

The 2River View

22.3 (Spring 2018)



new poems by
Justin Hyde, Jenny Ahn
Yvonne Amey, Bill Freedman, Anna Keeler
Jane Medved, David Nielsen, Virginia Slachman
Rebecca Starks, Sally Van Doren

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Justin Hyde

that summer

we'd cut the top off a pop-can

one of us would steal a little gasoline
from our father

out on the west edge of the trailer park
tucked up under the highway overpass
like hobos

we'd drop one of our
g.i. joes in the
gasoline bath with
a lit-match

silent full
attention

swirling the acrid burning fumes
with wooden sticks

squatting there
that last summer before our dicks got hard

women came

simple truth disappeared

& we turned inscrutable

like our fathers.

Justin Hyde

between the cracking knuckles of human thought

sitting
on a tiny chair
next to my son
at the parent teacher conference

teacher
pointing to a bar-graph
explaining percentile rank

i am focused
on her left hand

the nail
of her pinkie finger
immaculate
rounded
phosphorescent-green

the others
have been
chipped into submission

hit & run

by the pell-mell
akimbo rush
of children

she points
to another bar-graph

i stare
at her hand
thinking to myself:

norman rockwell
would have missed
this detail

but caravaggio
would have captured it
perfectly.

she leans back
in her tiny chair

crossing her left leg
over her right.

my throat throbs

it reaches
for her loins

i shit you
not.

Jenny Ahn

Neighbor Sestina

My neighbor plants flowers at the gates every season.
He was cast out by blue cheek bone.
He said god my arms but I all I hear
was the silence strangers could afford
wave snap flush clay crack.
I was the cartilage and the hound.

The raw fence crying for days like a hound.
The windows smoking so I know it's a ripe season.
I want to hold my neighbor, cradle her in the crack
and feign wellness in her smallest bone.
At striking moment, things lose the balance they can afford.
Her mask buckles. I hear

the floor peeling its lumber, hear
the beige light trapped in the corner, a hound
my neighbor does not have. Their locks afford
the house very fine openings. To season
their steps with grinded rocks and bone
is to dust my kneecaps until they crack.

I am funneling their pain rising through the crack
in the door. They don't know. He doesn't hear
the closet shuddering. Closer, her bone
hovering in the eye of the hound.
He said no god no it wasn't the right season
but what can my neighbor afford

besides what they displaced to afford.
I am the one who thatches their crack
in the door five times a season.
The kitchen marble, not as cold as I hear,
salivates at the toes of a hound,
rasping inevitable as bone.

No, she says, I am not the town of this bone.
He howls, so why can't we decide to afford—
My neighbor falls and looks up to the hound.
The fire blowing on the eardrums. Smallest crack
I know. This town is where I can hear
the quietest season.

My neighbor's season arrives to afford
phantoms like a hound sucking on sweet bone.
I crack it open, just enough for them to hear.

Yvonne Amey

January, Dam #5 Road, I Visit the Cold

Breath is a place where ghosts roam
but I remember this family
of broken dreams
and how they'd become trapped
inside darkness that smelled of grief
and rain and how they kept to themselves
and how their porch lamp cradled light
in the shape of God
and I know how hard they worked
to get nowhere
and when you smashed
that Jim Beam bottle across my cheekbone
I saw what it looked like when they died alone.

Yvonne Amey

you a heart but not glass

I followed your belongings blowing
through old Britner's field,
there among the scattered October
and coping saws were your broken promises,
the chrome bumper you mowed
that terrible stranger down outside Philly
and now I think it's time I had a heart to heart
with my unfinished self
how nothing you could do made
me unlove you
how your newly upholstered sofa
dangled our legs just so
to Old Dirty Bastard
how we laughed so hard
I thought we'll never breathe again
for a day, a year, forever.

Bill Freedman

The News

The phone rang at 2 a.m.
Silence.
I could not sleep.
In the morning I saw them,
the familiar trio,
two in uniform,
inching up the walk.
Heard them knocking softly,
firmly, advising me to sit,
asking someone to bring water.
Their faces fraught,
their voices trained and factual,
concerned.
They informed me, again,
of the death of someone far away
I'd never known.
I thanked them,
showed them out and
tried to sleep.
The phone.

