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Backward Glances

by Janelle Collins

As the new general editor of *Arkansas Review*, I have spent a great deal of time examining past issues of the journal in order to gain a broad picture of its accomplishments as well as to consider what new ground I might break. My predecessors have set a standard of excellence that I intend to emulate and honor. It has been my good fortune to be a part of *Arkansas Review*'s editorial board since its evolution from a literary magazine into an interdisciplinary journal of Delta Studies. The view from the top of the masthead, however, is quite different. While the learning curve has been steep, it is now my privilege and pleasure to bring forth this--my first--issue of *Arkansas Review*.

Our regional boundaries are generally recognized as extending from St Louis, Missouri through Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico. But I believe I may be forgiven for taking readers upriver just a stretch to Hannibal, Missouri, the birthplace of the American writer most directly associated with the Mississippi River, Mark Twain. Although I did not set out to follow a theme with this issue of *Arkansas Review*, one seems to have emerged loosely around memories and an examination

of the past. In our lead article, Dr. Regina Faden offers a retrospective on her tenure as Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home in Hannibal, Missouri, revealing why we need to represent the past accurately. With a synchronicity that delights editors, our fictional piece, an excerpt from Geraldine Glodek's novel, is a poignant meditation on the past as well as a story that begins in Hannibal and travels down the length of the Mississippi River.

In another lovely coincidence, Jo McDougall, one of Arkansas's preeminent poets, returns to the pages of *Arkansas Review* with excerpts of her memoir, *Daddy's Money*. McDougall was introduced to this journal's readers by Tom Williams in his inaugural issue as general editor, and I am tremendously pleased to have her prose work appear in my first issue as general editor. The memoir, which explores McDougall's rice-farming family history, will be published by the University of Arkansas Press.

Poetry is also represented in this issue as Carri Hendricks makes her first appearance in *Arkansas Review*, joining poets already familiar to its readers, Gordon Osing and Gregory Powell. These creative pieces are followed by what has been an intermittent feature in the

journal, Delta Sources and Resources, and a longstanding feature, the book reviews. Both sections will appear in each issue, demonstrating our commitment to interdisciplinary explorations of the Delta. It is fitting that the Delta Sources and Resources in this issue include entries from institutions committed to accessible and accurate preservation of the past.

I would be remiss if I did not adequately acknowledge the assistance I have had in bringing this issue to fruition. In addition to the editorial board and advisory editors who have remained on during the transition, Marcus Tribbett joins us as Managing and Production Editor extraordinaire. The issue could not have come into its printed form without his production skills, patience, creativity, and long hours at the computer. Guy Lancaster joins us as Creative Materials Editor. While he has been invaluable in that role, it is a fairly narrow description of what Guy has actually provided *Arkansas Review* in the transition period. In addition to reading and evaluating all the fiction submissions, Guy has given me names and contact numbers for book reviewers, publishers, museum directors, oral historians, and scholars. His own prose contributions to this issue appear in the Delta Sources and Resources and book review sections. Rick Lott evaluates our poetry submissions with a discriminating and careful eye. Editorial Assistant Josh Potter eased the transition between editors, handling subscription lists and mailings. I must also thank Frances Malpezzi, an experienced editor in our department, who taught me the business end of producing a scholarly journal, answering questions before I even knew which ones to ask.

My own backward glance is incomplete without some comments about my predecessors. In his moving farewell letter last issue, Thomas Williams made his apologies for the delay in production and mailing of the winter issue. What Tom did not mention is that he completed the year as *Arkansas Review's* general editor from a distance and in the midst of tak-

ing on new job responsibilities. It was a generous gesture that allowed me time to learn the business, solicit submissions, send out books for review, and compile and edit the April issue while Tom completed the December issue. I thank Tom for his commitment to our readers and consideration for me. I am delighted that he has agreed to remain associated with *Arkansas Review* as an advisory editor. In his five years as editor, Tom enhanced the journal's reputation in literary circles through the quality of his selections as well as his road trips to introduce and promote the journal at literary festivals, readings, conferences, and bookstores. In addition to bringing us work from the best writers in the Delta, Tom also contributed one of the journal's most popular features, his talks with independent booksellers. I hope that we might prevail upon him to visit us regularly, scout out some bookstores along the way, and allow us the privilege of listening in on more of these conversations.

Long time readers know that without William Clements, *Arkansas Review* would not exist as a journal of Delta Studies. His vision, knowledge, dedication, and scholarly standards are responsible for creating a unique journal that demonstrates the potential and importance of interdisciplinary and regional scholarship. Although this could easily become the longest section in my grateful acknowledgements, I will deliberately keep it short. From his invitation to a junior colleague to join the editorial board in 1998 to his accessibility, encouragement, guidance, and support as that colleague takes over as general editor eleven years later, Bill is a model and a mentor that every academic should be so fortunate to have. His door is open (even during a research leave) to my every question, and if I do my job well, *Arkansas Review* readers are the true beneficiaries of Bill's personal and professional generosity.

I cannot yet end this already overly long note without public acknowledgement of the continued and increased support the journal has

received from Arkansas State University. Charles Carr, Chair of the Department of English and Philosophy, has long provided the journal its departmental home and continues to demonstrate his belief in its value. Gloria Gibson, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, took a personal interest in the success of this editorial transition and has been instrumental in securing additional institutional support. Associate Dean Carol O'Connor adroitly handled details and fielded questions. I thank each of them as well as the administrative staff in both offices for their work on our behalf. In recognition of the journal's success and significance, the Office of Academic Affairs and Research has committed additional resources, for which I thank Glen Jones, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research, and Dan Howard, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research. My penultimate thank you goes to the staff of the Print Shop for the insider's tour of their facilities and tutorials in production. A final thank you must be offered to you, the readers of *Arkansas Review* who continue to subscribe, submit, support, and applaud our efforts. I appreciate the opportunity to assume responsibility for the journal and look forward to sharing with you the articles, interviews, literature, and art that explore this region with the attention it deserves. ▲▼▲