

Introduction

ALETHEA

THIS IS NOT a special issue. We did not send out a call for submissions, we hadn't settled on any particular theme, chosen any single burning question, field, or village, we hadn't even agreed as yet on our line of response. Last November, we did launch a blog series, #OurAmerica, though we realized it was at best a bucket brigade. As many as we could, as fast as we could, and perhaps the flames wouldn't spread. Then @POTUS decided to follow us on Twitter and we thought, "the pump don't work, 'cause the vandals took the handles." As the man said, you don't need a weatherman.

Truth is not a special issue. In recent years the poster kiddies for post-everything have been generally and widely lambasted for relativism, nihilism, and all sorts of indecorous behavior. I, for one, have never believed it. I don't think anyone ever writes anything worthy or serious without believing it's true, or without wanting others to believe it. Fiction imagines a possible world—if it didn't make the author believe, who else ever would? Poetry excavates language, eliminating the dross. Nonfiction is an index, not a mode. In a word, at some level, art itself—including all fiction, all poetry, every essay—is realist.

It should surprise no one that, as we began to select, organize, and categorize the work selected by us for publication, we rather quickly realized we had a themed issue in the making. At this point in time, the people who we care to publish care about one thing more than anything else. Truth. It's as simple as that.

So let's start with god. Why not, right? Isn't that what they always do? In this issue, Giacomo Sartori's first-person declamation, omnipotently

rendered by Frederika Randall, shows the divinity as voyeur, inexplicably fixated on a “tall girl with two purple pigtails who at every opportunity is shoving her arm up a cow’s ass.” Who can’t see the truth in that? After ruminating on this artifice of insemination, we should probably cut to the chase. When Noam Chomsky came to UMass and students came out in the thousands, he asked us, following the biologist Ernst Mayr, to ponder whether intelligence is a lethal mutation, dooming us to early extinction: the actions of this country, most pointedly its climate denial and nuclear warmongering, appear hell-bent on proving Mayr correct. Our point, and Chomsky’s, is that intelligence may yet win out. Or not.

Elsewhere, yet no less bleakly, stories by Lauren Marie Schmidt and Kwame Opoku-Duku come down to voice, or, to say it straight, those voices we fail to hear in this society that kills black men and rapes young women. We have the Italian writers Fabio Deotto and Giorgio Fontana to thank for their reminder that ninety years have now passed since this country, and this state, executed Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. And the question Deotto and Fontana pose concerns our future: who will this country decide it must kill tomorrow? Perhaps only the sense and sensibility of Martín Espada, in a poem placed as coda, can manage to mirror our infernal, apparently eternal, present.

BEAUTY, TRUTH

IF YOU’RE HAVING trouble figuring out this section, start with the conversations between Contributing Editor Ilan Stavans and Barry Moser, whose stunning illustration for the Scottish Play graces our cover. Or dive into the Patrick Thomas Henry essay (of which we bring you here part one, then keep you hanging until spring) and from there, work your way out, back and forth. Read Rivas’s apophatic elegy, Djebbar’s Camus, and everything else. Artists and critics—truth-tellers—all. The beautifully expansive entanglements of Tracey Physioc Brockett will be suggestive of such relations, as of the current state of the cosmos.

PARABLES

MORE BEND in the road than hermeneutic circle, here expression has both focus and directrix. The arc is left open. As such, let me wind up this introductory rumination with a word or two about the essay that both opens and closes our issue. Readers of this magazine will recall what

happened up at Middlebury College in March earlier this year, when a coauthor of *The Bell Curve*—a book that speaks of, but not with, intelligence—did not lecture. In the brilliant, passionate, elegant (and to my mind persuasive) essay that bookends this issue, nonfiction editor and legal scholar Adam Sitze responds—less to the specific events of that day than to the sort of discourse that time and again springs up everywhere at such moments.

Like most lit mags, our editorial default mode is to talk authors out of paratextual paraphernalia—those needless introductions, overly explanatory asides, and above all footnotes. *The text itself!* we cry. In scholarship on law, however, notes are never optional, they are the *midrash*, the *ahadith*, the critical legal studies making dead languages speak, going to hell and back. We trust our readers will be sympathetic to Adam's politics, though his argument may anger some of you. We share our editor's sense that gadflies are in short supply on our campuses, so we hope to help breed an additional few.

One last word, then I'll leave you to your reading. Truth is, after all, at issue, so I must end by saying that I myself don't agree with everything said within these pages. (Hell, some of it I don't even like.) In addition to its function as storehouse, as ammo dump, a magazine is also voiced by a collective. There are, to be sure, editors with ironclad aesthetics and little tolerance for work that doesn't match up. You know them, you've read their pages, perhaps you've even worked with them. I certainly have. Having already alluded to Keats once, I must here invoke that concept-for-all-seasons, negative capability. You see, I frequently say that whatever talent I have for this job stems from whatever capacity I have for thinking I may be wrong. To my mind, any magazine that fully managed to incorporate negative capability into its politics and into its pages would be, well, a second Shakespeare. The alternative, again to my mind, is all too clear. Writing that never questions itself, that never pauses, that sometimes hasn't got a clue, is the opposite of truth. Writing like that you only find in a tweet. By a twit.

Jim Hicks
for the editors