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MASTHEAD

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the wind has broken the glossy green silk of them
into ribbons.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present here, in our seventh issue, the winners and finalists of our inaugural October Prizes in Fiction and Poetry. Fiction judge Sara Pritchard lauds Lara Palmqvist's winning story "Beneath New Skies" for its ability to "make the ordinary seem extraordinary and the extraordinary seem ordinary," its "lush language and concrete details." Poetry judge Phillip B. Williams commends the "beautiful, taut mystery" of Caroline Chavatel's winning poem "The Given, These Bodies."

Our interview series Five Questions for Five Poets continues, this time around, with important, irresistible discourse from Kazim Ali, Laura Mullen, Chloe Honum, Stuart Barnes, and Benjamin Myers. Appearing in this issue for the first time in English are stories by Tony Duvert and Manuel Moyano.

The uniqueness of language as a force at once tender and dispassionate unfolds throughout the work collected here, from Allan Peterson's three poems that faithfully wed thought and observation, to Joe Aguilar's backward glance forward at aging, to the messages that appear from Evelyn Hampton's "Jay" in writing and in the gestures of the physical world, to the inside-out interrogation of the soul in Owen McLeod's "An Argument from the Phaedo," to the effervescent brutality that gives way from a Russian pie hat, a song, and a mutton dinner in Sara Pritchard's "Notes on Rudolph Nureyev's Hat." 1

Since this body of work was written prior to the recent ascension of demagogues to power in the US—dangerous people, in our context, because they represent a large authority not generally inclined to acknowledge the importance of language to compassion and the human condition—it is tempting to read this book as an alarm bell, a paean, even a protest. While *The Cossack Review* has not thus been in any way a "political" magazine except insofar as we—the editors, contributors, and readers—are all together and altogether political individuals, I urge you to read it in this way. Think this way about all the writing and reading you do. Refuse to stop or change course in using art and language to make life go forward in a way that would make your worst critic afraid to miss what you have said.

- CHRISTINE GOSNAY

THE FIRST ANNUAL
OCTOBER PRIZES IN
FICTION AND POETRY

Lara Palmqvist

BENEATH NEW SKIES

FICTION

Winner: **Lara Palmqvist**, for "Beneath New Skies"

Finalists:

Evelyn Hampton, "Jay"

Tessa Yang, "Runners"

JUDGED BY SARA PRITCHARD

POETRY

Winner: **Caroline Chavatel**, for "The Given, These Bodies"

Finalists:

Jane Medved, "Into and out of all the iridescent cities of war"

Sarah Ann Winn, "Eighth Ocean Algebra"

Renee Long, "Echolocation"

JUDGED BY PHILLIP B. WILLIAMS

The foresters dug up the skeleton on the day of the homecoming formal. I was alerted to the incident by an all-staff email, though the message contained few details, only the bald facts of the matter and an imperative in the headmaster's preferred British English to KEEP A KEEN EYE on the students. By then, they were already arriving. They came polished and pressed into formal wear, eyes widening as they entered the gymnasium of Kodaikanal International School, which for that evening had been transformed into a dance floor. Gauzy fabric hung from the netted hoops in low-slung crescents. Long tables hunched beneath silvered platters of tandoori chicken. A tiered dessert tray gleamed beside the bleachers, bearing chocolate sandwich cookies and *gulab jamun* slicked in a patina of syrup. Beyond all this, the rainforest heaved and sighed, rustling with ceaseless movement. Dense humidity peeled off from the opaque wall of trees, forming white fingers of mist that reached toward the darkening sky. I was chaperoning the dance along with nine other staff members of the boarding school, located in the Western Ghats Mountain Range, an overnight bus ride south from Chennai involving a series of switchbacks that could make your heart stop. We were isolated with little company except ourselves, the kids we taught, and the wild gaur that roamed the forests and trampled the vegetable gardens at night. We were hungry for gossip, and gathered close as S.P.V. Murthy, the economics teacher, spoke of the death in hushed tones while the high schoolers swayed around us, furtively groping below the ropes of yellow fairy lights.

