Introduction

THE CALENDAR OF A QUARTERLY — at least this quarterly — is marked up most heavily in its moments of overlap. For instance, today, this day in early spring, as I ruminate over a table of contents that will come fully into the world next summer, I am accompanied on my side table by our first issue of the year, an arrival little over a week old. Much of its contents commemorate a lecture first read publicly in Amherst in 1975, then published in these pages a few years after. And so it is that Chinua Achebe now stands solemnly before me, gracing our cover with gravitas that only a photograph by Jerome Liebling could capture, causing me to wonder one thing only: what the hell will this rag ever do to equal that?

Nothing. That much is clear. When Achebe's "An Image of Africa" ripped up and riposted Joseph Conrad's dark heart, what we now refer to as postcolonial studies gained a lodestone and touchstone, and certain truths became self-evident. No editor with any sense of literary and cultural history would ever predict that any pages — no matter how apparently worthy, exuberantly expressive, insouciantly innovative, or roughshod rebellious — could someday have such multiplier effects. What I will suggest is one way in which, having learned our best lessons from the Igbo master, we strive to continue his work.

In our last issue, with typically understated elegance, Caryl Phillips demonstrated how conversations with Achebe ultimately caused him "to rethink [his] diasporan relationship to Africa and, by extension, to the whole African diasporan family." The title of Phillips's essay, like that of the panel where he presented it, was taken from Achebe himself: "It is the Storyteller who makes us see what we are." The "fractured and difficult," "less romantic, more nuanced, and more challenging" legacy of Atlantic triangular trade is, of course, the great subject of Phillips's own virtuoso storytelling: that the encounter with Achebe gave new energy and meaning to this theme shows his essay earned its title. *Q.E.D.*

In the present issue, nearly all of these stories, essays, and poems place their wagers in or on the backslash between one place and another. In

Alicia Ostriker's "Cinco de Mayo," for example, Mexico sprouts forth in a Nueva York green world; elsewhere, Naira Kuzmich meditates on loss, with a *translatio* that carries her Armenian across and behind English lines. In Nil Santiáñez's exegesis of modernist war writing (the first installment of a two-parter), the backslash divides and articulates soldierly telling from showing a century ago, on either side of the Maginot line. An excerpt from Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (translated by Frederika Randall, who recently brought us Giacomo Sartori) portrays two generations of Somali immigrants in Italy, with their distance from home measured by triangulation, using a Bernini elephant and obelisk as focal points. The *art fantastique* of Allison Schulnik melts and morphs, troubling conventions of mode and media. Contributing editor Peter Bush trades on another triangle, sending us from the UK three translations of stories by the Cuban poet, translator, and film critic Jorge Yglesias. Aatif Rashid tells a tragic tale of Ottoman conquest in Hungary, whereas Kenan Orhan traces fault lines across the border war between Turkey and Syria today. Closer to home, a poem from Kathleen Kelley bridges time and distance in crossing to the Cape, while characters by Colin Fleming come of age way out here in the wilds of Western Mass., and hipster Brion Dulac entombs an unknown hitchhiker in his truly uncommon commune. As is his wont, Bob Dow sums it all up, sending it sailing in a rumination on the border between skull, mind, and memory.

I could go on — with Quinn, Fortenberry, or Fishbane, for example, each offering us specimen days chock-full of stories, telling us what we are — but by now you get the point. There are no equals to Achebe, here or elsewhere. Yet the stories, poems, and pictures continue to move us forward, and through that motion, we are made to see what we are. The point is to follow Achebe, not to equal him. Only by continuing on his path do we move beyond.

Jim Hicks
for the editors