

Editor's Note

AS WE WERE FINISHING UP THIS ISSUE, MY FIRST AS EDITOR OF THE *New England Review*, I took a break from answering author e-mails and wrangling with cover art to browse briefly through the nearly forty years' worth of issues that preceded this one—or, more specifically, the ninety-six that preceded me. I've been at home in these pages for ten years now, previously as managing and then senior editor, but I wanted to see if I could locate a sense of continuity from one volume to the next, from one editor to the next. To trace the founding editorial impulse of 1978 onward through 2014.

Some of the bindings cracked and came loose as I opened the journals one by one, and old subscription offers fluttered to the floor (\$12/year!), but I found myself unable to resist the temptation to read. I wanted to know what some of our recent authors—Marianne Boruch, Stephen Dixon, and Kathryn Davis, to name a few—were writing back when they appeared in our first decade as “emerging” writers. Was this Raymond Carver story the same as it appears in the canonized anthologies, and would Wendell Berry's argument in “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer” hold up? *NER*'s interest in works in translation can easily be traced through the decades, from special sections on the Caribbean (1985), Bengali poets (1989), and translation in general (2004), up to our recent “The Russian Presence” (2014). Occasionally the editors themselves would step in and comment on the overall project. At five years into the run, founding editor Sydney Lea spoke of the magazine's “commitment to language, and some sense of imperative: a willingness or compulsion to wrestle with questions of literature, and survival.” In the tenth-anniversary edition, Lea and Maura High articulated their dedication to “serious subject matter and careful craft, and to substance over cant.” As editor T. R. Hummer noted in 1990, “Part of what the new staff inherits from the old is a tradition of simple, but radical, openness.” Throughout Stephen Donadio's tenure—and now as I begin as editor—I know that both that strong sense of imperative, and that radical openness, continue to define and inform this magazine.

In other words, *NER* has never published work that is simply “good,” in styles the editors might “like,” confirming what we already know and feel, and in turn making assumptions about what our readers know and feel. Instead we make an effort to suspend our initial judgments, and allow ourselves to be surprised. While we haven't used the category “Impure Forms” since the early 1990s, its principle remains in play. *NER* is open to all forms, pure and impure; we're looking for writing that engages and provokes not just our emotions and intellect, but also our senses of curiosity and humor, our ideas of history and

language. That commitment has continued to reveal itself and to evolve through each decade and each editorship, and *NER* remains—to steal a phrase from Hummer’s 1993 note—a “vital communal endeavor.”

In each issue, certain themes come forward, and notes are struck once and then again in different pitches. Nothing is really new, but so everything is new—even death, nostalgia, illness, and love; or, as this issue suggests, even fifteenth-century Flemish painting, new-world ambition, the Holy Grail, and Wagnerian ego. Just as Stephen did before me, I’ve arranged the pieces here to play for and against each other when the magazine is read from front to back, but each of them was chosen individually, as part of a conversation among our authors and editors.

As I recognize *NER*’s past, I’d also like to gratefully acknowledge those who will be coming along into the magazine’s next phase. Our managing editor, Marcia Parlow, who came to *NER* in fall 2013, brings her forward-looking optimism and personal history of literary engagement to bear on these pages, and she has already shown herself to be adept and energetic on many fronts. C. Dale Young, whose association with *NER* began in the mid-1990s, has made editing itself an art, and he will continue to find poems for us with his dependable unpredictability. J. M. Tyree, who was a student intern here in 1995 and has since participated as a contributor, reader, editorial panelist, and web editor, is now an associate editor in nonfiction, where he’ll seek out a wide range of subject matters and perspectives, while also continuing to cultivate the *NER* Digital series. Janice Obuchowski and Jennifer Bates, with their broad taste and vital sense of “the real thing” in fiction, will continue to discover new voices as associate editors in fiction. And Lexa deCourval, our devoted office manager, will continue keeping those essential processes—including your subscriptions—up to date. I am also grateful to Christopher Ross, the driving force and imagination behind our quarterly *NER* Vermont Reading Series, and our editorial panel, readers, and student interns whose talents and energies help to sustain the magazine every day.

Although Stephen Donadio will return to teaching full-time after twenty years as editor, I am happy to say that he will remain on the masthead as editor at large, scouting out new work and offering his “rediscoveries,” which for the past fifteen years have added a note of surprise to each issue, a means of looking back in order to look forward. As editor, Stephen brought to this magazine his unbounded intellectual curiosity, generous humanity, and tireless dedication to literature in the making, and all of us associated with *NER* owe him our immense gratitude.

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