



The Cossack Review

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THE COSSACK REVIEW



*meaningful new work
since 2012*

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MASTHEAD

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DAVID BURDENY, "MERCATORS PROJECTION, ANTARCTICA, 2007"

Set in Caslon Pro

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Our sixth issue arrives on the fourth anniversary of *The Cossack Review's* first publication. In this issue, we have assembled work from twenty-five writers, including three pieces in translation. These poems, stories, and essays share a quality of lyricism that is concerned with something much greater than itself. These are meditations that extend beyond the boundaries of conscious thought for surprising substance.

Past those boundaries are inquiries into ethics, identity, physicality, and art. Where these pieces intersect with each other, you will find a common thing: the wide open space of interrogation, a kind of understanding *sous rature*.

In the past four years, we have made a commitment to publishing remarkable work in translation. "Joseph Olenin's Coat," a fascinating story of duality, jealousy, and sublime coincidence by the French writer and diplomat Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, appears here for the first time in English, translated by Patricia Worth. Maceo Whitaker and Akua Lezli Hope's poems of chance and accident, reverence and motive, complement wildly different stories by Evelyn Hampton and John A Maloney. The many connections that exist between all the distinct work in this book would be too numerous to list. I think you will enjoy discovering them as much as I have.

- CHRISTINE GOSNAY

Joseph Massey

Garden Level

Night gives nothing back; it only appears to cohere. What's locked in dissolves without pause. An animal rattles mulch and twice-dead leaves piled against the window. I know the walls are there for the sounds they sift into the room—the room that inhabits me—underground.

+

2 Sun in the shape of a quadrangle on a wood floor. Curtains blown horizontal split it in half. Dust divots air, dents the pale afternoon. An hour isn't like anything, not even itself. A window, a patch of lawn, a street for the tide of its noise, for measure. A stream of particulars undoing the room.

+

It can take all day to filter out the debris of a dream, to see a thing contained by its terms. Call it clarity. You have to almost stop thinking; get up to the edge of the clanging at the back of the brain. Go dumb to the light.

+

Three weeks in and the season begins to click. Weather to word; word to weather. A bird circles, punctuates a bloodless sky — the husk we're under. The street a monochrome stream. Cold enough to numb thought.

+

Snow light at dusk, the deepening bruise; a blue that hums. A soundless ringing between the eyes where all things sink and disperse. For once we're reading the world without the names by which we dream it. Nothing to say; nothing saying us.

+

3 Everything comes to a point along the horizon; every limb stripped to a line. Even the clouds sharpen, shaved against a mountain. A pond duplicates the scene — if your gaze drops. To suspend the senses in the drone of geometry. To forget the traffic here.

+

The way the mind bends to receive injured weather, the sudden warmth, as though half awake and watching a place — a room, a field — assemble itself one object at a time. A syntax expanding beneath fanned rays of gaping sun. Center everywhere, circumference nowhere.

Evelyn Hampton

HEIRLOOM

When I was a kid I strongly believed that the machines people made were the limit. There were things out beyond the farthest humans could go, but those things were interesting only because we would eventually reach them. If there was a place where no human could ever go, I didn't consider it worth knowing about. Once, I read the words "beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea" and had a strong reaction. I got goosebumps and felt peculiar. Not because I was thinking of the grotesque creatures that might be down there, like viperfish and black swallows, or because I was realizing that the bottom of the sea has a surface, or because I was imagining myself beneath it, but because I thought it might be possible that nothing was down there or ever would be. It was my first experience of trying to think about nothingness as an actual, physical thing that has dimensions. I didn't know how to think about something like that. That's what disturbed me—my own inability to conceive of something that seemed like it should have been conceivable.

Reaching that limit frightened me, but it didn't frighten Samuel. He wanted to reach the limit and then go beyond it. He wanted to be in the place that was beyond all limits so that he would be not only unreachable, but also unthinkable, like "beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea."

