

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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ISSN 1536-2086

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27 May 2014

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The Weakest Link

Jesse DeLong

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 *Aurorean*, *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

ISSN 1536-2086

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