From: Erika Dreifus
Date: Sunday, April 14, 2024 at 12:53 PM
To: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>
Subject: essay in latest Poets & Writers magazine[1]

Dear Kevin:

I hope that this message finds you well. As you may have noticed, I've long since ceased writing regarding other problematic content published and/or amplified by *Poets & Writers*.[2] (For example: Relying so heavily on Literary Hub for "news"[3] in connection with Gaza is something that I've been relieved to see *Publishers Weekly* stop doing; I hope that *Poets & Writers* might consider doing the same.) I'm not going to offer a detailed critique this time, either. Frankly, at this point, it's too much labor for me.

I'm going to address only one element of Philip Metres's new essay, because I am hoping, sincerely, that it's something you simply are not aware of. In this essay, Metres repeatedly invokes Jewish Voice for Peace. Unfortunately, JVP is considered an extremist, fringe organization by the vast majority of global Jewry. Self-identified Jewish writers affiliated with JVP (such as quoted in Metres's essay) are not exempt from charges of promulgating antisemitic rhetoric and incitement; citing JVP or similar sources is by no means a way to persuade most Jewish/Israeli readers that the author is concerned as much for their welfare as for that of others. (For clarifying background, refer, for example, to https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/jewish-voice-peace-jvp-what-you-need-know and https://aish.com/uncovering-the-real-voice-of-jewish-voice-for-peace/.)

Admittedly, I no longer subscribe to *Poets & Writers*, and I no longer read its online content with the same frequency and attention that I used to. If there's been coverage of what I and other Jewish and/or Israeli writers (beyond the fraction who ground their Jewish identities in anti-Zionism) have been experiencing since October 7 and the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust, perhaps I have missed it. (On this page of my website, on the other hand, you'll find a few relevant resources that do attend to this subject: https://www.erikadreifus.com/resources/jewish-writing/.)

I'd be pleased to point you to other writers who might be open to contributing work on this subject. You might consider, for example, a piece on new literary outlets that have emerged in

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[1] The essay by Philip Metres, "In This Time of War, the Muses Refuse Silence," appeared in the May/June 2024 print magazine and was posted online in April. For background about *Poets & Writers*, including circulation metrics, see this more recent information.

[2] My own freelance contributions for *Poets & Writers*/the PW.org website first appeared in the magazine's March-April 2005 issue (Kevin Larimer was not then editor-in-chief, but he was already on staff). Over time, I ceased pitching article/essay ideas. In 2016, I wrote a lengthy letter to the magazine that I published in full on my own website (they published an edited version) that is relevant to the current discussion.

[3] The homepage at PW.org features a "Daily News" ticker. In the feature's archive, "Daily News" is described as follows: "Every day the editors of *Poets & Writers Magazine* scan the headlines—publishing reports, literary dispatches, academic announcements, and more—for all the news that creative writers need to know." In this communication, I am referencing the magazine's reliance on the virulently anti-Israelist Literary Hub website as a major source contributing to its own skewed coverage, and its generally narrow range of perspectives.

the wake of October 7 that actually do provide space for Jewish/Israeli voices like ours (examples, as I mentioned this week on this podcast, include this one, where I'll soon have a piece published, and this one, which helped me write it). Or you might consider covering Julie Zuckerman's remarkable monthly reading series, which brings together Jewish writers from around the world; since October 7, the series has included several "literary solidarity" events, with the next one scheduled to begin in about 10 minutes. I anticipate that a recording will be available shortly thereafter at the series page: https://www.juliezuckerman.com/literarymodiin.[4]

I realize that much of what I'm writing here may be new to you. That only points to how distorted and skewed the discourse has become throughout the literary sphere, and how marginalized/silenced the vast majority of Jewish/Israeli writers have become. *Poets & Writers* could do much to remedy this, and I hope that that will indeed happen. (I'll add that I was relieved to hear, via a friend who was present, that the recent Poets & Writers gala was unmarred by toxic anti-Israelism. I'll admit that I wasn't confident that that would be the case, and I am grateful.)

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider.

Sincerely,
Erika

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From: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>
Date: Tue, Apr 16, 2024 at 3:22 PM
Subject: Re: essay in latest Poets & Writers magazine
To: Erika Dreifus

Dear Erika,

Thank you for sharing your perspective with me, for giving me more context on Jewish Voice for Peace, and especially for offering ideas for future coverage, including the CJN podcast and Julie Zuckerman's reading series and its literary solidarity events. I intend to listen, to watch, to read further, and as we plan future coverage I will gladly reach out to you for suggestions for contributors. Thank you. I appreciate your taking the time to write to me despite – and in light of – your criticism of the magazine.

