

To Our Readers

I have a line I've been quoting in conversation for perhaps thirty years; I *could* have been using it for forty, but I needed some time to recognize its real worth.

I grew up in western New York State, in a smallish city (pop. 40,000) with one large high school. The Jamestown High School had an auditorium designed to seat the entire student body, but we strained its capacity in those baby boomer years. Still, we had with some regularity “assemblies,” whole-school gatherings that nowadays seem relics of a distant past. Visiting speakers, dramatic and dance presentations by student groups, informational sessions conducted by the principal, and the occasional oddball entertainment: I recall, for instance, a leotard-clad man on a trampoline, his head and upper body disappearing again and again into the flies above the stage's proscenium arch. Sometimes the school band performed, two hundred strong; sometimes the orchestra, perhaps one-fourth that size. At the start of one of those orchestral concerts, the director Mr. Johnson faced the full auditorium and said, with great finality, “All music, and all of the other arts, are about one of three things: love, death, and war.”

I have no idea what percentage of my fellow students were listening closely enough even to have heard Mr. Johnson's bold assertion, so of course I don't know how many others—if any—were nailed by it. Was he right? Well, no . . . but he was not far wrong, either. I believe you and I might have a few other huge words to add—*birth, nature, religion, politics*, and *art* itself come to mind as leading candidates—but I don't think any of us would feel compelled to reach double digits with our list, nor do I think the essential truth and gutsiness of the orchestra leader's claim is diminished by a bit of expansion. At bottom, the vitals that encompass all others are blessedly and cursedly few.

The most immediately noticeable and striking component of this issue, Thorne Anderson and Kael Alford's “Eye Level in Iraq” (pages 498–532), is incontrovertibly about love, death, *and* war. Through Alford's and Anderson's eyes and words we see war as it is not usually available to us—war not as combat or politics but as private pain, grief, and devastation. We are forced to recall what the British soldier-poet Wilfred Owen wrote in a far different yet chillingly similar era, nearly a century ago: “My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the Pity.”

I have scrutinized each work in the following pages—including Jeremy Collins' and Laura Sewell Matter's first-ever publications, Janisse Ray's first-ever fiction publication, Margaret Gibson's stunning elegy for her mother—trying unsuccessfully to find even one that does not bear upon Mr. Johnson's claim. Does this mean he merely uttered a truism or that he had located a truth? Or perhaps that I am deluding myself for present purposes? Go figure. I only know that, to rephrase Robert Frost, Mr. Johnson gave me a few words I couldn't get rid of—and that my constant goal is for *The Georgia Review* to give you the same.

S.C.

The staff of *The Georgia Review* thanks and congratulates Gerald Weales for gracing this issue with his thirtieth annual "American Theater Watch."