

“ ‘And so this being the time of manifestos, here is mine: that poetry, at its best, does not speak on behalf of the self. It speaks on behalf of the Other. It speaks on behalf of community. It speaks the self only in so far as the self is part of something larger,’ Kei Miller wrote in *The Poetry Review* in 2017. His declaration bears a resemblance to a number of ideas I grappled with as I prepared and edited *Resisting Canada: An Anthology of Poetry*, published in September 2019 by Véhicule Press of Montreal. The twenty-eight contributors address a plethora of ills resulting from the statecraft of a settler-colonial enterprise, i.e., Canada. Miller’s manifesto takes up poetry’s capacity to bear witness – perhaps to injustice, or to a measure of social agency. It underscores a distinction between the enduring legacy of the egotistical sublime of the English Romantics – ‘on behalf of self’ poems and confessional poetry, which narrate an individual, and poetry with a view to collective consciousness, a politics not necessarily exclusively of identity and identity’s fraught subjective realities, but telling ‘history from below,’ of a collective identity ready to present such a history.

Nyla Matuk, ‘The Resistance’, p.18

“ You could not escape history. Returning to Tehran when I was older, I remember the contemporary art museum. A giant newspaper boat. Walking under knives suspended from the ceiling. Messages were hidden. They could not escape. I could, I thought. I had. And what was wrong with escaping? T.S. Eliot said that only people who had a personality and emotions could know what it was to escape them, and good poems should do this. I felt this for a long time. It suited me. I felt the lure of escape. I could pass like a chameleon into different shapes and into dif-

PNR

251

ferent sitting rooms, different voices: Iranian, Indian, R.P. South West London, softening into estuary.

Mina Gorji, ‘escape’, p.56

“ Our current political culture sees itself as one which does not produce, and is in some practical and moral sense beyond, propaganda (e.g. the BBC’s much-vaunted ‘neutrality’). Perhaps it is this sense of historical exceptionalism which circumscribes the ‘pure play’ or fake-political nature of much mainstream poetry today, a poetry which is part of the meta-propaganda of post-political neutrality. And perhaps most crucially of all, advertising gains its hold through this illusion of value-neutrality. In this sense, advertising is the apotheosis and emblem of our political culture as it is of much of the most prominent contemporary poetry. Much poetry of the last few years, perhaps especially the absurdist kind (a very prevalent and garlanded current trend), is ‘partly deceived by’ itself by dint of being produced by this culture of meta-propaganda. The fact that contemporary propaganda is euphemised as ‘fake news’ is part of this cultural disavowal of political cynicism. It is a euphemism which is not acknowledged as such, one which has emerged from the very powers that produced the ‘fake news’ in the first place. This kind of bizarre disavowal is the very form of neoliberal culture. The reader is made to feel clever by these poems’ overt banality.

Alex Wylie, ‘Democratic Rags’, p.24

Poems • Essays • Reviews • Comment

Sasha Dugdale Intimacy 15 Nyla Matuk The Resistance 18 Eugene Ostashevsky The Feeling Sonnets 27 Alex Wylie Democratic Rags 24 Nina Bogin Rain Clouds 35 Vahni Capildeo Of Pine Trees and Silence 06 Beverley Bie Brahic Bright Wings 23 Jonathan Galassi Remembering Jim Atlas 07 Annie Fan softboi season 40 Sinéad Morrissey A Tourniquet for Emily Davison 34 Mina Gorji escape and other poems 56 Thomas Day on Michael Edwards 43 Sam Adams Letter from Wales 09 Duncan Wu Martial 41 William Poulos Footnotes in Songs and Poems 10 Barry Wood on Shoestring Press 11 John Clegg Sheila Wingfield: From Finnesburie to Enniskerry 12 R.F. Langley From the Journals 13 Jeffrey Gray Voice Lessons: a Notebook 28 Rachel Hadas Three Poems 30 Katherine Lockton The Year of Grey 60 Brian Morton Orient und Okzident 32 M. Wynn Thomas Two unpublished notebooks of R.S. Thomas 62 Sarah White Five Poems 58 Betsy Rosenberg Changes Made 54 Hugh Thomson From the Nahuatl 49 John Fuller Keeper of the Fire 47 Brigit Pegeen Kelly Two Poems 21 David Herman ‘the simple arithmetic of brutality’ 37 Grevel Lindop on Robert Graves 50 Heather Treseler Olympia 52 Nicola Healey Fastidious Fly 55 & others

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