

Introduction

“STAND AND DELIVER!” There must generally be few circumstances where poets and writers get confronted with some modern-day equivalent to this highwaymen’s call. “Your poetry or your life!” sounds like a skit from Monty Python, not a moment *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*. Lately, though, I’m beginning to wonder. For example, back during the first half of August 2014, my wanderings took me for a short stint at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a two-week workshop on “Literary Responses to Genocide in the Post-Holocaust Era,” organized by Erin McGlothlin and Stephenie Young. Our discussions were of the sort where, years later, I feel I’m still at that table, sorting things out. In part, however, history itself has had a hand in the matter. During those days back in 2014, the third war in six years was raging on Gaza, the Yazidis had fled from ISIS to Mount Sinjar, and Michael Brown was gunned down in Ferguson. Genocide, to put it bluntly, yet again on the table.

One morning, after scanning my e-mail and the news, I headed for the USHMM. Just before leaving, though, I also happened upon “Running Orders” by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, whose poem “In Case of Emergency” we feature in this issue. I won’t say more about either poem here, since you should do your own homework, but I will say that I could not not take that poem with me that morning and place it squarely on the table for our discussions. Needless to say, it’s still there.

As is “No One and Syria’s Struggle to Sleep,” the meditation in verse by Seif Eldeine that opens these pages: “No one sleeps to the sounds of bombs”—except, all too easily, the rest of us. Then Francesc Serés (as ever,

trenchantly translated by Peter Bush) takes us on a walkabout through refugee camps in southern Spain; places where, as Serés observes, “They had made the leap from a boat to land, but everything is still a boat and made of plastic.” Elsewhere on the planet, the acclaimed Indian writer, diplomat, and Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor offers sage reflections on “Nehru’s Relevance in India Today”; the themes of a political legacy besieged and betrayed, we trust, will resonate in other countries as well. An able translation from Urdu by Syed Sarwar Hussain, and another from Arabic by Alice Guthrie, give us a pair of stories—by Kalam Haidari and Atef Abu Saif—reminding us that humor is what oppressors most lack and tolerate least. Then Tabish Khair, in an intimate, important essay, tells tales out of school to explore the roots of postcolonial resentment. Finally, our opening section ends, with some lovely blue notes from last year’s Halley Prize–winning poet, Taije Silverman.

Rather than recite the rest of our issue, I should just get out of the way and let you read. Rest assured, however; there is plenty more, both heroes and finds, in the pages that follow. Three poems from Dean Young, for example, work from Chejfec and Muñoz Molina, statements of faith from at least two religions, and gems from Eastern Europe and the Caribbean too. Not to mention Laurent Chéhère’s Parisian *hommage* in photomontage to the WTF world we inhabit. In times like these, artists, poets, and writers do need to give up the goods—to save their lives, and ours.

Jim Hicks
for the editors