

## Editorial

ONLY AFTER I HAD THIS ISSUE put together in final form did I notice a similarity among a good deal of the fiction: *location*—a strong rooting in place or culture. Andre Koscis's story involves recent Hungarian immigrants to Canada; it explores the ways they and a native Canadian WASP understand and misunderstand each other. The stories by David Koulack and Gila Tal are both set inside more or (in some respects) less assimilated Jewish North American culture. The setting of Laura Best's story contribution isn't named, but her characters are in and of deep rural country, exotic to many of us. Ronald Frame's and Paul Brownsey's stories are both very much about Scots in Scotland; here, the uneasy juxtaposition is not between the culture of the immigrants and that of their new home, but between very contemporary Scotland and its past, very much alive in the buildings and their surroundings. In all these, who people are is importantly constituted by the culture they came from, but also by where they are now.

You'll notice many similarities between the Frame and the Brownsey story. More coincidence: both authors, it turns out, in the same small suburb of Glasgow. I asked—they don't know each other!

(But this issue is not "themed"—the rest of the stories occur on familiar ground, more or less anywhere. Kevin Frazier's takes place, to begin with, in Finland—though, as far as I can tell, this doesn't make much difference to the story, which could as well be set in Minneapolis or Melbourne, as could Lori Callan's and Elaine McCluskey's.)

Anyway, I've been wondering what explains the large number of "located" stories. It may just be a consequence of the preferences of our editors. My suspicion, however, is that this isn't the whole explanation—that, rather, this approach, always important in fiction, is increasingly so nowadays. In many ways, it's a natural. For one thing, authors often write as a kind of self-discovery; so their home culture, and how it plays out where they live now, is an obvious frequent theme. And the contemporary pop-culture concern with "roots" and one's genealogy reflects the recent popularity of the idea that one's relations to one's culture and history are essential parts of one's identity; as does the growing philosophical rejection of the individualistic picture of us, shared by Enlightenment thinkers and existentialists,

as autonomous ahistorical self-creating atoms. Again, picturing life "In Another Country" (to quote the title of Hemingway's paradigmatic piece in this genre) is a good way to talk about human isolation and connection, and to produce the conflict (in this case, of cultures) without which fiction would be bland and pointless. And, of course, we readers like the characters in our fiction to be richly drawn, not generic, and putting them inside a culture is one way of achieving this.

There's a paradox here: fictional characters should be quite idiosyncratic and particular, but also, at the same time, universal. Ronald Frame, in an email to me, expressed some disapproval of "international fiction ... novels set in airport departure lounges etc." His writing demonstrates his view that "the local can still, in 2006, contain—well, the world, not to sound too grandiose." In his story in this issue, the voices of an old grand house reproach the floundering writer living there: "You made up stories, you invented other houses and people to put in them, while all the time we were waiting for you at the end of the driveway."

There's a second coincidence in this issue, involving two of our articles. Both are political, and both are highly critical of US influence and action abroad. Kai Nielsen offers a Marxist analysis of globalization, which he argues is harmful because it's in the service of US imperialism. Mustapha Marrouchi attempts to come to grips with the horrible actions of the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither article softens its strong radical political views, and both are sure to provoke some hostile opposition. I'm glad to include them. Intellectual life would not produce pearls without the injection of irritants.

R.M.