

# O:JA&L

OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters



2021 Pamphlet Series  
Poetry: All forms & styles

Writer's Portfolio  
**MIKE PUICAN**

## DEMOCRACY HAS LIFTED ITS VOICE



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**About the writer:** Mike Puican’s debut book of poetry, *Central Air*, was released by Northwestern Press last August. He’s had poems in *OPEN: JA&L*, *Poetry*, and *New England Review* among others. He was a member of the Chicago Slam Team and has been a long-time board member for the Guild Literary Complex. He has taught poetry to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals at the Federal Metropolitan Correctional Center and St. Leonard’s House in Chicago.

Cover Image: *Die Wölfe* by Franz Marc (1880-1916). Oil on canvas. 27.8 x 55 inches. 1913. **Public domain.**

## DEMOCRACY HAS LIFTED ITS VOICE

*Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep  
voting on what to have for dinner. --James Bovard*

Democracy has lifted its voice and boarded its windows.  
Democracy has entered the room. "All rise."  
Democracy is a bag of M&Ms without the blue ones.  
Democracy stands outside your window singing sweet songs of love.  
Democracy has chops.  
It dances at bars, has too many Manhattans, tells you it loves you,  
    tails you through department stores,  
    through the iron gates of its asylums.  
Democracy, your assembly halls are filled with tears.  
Chamber of dicks.  
Holy are the poor but let's table that for another meeting.  
Democracy needs to defend itself against other democracies—  
    Mexican democracies, Philippine democracies,  
    Beninian and Botswanaian democracies, not to mention  
    those pesky local democracies with stockpiles  
    of semi-automatic weapons and home-made baked goods.  
Democracy stands outside your door blowing the leaves off your lawn.  
So tell me . . . how do we settle this argument?

## MORNING COMMUTE

and manipulations  
Dawn begins the early meanderings of bank managers and ad copy writers who work for the milk  
“Because You’re Worth It”  
council and cosmetic companies and commute among hundreds of thousands of others. Waiting for  
who don’t like each other  
evidence everywhere  
“You’re going to Amsterdam”  
the train, surrounded by billboards, you invent ways to fight the deadness, as the day screams  
jumping onto the tracks for the  
feeling of jumping onto the tracks  
something indecipherable on its silver rail.

## AS THOUGH THE NARRATIVE WENT OUT FOR A SMOKE

As though the narrative went out for a smoke and never returned, and now

the cruel waitress  
the afternoon sun warming the shoulders of a runaway daughter  
the teenagers in loud cars who will not live much longer  
the baby on a ledge  
the hand gun in the freezer under a pork roast  
the upright piano approaching on the ice  
the key that fell into the cuff of her rolled-up jeans  
the ex-husband with amnesia  
the circus performers who cram into a local bar  
the strangely attentive fireworks salesman  
the morning snowfall covering something that wasn't there yesterday  
the man who appears from nowhere and says he can help fix your flat

are abandoned and we have to complete the story ourselves.

## CONVERSATION WITH A SKUNK

“Aren’t you  
the one,”  
said the man,  
“who’s  
been  
eating  
up  
my lawn?”

“The grubs  
in your  
fortress are  
especially  
flavorful,”  
the  
skunk  
replied.

The two realized  
they were  
speaking  
in tongues,  
as if  
touched  
by the  
Holy Spirit.

Said the  
skunk,  
“I have  
succumbed  
to an  
imagination  
I am unable  
to express.”

“We are both  
moved  
by a spirit  
of uselessness,”  
said the man,  
“and it  
delights us.”

## POET'S MIDTERM

Complete each statement with the correct answer.

1. The poet must
  - a. Embrace\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Expose\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Murder\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Make the anvil\_\_\_\_\_
  - i. the private parts
  - ii. the suck
  - iii. dance
  - iv. mystery
  
2. The poet's hand is tethered to \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. poetic tradition
  - b. honeybees
  - c. Instagram
  
3. The poet's eyes fly into \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. a window
  - b. a Snickers bar
  - c. the unexplained world
  
4. The poet's imagination \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. needs a "B" to graduate
  - b. cannot be bothered by earthly concerns
  - c.
  
5. Warning to all poets  
Be careful! Those \_\_\_\_\_ will pull your \_\_\_\_\_ through your \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. pliers
  - b. promises
  - c. little darlings
  - a. heart
  - b. words
  - c. forbidden thoughts
  - a. ear
  - b. iPhone
  - c. home security

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