Murthy's silk bow tie flapped against his starched white shirt as he gesticulated, offering up the grisly details. He said she was three years old, likely killed by poison. He said this was how most meet their end, these days. From Murthy we learned she was seven feet in length from head to tail, the 25th death reported in Tamil Nadu that year. "The cost of rising demand," he said, head bowed. According to Murthy, the tigress was one of many, part of a series of killings linked to a syndicate run by the "Veerappan of the North." The poachers were coming up the mountain to escape arrest, he said. He said there would be worse to come.

Ms. Yadev drew a circle on the gym floor with the toe of her rubber sandal, then raised her round face to look out at the students: the boys with

Pedro Poitevin

some trees

these are the trees that hide what we forget
 the light-and-shadow syntax of that day
 the clouded message of the castaway
 sun through the smoke of one last cigarette

I saw them once the way you saw me then
 you saw me once the way I see them now
 they know what nobody can disavow
 the glare the twitch the frown the how the when

22 these are the trees and how the morning haze
 filling the schoolyard we have left behind
 yields to the wind that leafs through memory

but this is not exactly the same place
 the leaves have turned the roots have not entwined
 this is where you and I but not where we

Allan Peterson

Nonetheless

In even the shopworn language
 of the obvious it sounds magical

to say we pulled stairs down
 on a string from the ceiling

But this is a commonplace

That night should fall sometimes
 dusk that day should break

as light in an attic cluttered
 with trunks and old photographs

Algebra can keep its unknowns

plain description is a dream
 cold pasting feathers to the glass

a rubber boa passing between us
 and into the false hellebore

Not magic but nonetheless a wand

Joe Aguilar

GERASCOPHOBIA

I don't know how to grow up.

What's to get?
Fused growth plates?
Proctologists. Expensive haircuts.

Maybe it just feels like the end, the first end before the last end.



44 My uncle said I'm taller than him now, either because he's shrunk or
because I've grown. I said that's so depressing.
He said here's Kleenex, son, but it was a Sheetz receipt.
This is a joke to him.



When you pause at the top of a ride, it seems the world lays itself out for
you.

From here you can see the end that's the start.
I'm talking about where everyone's lingering for you, waiting to get on.
People board the thing and leave the thing, other people board the thing
and the other people leave the thing so other other people can board the
thing, until the hour comes when everyone has agreed to leave, and now
somebody earning less an hour than what an airport milkshake costs shuts
off the machine.



That's not exactly what I mean.
What I mean is does anybody else feel burdened with this dread?
I can sense graying hairs behind my face ready to press into the future.
A force shrivels my gums back, driving out the cartilage in my ears and nose,
hugging in the bones around.
You might pay for dental work. You might investigate rhinoplasty.

Even the thought of surgery already liberates me.
I shave every hint of hair, above or below. I grease any rashes that result.
I stream cartoons on my laptop to soothe myself.
My brother tauntingly calls me Peter, as in Pan.
But even Peter Pan admits, "To die will be an awfully big adventure."



I cultivate nostalgia for feelings I can't understand anymore.
In seventh grade, I had few friendships that moved me, but Philip always
played me ping-pong at lunch, left-handed. He was right-handed. He never
explained.

He wore this new A's hat low. His eyes were a green that echoed the fresh,
beautiful color of his hat.

I suspected he hadn't tried to match.

He couldn't pronounce "r" right. His pockets were torn out. He farted
loudly during class, even while others stared, disbelieving.

Why does Philip stick?

My heart lurched when he spoke my name.

It devastated me. It devastates me, this love that can't touch what I am 45
now.



I'd say what's shifted is the expectation of what love is. It's relieved me
from an obsession with my own giddiness.

What's not to like? Maturity like this sounds wonderful.

While the momentum broadens you toward possibilities outside the
corporeal, it also traps you deeper in your flesh.

Your hip.

The winter air.

The shrinking ability to read road signs.

The mirror.



Okay. My uncle's father—the uncle who likes jokes—my father's father
too, this is my grandfather who I am talking about: he died last week.
I can't face how long his death took.

