

To Our Readers

In the fall of 1981 I rode the red-eye Greyhound from Columbia, South Carolina, to Atlanta and back to attend the South Atlantic Modern Language Association convention in the big city. I was a new English PhD in the middle of a three-year assistant professorship at the University of South Carolina, and I went to that regional meeting to present some now-forgotten scholarly paper whose title surely included the obligatory colon and subtitle. En route back to Columbia my bus stopped for a while, very late at night, in Athens, Georgia. Just a couple of blocks up the hill from the depot, a Greyhound clerk told me, lay the campus of the University of Georgia.

I could see nothing of that hallowed ground when I stood looking out the wall-filling windows that took up two sides of the depot, but I knew what was up there somewhere: the office of *The Georgia Review*, that beautiful literary journal I had been reading for many years, and in whose pages I had recently published a couple of book reviews and, more important, a half-dozen poems. I fantasized—I kid you not—about wandering the campus to locate that office, and even about leaving behind my life of freshman composition and sophomore literature classes at USC to work there. Didn't I, after all, have several years of experience as an editor for *The Devil's Millhopper*, the little poetry magazine I had helped to found in 1977?

Remarkably, about a year after that stopover I learned there was an editorial opening at *The Georgia Review*. I applied with a foolish eagerness, along with (as I eventually found out) ninety-eight others—ninety-eight who got a “no” from editor Stanley W. Lindberg when I got my “yes.”

I will not detail the story of driving from Columbia to Athens in the early June heat in a car that lacked air conditioning, then finding a secluded side street near the campus so I could change, scrunched down in my Toyota station wagon's front seat, from my soaked T-shirt and shorts into interview garb. I will simply say that I began working for *The Georgia Review* on 18 July 1983 and have been here, in various capacities, ever since: assistant editor, associate editor, acting editor—and trading these last two titles back and forth now and then over the years. But never until 1 January of this year had I been simply “editor.” So, as I come to you now for the first time with my name bearing that title on the masthead, I have allowed myself the indulgence of these opening paragraphs—in part because I am greatly pleased and wish to say so, in part because my following remarks may take on more weight, earn more credence,

after this glimpse of the commitment, passion, and love I have poured into the *Review* for almost twenty-five years.

Imagine working somewhere for a quarter of a century and being able to feel, in a positive way, that you are just getting started. Some of my friends have retired, and many others speak of doing so. And here I am, just getting started.

Not that I think I haven't done anything yet. Quite the opposite: I know that I have contributed consistently and importantly to the one hundred issues of *The Georgia Review*—upwards of 25,000 pages—published in my time here, and that the general aesthetic revealed in most of those issues, however broadly or fuzzily, has been mine to some significant degree. Still, the slant of the territory is now altered, so you deserve a brief set of statements and speculations about where we may be going together in the coming years.

The *Review* won't be morphing dramatically anytime soon, so you'll still find our "big five"—essays, short stories, poems, reviews, and visual art—in perfect-bound quarterly issues meant to please the hand and eye, and built to last in more ways than one. Nonetheless, you should expect to be surprised each time you sit down with a new edition. That surprise will take different forms and come from different angles—how else surprise?—but it will be there, and you can look for it. In *this* issue you might take a peek at Reg Saner's "Back Where the Past Is Mined" and Ihab Hassan's "Fundamentalism and Literature," essays that view current world crises through the provocative lenses, respectively, of combat service in the Korean War and a mid-twentieth-century upbringing in Egypt melded with symbolically placed rocks at a Japanese Zen temple.

In truth, I hope the surprises have already been accumulating for you in the past half-dozen issues published under my most recent "acting" editorship: the sixtieth-anniversary double issue (Fall/Winter 2006) that delved into the epistolary history of the journal; Thomas Allen's Wild-West art almost literally exploding from the Spring 2007 cover, and Gendron Jensen's huge illustrated letter to Stan Lindberg becoming a 10 x 30-inch foldout in the same issue; Harry Crews's raw autobiography of a southern childhood counterpointed, in Winter 2007, by Finnish photographer Pentti Sammallahti's poignantly gorgeous images of impoverished rural life in northwestern Russia.