Warm regards,
Kevin
--
Kevin Larimer
Editor in Chief
Pronouns: he/him
Poets & Writers, Inc.
90 Broad Street, Suite 2100
New York, NY 10004

[4] Highlighting throughout is mine.

212-226-3586 x208
Visit pw.org

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Erika Dreifus Tue, Jun 11, 2024 at 2:29 PM
To: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>

Dear Kevin:

Here's an item that I would hope to see amplified as the anti-Israelist pronouncements of less prominent writers have been: Nobel literature laureate Herta Müller's "I Cannot Imagine the World Without Israel," delivered May 25. But I don't yet see it mentioned within "Daily News" or anywhere else on PW.org. Have I missed it?

I learned about it only when a colleague posted about it yesterday (he was present when she spoke).

https://judiskkultur.se/events/herta-muller?locale=sv
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDUyBs-1Alo

I've been particularly struck by these lines:

"In the novel 'Doctor Faustus' by Thomas Mann it is said that National Socialism 'made everything German in the world intolerable.' I have the impression that the strategy of Hamas and its supporters is to make everything Israeli, and therefore everything Jewish, intolerable to the world."

Thank you for your continued consideration.

Sincerely,
Erika

P.S. Since I'm writing today, I'll take this opportunity to share my own latest essay, commissioned by *Hadassah* magazine and published yesterday: https://www.hadassahmagazine.org/2024/06/07/a-tale-of-lists-and-blacklists/.

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From: Erika Dreifus
Date: Monday, August 5, 2024 at 11:07 AM
To: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>
Subject: anthology news

Dear Kevin:

I'm not a part of this project. But I will be reading this anthology.[5] (And, separately, I do happen to be a newly-appointed board member of The Artists Against Antisemitism, mentioned within.)

I continue to accrue information about new Jewish-literary projects emerging in the aftermath of October 7, 2023, and remain available to help point you toward coverage possibilities that reflect the majority of Jewish (writers') views, per our springtime correspondence.

Sincerely,
Erika

[DELETED FOR BREVITY: FORWARDED TEXT OF ZIBBY OWENS'S AUGUST 5, 2024, SUBSTACK POST ANNOUNCING THE ANTHOLOGY *ON BEING JEWISH NOW*.]

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On Tue, Aug 6, 2024 at 9:06 AM Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org> wrote:

Thanks very much, Erika. I saw this in an e-mail from Zibby yesterday too. I'm just out for a bit of a rest but will be back at the office later in August. I appreciate your reaching out.

Best,
Kevin

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Erika Dreifus Wed, Aug 28, 2024 at 8:29 AM
To: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>

Dear Kevin,

Sending this along for possible aggregation.

https://www.timesofisrael.com/poetry-festival-moves-from-evacuated-northern-border-town-metula-to-jerusalem/

Thanks for considering.

Best,
Erika

[5] Beyond the general newsworthiness of the book's announcement, it seemed to me that this volume could be appropriately covered within "The Anthologist," the magazine's anthology-focused feature.

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Erika Dreifus Wed, Oct 2, 2024 at 11:03 AM
To: Kevin Larimer <klarimer@pw.org>

Dear Kevin:

I hope that everything's okay--I was a little concerned when you told me that you were out of the office for a rest. I very much hope that you're back there and that everything's in full swing.

I don't know where matters stand with any anticipated coverage along the lines that we recently discussed. I remain very much open to discussing that with you (even as I realize that I may not be the best person for such assignments myself). In the meantime, I wanted to ensure that you're aware of some very recent news, for background and/or any Daily News curation that you might find appropriate.

- Significant updates from the Jewish Book Council (JBC), as reported today: https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/to-fight-general-culture-of-fear-jewish-book-council-launches-efforts-supporting-authors-books/
- The JBC legal-rights workshop referenced in the above piece is also among the items in my own latest "Jewish Literary Links," which (if I say so myself!) is often a good source for Jewish-lit news: https://www.erikadreifus.com/2024/10/jewish-literary-links-235/.
- For that matter, the JBC also makes an appearance as an "affiliate" of Yetzirah Poets in Yetzirah's announcement of the launch of a Jewish Writers Caucus at the upcoming AWP conference: bit.ly/4eiE39n.

Again, wishing you all the best,
Erika

P.S. Please excuse any slight delay in a response--I expect to be off email tonight and tomorrow for Rosh Hashanah.

