

The 2River View

24.4 (Summer 2020)



Photo/Hybrid Images

new poems by
J. T. Ledbetter, Anthony Aguero
Despy Boutris, Terri Brown-Davidson
D M Gordon, Maura High, Peter Leight, Keith Love
Sharona Muir, Sarah Stickney, Peter Waldor

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J. T. Ledbetter

midnight at the Old Havalke Place R.R. 1

father your tongue was a saw
and your hairy arm at night used the razor strap
as I repeated god's promise that nothing would happen to me

mother you stood in the dark kitchen
bloody rabbits still in the sink
the picture of Jesus shimmering in your tears

I wept under the covers
my brother said that he would fix everything
and took down the 16 gauge
as the strap came down and birds flew against the window
taking me with them over the farm
their silky feather covering my sins

then all three were gone into newspapers
soggy on lawns in small towns crusted with silence
while I dreamed of clean white sheets and a sink full of light
from the sun he kept at the bottom of his heart

Anthony Agüero

To Being a Man

To be a boy again is to return to the apartment when I was dating Henry, just before the end of a few years of my life.

I am back in the apartment with my cousin. The only tears are from a baby. They are not mine. What does man mean to you?

I am holding the blade the wrong way — the handle is meant for the storm to kiss. I have already learned how to hold the blade.

I was intended for blood. The Latin boy. The queer boy. The boy with no ideas of man. I was intended for blood. I'm afraid of my dad.

The bodies are the empty ramen packages strewn across the counters. My body, it sits in a different country

where the bodies are bodies and the dilation of the pupils is the masc response. We are back in the empty apartment

where my body wasn't expecting to be. Where the man thing to do was end my life for those next few years.

Anthony Agüero

Elegy

At one point I believed in God, and I knew
he existed because Brad Pitt wasn't supposed

to be beautiful to me and I thought
it proved that God was a jealous one.

I am sitting on a carpeted floor of my Tia's
apartment. I am just now seeing the

beauty of the outline of a man's body
for the first time. For the first time,

playing Cops and Robbers with the boys
outside meant something else.

It meant something like the blood inside
of me was something as precious

as la Virgen de Guadalupe appearing on
the tilma Diego was seen wearing.

I am just learning that condemnation was
every pause to try and kiss the boy.

The boy wound up being a symbol for fear.
At one point, before a man, I believed in God.

Despy Boutris

Fourth of July

how his hands found your waist, tightening // on you //
the cigarette-scent // of his breath as he leaned // toward
you & you leaned away // & he moved in // closer, a
parenthesis that just kept bending // folding in on itself //
until it crushed what lay below // you // your limpish form
// growing cold at his touch // how you couldn't speak //
as he lowered his face // tongue thrusting into your mouth
// through your teeth, // as he tried to take you fullbody
// into him // & you closed your eyes // don't cry don't cry
// & you felt the air // become a cage you couldn't escape
// his lips // like poison as he killed you // slowly // & the
dying just kept going

Despy Boutris

A Warm Wind

rustles the leaves
(that sealike sound) with waves
of heat rising from the asphalt,
the black burning the soles
of your feet (walking barefoot
down the road). A glass jar
in hand, a hand reaching out
toward the grasses, the brambles,
hungry for the taste of summer
(and what tastes more like summer
than blackberries, excluding
the smoke rising from the hills,
the reminder that wherever
there is fire there is something
aflake?). Smoke so close
it strokes your hair (the scent
of inescapable heat). Its taste
at home in throats. And it's hard
to tell this morning from mourning
(with this heat, these flames,
this smoke, strangling everything).

Terri Brown-Davidson

Asleep

Father, asleep, brutalizes his beard.
I stroke his hand, check for breath.
His lids sag over bloodshot eyes.
Awake, he'll talk with a wink,
Walk with a limp, repeat his little cache
Of stories until I need him
To never stop.

Mortality's a fast drain, swirling
Into eternity our few paltry loves.
Father, where are you? Tell me another story.
Come: touch my hand. I lost you in the dark.

Terri Brown-Davidson

I Glimpse, Briefly, My Dead Father Among the Cranes

My father stoops by the river bank.
Here, seven cranes cluster,
Lift dripping breaks,
Their black eyes antediluvian.
Watching my father walk by,
They seem grieved
To release him, as do I
When he turns his back, wanders off
Into the fog to his ripped
Chair in a living room too frequently
Shadowed. Here, breathless, confused,
He'll sit in the dark for years
Though I'll never forget him
Or forget I'm his daughter
Who—unlike him—will die alone.
Will die forgotten.

D M Gordon

Longing for Mozart

It's two minutes to midnight. Steam from the heated pool glows blue with underwater lights. It's raining. At the window, I hear, but cannot see, the bad children running, the slap of their footfall, their laughter unbound.

