

"... powerful, frank,
and moving ...
a haunting music."

Scott Edward
Anderson

We Prefer the Damned Carlo Matos

... help but gasp at the price tag on new love

... cross finely drawn together and yet [somehow]

... ge to arrive a little shocked and surprised to be there

... remember who we forgot to be

... reduce a double negative.

UNBOUND EDITION PRESS

Praise for *We Prefer the Damned*

With lines like “When you don’t belong anywhere, you make a location of yourself / only to realize it’s not a place you want to be from,” Matos’s poems wrench and wring through what and who we desire. In a relentless searching of self, *We Prefer the Damned* mines both the harsh and the tender. This collection is both the digging and the earth.

Michael Torres

Author of *An Incomplete List of Names*

In *We Prefer the Damned*, Carlo Matos explores his bi+(-furcated) world: straddled between two worlds, two choices, two sexes, between denial and desire, between enlightenment and solace. Matos shares what it is like to be “between the old world and the new halfway between places we don’t belong to.” This is a powerful, frank, and moving collection of poems where, as Matos writes, “even a major chord can sound like dissonance” and, yet, can still make for a haunting music.

Scott Edward Anderson

Author of *Azorean Suite / Suite Açoriana*

We Prefer the Damned are poems for rejoicing. Here, bodies welcome the damnation of othering, can “meet without coming into conflict,” while still grappling with the “meat” of queering implicit in pop culture posturing, working class immigrant family legacies, intellectuality, biculturalism / bisexuality and “the erroneous idea that binary means two.” Matos deftly dissects the “wilderness” of lost boys and “malditos” becoming men who, despite their parrying, yield to “tenderness / like my hand in the back pocket of my new lover.” These are unsparing love poems with a fierce fighter’s joy at their core.

Paula Neves

Author of *capricornucopia (the dream of the goats)*

We Prefer the Damned Carlo Matos



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Who's the Boss?

for Christopher Larkosh

You could keep house for me anytime, Mr. Micelli.

[In the opening credits] I was never sure if I was the vacuum or the drapes

[*a brand new life around the bend*].

My 7th-grade locker was clipped to the edges

with pictures of the quick-fisted Alyssa Milano [your fictional daughter]

who looked so much like the girls in my school.

If I could pretend she was Azorean then I could pretend you were too

[that beautiful Italian-American mug of yours swarthy like the men
in my family].

And when I see you in your workman's gloves [working the speedbag]

I imagine us trading blows my nails painted blue nude

under my wraps

like something out of Picasso or Matisse.

We know about fighting but we can know about art too, right Tony?

They never tell us that.

They conveniently leave that part out or they mock our propensity

for enthusiasm.

Always a joke at our expense.

I'd rather you were nude blue in the moonlight [Oh-eh, eh oh]

stepping slowly out of Angela's fussy bathtub in a series of sexy fast cuts

like an odalisque a marble statue a boxer's broken nose

leaving the ring.

Ledger

My ledger includes more girls than boys
but when it comes to cleaving, I can't seem to tell the difference.
Unsure of which star to follow, I end up far from land
worrying the hard work associated with sacrifice
 where it breaks how it must be contained when it works
 what holds us hostage who is guilt [and who, blame].

It leaves our triad wondering why her father targeted her for lack of industry
 or his, for lack of anger or mine, for not being his lost nor his found.
She is rugged and champions those who take blows from all sides.
He's a self-defined do-gooder, always coming up against the limits of his
 own vanity.

As for me, I am quite difficult to pin down, except while wrestling.
We meet without coming into conflict
focusing not on what is gained and what is gone
but on how it takes three to tangle
pretending to be unable to tell where one ends and others begin.
At its most basic level, it's like the easy balm of a Phil Collins song
or a blow job
or a blow job to a Phil Collins song.

And not all of the tracks are expressly tragic.
It's not all mucking about and rolling your eyes
at the intractable and insatiable obsession with our exes.
The hardest part is the failure of the appeal to shared experience
 the inability to move beyond the obvious.

Don't say the word [daft] don't say it.

On the one hand, there's the sheer reasonableness of the question
about who remembers the other less or who remembers more strangely
or, maybe, who renders wonderful the most complex.

On the other hand, the answer is the very least part of damage.

To say so might be disingenuous

or maybe it's the purest kind of conclusion.

Cat and Mouth

If he senses I'm about to wilt, he might press the action.

He may even make me pay for it:

a moment ready-made and bound by obscurities

sex as a series of equivalencies not specialties

not just the simple execution of a clever conceit

but a threat at every turn a bursting from the inside out

 a method for assigning words alternate meanings [for one night, at least].

And then a game of cat and mouth

where he somehow manages to fool around with himself

and his febrile alter-ego.

He might even use the phrase "cultural signifiers"

in order to test if he's in charge or I am:

 the rib of bone the blood the bend in the lower back

 the tendency to give the game away.

We are lured by the lack of detail in that annoying way of seduction, darling,

our access limited to the fascinating and grimly decorated bedroom

 a tomb of gargoyles and gewgaws and grotesques

from a previous marriage to a woman.

The effect is not immutable not inanimate never quite adds up

 to excitement.

Or, it never quite adds up to excitement for him

the brown-eyed man in the autumn of my rooms

afraid of how the reliable works us over

how it denies and ignores how easily one can become rapt.

The Beautiful Ones

We were young, in the time of life scored to popular music
 marked unrelenting marked restless marked wicked
like Prince's purple smile and too-tight pants.
My beautiful Azorean-American prince neglected the spaces in the words
 [between words]
missed the instinct to long where something is withheld.
Do you want him or do you want me?
Because I want you
want his assembly and what he gathered about himself
the forked approach to the lintel of his mother's house
the smattering of old Iberian surnames the nautical telescope
 some fado songs.
We wore purple in those days [were not stylish]
 were thankful our girls didn't fall so easy for Anglo guys.
But what about the boys?
The movies are quiet on the boys as are all the books written in English
so we have no idea where to look nor no one to ask.
Those other boys brave our neighborhoods [those malditos who belong
 better than we do]
thinking they own the place [something nagging in their looks]
the word "poor" at the ready like a pubic hair in the backs of their mouths.
Sadly, our displays fall far short of their mark the mills
 the tenements
 the disappointments the entire pall of appearances
leading to the simple and obvious conclusion that
our food is not for eating
our clothes are not for wearing
and our rooms are not for living.

Get Into the Groove

Everyone expects melodrama [one of my grandmother's *novelas*]
a girlfriend needing to be placated and a wronged "best friend" waiting
to be mollified

someone angry at being paid less attention to
[though they were equal draws].

Don't say the word [poly] don't say it.

But the chords of our triad end up being relatively simple to finger.

What is not easy is the declension from trio to duo from 3/4 time to
2/2 time
from mazurka to polka.

We hate dancing couples

he a bulge of timbre she a desire of range

I a tease of dynamics.

Even as children we danced a clever three-way
with the holy ghost in church basements
got into the groove in the key of B.

B for *Boy you've got to prove / Your love to me* B for *Boy what will it
be?*

B for *Touch my Body, and move in time*

because in a world playing unisons, even a major chord can sound
like dissonance.

Most people like their dramaturgy simple

and I am willing to admit that maintaining the unities of place, action,
and time

demands a steady hand and a clearer eye

and sometimes requires making more than minor cuts.