Today, I know that there *is* something beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea, and that it's valuable: oil. Countries fight to claim the surfaces it's beneath. It's starting to seem possible that during my life, countries will have fought for every inch of Earth's surface that hasn't already been exploited. Rigs are already drilling beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea and extracting the substance that provides the energy we need to run our machines. We need to run our machines so that we can keep reaching new limits and going beyond them. When I first read the words "beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea," I believed that the thing beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea would always be just beyond the limits of machines, but I don't believe that anymore. Today I know that what's beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea is not beyond the limits of machines. Machines need what's beneath the

surface of the bottom of the sea. Without what's beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea, machines won't be able to keep running.

My dad liked looking at schematics of machines. He taught Samuel and me how to read them. We learned how to make sense of exploded diagrams. We understood why such a depiction was necessary: although it was artificial, it let us see all the parts of a machine and how they fit together. The artifice was an aid to our understanding. We knew to account for the artifice—accounting for the artifice was part of learning to read. We knew that the parts were not really exploded—that they fit together so snugly, one part resting inside another, that we would not be able to see all of the parts and their differences without the artifice provided by the schematic. When I looked at schematics, I heard a clicking sound I would make inside my head. The sound meant that all the parts I saw exploded by the artifice in fact fit snugly together.

When I looked at Samuel, I heard the clicking. I liked being able to see Samuel in front of me while he and I walked up and down the valley, where we lived. His shoulders were thin. His shoulder blades made shadows on his t-shirt. I wanted to get as close to being him as I could without actually becoming him. If I became Samuel, then I wouldn't be able to walk behind Samuel and watch him. Watching was a way of being two things at once.

If two pieces of the same kind of metal are pressed together, the atoms of one piece will bond with the atoms of the other piece. The atoms don't know they are in different pieces of metal, so the two pieces of metal will become one piece of metal. A good machinist is aware of this tendency of pieces of metal to bond with each other, Dad told Samuel and me. Because Dad told us what good machinists know, I assumed he was a good machinist. Yet the only project I ever knew him to finish was a sort of talking tube. The tube was Samuel's idea, not Dad's.

Samuel got the idea by listening to all of us arguing one night after supper. While we had all been arguing over whose turn it was to do the dishes, he had been listening. While he was listening, he heard a voice that was made by all of our voices together. At the intersection of all of our voices there was a single voice, and the single voice wasn't saying anything like what we were each saying. Although he couldn't understand what it was saying, it was saying *something*. Samuel said he was interested in understanding what the something was that the single voice had been saying. He said he was interested in what else the single voice might have to say, if it had anything more to say. He said

it might be possible to build a machine that could make the sounds of the single voice that all our arguing voices combined had made when Samuel had listened.

Our house was being remodeled. Partly this was why we had been arguing about who would do the dishes. The kitchen sink had been torn out—a new one would soon be put in the old one’s place—so doing the dishes meant crouching on the terrace in the garden, in the white light of a spotlight, where a hose and two pails were working as a kitchen sink. It made me uneasy to see two pails and a hose in the light of a spotlight surrounded by darkness. It reminded me of photographs, taken by deep sea submersibles, of the darkness where sightless creatures swim. Nobody wanted to go out in the dark to do the dishes, so we argued. The kitchen was a mess, and the yard was a mess—the contractor had left building implements outside in piles beneath tarps. If I stood on the terrace in the spotlight by the two tubs and the hose, I could see odd, dark shapes at the edge of the light from the spotlight. I knew that the odd, dark shapes were the tarps beneath which there were building implements, but the light of the spotlight transformed them into garish shapes that could be concealing anything.

Except that I knew, because in daylight I had looked, that beneath one of the tarps was a pile of different lengths and diameters of tubing. Beneath another tarp were bricks, and beneath another were wood beams, and beneath another were bags of concrete aggregate, and beneath another was metal ducting. But in the light of the spotlight my knowledge was transformed, and what I knew lay beneath the tarps no longer lay there. Only what I didn’t know and could never know lay beneath the tarps.

