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# ERA





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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Philo has a rich history as a literary society, including two publications throughout the years: ERA (1964-1980) and Philomel (1981-2013). I am immensely proud to be the Editor in Chief of ERA's 39th volume, a number that reflects the years of investment in both publications since ERA published its first edition in 1964.

When I first threw my name in the hat for Editor in Chief late last year, I could never have imagined where we would be today: sharing ERA virtually, as the Halls remain shuttered, along with Penn and much of the world. We kicked off ERA with an incredible open-mic, organized by Trize Stephen-Pons, and I imagined that we would celebrate the publication of ERA in much the same way. Instead, we are releasing the issue virtually, at Meeting the Eighth (held via Zoom), toasting in our own homes. I am profoundly grateful to my editorial team, who reviewed poetry, prose and literary criticism in the midst of incredible upheaval. Thank you.

I've been seeing a lot of notes about how the Renaissance followed the plague, and how perhaps this pandemic will be followed by incredible artistic creation. I personally have spent many afternoons taking ballet class online and contemplating how we might adapt performing arts for the new reality- or at least the one we might live in for the next couple of years. I hope that there is a huge resurgence in writing and the performing arts, but I think it is far from a guarantee. And throwing out the idea of a new Renaissance without context ignores the massive societal loss that preceded the Renaissance in Italy. Not only are smaller artistic organizations shuttering, like the ballet company I danced for in Dallas before moving to Philadelphia for grad school, but thousands of people are losing their lives.

The words contained within the pages of ERA bring me hope. We all have stories to tell within us, and there is so much talent in the world that we, as Philos and as individuals, can share. Whether you are producing your greatest work or simply keeping your head up, take care of yourself during this time. Rediscover great works. Explore new works, like the ones we have the privilege to share in these pages. And take care of yourself, in whatever way that looks like to you.

Stay safe, and may it not be long before we all meet in the Halls once more,

*Glen Miller*

# I Think I Will Be My Father's Biographer

JOYCE HIDA

I speak too much of my father. There are too many parts  
of him that I am willing to sacrifice to the night,

that like twilight live as final chances. Maybe it's the romance of it  
all, *so dark, so compelling*, the unlikely hero's likely end.

I suppose he would be a good soldier; he knows which poem tastes best  
on a dying breath. This he cried himself, in not so many words,

in words so sparse I worry I could collect them into poems.  
The power of that - of *performing memory*, of *making legacy*-

that on battlefields memorializes in ink and at coronations  
spills still deeper reds upon our thrones.

I am sick with power. I am young and unruléd and I laugh  
at the moon for her carelessness with time. Governments fear

poets, then, because every martyr's twilight is ours  
to decide. I lift my eyes. I count the lines by his mouth.

01001000 01101001

# ("Hi" in Binary)

GEORGE JANSSEN

A 3rd grade truth I still believe in is  $2+2$  does not always equal 4.

"In theory,"

Michael's classroom-mouse voice was heard in the kickball line,

" $2+2$  does not *always* equal 4.

*Sometimes* it equals 5."

Jake disproves Michael, 2 fingers on 2 hands.

"2 fingers and 2 fingers equals 4, dummy.

Go ask Mrs. Beech."

The rest of the theorists laugh, I did not.

I did not know what a theory was.

Michael's childhood thing, as everyone had a thing in their childhood,  
was to become a rocket scientist.

Wearing a goldfish bowl on his head, Michael asked his teacher  
if the class could watch him act out Neil Armstrong's first steps.

He did,

"One small step for Michael, one giant leap for..."

Glass weightless, goldfish loose, blood escaping,

Michael's footprint forever on the bullies face that tripped him.

I asked him while his backyard moonlander was under construction  
why he wants to go to space?

"To leave."

He left the house for his alien yard every summer night,

a colonizing telescope under his arm, and make-shift observatory in a 10-person tent.

His mother thought it a safe idea to leave him out of the house,

Under the care of the stars,

While his father and her battled on earth.

Thirty constructed years later, at a funeral for a real spaceman  
I realized the only calculations I've done are  
how many years of college payments I can provide and  
my age, but Michael, no children, could calculate the necessary escape velocity  
of 1000 kg off Enceladus.

The problem with math is, it's too precise.  
One point 000001 could boomerang a spaceship back to earth,  
Or collapse a bridge, or detonate chemicals, or  
Send Michael's theoretical brain to extinction.  
Too much precision and not enough answers.

leads one  
to only one; death by a gunpowder powered rocket.

# Day 16

YIWEI CHAI

I did not mind being alone until I fell in love  
Now, ready to suffocate at the slightest thing  
I half-flee towards you; my dreams at night  
Seem to tell me that I have not slept in days  
I say nothing; I dare not open my mouth  
Not quite feverish but close enough to foolish  
I tumble down stairs, impatient to hear your voice  
Confessions beating like birds in my throat



# Reality USA

## GEORGE JANSSEN

I threatened my kids  
I'd hug them  
until they fetched me a beer.

I kicked my dog  
a bone  
then laid her to rest.  
She was proud I didn't cry.

I shot a school  
of duck. We ate good  
buying my wife a diamond ring.

I polluted a river  
Skinny dipping, pesticides washed away  
And we made love.

I started a fight  
in the high school gymnasium  
when they punched your teeth in.  
She wasn't proud then.

I said I hate Church  
and Mom cried on the couch  
while I cleaned dishes.

My truck crashed into a museum wall.  
*Experts* called the new paint-job splatter  
an American Pastoral

I called it, insurance fraud and a new truck.  
The pitchfork man and puritan woman went missing  
after I left.

# Remembering the Sun in the Daytime

JOYCE HIDA

Few yellows survive the cruelty of the sky ---

August mornings in the palms of windows, sickly-sweet  
daffodil tea, the sun breathing through your eyes.

The softness of it all was the only secret I've ever kept,  
frozen in the Atlantic morning as if the sun forgot  
its obligations to the night.

But horizons drink the last of us.

I wish we had washed our hair in it, bathed in yellow  
until the sky accepted our stain.

We could trade part-me for part-you until even we  
stumble blindly between our soft borders;  
we could call that messy footwork *dancing*.

We could crown ourselves with yellow daffodils.

# That Unnameable Feeling

FARAH SAYED

I have no name for looking out that window, seeing foliage saturate the limbs of the age-old maples. They've been there forever, haven't they? They've cycled through winters and summers, autumns and springs, regenerating each year undoubtedly. I don't know what this feeling is, when the world is supposedly destined for chaos, that some horrific tragedy has plagued us all, and all I notice are the leaves glued to their branches. The trees remain rooted in the earth, and the painted moldings on the windows, cracked with age, frame the view outside. Nothing has changed, as I stare out the second floor, pressing my elbows into the grain of the Harkness table.

Brontë would know exactly what to make of the scene outside. If we were Jane right now, the sky would be pouring out a rainstorm. It would be squealing its heart out, throwing a tantrum against fate. The trees would be bare and empty, frozen in the cold, not glowing with technicolored leaves in the late autumn sun. She would never paint the sky this unusually blue, this unusually clear, so beautifully radiant.

But we cannot deny that we are here; we have arrived at what seems like a rainstorm, a natural disaster. No matter how much it feels like everything is the same, that we are here with our composition notebooks, our beloved Jane, our backpacks, at the Harkness table, we cannot avoid reality. We must stop staring out the windows of our castle, observing the color of the leaves outside, and we must come to terms with the fact that the sky may not always look this brilliantly blue.