of combing your hair.  
Hello to the marker for this way up and east.  
Hello to the masters of vaginal arousal.  
Hello to the mate of the boat and the wind.  
Hello to the means to the end of an end.  
Hello to the menstruating pig and her ears.  
Hello to the milk setting the world down.  
Hello to the missing, to the impending impulses.  
Hello to the mockery with this horse on mute.  
Hello to the modernicide and motorcycle clans.  
Hello to the monkeys and the invention of meat.  
Hello to the moon as a knock on the door.  
Hello to the moors of an animal's dreaming.  
Hello to the mortuary and the birth canal.  
Hello to the multiplication of my mother's eyes.  
Hello to the music of Brain and Soul and Bark.  
Hello to the mysterious cold gaps in this window.

*Chera Hodges*

## The Pictures Are On A Tilt

The pictures are on a tilt, shaken by wind,  
a hand that came in under the door, teased the  
fire, and scattered papers. Van Gogh lost his mother,  
his ear, and finally his balance on my wall.

Drops of stars gather in the corner of the frame,  
catch on the cathedral, slide off mountains and the  
tops of houses, leave ripples around their empty spaces.  
Midnight pushes forward, black. The villagers do not  
feel the valley spinning, do not see it, but hear it creak.  
The ground falls up, the buildings tremble, lights jump  
to life in the sanctuary; stained glass blocks the cracking  
roads, turns the world outside into Virgin Mary blue.

The left side needs only a lift, the right perhaps a lowering,  
and all of it an extra nail to keep it from rocking again. Just that.  
It is not unwhole. But it lacks realization; it is a house forgetting  
The holes in the old plaster, the water-stain on the ceiling;  
Pale shed skin of a snake left on green lawn.  
And then, too, windows are not doors.

Stars slide down the bell-tower, drip from trees, surrender for nothing.  
They leave no face, not a footprint or shadow.  
They are not recognition, reflection, or alarm.  
Only the small frightened voices of a village routine.

When all has melted, no gaps appear. Things are not unwhole.  
Only, sinking, stars watch traces of themselves disappear behind them,  
A sort of comet: faces of an imaginary congregation in an oil church  
lit by moon; a painting, in a narrow frame, sliding out.

*Chera Hodges*

## To Matthew

I remember naming you. You would be  
someone else except the sound of it did not fit.  
You were notes on the back of a photograph,  
written down, not keeping shape with many fingers.  
The rhyme was lost with every voice touching you;  
your edges cracked until concern was cut away.  
The silent square of the mirror  
shows only the colorless black of eyes,  
that void inside the television  
which no one has turned on—  
a flicker of scales, a rippling speaks of  
making forts out of pine needles,  
the summer we got snow cones every night,  
how you shot a sparrow with a pellet gun  
and cried when you found that the clouds had dropped it,  
and would not reach for it, and things have blood.  
I can see, when the sun slides through trees,  
the way I never let you gather the almost-ripe tomatoes.  
Or someday I will say, nothing is surfacing,  
but when do I walk away?

My hands remember porcelain birds,  
the smooth white windowsill;  
the place in your hair you almost never outgrew;  
that piece of clear that kept everything in—

*Robert Jacoby*

**My mind's a cathedral, exploded in**

My mind's a cathedral, exploded in  
Kaleidoscopic sun-stained glass  
Blood splinters, nerved and lead-veined  
Ruinous bones' veneer  
Of bleeding figurines, cloaked guilt  
Whispered memory lingered under skin of water  
Fragrant incense smokes significant  
Sip the blessed nectar!  
A thousand risen Christs shall shine  
Exquisite solace of the sun  
A thousand silent Christs burn  
So Sing! choirs of doomed gods  
Out of time and out of grace  
Mount the quick altar crest!  
Time's teller parses bone from marrow and  
My gargoyles inform me in my empty tomb:  
The wisdom tree's roots remain

*Robert Jacoby*

## The Reverse Funeral

Start at the empty tomb and rewind time

if you can.

Undo your dead.

Undo the dead and all their ghosts,  
legion.

Do you dare call them from their tombs?

Unravel,

unearth  
their mysteries,  
their stuff of life.

What went wrong in the garden?

Why do you bleed?

Talk with your dead  
Speak with your dead  
Until you come screaming  
out of them  
back to you.

And know that not  
all want to be raised  
or need to be.

Some have had enough.  
The dead roam the earth  
sprung from rocks.

Our steps to the grave are watched over silently.

Leave the graveyard while you can.

*Thomas David Lisk*

## **Blisters**

The blisters broke. Everything around the heart pine looked dirty.  
A letter addressed key issues, but the key never fit the lock.  
Issue-thin it was so hard it turned against the tumblers.

