

Postscript

This double issue has been a long time in production, and our bringing it out seems a good moment to reflect on where we are. As we do so we have two more issues for which material is all but entirely selected and is entering into production. A third, another double issue, about the size of this one, is taking shape as well. We can see much, therefore, of where our work is leading.

For one thing, we plan a series of double issues, one each year, so that without reducing the number of pages we offer, we will appear on more of a tri-quarterly basis. This issue has been a happy one to gather. We are pleased to have Marvin Bell, the original poetry editor of *The Iowa Review*, return as our guest poetry editor. It was our pleasure also to interview Donald Justice, a poet we very much admire, and the Pulitzer Prize Winner for Poetry in 1980. Then when an interview of John Logan arrived, serendipitously, we recognized the pleasure of an additional coherence: Marvin has had long and rewarding association with both poets.

This will be the third consecutive issue in which we have had one piece of long fiction. "The Little Book," by David Hughes, follows on contributions by Robert Coover and Yitzhak Orpaz that we have called novellas. Another by R.H.W. Dillard will come out in our next issue and with it a play of similar length by Sherley Anne Williams. Obviously we are receptive to works of this length; they have grown on us as we have read and reread them and we hope they will appeal to many readers. At the same time we make no promises for a continuing series. We receive from thirty to fifty unsolicited stories each week, of average and of shorter lengths, and we want to find room for the work we like best from those offerings.

The six stories that accompany the novella in this issue vary strikingly in length and style, from the short, brisk, and playful (Alexander Theroux) to the longer and more realistic (Michael Krekorian and Robert Taylor). What they have in common is that each one spoke firmly and convincingly to at least a fair number of us who consider this work together.

The Iowa Review has a history of publishing sustained critical articles on contemporary authors. If there is one area in which our editorship has altered the tone and habits of the magazine, it is in our receptivity to those pieces. We still admire fine literary criticism and find what we believe to be a good critical essay or two for almost every issue. But we have begun to think of critical writing as essays rather than as articles. On a recent form, we described our audience as "general literary" rather than "academic." We have become receptive to memoirs, essays in autobiography, and to other kinds of narrative, reflective, or meditative writing. Consequently more kinds of writing compete

at any one moment for our attention. Some of these essays are hardly distinguishable from stories—see the one by Wayne Fields in this issue—and it is only the rubric under which they have come to us that distributes them, possibly by an outdated sense of decorum, in our table of contents.

We would like to think that we would have selected Fields' essay as readily had it come to us as a story. Since we try to settle on both essays and stories for each issue, we cannot be sure that we would have made that choice under those hypothetical conditions. After the fact, nevertheless, we can believe it possible, and by so saying we stress one of our enduring problems: every submission competes for some of the same slender space and if we are unsure of an essay we are apt to ask whether there is a story we like better, and vice versa.

Therefore, though we hope to continue carrying thoughtful, informative, and attractively written essays in criticism—essays that teach us something as the essay by Boxer and Phillips a few issues back convinced us of a way to read Raymond Carver—we are unlikely to be receptive to a study the single virtue of which is its dogged persistence on some trail of truth or that is wedded to the private language of an advanced seminar that we have not attended. At the same time we hope to open more pages to book reviews and to treat those as short essays. We want alert, incisive discussions of six to ten pages that help us read someone worth reading, where our attention may have been wanting; and we are particularly interested in such reviews when they are of books that come out of small and undernourished presses.

We have begun to think of ourselves, in part, as a review in a slightly different sense, as a place to preserve for a wider and more enduring audience some of what happens around us. With this purpose in mind, we have taken advantage of the International Writing Program, which brings writers from many countries together in Iowa City each fall; several interviews and a few other contributions have come from that quarter. The questions and answers with Joseph Brodsky (9/4) and the essay by Northrop Frye (11/1) were taped during their visits here. Marvin Bell, our guest poetry editor, and Henry Carlile before him (10/1) have both, of course, been attached to the Workshop. In a similar spirit we interviewed Don Justice and, more recently, Claude Richard, a visiting professor from France.

A larger example of this kind of opportunity is the Symposium on the Languages of Pain and Fear that we present now. Richard Selzer was a guest in early 1980; the Symposium selects from his readings and recreates one afternoon of discussion with members of our faculty. We are glad to have been able to assemble that unusual gathering.

Our next issue will feature a similar offering. Over two years ago, Sherman Paul orchestrated a week-long conference on Charles Olson. Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, and George Butterick were its main participants.

It was a week of readings, lectures, and discussions, most of which was preserved on tape. We had intended to devote a whole issue to that conference, but most of what is on tape transfers uneasily to print and so, at this writing at least, a whole issue's worth is not available. What we will present instead will be three of the principle lectures, by Creeley, Butterick, and Paul.

Our next double issue, three publications down the line and that we target for Christmas, will again take advantage of our surroundings. Finding Jane Cooper and Gwen Head teaching in the Workshop this year and Marcia Southwick also living in town, we invited them to work with Dee Morris, one of our associate editors, in gathering a Women's Issue. That will be work by women, chosen by women, and we are grateful to all four persons for having undertaken this considerable labor.

All this aside, however, the central life of our *Review* is not a series of special events. It is instead the series of Friday afternoons that we string together through most of the school year in order to talk about the stories and poems that arrive at our office. We spend a good deal of time reading this work to each other—especially the poems—and then searching for what we can find to say about it. We try to listen well, both to the poems and to each other, to learn from voices that are often strange to us, and to settle on selections that we will want, with considerable care, to bring out in a future issue. Therefore, in spite of the pleasure we take in presenting an interview with Don Justice, an afternoon with Richard Selzer, David Hughes' novella, or Marvin's choices of poems, what we are most pleased with at this particular moment is the twenty poems we have gathered for our next issue. By Ai, Jim Simmerman, Sally Kearney, Edison Dupree, Jim Gauer, and several other writers, about half of whom we'd never heard of before, each one of those poems captured our attention convincingly last fall. By the time we bring that work out we hope to be looking ahead again.

We consider ourselves, after all, part of the grassroots of contemporary American literature. We are intent on showing that something fresh, artful, and intelligent, something with a chance to endure can be discovered continually. We hope you will stay with us as we work through our second decade of publication. We hope you will press us on your friends and on libraries you frequent that have not made a place for us on their shelves. We value our writers, but we value our readers as well. If we had not some sense of your finding pleasures in these pages, as we have found them beforehand, our labors would make a little less sense to us all.

The Editors