

2RV

21.3 (Spring 2017)

The 2River View

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2River

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new poems by

Deborah Brown, Lauren M. Davis, Audrey Gidman

James Harms, L. I. Henley, Lowell Jaeger, Richard Pacheco

Sarah Wetzell, Rodd Whelpley, Donald Zirilli

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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
2River

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James Harms is the author of nine books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Rowing with Wings* (Carnegie Mellon University Press). His distinctions include an NEA Fellowship and three Pushcart Prizes. His recent work appears in *The Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *The Southern Humanities Review*.

L. I. Henley won the 2017 Perugia Press Prize for *Starshine Road*, her second full-length collection. She is the recipient of The Academy of American Poets University Award, The Duckabush Prize in Poetry, and The Orange Monkey Poetry Prize

Lowell Jaeger is founding editor of Many Voices Press; editor of *New Poets of the American West*; the author of seven collections of poems, and, for promoting civil civic discourse, the recipient of the Montana Governor’s Humanities Award.

Richard Pacheco is a playwright, poet, artist, journalist, filmmaker, educator, and professional actor. He holds a BFA and an MFA from University of Massachusetts—Dartmouth. In 2015, *Geography* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in poetry.

Sarah Wetzel is the author of *River Electric with Light*, which won the 2013 AROHO Poetry Publication Prize; and *Bathsheba Transatlantic*, which won the Philip Levine Prize for Poetry (2010).

Rodd Whelpley has work appearing or forthcoming in *Antiphon*, *The Chagrin River Review*, *Driftwood Press*, *Eunoia Review*, *Literary Orphans*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Spillway*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Triggerfish Critical Review*, and elsewhere.

Donald Zirilli has work in *Antiphon*, *Art Times*, *Nerve Lantern*, *River Styx*, *Specs*, and elsewhere. He was the editor of *Now Culture* and is currently a member of the Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow Gang.

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Contributors

Deborah Brown is coeditor of *Lofty Dogmas: Poets on Poetics* and co-translator of *Last Voyage: Selected Poems of Giovanni Pascoli*. *Walking the Dog's Shadow* won the A. J. Poulin Jr. Award from BOA Editions and later won the New Hampshire Literary Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry.

Lauren M. Davis graduated from the University of Southern Maine with an MFA in poetry. Work from *Women Bones* has appeared in several literary journals.

Audrey Gidman received her BFA from the University of Maine--Farmington. She has been an editor for the *Sandy River Review* and released a broadside with Foxglove Press (2015). She was the 2016 recipient of the Slippery Elm Poetry Prize. Her work can be found in the *Sandy River Review*, *Slippery Elm*, *The Unrorean*, and elsewhere.



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Donald Zirilli

Learning to Ride a Bicycle with Attendant Vulture

The well-attended funeral echoed white roses.

They escorted her sister to the altar.

She said Cordelia never missed Lasagna Thursdays
up to that very week.

She said as many people cried when Cordelia retired,
and she got sick eating five different cakes.

She said Cordelia quit college to ride across Europe
but somewhere in Northern Italy, at the top of a walled city,
she saw her dead father and never rode a bicycle again.

She said what a brave child.

She said Cordelia was only four when the training wheels came off
and she learned the taste of driveway,
got her first whiff of today's grand bouquets.

Donald Zirilli

American Glinda

I met Glinda on the road.
She had a theory about
those crosses you see in the South,
something about lynching.
When you pass by a cross
in New Jersey
it probably has to do
with a drunk driver.

Glinda's one of them
answer for everything
type girls
you meet when you're
traveling too long.
She comes along
when it's almost over, explains
why you didn't have to go.

She used big words
she didn't know how
to pronounce.
Communicating was difficult,
but I took her to Tennessee.
I couldn't think
of a better place.

She had a theory about Elvis.
I told her to shut up about that.
We slept at the Motel Lorraine and she cried
as she ordered room service.
Before going out for ice
and never coming back
she told me when he said Mama,
he really meant Mama.

Lauren M. Davis

Inside of Women

I.
I knew a woman
who
after she swam in the ocean
was filled with its sand
and when the doctor removed it
he found inside her a pearl.

II.
Inside tiny apples my lips often find
the core absent of seeds—
many hollow stars
have reminded
that inside me a mouth
would find the same hollow,
my young body / bones too thin,
on a hunger strike.
But tiny sterile apples seem safe for eating.

Lauren M. Davis

The Secret

When I forget to say amen
at the end of a prayer
it's like leaving something
that should be closed,
open.

Like I'm not home
and have left a window agape,
and a storm has begun.

Like the rain will enter me,
flush out the things
I'm not ready to part with.

I rushed home
during that storm,
and pushed the heavy glass

up to close where I had once opened it

the water rushed like a tide,
down my forearms,
filled the empty cups of my bra
where lately space has collected.

Rodd Whelpley

Middle Illinois

for Wallace Stevens

My apologies for the mountain
that without syntax or sound coaxed us to the back yard.