"Predictable" surprises will come from our ongoing commitment to identifying and printing distinctive work from previously unknown writers. In the past eighteen months we have brought out first-ever publications by essay-

ists Jeremy Collins, Jacob Doll, Michael Donohue, and Laura Sewell Matter—as well as the first short stories by essayist Janisse Ray and journalist René Houtrides. Donohue’s “Russell and Mary” went on to win the 2007 National Magazine Award in Essays for *The Georgia Review*, besting finalists from the *New Yorker* and *Smithsonian*, and Matter’s “Pursuing the Great Bad Novelist” will be reprinted soon in *The Best Creative Nonfiction* annual from W. W. Norton. In other words, you can count on seeing work you didn’t count on.

We’ll also keep bringing you the best new writing from our proven best, among them Lee K. Abbott, David Bosworth, Kevin Brockmeier, Stephen Dunn, Alice Friman, Margaret Gibson, Albert Goldbarth, Lola Haskins, Ihab Hassan, Mary Hood, Judith Kitchen, Sydney Lea, Philip Levine, Linda Pastan, J. Allyn Rosser, Reg Saner, George Singleton, Kathleen Snodgrass, Gerald Weales, Robert Wrigley, and Paul Zimmer.

The “new” is always vital in literary terms, but so is the “old”—and so are the inevitable connections between the two. So, expect *The Georgia Review* to look back as well as ahead: for instance, upcoming issues will bring a retrospective look at the poet Richard Hugo, a vital American voice from the 1960s until his too-early death in 1982, and Mark Halliday’s whimsically serious study of a forty-year-old issue of a literary magazine excavated from the trunk of his car—no, it wasn’t *The Georgia Review*—in search of both its historical and its present-day value.

Quietly but steadily, the *Review* has come to be recognized during my twenty-five years on staff for its concern about the present and future of the earth’s environment. Featuring quality essays by such passionate and varied writers as David Bosworth, Jane Brox, Louise Erdrich, David Gessner, Gretchen Legler, Barry Lopez, Barbara Mallonee, Scott Russell Sanders, and Reg Saner, we have acknowledged that neither fine writing nor anything else has a future if the natural world lacks one. You can look for this facet of our overall program to become a bit more prominent—most immediately in the form of a special issue we are building around an important new essay by Scott Sanders.

Many other pots of innovation are on the back of our multi-burner stove as well, so you can watch for their moving forward in the near and middle future:

—We have made some minor changes to our website (www.uga.edu/garev) that you might want to check out, and we are in the process of completely redesigning it to better serve as both adjunct and complement to our print issues.

—We have several other special numbers in the planning stages, and we anticipate bringing those to you roughly once each year.

—We have scheduled a number of public events in 2008: we will have our second annual “*Georgia Review* in New York City” week (28 April–2 May), following up on our successful slate of readings there last spring, and on 27–30 October we will present “The Pulitzer Legacy in Georgia” at the beautiful Jekyll Island Club, just off the coast in the southernmost part of the state. We also hope to begin sponsoring literary events in other parts of the country as well. (Watch our website and future issues for details.)

—We are embarking upon the first sustained fundraising efforts in the six-decade history of the journal, hoping that loyal and new supporters will want to join us in our commitment to making what Terry Kay has called “simply the best literary publication in the country” better and better, year by year. You should find an informational envelope tucked into this issue, and we will soon be giving you additional news about this important venture.

If a piece of writing—about the natural world or any other subject—falls through this heavily wired planet without hitting an audience, does that writing make a sound? Just like our authors and editors, you as readers have a role to play in the coming years of *The Georgia Review*’s unfolding, so please: (1) maintain or begin your personal subscription; (2) read your quarterly issues with pleasure and diligence, and then let us know what you think, be it positive or negative—and if it’s positive enough, give gift subscriptions to your reading acquaintances, and maybe even to your doctor or your local library; (3) if you’re a writer as well as a reader, always be sure to allow us to consider your finest new work.

Recall, please, as we go forward, these words from Archimedes, some twenty-three centuries past: “Give me a lever and I will move the world.” Then, note that Archimedes didn’t *really* need us to give him a lever, because he already had one—in the form of his words themselves, balanced so keenly on that central conjunction that they could support more than two millennia of humankind’s remembering and pondering them as well-wrought language, that most unique of our human gifts.

S. C.