The remodeling had disturbed our lives in other ways. There was no longer a wall between Samuel’s bedroom and my bedroom. Where the wall had been was an opening that made two separate, small rooms into one larger room. Tearing down this wall had been a mistake—the contractor had mistaken this wall for the wall separating the guest bedroom from Dad’s study. *That* was the wall that should have been torn down (and subsequently was). Since Granny had begun to rely on a walker to get around, she needed a bedroom on the ground floor, and we decided that the guest bedroom, a small room, would be joined with Dad’s study, another small room, so that in the end Granny would have a large room she could easily get to. Dad’s study would become an area of the living room accessible by a ladder. It would be lofted above the living room.

He would hang his planets and his diagrams from the beams that held the roof aloft. From down in the living room we would be able to look up and see Dad’s planets hanging above us. We would be able to climb the ladder into the area that would be Dad’s study.

Granny would not be able to climb the ladder. She was the one person in our house who would not be able to go into the area that would be Dad’s study. Even climbing the small stair outside the front door of our house gave Granny trouble breathing. After it was remodeled, the house would be easier for Granny to get around in, except there would be one area she would never see—unless we took a photograph or made an image of it in another way and carried this down the ladder to Granny. I imagined Uncle Clem would come and photograph the area of Dad’s study for Granny, so that she could see it. I imagined that at any moment as he moved through our house, the emptiness behind his eye patch would be revealed. I wondered if Dad had purposely chosen a design for his study that would make it inaccessible to his mother. That she would never see that area disturbed me. Not because there was anything special about it. Just its being inaccessible to Granny made it a symbol of something to me. The area that would be Dad’s study became a symbol of what was conjured in me by the words “beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea.” I never told Granny this, of course, because I did not want to frighten her. I did not want her to feel that there was an inaccessible (to her) place of vast nothingness in our house with us. I did not want her to lie awake thinking of this place the way I lay awake thinking of “beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea.” I wanted to protect Granny from my thoughts. It occurred to me that Dad may also have felt this way—that he wanted to protect Granny from his thoughts—and that this was the reason he had designed a study that would be inaccessible to her.

The area everyone thought of as belonging more or less exclusively to Mom was the garden and the terrace in the garden, which she had built. This area remained accessible to Granny after she got a walker. This area was never included in the area that existed—for Granny, by way of my thoughts—“beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea.” There was a comfortable chair on the terrace where Granny could sit, which she often did when the weather was not, as she called it, *inclement*.

I had mixed feelings about the word *inclement*. I liked it because it made me think of *ink*, and I would picture inky-black clouds bleeding into the sky from a place behind the sky, filling our side of the sky with their darkness. I

thought of the octopus I liked to look at when Mr. Ainsley, our teacher, took our class to the aquarium. The octopus hid inside a grotto, looking out at us from inside the dark opening in the rocks that concealed it. But the word inclement also reminded me of Uncle Clem, and Uncle Clem was missing an eye. Most of the time he wore an eye patch over the empty socket. He spent his days in his apartment. The windows of his apartment were covered with cardboard and black electrical tape. This was to keep out the light. Uncle Clem did not want any light from outside getting into his apartment because he used the apartment—a small studio—as a darkroom where he developed photographs. He took the photographs by looking with his one eye through the viewfinder of a camera. He focused the lens of his camera on the thing he wanted to make an image of. When I imagined Uncle Clem taking a photograph, I saw an image being projected through Uncle Clem's camera, through his eye, through a space behind Uncle Clem's forehead, and out through Uncle Clem's empty eye socket onto the inside of his eye patch. I imagined the process that took place in the darkroom of Uncle Clem's apartment involved extracting the image from the inside of the eye patch. To do this, Uncle Clem needed to take off his eye patch. Because the sight of the empty socket was so hideous, he chose to do this work in the dark so that nobody would have to see his empty socket.

I did not like it when Uncle Clem came to our house to visit us—we only once, as far as I can remember, went to his apartment to visit him—because, although I liked Uncle Clem, I expected that at any moment his eye patch would be pushed aside and what it concealed would be revealed. I saw Uncle Clem's empty eye socket once—Dad had dared Uncle Clem to show it to Samuel and me—and I did not want to see it ever again. I worried that in Uncle Clem's presence I would be overcome by something wild inside of me, something that wanted the opposite of what I wanted, and that I would purposely push aside the eye patch, revealing a sight I dreaded.