Bill Freedman

The Hair of Graves

A child said, What is the grass?
fetching it to me with full hands;

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.
—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

Her plaque lies flat,
her name and years of passing through
obscured by weeds and grass
as she is.
Nothing stands
to call to passers-by or catch an eye.
One would trip or trod on her
to find her, or kneel
and part the tangled hair
to imagine hers, at six
or twelve or seventeen,
when her mother brushed it back
and tugged when something caught
and said, "Hold still,"
but did not mean like this.

Anna Keeler

Botswana Agate

I dig my hands into lottery tickets
Because my birth was breached
By a sensitive something eye.

Soft like soul,
I'm like a living, breathing coupon—
Always looking for discounts.

Teasing karma out of
It's mandala dress,
I am fire;
I offer her no protection

But the proverbial O.D.
Of freedom of stability.
I stand back here
Acting like the damn
Statue of liberty.

I repel luck,
And crystallize toxicity
Between my fingers.

An error occurred.
I'm repressing the light.

Help me.
I don't want to struggle.

Anna Keeler

Explosive Neon

You had a single romantic bone in your body;
I'm sure those soft x-rays removed it.

How noble to wear denotation like angel wings
And tell me you're inert because you're primordial.

Loner, you tell me. You've always been a loner,
Just like the space below your dermis is always red-orange.

"No one can hear me."

I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

"No one likes you."

Yeah, I know.

Jane Medved

Nissan is the Ram

and the shiny fence of teeth, the restless tongue,
the burnt palette, the five places of the mouth

where speech is born. They say the evil eye
will flee the five-fingered hand and that our world

was given five unsteady oceans. I have been
in three of them and water changes

color everywhere. In the five books he left us
Moses narrates only one, which leads me

back to speech, how even breathing has a sound
and sighing is a kind of prayer. By that I mean,

there are all sorts of ways to get God's attention.
Look at the moon who reappears dressed up

in borrowed light so diffuse she can only return it.
And the ram, who gave its horn so that the angels

could say, this is how language begins in the belly,
where air is broken down, but not digested.

I am thinking of the lungs and how one side
sorts the blood and sends the rest back to the surface

where it feeds the trees. I am thinking of the trees,
which are the cure for us, the many exhalations

never seen, how the horn is not metal or wood but
what we call the body, twisted and bent, providing

certain passage. Even the guards of tongue and teeth
have to move aside when it's time to send the last breath out.

David Nielsen

Bullshit

In my house the plates
have been known to wash themselves.

The clothes too,
piled in a heap on the couch,

hot after the dryer,
have, from time to time, risen up,

crossed, and folded themselves,
like some kind of resurrection.

You say the bathroom won't tidy itself,
but maybe it will.

Maybe it all happens
best when you aren't looking.

In the bedroom the god of this story
sleeps soundlessly

beneath a silver moon.

David Nielsen

Run For It

Sometimes if I listen carefully
I can hear my daughter
arranging the furniture
in the dollhouse behind me

a chair scraping across the floor
a table pushed up against the wall
the little fake food
clicking against the plastic plates

my own wrist watch
ticking like a grandfather clock
and if the window is open
something bigger

a car
the wind yes
the mountain
like a great big animal

breathing through the screen

Virginia Slachman

Starless Field

i

All the horses are gone. All the horses
are broken. One horse left in the wind-
less and moon-lit drifting. His hooves

pound the earth without anger
as a mad child might a wood
toy, blows from his little hammer, each one

the same. The world is full of grace,
isn't it? The dogs are also mad and
mindless, biting the slim and delicate tendons....

Foolishness, yet they killed the horse. Starless
field, the dogs' mouths hung
with blood. And the horses pound

the earth, broken. They are no
help at all. The child continues,
intent, giving himself to his pure

work because not one of us can exceed
what we are. In the air, scent of wood
smoke, the field still as rapture.