After the door opened, we wondered why it was unlocked,  
while other key observers looked beyond the opening  
and saw deficiencies in the maple floor, the surface,

which, as far as we could tell, was perfectly sound,  
though betrayals are everywhere you look, if you look in the right places.  
It should, however, be easy to look away, at trees, at

cloud shadows, unblinded windows,  
the pack of snarling dogs  
running toward you from the other side of the parabola.

*Thomas David Lisk*

## **Intelligence is a Miracle of Desire**

1.

They came to the good city, she on a bicycle and he in stranger's shoes,  
seeking silk, salt sauce, plantains, and many foot-bound volumes.  
They met in an urban library, where she had made long tunnels and he  
had visited or flown over.

She loved her teacher, whose name was tongue/ tongue/ tongue/ in a  
different tongue.

He liked to, for juxtaposition and a change of state, think of mangos.

2.

They made love on the yellow linoleum of an apartment he never visited.  
He thought it was love.

She never said.

The room was full of black and orange silk dragons woven under  
mulberry trees in some gone dynasty or khanate.  
Paris was a glossy black caution sign.

3.

The first time they met she could hardly see over the wall.

The first time they met in earnest he smelled foreign.

She couldn't breath, but that wasn't the reason.

Would you pour a silk-black cat down your throat?

4.

Prowling joy was sleek, was black, transcendent.

The day she left, she laughed near nervous tears and poked him twice  
on the arm.

He thought, I am your dog, greet you with leaps.

Their tongues touched, though they never touched.

*Iain Macdonald*

## **Alongside the Dumpster**

Today, a pair of snow boots  
in surprisingly good shape;  
yesterday, a mattress  
with the usual suspicious staining.

Every day, it seems  
someone from the apartments  
leaves something  
for someone else to glean.

Furniture shows up most--  
drunken bookshelves and the like,  
but discarded electronics--  
computers and their parts,  
come close behind.

Some objects beg questions.

Who, for example, abandoned  
the deflated "pleasure doll"?  
And who, God help us,  
picked it up?

Why did someone  
paint all those watercolors  
only to leave them  
bleeding in the rain?

And as for the child  
whose neatly folded  
T-shirts and dresses  
sit stacked beside the trash--  
where is she now?  
Whatever in this world  
has become of her?

*Iain Macdonald*

## **History Lesson**

When our dog died,  
I dug her grave  
with pick and shovel;  
even through leather gloves  
my hands blistered,  
then bled.

Now,  
fresh grass conceals  
the upturned earth,  
unblemished flesh  
denies the wound.

Again and again,  
memory persists  
as bones within the soil,  
scars beneath the skin.

*Michael K. Meyers*

## **Telling Everything**

I took the child up in my talons. Do not be alarmed, I said, you are in no danger. By then we were at a considerable height. Look down, I said, go ahead. When he had I directed his attention to points of interest passing below. There was much to tell, to explain, but we had time and so I told him everything.

*Michael K. Meyers*

## **This Is Sweden**

Fred and Ellen have rented a cottage beside a small lake in—is it in Wisconsin, or is it in Minnesota? Or, a third thought, Sweden. Why not Sweden? Both look around. This is what Ellen thinks; It is because of the cottage, the design of the windows, the line of the roof, or—and this is Fred's thought—perhaps it is because of the auto that we have arrived in? Both turn look at the audio parked beside cottage, beside lake and think, could be, perhaps is Swedish car. Then for sure, both agree, feel confident in saying aloud, know for sure, this is Sweden. We are—spoken words gushing and speaking together—we are in Sweden. And maybe they are. You are somewhere else. You are not responsible. None of this is your fault.

*Nancy Wing*

## Facts of Death

Into his perfect death  
my father grows,  
shrinking smaller  
into his narrow frame  
of bones.

Within the crucible of dying  
his blood turns slowly  
into clear translucence  
until at last,  
self embalmed and cleaned,  
he meets the living flame;

The junkyard  
of his fragile bones  
curling back  
into his last becoming.

These are the facts  
of death.

What's left for us  
the living  
is a ceremony  
of emptiness.

On the green sward  
of a sloping hill  
below the birdsong trees  
we come  
to bury ashes  
and an urn.

Above the mound of earth  
covering his absence  
a small white butterfly  
hovers fluttering its wings  
and rises.

A bird sings on.

*Nancy Wing*

### **Somewhere in Between**

Grandfather is dying in his room  
I cannot see him until he is dead  
I am eight or nine years old  
I hear them say he broke his hip  
long after, my mother would  
keep his sterling silver cigar case  
with its dent where he fell

When we go to see him, he is lying on a  
long narrow bed. His pale fingers  
hold a rose on his chest.  
His nails are clean and neat. He is dead.  
His hair is soft and silky. His beard is  
very trim around his mouth. Where did  
he go? I only knew him a little when he  
gave me life savers from an inlaid box  
and in my nervousness I swallowed  
one whole and it hurt until it melted.