Uncle Clem was missing an eye because Dad had knocked it out when the two of them were playing a game. They had been boys. The purpose of the game was for each of them to hold a stick and to try to hit the other with the stick. Because of this, Samuel and I were forbidden to play with sticks. It was the only rule I can remember Dad imposing on us. Otherwise, we were allowed to play any game we wanted.



The game Samuel and I liked best to play didn't have a name. It wasn't even so much a game as an understanding—of what needed to happen in order for Samuel to disappear.

Samuel thought a lot about how to disappear. He wanted to be what Mom and Dad and Granny and I would see when we stood at the top of the path and looked out over the valley—the blue air electric with insects, the trees a solid, shifting green made fluid by sun and shadow. He wanted to be really gone, completely forgotten, which meant becoming everything.

At school I talked a lot about Samuel. I told people at school about the things Samuel did even though he was standing right there with me. He stayed quiet while I talked him up, and as a result he got both larger and farther away. I bragged about how we stayed out all night in the valley eating beef jerky and looking at the stars. If Samuel did something small, like find an antler, I made it seem large—he'd wrestled a buck, he'd killed the buck with his hands. When Samuel patched the hose, I said he'd dug a well our family got water from. He'd made a couple of walkie-talkies with metal hangers for antennas; I said he'd made a radio that let us listen to astronauts' transmissions. I said Samuel would be an astronaut some day. I said NASA had already contacted him. He'd be on the moon very soon, I said. After the moon, he'd be sent to Mars. After Mars, he'd go to the boundary of the expanding universe, beyond which there was nothing, and stay there, right on that edge, getting farther and farther from us.

If kids wanted to talk to Samuel, they talked to me. They asked me what they wanted to ask Samuel. I answered for Samuel. I made up what he would say. Kids didn't seem to notice this, or if they did, they weren't bothered by it. Samuel and I had a bond. We came from the same family. It was assumed I knew things about Samuel nobody else knew. Therefore I was a reliable medium. I was like one of the ladies who wear veils and look into a rock and tell you what your future will be like. I relayed messages from Samuel that in fact I had made up. Samuel became an act, my act. Even when he was standing next to me, his absence was assumed. It had to be, for the act to work. We all wanted the act to work. We wanted Samuel not to be there. It made things more exciting if he wasn't there—he could be anywhere, doing anything. He *was* wrestling bucks. He *was* talking to NASA astronauts. He was already on Mars.

I liked being two things at once. Samuel was disappearing through me. I'd spent a lot of time watching Samuel. I knew how he moved. I could move

the way he moved. My act included not noticing that I tensed my shoulders the way Samuel tensed his when he was thinking. Kids would ask me questions for Samuel and I would answer for Samuel, doing the thing with my shoulders because it helped me to think like Samuel. It wasn't that I wanted to look like him. Still, it made me look thin like him.

Samuel must have been watching me all the time I was doing my act. I didn't think about that back then. If I had thought about him watching me, I wouldn't have been able to do the act. Maybe he recognized the thing I did with my shoulders as his own—I was giving Samuel a way to see himself from a distance. It was a distance he was interested in enlarging. To be forgotten, he needed that distance to encompass everything but himself. He would be outside of the distance that encompassed everything. The distance that encompassed everything would have no memory of ever having included him. He would have reached a vantage no path led to, yet everything he saw from that vantage would be somewhere he had been.



The night when we were arguing and Samuel was listening, I did not want to go outside to do the dishes because of the tarps and Uncle Clem's eye patch and the fear of something lurking, and also because I was tired. I had not slept well since the wall between Samuel's bedroom and my bedroom had been torn down. Maybe because of this, the images I was conjuring in my mind seemed less predictable and more dreamlike than usual. I was afraid of being overwhelmed by thoughts of what lay beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea. I was afraid my thoughts would take over my experience and dance before my eyes the way they did in dreams. I was glad when Samuel offered to do the dishes.