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From: Erika Dreifus
Date: Mon, Oct 14, 2024 at 9:39 AM
Subject: November-December issue (Was: Re: Jewish-lit updates)
To: Kevin Larimer klarimer@pw.org

Dear Kevin:

I remain hopeful that you're back in the office and doing well. Since I sent my last message, I've noticed that contents from the November-December issue have been posted online, and those contents include an editor's note with your signature. So I can infer that, at least, you are certainly still very much the editor-in-chief, whether you're in the office or not.

At this point, I'm not at all confident that it's worth my time to comment at length on either the cover feature for November/December[6] or on the ongoing "longest poem" project[7] that the magazine has created to complement it.

Nor, unfortunately, can I have any faith that—six months after I suggested that attention might be paid to the experiences of Jewish and/or Israeli writers who, while being far from monolithic, depart from the anti-Zionist minority whose voices *Poets & Writers* has privileged to date—the magazine has even a fraction of the interest in (never mind compassion for) us that it exhibits, time and again, for every other group of writers among its readership.

I've often joked that the best parental support I've received for my writing came at the very beginning of my life, when I was born under the sign of Taurus. As you've probably noticed, I am tenacious. But even I can reach a point when I stop trying to effect change

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[6] In this space, however, I will share some limited observations about these materials, which I discovered between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 5785/2024, about two days after observing the one-year mark of the October 7 attacks. Written by Contributing Editor Destiny O. Birdsong and titled "The Definition of Poetry: An Interview With Mosab Abu Toha," the cover feature makes for poignant, painful reading.

The format also permits the Palestinian interviewee to reiterate charges of Israeli "occupation" of Gaza and "genocide" of Gazan civilians while minimizing the role Hamas plays in its own people's suffering: Birdsong once references "the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel"; Abu Toha observes that those Gazans under the age of 18 "did not vote for Hamas or any other faction." Moreover, the experiences of Israeli civilians (including children)—whether as hostages in Gaza or living (or dying) under rocket and missile attack in Israel—are unacknowledged.

Similarly, the interview format facilitates these assertions from Abu Toha: "The experience of the Palestinian people is just like the experiences of Black people, of Native American people. They are treated as outsiders, even on their own land. When I read works by Indigenous people and oppressed people, I relate to their work and I feel like I'm continuing their work. My work is part of their work, and their work is part of my work. We are chanting against the same set of oppressive regimes." I would object to leaving these claims go unchallenged at any time; for them to land with readers just as coverage of Ta-Nehisi Coates's latest book is amplifying similar charges throughout the media makes them particularly problematic.

It is perhaps also worth noting that this cover feature coincides with the publication of Abu Toha's own latest book, which I have not read. On the other hand, I **have** read his debut collection, which, as Birdsong correctly notes, received much acclaim. Find my published thoughts on Goodreads, which include, in part: "[As this book conveys the poet's suffering, and his people's, it operates under a binary division between 'Us and Them' (in fact, the title of one of the poems). But it never once acknowledges any depth of suffering on the 'other side' (if anything, it scorns that pain in the aforementioned poem). And its other omissions and selections suggest a desire to pin all of Palestinians' wounds on a single cause: the Jewish state. Whether the poet's choices stem from lack of awareness or lack of concern, the effect on this reader is sadly the same. It leaves me bleak and despairing for the future….Until both 'us and them' can acknowledge each others' suffering—and their own errors and transgressions—it's hard to hope for a better future for all." By no means do I expect anyone to have read these words. But after all of the previous correspondence, I had hoped that Kevin Larimer might have begun to edit/curate at a higher, better-informed, and more responsible level.

[7] The interview portrays Abu Toha as wearing "the mantle of both poet and historian, chronicling the violence he has inherited, witnessed, and survived." And to advance Abu Toha's call within the interview for "anyone who calls themselves a true poet" to "take a stand," the magazine has created a forum inviting everyone to do so. Titled "The Longest Poem," the ongoing online project invites readers to contribute lines to a poem-in-progress. As the magazine explains, "The Longest Poem" begins "with two lines written by Mosab Abu Toha specifically for this project, which he will curate and sequence." Those lines: "*In bombed Gaza, the air was so scarce/that I could feel it laboring up my nose.*"

within a certain environment, even/especially through words. As you may or may not have seen, I reached that point recently with AWP. I may now have reached it with *Poets & Writers* as well.

Sincerely,
Erika

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As of October 28, 2024, I have not received any further reply from Kevin Larimer.