In middle Illinois, it rises, unseen, mystical on a horizon just past
the rows of houses that, not ten years before, were fields of corn
and, at some time beyond reckoning, a salt sea teeming
with coelacanths and Tully monsters, where now the dog

rolls on my plate of grass, squeaks his rubber pork chop toy, answers
the calls of spring's immigrant birds, hungry to feed their nestlings.

The mountain has kept me from writing all these things,
their precepts, practicalities, their ultimate causes.

Instead, we loll here with our Buster, who we would be
if either of us were blessed enough to be this dog,

loyal and only slightly brave, already white around the muzzle,
already slowed, aging away toward adventures without his master—
perhaps there to chase incessant gulls on a coastline shaded
by rocked and piney peaks that make sense only to a nose like his.

Rodd WHELPLEY

Equus Poiesis

after *Odyssey*, Book IV

You think what animates a creature—lives
inside him—comes from deep inside him.

But after such hard years, the land denuded,
it's scarcely clever to pull the rigs and spars, these lines

From vessels set to take us home; form this gift,
this built thing, you believe can speak to you—

An object taken in to complement your mood today
that, you hope, will whisper, echo every secret you can coax,

Which is exactly what we crave. No victory, but you,
our Helen, outside, singing to this wooden thing

In the voice of everyone we've ever loved. We leave
for you this silent horse, a poem that you now murmur into life.

Lauren M. DAVIS

Papers on my desk below
absorbed the rain,
rusty water filled my mouth.

With a towel I soaked it up,
like I didn't want anybody to know:
committing to a secret.

These papers will dry
this window I can keep closed / shut
but my aching body
is the one

who will never forgive me,
and will never let me forget
the secret only God knows.
Amen, I am forgiven,
Amen, I must forgive myself.

Deborah Brown

Ghost Prattle

A few black branches and wished-for ghosts
murmur in the clouds.

Adorno said that writing becomes a place to live. You crawl in,
pull each letter closer. One hides your face from the sun.

The curves become mother and father, the sharp slash of the t,
the angles of the k, sister and brother. Sometimes they speak,
sometimes they do not. The glottals are soft to the touch,
they do not insist on their sounds. You live

under the shadow of reaching branches
and the longed-for ghosts whisper, not so far away.

Sarah Wetzel

Wanting It

Make him stay with your father's gold watch
or watch
the hours drown, and still so much
remains for the taking, for stealing.

You think of rope, a man's arms
like rope. But again
you leave the doors unlocked, your hands
cached in a box
and the computer running.

Upstairs, you've hidden the one thing

that can't be hidden. The dog is sedated
but it

won't stay quiet.

Sarah Wetzel

The Crow

I refuse to give in, as I refuse
the tin cans and wailing of the child two floors up
as I refuse this morning's televised car crash, the volume
still reaching me at the bath's bottom.

This dark din, as useless as three baths
in a day, useless as the stuttering static of the man
paralyzed, his wheelchair capsized into the crowd
rushing from last night's symphony, his guttural rage.

A crow flies through the house, which makes
my dog crazy. Underneath the water, I listen
to his muffled barking, the crow
flapping couch to kitchen chair, flying again
and again into the sliding glass door.
Once, the dog almost had him.

Deborah Brown

What I Know about the Night Sky

The new moon is never visible
on the night of the New Moon.
When the sky is darkest
you sometimes see fireballs flash,
and through the night
newly-bare branches reach towards the sky
while my brother has electric shock therapy,
convulsions he won't remember. They cut
some connections in the brain,
the ones that fine-tune grief.
While I pace, I look for Andromeda,
so many light years away that the light
I see tonight was emitted
when woolly mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers
roamed here. The next day my brother
reaches out to me from the darkness
he's wrapped in. He tests the light.

Richard Pacheco

Fresh Coat of Paint

Even the fresh coat of paint
cannot hide
the shreds of wallpaper
still clinging to the walls
in a crevice by the door.

Audrey Gidman

Meditation 51

The leaves on the old maple twitch in the afternoon breeze—bleeding soft reds and yellows
into their green shelves and it's a Thursday, which means the bagpipe players have gathered

so as not to practice alone but become a brick wall, and today the mantra is Three Blind Mice
in the small park gazebo downtown

(though each nail is chewed too roughly to reach the surface) and the leaves now look in groups
to be dancing
—I tap along on the scratched wooden coffee table

attached by branches swinging like hips and glowing with the bright-
dipped sun behind them—a rustle like chiffon dresses—

is turning gold, turning poetry and
and the air

God is whispering—

Audrey Gidman

Meditation 59

I walk down the sidewalk writing invisible poems to the taste of
in my mouth. The sun
just bright enough to call the water out
graying mounds of snow.
It is early March in the mountains of
There are coins jingling or bells chiming
The sound cuts
Others are out walking too and they can't seem to hide.
They avert their eyes but keep soaking.
There are souls on the street and they are

blood
from below
the Northeast.
somewhere.
uprooted.
bending.