It's mid-morning. The balconies are rotting and must come down. Men with sledgehammers shake the house. On their paint-splattered radio, the news loops: *The Last Rhino Has Died*.

On my bed, my mother sits, straight-legged, stiff feet, perfect blond curls. She hugs a life-sized doll of herself in her lap, straight-legged, stiff feet, perfect blond curls.

In the evening, I dress in coral silk with rosettes at my hem. The Steinway waits open, the gold candelabra, the audience of friends my mother invited. She, with her Madonna lips, waits in the front row. I adjust the bench, put my fingers on the keys. I crave Mozart.

A narrow river runs beyond the lawn and steaming pool. In it, a dappled whale shark slowly swims upstream, leaving the ocean. Others follow.

In all the world, all the cars.

D M Gordon

I am burying someone in a muddy corner of the yard. I didn't kill them, but there has been terrible violence and I am the one with a shovel.

Outside the room where my mother held the doll of herself, and the ballroom, empty now, beyond the demolished balconies and pool where the bad children run at night, beyond the stream with its dark creatures, there is a field. Four fawns rest there, legs tucked, eight ears, looking at me looking at them. Above, geese migrate. How much longer will they be able to fly away?

Maura High

And the Living is Easy

Petunias loll in their clay pots, stumps
and peelings on the compost heap.

They say, "There is plenty of time,
it is like this everywhere."

I know this is a lie, a local
pleasure. But still, I am comforted.

Later, I will boil a syrup for the hummingbirds,
and in the dusk we will watch them swoop.

Maura High

Clearcut

Craig Tract of the Bolin Forest, Orange County, North Carolina

A forest remembers what to do

after a death, after
the first shocks and panic,

in the disarray and silence.

I think it does not grieve
for itself as we might grieve for it.

It grows. Toward a future

written in its genes, horseweed
and crabgrass, suckers, seeds

blown in, washed down

into the tractor ruts.
I finger some green leaves,

remembering the shade,
touch slash and stumps

and tree-rings, remembering

the trees; and the cracked mud,
remembering pine needles, thick

layers of them below the loblollies.

Peter Leight

The Appearance of Beauty in America

Tonight I'm sitting around with my friends, thinking about how beautiful it is right here in America where everything is beautiful, and if it's not beautiful it's about to be, it's the first thing I notice when I'm with my friends, who are beautiful or doing something beautiful, there are so many things that need to be done right here in America it's beautiful when you look at all the things my friends are doing, or getting ready to do—it's true, they don't always know what they're doing, not all the time, how do you know if something is beautiful or if it's just the appearance? Everybody knows about America the beautiful, where everything is beautiful or is about to be, but honestly I don't care if my friends are beautiful—when they're your friends it doesn't matter what they look like, they don't need to be beautiful, even when they are. Of course, as long as something is beautiful it doesn't have to be more beautiful than anything else in America, it doesn't even need to be as beautiful as something else that's also beautiful, although I don't think anybody is more beautiful than my friends are when they're doing something beautiful, I mean they don't even have to know what they're doing, not all the time, as long as it's beautiful.

Peter Leight

Unsafe

When they hold out their hands that's when they're waiting for you to play into their hands, you think they're somewhere else but they're not where you think they are, they're somewhere else. When you back up they're behind you, as if what's in front of you is only the shadow of what's behind you, move to the side and they're right next to you, as if they're giving you a hand—that's when they're looking at you as if they've never seen anything like it, that's when they're holding their hands together as if their hands are tied. Of course, everybody wants to be saved, as long as it's legitimate, they're offering you a hand, attaching themselves to you the way interest follows the principal around, that's when they're looking at you as if you need to be taken away and deposited. When you look for them they're somewhere else, as if it's out of their hands, you never see both of their hands at the same time. As soon as you think they're somewhere else they're surrounding you on every side—don't let them tell you they consent to withdraw voluntarily, they never do, their biggest need is to be exposed. Holding out their hands like one of those safety nets you don't even know you're caught in, that's when they're holding on, that's when they're looking at you as if they're taking you home with them.

Keith Love

Fish Fry

If we meet one day I will tell you how we sat on the floor while your father cooked fish in a shallow pan and how you ate yogurt from the spoon I filled and cleaned by tidying the excess from the reservoir along the rim of the bowl. After a few bites you insisted you feed yourself— hands jutting, lips drooling— and after your last bite you held forth the bumbling knuckle of your pinky to offer its vanilla coating. So sweet was the cream from your fingernail as fried trout crackled behind us.

Keith Love

Thursday Pie

I didn't have time to pick every apple, just
those within reach
when I drove my toe into the core of the branches and
clung by the stem of my arm. But I must admit

to leaving the apple, quiet and still, caught
untethered in the boughs, who may have broken free

when I shook the trunk or the wind awoke. But
unready for the basket, the soil, the noon sun that preys
on apples who roll the length of the orchard hill,
tonight his mother holds his bruiseless body, his embered
smile,
his ripening cheek.

