

# The 2River View

20.3 (Spring 2016)



new poems by

Jesse DeLong, Lindsay Adkins, Bill Barone

Catherine Connell, Patrick Lawler, Keagan LeJeune, Alice Mills

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**27 May 2014**

Sat, a dragon-  
fly behind a railing.

What's visible: its wings  
ticking,

a second, hindered

behind  
the veined

transparency of wings, humming,

& my consciousness now  
recognizing the difference

in layers of light,

& also of my taking  
in of the shift

in vibrations,

the wing's blocking of the green  
grass,

& of my thinking  
on what it means to draw

these particles  
in as an idea: humans once

became

conscious of themselves & so  
too has consciousness

like chalk scrawled over  
the residuals

of yesterday's lessons  
scribbled itself over its own  
markings of making.

*Lindsay Adkins*

## **Fabric Tricks**

Blue-checked six hundred-thread count cotton,  
Egyptian silk, jersey, lace and cream trims hot

from the dryer and my mother would sweat  
as she folded them, hands cracked and throbbing

bending covers to cover themselves up,  
corner to corner. Even the fitted sheets for

the mattress were crisp squares in the end—  
she'd forge edges where there were none,

pinching curves to form angles while I chewed  
my lip, hands folded over knees up to my chin

on the carpet. And company would arrive,  
they'd take off their coats, hats, scarves

and my mother would lay them atop the quilt  
on the bed she shared with my father, while

my grandmother would arrange the bracelets  
on her wrist and remark that it looked like

no one lived at our house.

*Lindsay Adkins*

## **Memorial**

I step on a dead blue jay  
in the marsh woods behind the shed,

its feathers mussed and kissing  
the rusty bruised leaves in the dirt,

wings parted from its sides,  
still bent in the flap of flight.

Skinny clawed feet punch out  
either to brace or attack,

Eyes open and beak split,  
still biting the skidding air.

The bone pop underfoot jets  
my eyes down, hands up—

a reflex regret for rattling a pure  
ode to shock death from the sky:

the moment of impact bottled,  
no stone to take my hands, or lilies

to hush wishes of “if only, if only,”  
no scratch of fresh sod to trick me

into believing that death does  
not belong to the living.

*Bill Barone*

## **Almost Like Church**

It seems like many years  
but maybe it is not  
that I have watched you  
or at least thought that I did.  
It has become a ritual  
much like all the years  
of sitting in pews  
on winter mornings  
breathing incense and stray prayers  
and waiting for a miracle.  
Remembering you  
is almost like that when  
I think about all I used to believe  
and of all the things I did  
in the name of something  
that wasn't really there.

*Bill Barone*

## **Crippled Dog Dreams of Running**

The car was a long time ago;  
no need, really, to recall,  
even if he could.

It seems now without  
these hind legs dragged  
uselessly, tearing his feet sometimes  
on concrete and leaving  
thin trails of pink blood

that one wouldn't know,  
as he lies flat on his side  
that he wasn't who he was  
as he sleeps,  
four legs twitching,  
muffled mini barks puffing his jowls  
that he was not again  
in green fields of early days  
chasing all that moved  
wild and okay  
with all that used to be.

*Catherine Connell*

## **Desolate, My Desolate**

Yet again I am uncertain which animal is mine.  
The birdhouse and barn have blown away  
in the tall winds and dust.  
My kittens and horses are wild and the soft hay is gone.

It is the most loved gone.  
The flown gate and high lamp burrow  
to kindling and rust.  
The wind has a will to summon its own.  
My companions have tired and the soft days are gone.

*Catherine Connell*

## **Waiting for My Father's Bus in Mombasa**

I won't look for the locusts  
stalking slowly like rickshaws  
along the high power wires,  
or hear their shrill-pitched whirring  
stirred by the singing current.  
The white sun breathes out and in,  
and a curve in the road moves.

I won't watch for your slow bus  
or the traveling shadows  
above long Nyali Road,  
or hear your high-pitched whistling,  
the evening's first stridence.





*Keagan LeJeune*

## **Crabbing**

Star-wracked and before dawn, I toss my baits  
of smelt and neck bone into the brack for crabs.  
I don't know who molded their claws into form,  
but they'll ignore the string's slow pull to shore

and often won't unpinch even as the reeling  
lifts them wholly out the water. And so long ago,  
they became our first totems of home  
and of success. The self smug inside a shell,

of course, but also their knack to hold  
nothing as useless. They make dirt a meal  
and the suck and surge of brine on and off the beach  
as a sign the moon's looking after them.

Their best teaching, though, comes when a limb  
just lets go of its body and shows itself  
for what it is—a trickster's ploy. Then, bodies hit  
the sand and legs start their ancient dance

to remind us of any tradesman's greatest act—  
crafting from brokenness and making backwardness an art.