Whenever I would visit his apartment to surprise him with lunch, he
said, "Joey, I don't know why the Lord hasn't taken me yet, but here I am."

Once he threw his pinched-in eyes up toward the stains on the walls
from his cigarette smoke and he yelled to his Lord, "Strike me down!"

Later his spine bent so badly it injured his organs.
 It was the most evilly unnatural natural process.
 He visited a discount chiropractor, who adjusted him vigorously enough
 to fracture his back. The discount chiropractor was protected from malpractice
 by fine print.
 My grandfather wore a cheap brace he'd found online. He slept hunched
 on a cot in the smallest bedroom. Everything smelled yellowing, like bandages.
 He never forgot my birthday.
 He'd bought me the ping-pong paddle I used for Philip. It had its own
 leatherette case.



Don't many people age gracefully, joyfully?
 For example?

I guess there's this famous artist in his eighties who everyone posts
 pictures of, who wears an expensive little Panama hat and has tattoos up to
 his knuckles? Or there's this woman in her nineties, a viral star, with articles
 about her in various large online publications, she's witty, she says "fuck" a lot,
 and she dyes her hair pink?

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No, that sounds very depressing.



My grandfather's sister used to say "When I am an old woman I shall
 wear purple." She died alone in a nursing home, in a hospital gown. I don't
 know the color.

She was not someone who let others in. I'd guess she wasn't unpleasant
 or shy, only indifferent.

She would have filled the passenger seats of her car with empty soda
 cans. She would have ordered every channel possible for her television.

I only saw her at weddings or funerals. She would whisper her faraway,
 wry pronouncements, like she never expected an audience.



Today, I find myself eating breakfast alone at a café by the waterfall.
 Through the window water falls. A group of elderly women arrives, in a fog
 of perfume, carrying shiny gift bags. They greet each other. They linger in
 their hugs.

They pass out bright, meticulously-wrapped presents, which they open,
 one by one, different books of different colors. They inscribe long messages in
 each other's volumes. They take their time.

They laugh and laugh.
 They lay their hands on each other's wrists. They ask about each other's
 granddaughters' soccer teams, each other's backs, each other's feet.
 They pass the syrup. They exclaim sincerely over their pancakes' delicacy.
 They do not check their compact mirrors or their phones.
 None has dyed their silver hair.
 What they are is hidden from me.
 I look down at the shoes I paid too much for online.
 The water falls over the rocks.
 It shines silver. It allows its own movement.

I wonder how long it will go on like that. ❧

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Owen McLeod

An Argument from the Phaedo

Flanked by corn, my truck
a rusted out comet, tail rising
from the orange dust, music

on the radio me and mine—
but down the road it won't be.
Which raises the question:

how many times can a man
be reborn? Cebes, friend
of Socrates, said the soul

66 was like a coat—durable
but not everlasting, worn out
by repeated incarnations.

That would make us kin
to these ears, golden meat
wrapped in tufted husks,

the soul outside, not in,
metaphysical skin, unseen
yet tougher than matter.

Just not eternal. I'm okay
with that. Months from now,
the flesh long gone, shreds

of blackened husk will cling
to the stubble—waiting out winter,
outlasting the farmer, longing

for the great plowing under.

Amaris Ketcham

THE LAST OF OUR UNREASONABLE CUSTOMS

Yesterday I was in a swordfight with my boyfriend's ex. I knew the outcome was doomed, or at least predetermined. She is a former World Cup fencer, and I'm so new to holding a sword I often forgot to keep my tip pointed at the opponent. As I stepped onto the strip, my hand trembled grasping the pommel. My feet were glued to the floor. My fate was sealed: come sundown I would be skewered through and through, tie-dyed with bruises, hobbling toward pizza and a cold beer.

67 While they share origins in trial by combat, Olympic-style sword fighting and the classic duel drifted apart a little over a century ago. The former, being a sport, now takes place in a gym, is marked by good humor and safety precautions, and has a little buzzer to show who got a point. The latter begins with a simple insult, betrayal, or act of violence, and establishes who wins and who loses by how bloody the foes end up. While mine was a sporting match and not a duel, it upheld the air that I'd been summoned to the playground after school to get my ass kicked. After all, on this evening, the two overlapped: both were acts performed by rivals, and both were marked by self-control and civility, which we now call "good sportsmanship."