Sharona Muir

The Golden Door

Ten thousand miles in the gouging shoes
bring us to the border
of speech, where what you mean
is swallowed in the mirror of lost faces.

This phone won't open the required screen;
the passport's gone, so's the wallet.
Night is falling in a foreign city
that has one bed for rent in an erased hotel.

What is supposed to be
important—
the golden key—
why can't I remember? Can you remember?

Sharona Muir

Light of Wandering

Lucretius sought a cause of movement besides the blows
or weight of colliding atoms—the source, he wrote,
of our inborn capability to act freely.

He thought it was a swerve of atoms, like
raindrops slipping out of parallel down a pane.

And when one still dreams
that what the soul is forced to suffer
as though in chains, must have a reason—

that too is a native wandering
like Heisenberg's uncertain shimmer between 'not' and 'is.'

Venus, founder of our race,
we dedicate our freedom
to you, with the soul's impassioned errancy

beyond blows and chains, beyond weight and the grave.
Your star walks desolation, shedding rays.

Sarah Stickney

Cheap Champagne

Everyone wants to believe
my sister and I were devastated
when my father took a mistress.
My mother told my sister,
and my sister told me. The closest
my father got to fessing
was to warn me off the married
astrophysicist who entranced me
with the fantastic ugliness
of his ungainly face. It was going
great, until he brought cheap
champagne to the place
he had in Rehoboth Beach.
At 4am I was woken
by my daimon saying loudly
"no." I ran one of the best
runs of the year on the beach.
I wore my green silk bathrobe.
He gave me the letters
of De Beauvoir to Sartre. I read
the whole Gorgias aloud in the car
because it was my homework.
I don't remember anything we ate.

Sarah Stickney

Shapes Under a Blanket

We are worried about the animals these days
but it's because we are worried about control.
Yes, that acid trip was the worst
of my life, but the green chile cheeseburger
I ate afterward was transcendent;
it rivals sitting under Tuscan sycamores
eating pasta in their dappled light
with Patro. You see only shapes
under a blanket which is what it's like
to look at your relationship.
You can make out the articulation
of a shoulder, the heavy, fused
pelvis. But the moment movement
starts you may as well be looking
at leaves on the side of a ripe grape
cluster trembling because a hungry bird
has dived to eat them, or a bonfire,
or its smoke climbing the sky.

Peter Waldor

Doing the Dishes

Your plates are all mismatched
as if you have one from
every kiln on earth
like Noah collecting animals
They are all old so even
the ugly ones are beautiful
like the rusty knife you use
while the box of tempered
German blades stays sealed
On one plate your grandmother
painted a hummingbird
and though you love it more
than any object you let it
take its place on the table
Accidents don't worry you
just this darkening world
and so you cook for as many
people as you can
letting them stay late
talking and laughing
and you let me
do the dishes
so I can skip
the dancing when it
inevitably begins

Peter Waldor

Magic Trowel

Your hand
briefly
on my hand,
teaching me
the trowel,
to leave
no trace of the
instrument,
and to angle
everything slightly
so liquids won't pool.
I wonder if you'll
notice the faint
crescent moon I left.
Will it bother you?
It's waxing,
always.

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Contributors

J. T. Ledbetter has poems in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Southern Review*. *Old and Lost Rivers*, was published in 2012.

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Despy Boutris is published or forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston and serves as Assistant Poetry Editor for *Gulf Coast*.

Terri Brown-Davidson is the author of *Rag Men*, winner of The Ledge Chapbook Contest. Recent work of hers has appeared in *Los Angeles Review*, *North American Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and *Triquarterly New Writers*.



Photo/Matt Rourke

D M Gordon is the author of *Nightly, at the Institute of the Possible*, a finalist for the Massachusetts Book Award. She's a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellow in fiction, two-time finalist in poetry.

Maura High, originally from Wales, but settled now in North Carolina. Her poems have appeared in the *New England Review*, *Southern Review*, and *Tar River Quarterly*.

Peter Leight has previously published poems in *AGNI*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *Field*, *Matter*, *Paris Review*, *Raritan*, and other magazines.

Keith Love is resident physician in the Department of Medicine at the Yale New Haven Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut. The poems here in *2River* mark his first publication.

Sharona Muir is the author of four books including *Invisible Beasts*, a novel. Her work has appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, and elsewhere.

Sarah Stickney has recently published poems in *Crazyhorse* and the *Massachusetts Review*. Her chapbook *Portico* was selected by Thomas Lux as 2016 winner of Emrys Press's annual competition. Stickney translates Italian poetry, and is Dean of Deep Springs college.

Peter Waldor is the author numerous books, including *Who Touches Everything* (Settlement House), which won the National Jewish Book Award. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily* and elsewhere.

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About the Photographs

Covid19. Pandemic. Social distance. A hell of a summer.

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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