*Gerald Yelle*

## **Afternoon in Afterlife**

And I know before waking each wave of tenderness the baby  
gives access to, paths

like velvet on evening's adolescence,  
a town like Rising Sun limning the West.

And here a hearth in the glow of a restful interior.

And here a soft place for landing.

I cradle my cargo, my baby, so big in my arms  
I can't see my wingtips. It's the same with taking off:

Never anything solid to push away from and still you glide.

I leap from the rafters in the market  
in mid-afternoon and business  
is so brisk nobody notices

when I lean and let go.

It's their new specialty garners attention:

a thin bundle bound at one end,

a morbid shock of human hair coyly  
christened the fashion fetch.

More fetish than fashion, I might add, speaking as one  
who owns many.

I only wear a T-shirt, a pair of shorts ready to hand  
in case someone tries to stop me.

One cop scratching parking tickets won't:  
and the shock dangling from his rearview  
corroborates my confidence.

Like the day's final

run, full of land-grab, full of fishing holes and couples,  
full of picnic ground and fairground,

hairless head of the cowpoke I've been dogging,  
all shank legs and big charisma.

Small tin soldier from where I sit.

Everything I want I assimilate: every up-  
braid, every sigh, each heavy-lidded languish of chicanery.  
No qualms invoking pity to cadge tobacco,  
stroll my baby, break my will.

*Gerald Yelle*

## No Different Than Crows

Birds are like weather: Once gone,  
it's hard to tell where they were.  
One cardinal tripped the wire and  
so it was recorded, though none of  
this is verifiable. Like a physical  
attentiveness clotted by veins, this  
attempt to limber the neck, this  
strain after the mouthful running  
from the fountain. Crows' diet  
leaves nothing to boast of--though  
it keeps feathers well-oiled and  
shiny. They might charcoal their  
beaks or pick the webs off their  
wings. Critics say they're clumsy:  
they ought to peel back the onion.  
What grace they manage they  
abandon as soon as they come to  
the table where they encounter their  
bettters, opposable thumbs, live  
from their mothers and cold. Their  
very breath deprives others of  
their livelihood. Crows know this  
and suffer, preferring whirligigs,  
canaries, the Fourth of July white  
noise whistling of the troops.

## About

James Bertolino is a past Writer In Residence at Willamette University in Oregon and is now retired. His work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Indiana Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other magazines; and anthologized internationally—including in *Century: 100 Major Modern Poets*.

Alice Cullina received her BA in English from Harvard University, where she wrote a book-length collection of poetry for her Honors thesis. She lives in New York City.

Jaimie Gusman lives in Seattle where she validates data and builds artful things from collapsed filing cabinets. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Diagram*, *Margins Magazine*, and *Permafrost*.

Chera Hodges lives in Laguna, New Mexico. She has successfully competed in the Texas Association of Creative Writing Teachers Annual Competition, and Frontiers in Writing. Her poetry appears or is scheduled to appear in *The Cherry Blossom Review* and *Paradidomi Review*.

Robert Jacoby lives in Maryland. The two poems here in 2RV are from *Stars Fall Nude*, currently seeking a publisher. Excerpts from *Escaping from Reality Without Really Trying: 40 Years of High Seas Travels and Lowbrow Tales*—a memoir-by-interview of a 61-year-old, life-long merchant seaman, also seeking a publisher—appear in *Alice Blue Review* and *Oregon Literary Review*.



Thomas David Lisk teaches American Literature and sometimes Journalism at North Carolina State University. His work has appeared in *Bat City Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Town Creek*. His newest books are *These Beautiful Limits* (Parlor Press, 2006) and *Tentative List (a)* (Kitchen Press Chapbooks, 2008).

Iain Macdonald, born and raised in Glasgow, Scotland, has earned his bread and beer in various ways--from tree climbing to seafaring. He currently lives in northern California, where he works as a high school English teacher.

Michael K. Meyers teaches at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. His fiction and audio work have appeared in *Chelsea*, *Chicago Noir*, *Fiction*, *Fringe*, *Mad Hatter*, *The New Yorker*, *Quick Fiction*, and *Word Riot*. A video piece can be viewed at *9th Letter*. His CD of flash fictions is *Once Again Doctor Freud's Horse Has Gone Missing*.

Nancy J. Wing has been writing poems for more than 50 years. She has appeared in literary journals, is a winner of first prize from the Poetry Society of Virginia, and has self-published *Calling From The Seed*.

Gerald Yelle teaches high school English. Poems of his are published or forthcoming in *Argestes*, *Main Channel Voices*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Pinyon*.

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## About

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View*, occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series, and podcasting from Muddy Bank, the 2River Blog. Please visit [www.2River.org](http://www.2River.org) to read the submission guidelines.

Richard Long

Editor



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