The desire to believe in self-control is one of the reasons dueling persisted well into the twentieth century. In France, in 1883, when all citizens were free, when everyone could vote and even divorce if they wanted, when the people felt in high spirits and sang out about *liberté, égalité, fraternité* while they broke baguettes and shared wine, the author Guy de Maupassant pronounced dueling "the last of our unreasonable customs." The custom endured nearly a century more, when, in 1967, the last duel was fought after an insult at the French parliament.

There is one thing about sportsmanship in dueling that your average unreasonable custom does not allow. According to the stories I've read about famous duels, you can be friends after your swordfight. The insult that

*Five Questions For Five Poets**an interview series*❧ **What comes closest to meditation for you?**

Kazim Ali: I do engage in contemplative practices like yoga and meditation. It depends on what you mean when you say "meditation." For some, meditation means moving into that state where you can observe your own mind operating. If that's what you mean then whenever I am on a yoga mat either practicing yoga poses or sitting meditation, I am there. But mostly when folks say "meditative state" they mean quiet contemplation-- and for me that is walking. Especially slow meandering, I can just disappear out of my body and into some abstract place where often I find language.

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Chloe Honum: Lying down with my dog, a five-year-old Lab. I close my eyes and try to match my breathing with hers.

Laura Mullen: Meditation

Benjamin Myers: I try to start each day with prayer and meditation, so, for me, the role of meditation is filled by meditation itself. I agree with Simone Weil, though, that anything done with great care and concentration approaches meditation or even prayer. Recently I spent several days building a large rabbit hutch from discarded shipping pallets. It was a meditative experience. Playing guitar, and sometimes even playing basketball, can be meditative for me as well. I don't find writing poetry to be meditative at all, but reading certain other poets approaches meditation at times.

Stuart Barnes: Contemplating Sylvia Plath's poem 'Ariel' whilst swimming.

❧ **Describe a book you love, without naming it.**

Kazim Ali: This is a great question and one I cannot really answer. I love different books for different reasons-- poetry, novels and philosophy/cultural theory being my favorite kinds. I do occasionally read nonfiction and essays, as well as letters. (Are letters a lost form? Will private emails eventually be excavated and published as correspondence the way letters once were?). But books I love are savage--as in the French "sauvage" which depending on contact can mean "wild" or "raw"-- those two categories of language having some thing to do with each other. They are also "strange" or "estranged" from normal use. I like books that speak in tongues.

So let me try to describe a single book of poetry I do adore-- it is full of confusion, full of musically intense fragments that are erotic, alarming, disturbing in all the best ways. It doesn't assemble a narrative nor a rhetoric of any specific intent. Its effect is its own unfolding. It is sound issued from the body, polyphonic, polyamorous.

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Chloe Honum: Could I give a quotation from it instead? Marilynne Robinson's sentences are too beautiful. Here's one:

"[E]very memory is turned over and over again, every word, however chance, written in the heart in the hope that memory will fulfill itself, and become flesh, and that the wanderers will find a way home, and the perished, whose lack we always feel, will step through the door finally and stroke our hair with dreaming, habitual fondness, not having meant to keep us waiting long."

Laura Mullen: The cover is dark, the words don't fill the page. The author is female. The stanzas are numbered, and the pronouns are restless, maybe unaccountable. The speaker is certain and certain and certain, and the application of successive certainties makes for a text that's in flux and unstable. It's as easy as music and as hard as philosophy it's as easy as philosophy and as difficult as music (it's a lot like Bach) it's a work you can live in—if "you" are me. I return again and again and it's always fresh: I will go on learning to read it forever. The questions are good ones.

Benjamin Myers: The poet dreams himself in parts and talks to himself. He dreams his father and the movies. He dreams jazz and death. He is awful and hilarious and heartbreaking. His words go all sideways.