The tube Samuel brought into the house for the machine came from beneath one of the tarps. Dad and Samuel worked on the machine in Dad's new study. His new study wasn't finished yet—nails stuck out of beams drywall had not yet been attached to—but it seemed like this was as finished as Dad's study was going to get. It was going to be another of his unfinished projects. I did not work with Dad and Samuel in Dad's study. I stayed in the living room with Granny playing canasta. Sometimes she had to stop playing to breathe. The sound she made when she stopped to breathe made me think of air being

forced through a narrow opening. When I read the words "beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea," I had been reading about openings—thermal vents—in the surface of the bottom of the sea. Through vents, heat and gases pass out of the realm beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea, into the sea. When Granny stopped playing to breathe, I thought of the deep-sea vents. I also thought of the metal ducts beneath a tarp in our yard. The ducts would bring more air into Granny's bedroom, once it was finished. She said the side of one of her lungs had *melded* to the other side. Because she used the word *melded*, which was a word I knew from canasta, Granny's condition seemed less serious. It seemed like her condition was part of a game. As long as I could conceive of something as a game, I would not be frightened by it.

Samuel was invisible at school now. Or, he was only visible through me. If anyone wanted to say something to Samuel, they said it to me. I responded with what Samuel would say. Even our teacher, Mr. Ainsley, went along with my act. Samuel never raised his hand to ask or answer a question. Mr. Ainsley did not seem to notice. Once in awhile he spoke to Samuel, but as he spoke to Samuel, he looked into my eyes. He made it seem accidental—he would say Samuel's name and then move his eyes across an area that happened to include my eyes as a moment of focus. His gaze affirmed everything I knew about the atoms of metal and how to read schematics and the rules of games. As he held my gaze, he would nod. The nod meant something. It seemed to me that the nod meant something like this: I know of your difficulties with the nothingness beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea, I know of Samuel's strong desire to be forgotten completely, and I accept all of it.

"Samuel," Mr. Ainsley would say, and then his eyes would find mine. I knew in the moment when Mr. Ainsley's eyes met mine that Samuel was slipping into the place beyond limits where he could be forgotten completely, the place beneath the tarps and Uncle Clem's eye patch and the surface of the bottom of sea. When he slipped into this place, a clicking occurred like the clicking I heard when I looked at a schematic and imagined all the parts fitting together. Samuel was fitting into that place. He was just the right shape for it. An experienced machinist had made the machine in which Samuel and the place where he would be forgotten were parts. In the exploded diagram I imagined of that machine, there was a faint line that was the axis connecting Samuel and the place. There was an arrow indicating Samuel and there was an arrow indicating the place. From each one's shape it was apparent that the two

were meant to be in close proximity. One was meant to rest snugly inside the other. The atoms of one were meant to meld with the atoms of another. The two were meant to become one.



After school, Samuel worked with Dad on the talking tube. They made it speak in the voice Samuel heard the night he listened while we all argued about who would do the dishes. They made the voice by arranging lines on the screen of Dad's computer. There were four lines. Each line was a recording of one of our voices. Samuel's voice did not have a line—the voice he had heard the night we were all arguing did not include his voice because he had been silent. To make the voice, Dad and Samuel moved all of the lines together so that they overlapped exactly. The lines fit snugly, one inside the other, making one line that was a composite of the four lines of our voices. The one voice that was our four voices combined sounded low—not as low as Dad's voice, but lower than Mom's and Granny's and mine. The one voice that was our four voices combined did not sound like the voice of a person but like the voice of an emptiness below a person that a person could fall into. The sound of the voice came from the area of Dad's study. Samuel had connected the tube to the computer so that the tube amplified the voice. The tube made the voice coming from the area of Dad's study louder. Granny and I listened to the voice. We were in the living room. Mom came inside from the terrace where she had been washing dishes and asked what was happening. Only Samuel's voice was not part of the voice. Samuel's listening was part of the voice.