*Keagan LeJeune*

## **Crossing the Mississippi Bridge**

For luck, I guess, I tell my girls to hold  
their breath as we cross the bridge  
and, in part, because my mother  
liked to play this old game. What better way,  
she thought, to record the trip across  
this cantilever of rebar and poured cement.

And because my father was proud some men,  
even if not him, watched the sun's high-wire  
tumbling as it sunk into the anchorage,  
men who slept with dreams of tools fumbling  
from their ladders and of the crane still whirring  
and unsatisfied, and woke, and went to work.

And because my brother and sister had learned  
by heart the story of the fabled bride  
sealed tight inside a cornerstone  
by a husband who walled her up as sacrifice  
so bricks wouldn't brittle in the sun  
and the town's temple wouldn't fall down.

And because it doesn't last. For a time, the lungs stay set  
then buckle like a failed stone crib. How easy  
even a perfect arch—the curve of day,  
a rib's bright bend, a sacred entranceway—just gives.  
Not because of the grave, but against its quiet,  
we hold our breath, and cross the bridge.

*Alice Mills*

**until then**

of course Time with its  
worn suit and new socks  
dreams of endlessness,  
summer lands without paths  
rotations cease for  
the misremembered stars

the old father has polished  
his last clock the millennia spill  
across the floor their inner works  
spin without purpose  
the book of deeds is smeared  
even History wise with experience  
can't decipher the world's ancient ledger

the winds sift minutes into the hills  
sigh all you want breathe too heavy and  
all those moments  
milled to fine dust  
scatter in the last shaft of light

*Alice Mills*

**what to say**

We both know this conversation  
skirts the body of a man you loved.  
I can only show you the leaves  
of this elderly tree. See the black spot that  
stains each leafy plain?  
And there the iron spikes of dead branches  
interrupt the green  
reflections of the sun and the rain.  
Shields of bark lay  
broken at your feet.

The moss clings to your loss but  
trees cannot help but live.  
The old rings dry up slow and who knows the moment  
The sap no longer stirs?  
For now, you live time shrouded like  
the ancients and their buried stones.  
Be this present tree.  
Salute the world with your sharp grief.

*Vi Khi Nao*

## **Miscarriage**

You stretch your music sheet  
Over a stillbirth canvas

And ask the taut skin of  
Silence to bellow softly  
    Into the wind

Your emotion is speech  
    is intelligence

While your piano madly falls  
In love with death

Lying on the grass with its legs  
In the air, the piano  
Is humming a song of vulgarity

Or so when it is not wearing  
A skirt

*Vi Khi Nao*

## **Nocturnal Core**

The rose isn't afraid to  
Die having dyed its  
Hair purple, the color  
Of death.

Several ozone layers later,  
The rose isn't afraid to  
Give birth to a firing  
Squad of leaves, stems  
Drawing amphoral bullets  
From the roots spreading  
Deep + wide.

Below the waist of time,  
Sedimentary pose for  
Cemented soil + volcanic  
Ruptures.

The rose, after emitting a  
Pollution of love, is now  
Ready to conquer daylight  
Seeing time, where darkness  
Has woken up less darkness  
From its nocturnal core.

With its heart dipped in ice,  
"Now I wake up from a  
dream," says the rose.

*Edward Nudelman*

## **Red Tide**

The golden bowl is almost broken,  
though it still supports a fine hat.  
Mom slips slowly and surely out to sea,  
lost memory's red tide obliterating  
any beachhead we make. So be it,  
said the prophet at his desk;  
and so be it, refrained her sons  
and daughters in their eagerness  
against the rising stream of decline.  
Tonight, she eats her French fries  
like her Epicurean self, chomping  
them to a leftover tip, forming a pile  
on her plate—in the manner  
of eating prawns, we all suppose.

*Edward Nudelman*

## **Utilitarianism Made Simple**

She immerses herself in the ritual  
sacrifice of fruit flies, infinitesimally  
insignificant as dust motes, whose loss  
she claims earns no compunction  
compared to appeasing the cleanliness gods.  
Guilt diminishes in the taking of dirt  
particles, she reminds me, laying waste  
to winged apparitions without souls.  
Slyly she circumnavigates the kitchen  
employing various deceptions—open palms,  
crouching and leaning, baiting and bagging,  
but her greatest claim to fame is in the suds,  
a dark stout or one of Seattle's deep and spicy  
microbrews, tendered in a narrow cup  
capped with pin-pricked cellophane.  
O kind duplicity, grant me such sweet demise.

William M. Rivera

## Free as a Bird

'Free as a bird?!' Where's the truth in that?  
How hard in the rough birds work!  
At least the caged bird eats, albeit at the cager's will.  
It's archaic, *free as a bird*.

