

RUSSELL SCOTT VALENTINO

EDITOR'S NOTE

You may need this recliner. As a point of reference at least. You see, the house is empty, the kids have moved to town, and this house with all its many things from a different time, it can wait. It must. Out in the Iowa quiet. Someone will be out to sort by and by.

It seems that (for contrast maybe) we're celebrating contest winners in this issue, though content-wise we've got a mood going here we're loath to counter. Maybe it's the anticipation of winter. Not that we wallow—we never wallow—but we might like to linger once in a while in our seasonal melancholy. It's the kind of reflection that only follows fall, with tiny flickers of vicarious escape—to an island off the California coast, or the high seas, to India, or Thailand, to Palm Springs, to the next town, any town, any other town than this—but tending inward, evaluating what-who we are or have been to now. Tomorrow who knows. The snow may be melted by then.

We've chosen to intersperse our contest winners and runners-up with non-contest work in this issue. The magazine's more whole that way, though we've included a handy page with all the names of the winners and their work just after the table of contents. A profound thanks to our judges: Michael Cunningham for fiction, Brenda Hillman for poetry, and Jo Ann Beard for nonfiction.

Here too we announce the winner of this year's McGinnis award, upon which David Hamilton, in his "At the Fair," from December 2009, reflected in these terms:

Tim McGinnis grew up in north central Illinois, flatter land than Iowa, to become a writer in New York from where he sent us a three-page story, "The Trail," about a distracted Kafka on a hike at Boy Scout Camp, and as it had in fact been a while since we'd run anything on Kafka's scouting days, as his two and a half line cover letter reminded us, we placed it first in an issue over twenty years ago to learn, a couple of years later, that McGinnis, not yet forty, had died of a brain tumor; the news came when his family approached us to sponsor an award in his name, for he had been especially pleased by our acceptance of his work, over the transom

1

as the saying goes, what we have been here for most when we are at our best; and so the prize has continued, with interruptions, and some shading of emphasis, since holding out for comic sketches, which had been our intent, threatened to make it a very occasional prize as almost all such writing wilts under a second glance.

Emphasis shaded, the prize-winning piece is now the one from all those we have published in the past year that we judge most fits the spirit of Tim McGinnis's work, something unusual, quirky, perhaps humorous, likely surprising, oddly perspective. The unanimous choice of our staff from this year's TIR pages was Saint James Harris Wood's "Rabble Letters," published in our Fall 2010 issue, which surprised and entertained us with their quirky profundity or profound quirkiness, their Kafka-at-summer-campiness, their "sense of endless dislocation, endured by meandering between pathos, humor, poignancy, and randomness" (Hugh Ferrer). Those not selected should not lament over much: it's hard to compete with an inmate for oddly perspective.