What the voice was saying were not words exactly. What it was saying were sounds like the ones I heard at night through the opening where the wall had been that had separated Samuel's bedroom from mine. The sounds I heard at night through the opening were the sounds Samuel made while he was asleep. To me they sounded like pieces of a language if the language were disintegrating, its pieces floating slowly apart like the parts of a machine in an exploded diagram. But the pieces of the disintegrating language had no artifice holding them together the way the parts of an exploded diagram did. There was no faint line making an axis the parts were arranged along; there were no arrows. The sounds I heard through the opening and that Samuel made in his sleep were the sounds of a language that had lost its artifice. Because it had lost

its artifice, the language no longer made sense. I would not be able to decipher the sounds unless I found the artifice that connected them in a way that gave them sense.

At night, as I lay awake considering where I might find such an artifice, my mind flashed on different images: the lengths of tube and ducts and piles of bricks and bags of concrete beneath the tarps, the empty eye socket behind Uncle Clem's eye patch, the darkening of the sky, the nothingness beneath the surface of the bottom of the sea, the parts of language drifting apart endlessly, getting farther and farther from me. The last was not an image, really, but a feeling of terror that I would disappear completely. When the terror became absolute, when I was certain I was no longer anywhere at all, I called out for Samuel. He woke and asked me what was wrong. I told him he had been talking in his sleep. "What was I saying?" he asked. I told him I did not know because the language he had been speaking was indecipherable. After some time I heard his breathing get slow—he was asleep again. I stayed awake, my eyes fastened on the darkness that seemed to be both surrounding me and filling me. When Samuel began again making the sounds of the language that had lost its artifice, in order to fall asleep I imagined a schematic I knew how to read, the exploded diagram of a simple machine. I imagined the faint line of the axis connecting all of the parts. I imagined the parts arranged in such a way that I could see the details of each part and understand how each part connected to the other parts. I imagined each arrow that pointed to each part. I heard the click of the parts fitting snugly together. The artifice of its depiction told me that this was a good machine. It had been made by a good machinist.



*Maceo Whitaker***Bloopers**

After slipping from a star's
gravitational pull, a rogue planet
zips through space. Sightless.

On its skin, an alien surfs;
a nervy renegade, it backflips
against the planet's gyrations. . . .

In *Teen Wolf*, when Scott surfs
on the van, they pass palm trees.
The movie's set in Nebraska.

Now, this: this is one blunder
even a fool like me can't believe.
Not on this microspeck of earth, with

our planet animate for a mere breath.
Maybe in some other supercluster—
perhaps the Horologium—a dwarf

galaxy exists where wolves dunk
on meatheads, where flora trumps
ether, where rogue planets speed

toward one another at a sick rate,
ready to crash, products of a clumsy
guard dribbling two basketballs.

What a multiverse, the utmost anti-null,
gnawing at these borders of oblivion.
Maybe this is more geeked-out whimsy.

As our sun keeps us on our boring track,
we feed an eternal blooper reel, our turn-
overs recorded, then stamped into lowlights.

We stagger backwards into the abyss,
but our infinite clones man the vanguard,
intergalactic idiots hungry for collision.

Steven Sanchez

Phantom Tongue

A cavity grows inside
 your mouth, a void
 collapsing your tooth:

a broken crown
 exposing dentine
 and a nearly severed neck.

You feel an open nerve
 billow from its canal
 like a Tule reed trembling

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between each sharp breath.
 This is why you are here:
 to eat, drink, and breathe

without vigilance;
 this is why you permit this man
 wearing a white mask

and white gloves
 to reach inside your mouth.
 His anesthesia spreads

through your gums, seeps
 into your lips and seizes
 your tongue, breaking

communication
 between you and your body.
 This white man

begins to speak
 of Baltimore, of burning
 cars and shattered windows

as he drills inside
 your tooth,
 excavating pulp and nerve

to ensure you never feel
 this pain again. He praises
 the mother for hitting her son

protesting in the street. He packs
 your mouth with cotton
 to keep your tongue

from getting in the way.
 He says *you're lucky*
your insurance covers composites;

the white crown
inside your mouth
is safer than amalgam

because silver seeps
into your gums and
blood, it makes your mouth black.

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Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé
Maceo Whitaker
Patricia Worth

*What a multiverse, the utmost anti-null,
gnawing at these borders of oblivion.* 

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