Even their mating games arise from compulsion,  
and their fights? to gain a dying worm, a slug,  
remnants from the garbage truck. Even the stars  
in sparkling speed shine toward a certain fixity.

Of course the peaches bought today, hard rocks,  
might still take off with auks next week  
and skim north waters, white-breasted on  
tuxedo wings. We hunt and peck, wing songs,

color the sky with birds in flight and words  
for sustenance to suit our mood, always hungry.

*William M. Rivera*

## **A Literal God**

A literal god is best, the Methodists  
taught me. The whale did swallow Jonah.  
Believe, and you will arise. I imagine  
summer steam in air, absorbed as rain  
kids stamp their feet in.

It makes little difference  
what I thought, or think. I see  
St. Christopher hold hands with Fatima. Sure,  
it was a jumble, a jungle, a jigsaw, Jesus,  
Siddhartha, Mohamed, Zeus.

I grew to love  
Akhenaten's one god, the Sun, Aten, a literal  
god—neither stone nor burning bush, or any  
other imitation of invisibles meant to occupy  
the center of the universe.

The Sun—champion of the way  
things vitalize. I know it's not good story line, like  
Abraham's or Job's but then, it shines so brightly when  
it shines, what else is there to know.

*James Valvis*

## **Don't Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth**

A good set of teeth.  
That's what matters.  
White, straight, tight.  
Don't kid yourself, kid.  
What really matters  
is you have a nice mouth,  
your breath is berry sweet,  
teeth aren't buck or brown,  
and you can smile the smile  
they want you to smile.  
If not, you can trot out of here,  
mosey on down the road, kid,  
and find yourself to a dentist  
for a set of false teeth.  
Nobody minds if you're fake.  
Phony is fine if phony is pretty.  
So be a phony pretty pony.  
That's what I'm saying.  
Because if you are, kid,  
you may even be good enough  
for them to accept your gift.

*James Valvis*

## **The Weakest Link**

Later, the weakest link hears it again:  
whispering and snide sideways laughter.  
Next day, working, he struggles to bear  
weight other links endure without trouble.  
He says nothing but his straining exposes him.  
Some mock. No one offers help.  
Only he knows every day he's holding on  
with his last strength, each enjoined hand  
pulling him apart like the King's horses  
would their very worst traitors.  
Most are happy in chains.  
They enjoy holding hands, and to them  
interlocking arms are friendship.  
The weakest link feels nothing like this.  
All the chain's weight finds him.  
Their grip on him never loosens.  
He feels he will snap any moment,  
scattering the half holding his left hand  
and the half holding his right,  
each half preferring their world shatter  
than allow one link to break free.

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## Authors

Jesse DeLong teaches at Lehigh Carbon Community College. His work has appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere, as well as in *Best New Poets 2011* and *Feast: Poetry and Recipes for a Full Seating at Dinner*.

Lindsay Adkins is an Assistant Supervisor of print book production with the Random House Publishing Group. Her poems have appeared in the *Aureorean*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*.



After the Fire by James Deeb

Bill Barone earned his B.A. in English from Penn State and his M.A. in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio.

Catherine Connell is a university administrator in metropolitan Boston, Massachusetts.

Patrick Lawler has published six collections of poetry, the most recent of which are *Underground (Notes Toward an Autobiography)* and *Child Sings in the Womb*.

Keagan LeJeune was a finalist for the 2016 Tennessee Williams Festival Poetry Prize. His work has appeared in *New South*, *Louisiana Literature*, and elsewhere.

Alice Mills holds an MFA from the University of California, Irvine. She has taught various forms of writing for over twenty years. NPR has featured her work, and her poetry was recently published in *Metonym*.

Vi Khi Nao holds an MFA in fiction from Brown University. Her poetry collection, *The Old Philosopher*, was the winner of 2014 Nightboat Poetry Prize. In fall 2016, Coffee House Press will publish her novel *Fish in Exile*.

Edward Nudelman is the author of *Night Fires* (Pudding House 2009), *What Looks Like an Elephant* (LummoX 2011), and *Out of Time, Running* (Harbor Mountain 2014). Poems have recently appeared in *Cortland Review*, *Plainsongs*, and *Tears in the Fence*.

William M. Rivera has worked with international organizations and universities in some 30 countries. His poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Nation*, and elsewhere, and he is also the author of *Buried in the Mind's Backyard* (2011), *The Living Clock* (2013), and *Noise* (2015).

James Valvis has placed poems in *Arts & Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Ploughshares*, *River Styx*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *The Sun*, and *Verse Daily*. A former US Army soldier, he lives near Seattle.

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## **About the Artist**

James Deeb holds an MFA from Western Michigan University. His art has its philosophical roots in texts like Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, the work of the German Expressionists, and the writings of authors like J.G. Ballard and Charles Bukowski. Deeb refers to this artistic strand as the dystopian minority opinion.

## **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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