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# NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

# **SINCE 1815**

Spring 2024 VOLUME 309, NUMBER 1

## ART

Cover	Mark Twain [pastels on paper] • Gary Kelley
16	Samuel Langhorne Clemens [pastels on paper] • Gary Kelley
31	Gala Contemplating the Mediterranean Sea Which at Twenty
	Meters Becomes the Portrait of Abraham Lincoln (Homage
	to Rothko) [oil on canvas] • Salvador Dalí
34	Galacidalacidesoxiribunucleicacid (Homage to Crick and
	Watson) [oil on canvas] • Salvador Dalí
36	Diosa de Maiz [mixed media collage] • Corinne Stanley
45	Connecticut Ash [relief print] • Erik Linton
48	Cut and Stacked Lumber [relief print] • Erik Linton
51	How to Take Care [mixed media collage] • Corinne Stanley
57	View Down Subway Car: Accordionist Performing in Aisle
	[photography] • Walker Evans
65	Endless City [ink on paper] • Grisha Kim
72	Tesla [acrylic on canvas] • JR Sibaja
83	Influence [acrylic on canvas] • JR Sibaja
90	Venus Fly Trap [acrylic on cardboard] • JR Sibaja
99	Universal Light? [mixed media collage] • Corinne Stanley
108	Warm [ink on paper] • Grisha Kim

# **FICTION**

3/	Mrs. Gordon's iced lea • 20e W. Briscoe
50	Return • Kim Samek
64	Purification • Yiru Zhang
73	What You See • Katie Cortese
91	Chasing Summer • Cyrus Smith-Gathers
96	Fifteen Square Stories • Louis Jensen, translated by Lise Kildegaard
98	We Heard You Had Something to Say to Us • Lauren Barbato

Mus Candania Isad Tas Zas W. Duissas

Mark Twain's Playground • Matt Seybold

# NONFICTION

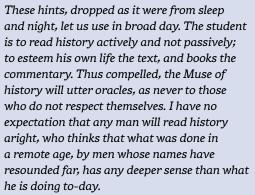
30	The First Weekend with My Estranged Mother We
	Contemplate Salvador Dalí • Sarah Orner
44	White Ash • Caroline Sutton
49	Three Papers • Sarah Gorham
56	Twenty Thousand Moments Under Lexington Avenue •
	Leah Mensch
83	Robert Burns and Race: American Influences, Friendships, and
	Admirations • Thomas Fox Averill
109	Homeland Fictions • Hannah Keziah Agustin

# POETRY

- Anticipatory Grief as Phases of Moons •
   *Tara Mesalik MacMahon* Let's End This Now *Jessica Barksdale Inclán*
- 6 Dear Audre: [We were on the bed] Molly Sutton Kiefer
- 7 Dear Audre: [Instead of buying dresses] Molly Sutton Kiefer
- Dear Addre. [mstead of buying dresses] Wolfy Button Rid
- 7 How We Do Silence D. Rhodes
- 8 Hotel Room in Sfakia C. Francis Fisher
- 8 100 Husbands Chelsea Kerwin
- 9 Single Helix Jan Freeman
- 10 Self-Portrait as Gender Neutral Bathroom Timothy Liu
- 10 Winter B. D. Olivier

### **POETRY CONTINUED**

- 11 Anthimeria Erin Murphy
- 11 Azul Erin Murphy
- 12 Prayer for Charles Simic Gregory Emilio
- 12 Gulls at Santa Monica Beach Xiaoqiu Qiu
- 13 Obit for Newsprint David Tucker
- 13 Drowning in the Sky, July 26, 1959 Zebulon Huset
- 14 Poppies and Swallows Justine Defever
- 14 You will never Raphael Dagold
- 15 Invisible Kurt Luchs
- 15 Divorce Flat: A Nocturne H. K. Hummel
- 25 Officer Mark Dial, Who Shot Eddie Irizarry, Will Be Fired for Insubordination • Martín Espada
- 26 Guadalupe's First-Year Law School Tumbao • *Martín Espada*
- 28 My Mother Sings an Encore Martín Espada
- 29 Love Song of Frankenstein's Insomniac Monster • Martín Espada
- 42 Mechthild Counts G. C. Waldrep
- 42 Feast of St. Benedict, Saratoga Springs G. C. Waldrep
- 42 Vacation Jason Tandon
- 43 Yelping Heck's Bar Cal Freeman
- 55 The Poet Traces His Ancestry *Michael Garrigan*
- 55 I Am Alive Haibun Michael Garrigan
- 71 The Child Who in June Owns this Island *Kelly Rowe*
- 71 A Minute of Light Added to Each Day Kelly Rowe
- 71 Emily Dickinson Could Not Read Rob Merritt
- 88 Invasive Species Rebecca Clarren
- 88 Beneath the Medicine Moon George Kalamaras
- 89 The Pacific Northwest Logging Industry (A Coda) *Aaron Baker*
- 89 Magic Trick Dakota Reed
- 107 Cobbler Daniel Halpern
- 107 [It's hard to trust what wants us dead] Nancy Naomi Carlson
- 117 Oversoul John Warner Smith



Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History" (1841)

Since late last year, the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict has escalated dramatically, to say the least. The October 7 attack by Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis. Thousands were injured and hundreds more taken hostage, leading to massive and ongoing retaliation by the Israeli military and regular exchange of rocket fire from both sides. As of this writing, the death toll in Gaza sits at an estimated twenty thousand. Millions of Palestinians have been uprooted. These are bleak facts. Heavy, heartbreaking facts. From the distant vantage of North America, many impassioned responses by perceived allies and enemies alike have drawn clear political lines, separating those who belong on the side of justice from those who deserve our scorn. Such entrenched enmity assumes the impossibility of sympathizing with the plight of one group without also harboring hatred toward the other. The steady stream of bad news is dispiriting, and the images of death and suffering are difficult to witness—and sometimes to understand. Grief reigns.

In her ethereal poem "Anticipatory Grief as Phases of Moons," selected by Diane Seuss as the winner of this year's James Hearst Poetry Prize, Tara Mesalik MacMahon describes the feeling of all-pervasive grief as an elusive thing that "I cannot un-picture," as "thoughts I cannot unthink," as something that "I forget to understand." Inescapable, ineffable, inexplicable. Grief has a way of folding time into itself so that you exist in a perpetual state of memory and anticipation, neither waxing nor waning but doing both at once. When fully unfurled, grief presents us with an emotional palimpsest.

The Holy Land of Israel and Palestine can itself be read as a grief-ridden palimpsest, retaining the social and political traces of the last seventy-five years since the First Arab-Israeli War, with all of its greater and lesser eruptions of violence and temporary reprieves. Everything that has transpired before threatens—or promises—to do so again, not as a cycle but as something that has never truly ceased. "The past is never dead," said

