

## To Our Readers

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Back in a time when people in the United States could read or hear the word *Iraq* without immediately attaching to it the word *war*, a letter came to our office from an American citizen living in that country who was a *Georgia Review* subscriber. She asked us to please settle a friendly dispute she was having with another *Review* reader—I don't recall whether he was also in Iraq or not—concerning the orchestration of our issues. The letter writer noted that she always found interesting connections among the different works sharing space within the same covers, and she was quite certain these connections—sometimes large and obvious, sometimes small and subtle—must be intentional on the part of the editors; her friend was equally certain that most of the “alignments” she was discovering were born of her active reader's imagination.

We were pleased to be able to make this correspondent happy, or mostly so, by telling her that we do indeed pay attention to the placement of each essay, story, poem, and review in every issue. On occasion our efforts in this regard are so obvious as not to be worthy of the term *effort*—as when we trumpet a special feature that includes a number of sections, or as when (in Summer 2000) we enclosed Kim Barnes's forest fire essay “The Ashes of August” with two poems, “Drought” by Alice Friman and “Drought” by Don Welch. Very often, though, we must be quite creative—and many readers might say quite self-deluding—to weave a web of “wholeness” that may go unnoticed outside the confines of our office, especially considering that most of our readers probably don't treat an issue like a novel. (In Summer 2009, for instance, Sydney Lea's poem “Woodpile to Woodshed” concludes with the line “The flames will help us brace for whatever comes,” and overleaf begins Ann Pancake's story “Arsonists.”)

Some planning, some serendipity, some fudging—one potential definition of a life, I suppose.

In this issue, you can find us juggling many of our orchestrating tools. Right off the bat—and there even *is* a little baseball involved—you'll encounter one of those “special features,” this one including work by and about the inimitable and often outlandish Albert Goldbarth. Judith Kitchen, since 1991 a regular reviewer of new poetry books for *The Georgia Review*, has said in our pages that “Albert Goldbarth has the all-encompassing vision of Whitman or Ginsberg, the precision of Bishop, the knife-edged refinement of Stevens or

Plath. This is a recipe for originality, and Goldbarth just may be the American poet of his generation for the ages” (Summer 1999). This is deeply serious (and of course unprovable) praise from one of the country’s most knowledgeable and insightful poetry critics—and its closing assertion seems to me to remain valid to this day, a decade after Kitchen made it.

I’ll have more to say about Albert Goldbarth’s writing a few pages further on, when I formally introduce the feature. The point here is that the presence of a substantial cross section of his work greatly reduced the serendipity-and-fudge factors for us as we laid out the issue: his writing bids fair to encompass literally everything in this and other worlds, and in so doing makes a number of connections with just about whatever anyone else may write.

My challenge to you, then, is this: as you read all that follows, note any specific points at which you think you have caught us organizing the movement of the issue. Then, write me a letter—not an e-mail, but a *letter*, which must go inside an envelope, which must have an address and a stamp on its exterior—telling me the links you have found and explaining (concisely, of course) how and why those links do or don’t work effectively. The composer of the best letter—yes, I get to be the judge—will earn a year’s extension of his or her *Georgia Review* subscription *and* one-year gift subscriptions for two other people or organizations.

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And speaking of subscriptions, do you remember my telling you in an earlier issue that you—every one of you subscribers, en masse—could change the life of *The Georgia Review* and its contributors if you would give this gift of good writing and art to at least one other person? Well, this is really true, and I need more of you to act on the truth. And what a great, simple-to-accomplish act—good for you, for your gift recipients, for us. Please do it—and do it *now*, before the price bump that is coming with our Spring 2010 issue.

S.C.