

“Since We Have Been a Conversation . . .”

That’s Hölderlin’s phrase, of course—a swift gesture toward our paradoxical condition. We don’t merely *have* conversations. As Conrad Aiken once put it: “our lives are speech / you with a word and I with answering word / here we are walking in a world of omens . . .” And writing, as it seems to me, is not worth much unless it somehow invites us to become more fully the conversation which in principle we are. How? By waking us up. By enabling our voices to engage in mutual clarification. By alerting us to the astringent beauty of the opposition which Blake called true friendship.

For the past five years Merle Brown’s skillful editing of *The Iowa Review* has made very clear a commitment to such a conversational aim. *The Iowa Review* has printed a remarkable series of critical essays accompanied by new poetry or fiction from the writer criticized. (I think, for example, of Ralph Mills on Galway Kinnell—with a poem now included in *The Book of Nightmares*; of Thomas Vogler on Ralph Ellison—with an excerpt from a novel-in-progress; of Donald Davie on Samuel Menashe—with poems now included in *To Open*; of Jackson Cope on Robert Coover—with “McDuff on the Mound.”) Interviews with William Stafford, Angus Wilson, Alan Dugan, and Stanley Kunitz have also been accompanied by new work from those writers. The conversation has expanded to include journalit by Seymour Krim, Sandra McPherson, and Leo Raditsa, and translations from the work of Samuel Beckett, Italo Calvino, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Georges Limbour, Meir Wieseltier, and others. And *TIR*’s poetry editors (Marvin Bell, Norman Dubie, Barry Goldensohn, Anselm Hollo, Donald Justice, Helen Chasin, Michael Ryan, Michael Burkard) and fiction editors (Wilfrido Nolledo, David Hayman) have been open to a wide range of voices, old and new. If one issue might be said most clearly to epitomize this aim, it’s probably that of Fall, 1974 (4/4)—with its “Symposium of Young Poets” edited by Michael Ryan and capped by a brilliantly dialogical response from Merle Brown.

What we have been—and what we must more fully become. As Merle Brown now leaves the staff of *The Iowa Review*—though remaining, I trust, an unofficial monitor of our efforts—those of us charged with continuing responsibility for the magazine hope that we can maintain its imaginative and critical vigor while moving toward yet greater range and variety. Kim Merker and I would like more fully to recognize the unprecedented fact that in our time the voices of all languages and cultures are entering a single conversation. And we would like more fully to recognize a related fact: the remarkable diversity of the writing encouraged on our local scene.

Here is a partial listing of special features and issues that we’re planning for the near future:

- In 6/1 (Winter, 1975): "Fields of Action-1"—including Guy Davenport on *Ulysses*, Marjorie Perloff on *The Cantos*, Sherman Paul on *The Maximus Poems*, Diane Wakoski on *Coils*—and new work by Denise Levertov, W. S. Merwin, and Ronald Johnson.
- In 6/2 (Spring, 1975): A special issue on "Black Writing," with poetry, fiction, drama, and criticism selected by three guest editors—Michael Harper, Al Young, and Darwin Turner.
- In 6/3 (Summer, 1975): Stories selected by John Leggett and William M. Murray from manuscripts submitted to the Iowa School of Letters Award for Short Fiction. "Fields of Action-2"—including essays by Charles Altieri, Paul Mariani, and Sherman Paul.
- In 6/4 (Fall, 1975): "A Symposium of Young British Poets," edited by David Heal with an essay by Edward Brunner. Thanks to the good offices of Jon Silkin and Merle Brown, this symposium will be published jointly by *The Iowa Review* in the United States and *Stand* in the United Kingdom.
- In 7/1 (Winter, 1976): A special issue on "International Writing," with material selected by two guest editors—Paul Engle and Hua-ling Nieh Engle.

In addition to these special features and issues, we'll be printing poetry selected by Charles Wright and Sandra McPherson, who are joining the staff this year as Poetry Editors. And we'll be printing fiction selected by David Hayman and also by Robert Coover, who will soon join us as Fiction Editor.

As we continue in this direction, we're grateful to a number of persons and institutions for help and encouragement. I'd like here especially to thank John C. Gerber, Director of the School of Letters, D. C. Spriestersbach, Dean of the Graduate College, and John Leggett, Director of the Writers Workshop, who have provided assistance of various kinds, and also the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines and the University of Iowa Foundation, which have made grants in support of publication.

—TRW