Foreword

The Fall 2005 issue of the Bellevue Literary Review contains a special focus on writings about infectious diseases. This seems particularly appropriate, since Dr. Martin Blaser, the publisher of the BLR, is slated to become President of the Infectious Diseases Society of America this year.

Evan Lyon’s essay *The Only Fat Man in Lascahobas* interweaves the opulent life of a local funeral director in Haiti with vodou rituals and the death of Saintilus Joseph, a poor man with tuberculosis and AIDS. In the poem *The Porch*, Katherine Soniat speaks of the Saranac Tuberculosis Sanitorium. “The wilderness cure, it was called/ as countless inhaled, then petitioned the cold/ to polish each lung clean.” AIDS, in “Silence=Death” by Rafael Campo, is symbolized by a “worn-out T-shirt, black as mourning, black/ as countless deaths.”

Influenza, the great pandemic of 1918, is vividly depicted in Marcia Calhoun Forecki’s story, *The Gift of the Spanish Lady*, when she writes, “The news of a death was often the first word of a victim’s illness,” and in Priscilla Atkins’ poem, *The Sky Gone White*, which reminds us that “In 1918, thousands more/ than died in the trenches/ died of the flu.”

The deadly bubonic plague is recalled in William Orem’s *Plague Year*. “I remember Pastor saying/ there was something not quite/ safe in how the sun was setting...Then he went/ as well.” The plague is still present today, carried by “delightful-looking rodents called marmots,” as described in the essay *Quarantine* by Matt Davis, a Peace Corps worker in Mongolia.

Hansen’s disease is seen through the eyes of Gar, a government worker, whose job it was to transport a sensitive young woman to the leprosy hospital in Pat Tompkins’ story, *The Road to Carville*. In the poem, *Mary Sees Her Daughter*, Eve Rifkah describes how Mary Martin, a young woman from the Cape Verde Islands, is also taken to Carville. “Mary is placed in a wheelbarrow/ trundled to the train/ face shawled and shrouded/ shoulders shake in rage and sorrow/ Mary don’t you weep don’t you mourn.”

In addition to the selections that focus on infectious disease, this issue features other writings on our general theme of illness and healing. We are delighted to welcome back Bob Oldshue and Cortney Davis, as they each make their third appearance in the BLR. We hope you enjoy our attention to *Plagues and Pens*, as well as the broader landscape of the BLR.

Jerome Lowenstein, MD

*Nonfiction Editor*