

ad•ja•cent

**AUIS LITERARY JOURNAL
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Masthead:

Chief Editor

Yalda Al-Ani

Editors

Ream Dhaher Haydar

Rez Latif Fatih

Dilan Hussein

Karbin Darwesh (visual art editor)

Andrew Dorie

Chris Edwards

Jamalieh Haley

Finance Developer

Chris Edwards

Designers

Pshtewan Kamal

Jamalieh Haley

Proofreaders

Chris Edwards

Carmen Ibrahim

Faculty Advisor

Jamalieh Haley

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Sulaimani - Kirkuk Rd, Sulaimania, Iraq 46001

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Special thanks to:

AUIS English Department

Dr. Ali Chetwynd, Chair

Dr. Akeel Abbas

Dr. Choman Hardi

Dr. Donald Cruickshank

Dr. Marie LaBrosse

Dr. Isaac Cowell

Ms. Jamalieh Haley

Kashkul

Pshtewan Kamal

Marie LaBrosse

Communications Department

Delawit Mesfin

Awder Omer

Cover Art

Fahad I. Khalel

Faculty Advisor

Jamalieh Haley

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Foreword

Our collective mission, when we gathered in the spring of 2018 to explore the idea of establishing a literary journal, was to encourage and expose diverse literary and artistic voices related to the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani community by publishing their original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, artwork, and photography in an annual print journal.

We took a few journal meetings to articulate that mission: immediately, our ideas and intentions with the journal reflected the diversity of our interests in literature, our fields of study, our priorities, and our backgrounds. We kept coming upon one common goal: **our vision is to locate Iraqi writers and their themes among a wider aesthetic of international writers.**

Since this is a learning institution, and since this is our first endeavor to print a literary journal, our student editors, with help from two faculty and a high school teacher from the Suli community, took a year to collaborate, research, and test how to publish literature from start to finish. They set up the infrastructure, wrote the materials, marketed the submission period, curated the literature, set up a funding plan, and communicated with contributors. They collaborated with a designer from Kashkul to format and layout the journal, and arranged with the printers for our hard copy. I am tremendously proud of them.

During the editing process we discovered three themes to be most prevalent: **culture, self, and nature**. We felt the complexities of each theme posed adjacent questions, such as *How do we negotiate our true selves within a traditional culture?* and *Can we maintain an ethnic identity embedded in nature when that environment is ravaged by war?* Here, we established the theme **adjacent**, a derivative of “I lie beside”, or “next to”.

In the end, we have our AUIS Literary Journal, Volume 1: ad•ja•cent. The journal is organized into three sections, Culture Adjacent, Self Adjacent, and Nature Adjacent.

In the Culture Adjacent section, Zheera A. Bazzaz’s poem, “Red Color”, fragments meaning through a series of shape-shifting subordinate clauses that explore and linger in dependency. The poem’s form reflects its brief narrative with these shape-shifting subordinate clauses in which “the world of women” meditate on their collective fear of being left behind to linger in dependency—after their hero sheds her bloody clothes and “her pleasures” and flies away—with her wings.

In the Self Adjacent section, Carmen Ibrahim's short-story "The Girls in Pigtails" features dynamic prepositional phrases that locate its self-conscious protagonist in a world to which she finds herself hopelessly adjacent; she can't touch that world, she can't move far enough away from it, she'll probably leave it, and she probably makes it just a little more significant.

In the Nature Adjacent section, Jude Marr's "What Passes Overhead" fills the sky (?) with the signifieds of half-rhyming noun-phrases that create depth and movement, but reflect momentary stasis, and yet transcend stasis like "jets" and scream like "descant[s]": all through parataxis—according to its speaker, who waits underfoot.

We welcome you to read through the journal at whatever pace and sequence suites you, and we hope you find delight and interest in new and significant ideas. Our chief editor was relentless in motivation, and fueled this project to the end. Our editors showed tremendous commitment to the discussion of literature and how it fits into their student-lives. Thank you for holding this journal in your hands and fulfilling our end goal.

Zheera A. Bazzaz

Red Color

Sometimes,
The whole world of women
Is looking at her bones
On her back,
Fear they will turn into wings,
And leave the wingless on the ground,
Powerless in their rooms,
Gazing at the white cloth with the blood on,
Thinking about her pleasure every night,
Or about a smoke and a cold beer,
Putting on their lipsticks,
Hiding the blue and dark bruises,
As they turn the fire into ashes,
So does the red color on their lips.