The ducks are standing on the pond's thin ice,
wings tucked, the late sun casting the last
of the day's shadows. I know it's ice, but maybe

they stand on water. After the first
step, the ice gives way. They fall. It's such a small
falling. Perhaps they have too little

faith, or perhaps it's merely the sun has worn
down the pond's fridity. A man watched this
with me, a young man come from the market. His life

is so secret, you can see that in how
his face hides nothing, as if he expects all
that is promised. He smiled as the ducks fell,

not in the way a mad child
would smile, being able to see only
the miraculous. I thought for a moment

that young man might rise
into the last of the day's light, so
delighted he seemed, witnessing

this fallen world
where nothing is harmed.

Rebecca Starks

For Sappho

In the woods, the stillness. The hush
of everything hanging: heavy, humid,
the tickle of sweat. Helices of gnats
mating with motes of light.

There—you see that isolate leaf
oscillating drunkenly

like a little mask of Bacchus
dangling
in Catullus' courtyard

prick for the first drop of rain,
hand raised eagerly—
so sure it has the answer
the rest huddle waiting for?

But it is like that:

out of all the leaves the beech hosts
one is seized by love—and

cannot, cannot,
stop its wingless trembling.

Rebecca Starks

How a Mother Loves

When their dog disappeared out back, last May, fifteen years after they'd brought him home, she looked until she found him, down the hill and under some hemlocks where he'd lain down to die, the way animals do—she says she knew that's what he was doing—and though he was too big for her to lift and she had no cartilage in the joint of one hip she got him up the hill too steep to mow and into the house to his spot by the door and he lived there another week and a half, with her lifting him up with a towel each morning and hugging him to sleep at night, since he could neither stand nor lie down, nor remember what to let go of, to fall asleep.

Sally Van Doren

Domesticated

I left Black Creek to come
here to distance myself
from the magnolia leaves
pressing themselves against
my south-facing windows. I
sought to distinguish myself,
the self desperate for the
dithyramb, the self opening
and closing the door to the cellar
in my doll-house on wheels.
My mother had painted the doors
blue and the stucco walls yellow.
I was not inclined to flock
to the forever she followed,
but I brought her flowers
yesterday, yellow daffodils
to fill her crystal vases.

Sally Van Doren

Mildred's Granddaughter

This is a poem about
a woman who lived
forever. She lived through
years of poetry readings.
She lived through many
presidencies. She
lived through the births
of her sons and
grandsons. She never
stopped for death
and ate when and
whatever she wanted.
She lost track of
time sometimes,
but it never caught
up to her. The motivating
principle of her life
resembled a mass of
hyacinths levitating
over the house next
door. The neighbors
invited her in and
offered her tea
in every season.
She drank it to
warm her heart,
to flush out the
memories of those
who would not love her.

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Authors

Justin Hyde lives in Iowa where he works as a parole officer. His work is published or forthcoming in *The Alaska Quarterly Review* and *The Iowa Review*.

Jenny Ahn is pursuing a Poetry MFA at Columbia University. Ahn's work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Apogee Journal*, *Into the Void*, and *Palimpsest*.

Yvonne Amey holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Central Florida. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in *Bending Genres*, *The Los Angeles Review of Los Angeles*, *Vine Leaves Journal*, and elsewhere.

Bill Freedman is a retired professor of English Literature and a scholar of modern literature and the history of baseball fans. His poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Nation*, *The Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere.



Anna Keeler is a queer poet and fiction writer. Her work has been published or is upcoming with *Ambit Magazine*, *apt*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, and Poets.org.

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Virginia Slachman is the author of three collections of poetry, a memoir, and one novel. A recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, she currently teaches at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

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Sally Van Doren, a poet and artist, is the author of three poetry collections, *Promise* (LSU Press 2017), *Possessive* (2012) and *Sex at Noon Taxes* (2008), which received the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American poets. She lives in New York and St. Louis and posts daily excerpts from her ongoing poem, *The Sense Series*, via Instagram@sallyvandoren.

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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, Editor
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