Richard Pacheco

Blind Man

Like the blind man and
the elephant
every time we meet
I come away
with a totally different you.

James Harms

Accidental Bohemian

Slim boy on the sidewalk, you must be mine, headphones locked to your ears as light leaves the earth around you, day draining away like a voice calling you in for dinner. You love the wind hiss at the edge of song, the sweet leak of music that stains the air around your body as your walk turns to dance on this quiet street near home. I slow the car to keep pace, to stay just behind and out of sight of you, to watch you sing in a privacy so complete I'm called away, returned to some central mind in the sky beyond your little brother's small cloud (painted on blue paper and taped to the refrigerator), where each of us is stilled in time and left at the open door, beyond which are windows without rooms, a place I'll always join you. Call it love.

From My Lips

Each night around ten
I stand over my son's bed
for a few minutes and watch
him dream. I usually pull
the blankets closer to his chin
and kiss him before checking
the humidifier and stacking
the books on the floor next
to his bed, the books
he's dragged under the covers.
We all do this, parents.

For years now I've loved
a song by Grant McLennan
called "From My Lips," which
includes the following lines:
"Sometimes it all falls apart
at the seams, and you wish
for the peace of a child's dream."
And I'll admit it, as I kiss

Lowell Jaeger

The Jesus People

Grandmother touched older brother's head
each time she stood and stirred the embers to blaze,
and older brother hunched his shoulders
as if Grandmother's hand hurt like cactus spines.
The goats huddled close, watched us, said nothing.

Older brother had crossed the river with the Jesus People,
helped them climb the canyon, brought them
into the high summer grasslands to find our camp.
The Jesus People smiled like famished dogs, ate
Grandmother's fried bread, and talked and talked

while older brother nodded and told us the meanings
of what the Jesus People said. They said Jesus
loved his sheep. Said they raised cattle and lacked
summer grasslands to graze them. They looked at me
when they spoke, mostly, and Grandmother snugged her blanket

around me and pulled me near. Grandfather chewed each bite
slowly and stared into the fire, the creases in his jaw
like broken rocks in the canyon, telling how all things pass,
all this talk, talk, talk. Like the arroyo dries again
after rain. Like yellow blossoms return and fade on the sage.

Lowell Jaeger

The Goat People

That day Grandmother bundled the blankets, and Grandfather harnessed Chaco to the cart to move us up the mountain toward summer meadows where the goats could graze and fatten.

That day older brother would leave us again and cross the river toward the edge of everything the clouds passed over, where the Jesus People chanted songs older brother sang for us nights beside the fire.

That day the goats had wandered into a thicket of chaparral and cactus. Older brother hacked with his machete to set them free, and when they burst forth bawling I hurried behind, herding them toward Grandfather's cart.

That day I ran away from older brother who called out and scolded – Come with me! Come with me! Suddenly I was a little brown goat; the sand beneath my hooves golden, the canyon walls glowing flame.

James Harms

my son and tuck his covers tight, I think about all that's fallen apart in our lives

and I lean in close and listen hard to the dream leaking from his little body. I let it change the salt in my life to sugar, at least for the few minutes I stand there watching him. His peace is no more complete than any I might find, but I believe in it. That's what McLennan means I think, that it's the surrender

that matters, not the treaty that comes of it, a child's uncomplicated dream, not how we interpret it. My son and I both lost, but he deserves none of the blame; his peace has precious little back story; and so it will save him. I don't need saving. I need him. And I'm not ashamed to say it.

L. I. Henley

And would it matter if I *could* sift the truth

from the rye? This is my best dress
and I wear it when I sweep
the bees and oleander buds from the breezeway.
I wear it when I'm on my knees cleaning up
the egg yolk, the syrup, the spilled coffee.
I take it off before my husband comes home
because this dress is just for me—
and now y'all have seen me in it.

I'm tired of your questions, I'm tired
of my window facing my neighbor's door
and seeing mourners with their casseroles
and lilies.

Truth is born in circles and dies before it can
be held, like a baby too pure for this world.
You all want to know what happened, but you have to wait until
the next stone gets dropped. And when the future
becomes the now, you'll be back here,
on my porch, asking what happened again,
trying to pick the flame and turnip moths
from the shifting grain.

L. I. Henley

My baby I love more than my husband

but I love my baby as much as I love
my lover, the way he frowns when a little milk
flows into his sucking kiss. My husband
I love more than my father,

who once shaved my head for loving
Darren, a black boy, in the field
behind the barn.

If I could, like a dog, save all my love for just one thing,
what would it be?

Not a baby, not a man. Something steel
and gray and shaped like a train
or a bullet or a long-necked bottle
for me to stare at or sit on
or throw across this stretch of tumbleweeds
and crows
like a faithful boomerang.