The All Seeing Hill

Look up to the hill we're going up to,
See the smoke of the city,
And how gods are burning every day,
You see them, till the night comes,
And darkness shades the smoke,
Let's crash into each other's words,
And sing toxicity of the city,
Let's run even higher, until going further will mean coming down,
Every rock we throw up here,
They make a wish to it down there,
Shouting is forbidden down there, and useless up here,
We're tired and broke,
But no one's around, if we die now, we never existed,
The stars will bury us every night, and the
Sun will burn us to the ground every day.

Childhood Empire

Put your gun down and shoot your scream through my chest,
I know the feeling, I know the agony, I know the horror,
I've been there many times,
We both wear nothing but black,
We take the world in and give nothing back,
We ain't numb, just too weak to react,
Is your chest feeling better? Cause mine is warming up,
You didn't win this? You didn't get that?
Well, they didn't win you, they wouldn't get you either,
You stayed and came this far, you are a survivor,
I'm not telling not to go,
I'm just saying that childhood empire of yours will grow,
It just needs few more tears to fill its river,
And here you go, thick and immune to the world.

Play With Bombs

Now, we're playing football in the street,
Bombs are coming down,
But we got used to it,
A car is going through the road,
We have to stop the game for a minute,
There's that kid on the corner,
Who no one chose for their team,
The car disappeared, we resumed the game,
And forgot about him again.

Roza Aziz

The Foggy Windows

Beyond the foggy windows, there exist many motions;
Blond soldier that has just returned from a mission.
Mother who has recently lost her newborn baby.
Others are preparing for the wedding party.

Beyond the foggy windows, there exist many things;
Pond of blood of a dead chicken for the feast.
A broken chair that is the fight's effect.
The TV makes family's unity protect.

The foggy windows are blinding us, thankfully
Since we have enough difficulties, unhappily.
Don't clear the windows for many years,
Throats otherwise will be full of tears.

What If

What if the mountains wouldn't grow more red flowers?
Out of the blood of dead fighters.
What if our mother's clothes wouldn't be black anymore?
Out of the bad news that they hear every day.
What if our father's hand wouldn't get wrinkles?
Out of all the tiredness that life brings upon them.
What if this country's children had brighter dreams?
Rather than being politician or rich.
What if they followed books not boots?
Of the soldiers to give them a news of their fathers.
What if our religions were well used to bring peace?
Instead of bringing conflicts, violence, and hatred.
What if there were more beautiful images in my mind?
So that I would create a cheerful poem out of them.

Zimkitha Mpatheni

What if Our Skins Were Paper?

What if our skins were paper?
Would it be a marvelous canvas?
Priceless to the eye, a wonder that we once lived?
Would it be that the ink would finally sink in?
Leaking all over our blood and veins
So that no story and no trial is left in vain?
Each thread of veins carrying more than our blood
Carrying us.
Would we become books to each other?
But books without words,
Just alphabetical scars carrying or narratives
Protecting it just like it has never left our bones bare?
Would our lovers beg to be pens?
So that they can not only write our romance, but to be it
No matter how sharp the tips are,
Would we welcome the scars the way we welcomed love in?
As long as they have written down that we once loved?
Would our wrinkles be something we accept?
Something we can laugh at, be proud of ?
Something that adds in this life that withering away without our permission?
Would our colors, our unmatchable pigmentation be a symbol?
A symbol that somehow God is more creative than what we think?

A Soldier's Photograph

The war was over.
The books was finished.
And he had a photograph to keep a memory of it all.
It was the last one he took with all of his friends
The friends he didn't meet for coffee or tea
The friends he didn't know whether they wanted to marry or not
The friends he didn't know at all while looking at them in this picturized memory
They didn't even know he had a book.
The more he looked at them, the more their faces faded.
The more he really saw the memory of what he hoped he had left behind.
He saw the faces of young children running with no direction.
All they wanted to run away from was the fear from the sound of the bombs
He saw women carrying all of who they are on their heads and backs
Perhaps, hoping their feet would find a new beginning that didn't include chemicals
There were no trees in his photograph.
There was no grass, no shrub, or even a river.
Even life itself had given up on them.
And his friends, his dear friends, weren't there to make him feel okay about it all.

My Mother Tongue

They say a child acquires a language by spending two years listening to its sounds.
I never followed up to the next stage.
I beg my tongue to click, to pull, to gag.
I beg my throat to open its gates to my ancestors
They are in each sound, in each conversation that I am dying to be part of.
But my mother tongue hasn't forgiven me since the day I thought English was better.