

2014

Editor's Note

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Recommended Citation

Stecopoulos, Harilaos. "Editor's Note." *The Iowa Review* 44.2 (2014): 1-2. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.7461>

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Editor's Note

As even a brief glance at this issue's table of contents will suggest, *The Iowa Review* emphasizes three distinct categories: poetry, fiction, and essays. Like many publishers and booksellers, we depend on genre to organize our literary work. But we relinquish certain insights in doing so. Our reliance on genre can make us less sensitive to intra-textual diversity and to how a particular work might cross or confound formal boundaries. Distinguishing genres often seems more important than recognizing the affinities linking disparate types of writing. That we tend to ignore how our other offerings—book reviews, dramas, even editors' notes—often draw from and comment on multiple genres highlights all the more the limits of our literary mapping.

In fact, we always break our self-imposed law of genre by diversifying, mixing, and “mashing” our three mainstays on a regular basis. And we are the richer for it. Consider the dizzying array of nonfiction in this issue. Tom Lutz provides us with a compelling example of travel writing: his account of a frustrating visit to rural Albania suggests the absurdity of a Gary Shteyngart narrative even as it recalls the lessons of the international theme. Michael Meyer stays closer to home—Berkeley—but takes a similar ethnographic perspective as he chronicles his relationship with Chris, a troubled middle-school student linked to a horrendous crime. Lia Purpura departs from these nonfiction forms in her inspired lyric meditation on crape myrtle. Who would have thought that this brilliantly colored flora could inspire musings on Martin Buber?

At other points in the issue, the firewall of genre gives way to thematic interactions, as evidenced by the implicit dialogue between Susan Stabile's essay “Bestiary” and Stephen Burt's poem “To the Naked Mole Rats at the National Zoo.” In “Bestiary,” Stabile reminds us that humans have a driving need to kill animals of other species. Tracing a line of death from the highway to the pet cage to her grandfather's butcher shop, she delivers discomfiting insights about how readily we exercise our lethal powers to affirm the superiority of *Homo sapiens*. Burt's “To the Naked Mole Rats” takes on a similar challenge in its focus on a creature seemingly far below our vaunted species. The mole rat may provide an easy target for mockery, but it reminds the speaker that we too are “skin tubes” who scurry around, struggling to find

heaven, hell, or “a colony on the moon.” Neither zoo nor butcher shop insulates us completely from knowledge of our animality.

Other themes establish new connections between pieces of different genres. The topic of female sexuality, incipient or mature, links Dora Malech’s poem “Working Order” and Lenore Myka’s story “Day of Lasts”; indeed, we might imagine Malech’s self-assured speaker as the inverse of Myka’s vulnerable protagonist. In a somewhat related vein, both Doug Ramspeck and Rusty Morrison explore how women confront the unsettling prospect of a shuttered future. The anonymous character in Ramspeck’s story “Omphalotus Olearius” shares with the speaker of Rusty Morrison’s poem “Everyone Is Noah” deep uncertainty over the lives they’ve made and the losses they’ve incurred in the process. As Morrison powerfully puts it, “The future won’t furnish the room she made herself become to house it.” For all their generic and formal differences, each of these pieces testifies to a fascination with the female subject *in extremis*.

The Iowa Review doesn’t leave all such connections to chance or editorial commentary. In our more ambitious moments we build inter-genre, or indeed even inter-media, affinities into the magazine itself. In this issue, for example, Charles Johnson’s story “The Weave”—a wise and richly global engagement with black women’s hair culture—takes on new meanings thanks to Michael DeRell Hill’s interview with the author. But “The Weave” also resonates in other, more visual ways, as the basis for a cartoon by Johnson himself. And this visual emphasis extends to poetry as well. Dora Malech’s “Working Order” comes paired with images from the Motionpoems film of her powerful lyric. We’ve also attempted to promote a greater sense of the relation between different forms by publishing Jayne Anne Phillips’s moving and beautifully written re-introduction to Delmore Schwartz’s classic “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities.” This pairing of a contemporary writer and a well-known story will recur once a year as we seek to promote a conversation of genres across literary history.

Of course, no matter how we invite certain connections or address them here, readers will find their own way through and beyond the genre organization informing this publication. And that’s part of the point of reading a literary magazine: imagining new configurations, tracing alternate routes, functioning as an inadvertent editor through the reading process itself. We hope you enjoy exploring this issue of *The Iowa Review*.