

## Foreword

A number of years ago, I attended the wedding of a surgeon and a poet. The guests were almost evenly divided between doctors and writers, and the conversations between the groom's side and the bride's side quickly became strained. Questions about work did not open up onto interesting conversations. One doctor, in response to "I teach poetry," looked at me with a touch of disdain, and in slightly accented English, asked, "You can *do* that for a living?" By the end of the evening, the poets and doctors had stopped trying to mingle.

Literature and Medicine should be the easiest of bedfellows. Anton Chekov invented the modern short story and William Carlos Williams undertook one of the twentieth century's most compelling investigations of the line between poetry and prose. In contemporary letters, C. Dale Young and Rafael Campo loom large in poetry. But perhaps this already reflects a certain prejudice on my own part. Should I be looking for the poetry of Jonas Salk? The short stories of Marie Curie? Except for rare figures like Oliver Sacks and our own Danielle Ofri, when we speak of people at the intersection of literature and medicine, one is usually the achievement, the other a footnote.

One of my first experiences teaching poetry was in a hospital, in the hospice ward. I wish that I could say that I found the experience edifying or inspiring, but I didn't. I found it depressing and demoralizing. The patients were confusing. I once found myself in a restroom unsure if a wheelchair-bound stranger was asking me for help getting into the stall or propositioning me (or both). One of my students had suffered massive strokes and could only communicate by pointing her foot at letters to spell out words. If I was late, she would chastise me in long sentences, one laborious letter at a time. By the time I finished the program, I never wanted to set foot in a hospital again.

Which brings me to why I value the *Bellevue Literary Review* so much, and why the staff works so hard to get each issue into

your hands. Whether you come to the *BLR* as a doctor, patient, poet, nurse, novelist, phlebotomist, or insurance claim adjuster, these pages offer you the rare ability to see something from all sides. There's no small talk here. Without the sensationalism, sentimentalism, or hysteria that attends most reporting on the experience of receiving or giving medical care, the *BLR* focuses on both writing and literature as *humanisms*.

Literature is never far from the body's odd combination of tenacity and fragility, the fact that each body is both the whole of an entire universe and a speck of dust in the sands of time. Stories, essays, and poems remain the best way to understand the nuanced tensions that define our lives (much better than PowerPoint or talking points). They allow us to lower our armor and offer us intimacies that would be otherwise unbearable.

We're especially proud of the contest winners for 2014, and deeply grateful to the sponsors of the *BLR* prizes. The Goldenberg family has sponsored our fiction prize since the inception of the *BLR* prizes nine years ago. Marica and Jan Vilcek have been steadfast supporters of our poetry prize for the past five years. We are now very pleased to announce the Felice Buckvar Prize for Nonfiction, sponsored by the Buckvar family in honor of Felice Buckvar's literary achievements.

The winner of the inaugural Felice Buckvar Prize for Nonfiction—selected by Helen Benedict—is "Forty-One Months" by Will McGrath, which offers a harrowing account of ameliorating the impact of AIDS on children in Lesotho. Honorable Mention went to Elisha Waldman for "Double Exposure," his examination of the human ramifications of the Arab-Israeli conflict as played out in a pediatric oncology ward.

In Abby Horowitz's "Pediatricology"—selected by Nathan Englander as the winner of the Goldenberg Prize for Fiction—a pediatric resident struggles to find her way as a doctor in a ward full of sick children, academic sarcasm, and an attending with a distinctive mode of mentorship. Lilliam Rivera received Honorable Mention for her riveting story "Death Defiant Bomba or What to Wear When Your Boo Gets Cancer."

The winner of the Marica and Jan Vilcek Prize for Poetry—Laurie Clements Lambeth’s “Chronic Care: ‘Broken Leg’ by Keith Carter, Photograph,” selected by Tina Chang—is “ekphrastic,” based on an image. The result is a haunting poetic dialogue between girl and fawn. The aphorisms recited by generations of surgical interns forms the basis of the striking poem “The Rules of Surgery” by Kristin Robertson, which won Honorable Mention.

One of the goals of the *Bellevue Literary Review* is to champion new voices in the literary world. The *BLR* was recently named one of the top ten literary magazines that “really do publish emerging writers.” After we assembled the selections for this current issue—from the thousands of submissions—we were delighted to see that half of our fiction offerings represent first-time publications. Kudos to Susan Bartlett, Sean Kevin Campbell, Lillian Huang Cummins, Sonia Greenfield, and Jessica Stults. Elisha Waldman’s Honorable Mention essay is also a first-time literary publication. Expect to see more from these writers in the future.

Medicine is a blend of science and art—the objective reality of cells and hormones balanced against the subjective experience of beauty and pain. That wedding reception may not have blended letters and medicine very well, but the marriage itself has been a roaring success. Husband and wife, by all accounts, have never been happier. From wherever you come to the *BLR*, welcome. Bring all of yourself. I promise you’ll find something you’ve been missing. I promise you’ll find something that you need.

Jason Schneiderman  
*Poetry Editor*

## Publisher’s Note

I’m humbled and delighted to take on the title of publisher of the *Bellevue Literary Review*. Humbled because I follow in the footsteps of my remarkably talented friend Marty Blaser, whose vision and perseverance helped bring this journal to life fourteen years ago. Delighted because the other co-founders—Danielle Ofri, Jerry Lowenstein, and Ronna Wineberg—remain solidly on board. Subscribers to the *BLR* are treated to an original, eclectic, and elegantly produced publication. What they don’t see are the long hours, devotion to craft, and spot-on brilliance of the tiny staff, led by Danielle and Managing Editor Stacy Bodziak, which dazzles readers twice each year. The *BLR* was begun, in Marty’s words, “to marry literature and medicine in a new way.” It’s done that, and so much more, introducing us to exciting new writers and poets, and to unexplored corners of the literary imagination.

I came to NYU this fall as a professor of history at the Washington Square campus and director of medical humanities at NYU School of Medicine. I’m an historian by trade, currently writing a medical history of New York City seen through the lens of Bellevue Hospital. My research interests are thus very close to home. As the director of medical humanities, my goal is to make the disciplines of history, literature, and creative writing come alive to medical students in ways that will influence their personal and professional lives. These students already inhabit a special environment. No other place has so many unique and amazing resources devoted to the medical humanities: the *BLR*, the prize-winning Bellevue Literary Press, and the immensely popular Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database, to name a few. My job is to insure the excellence and stability of these resources as we move forward. I embrace the challenge.

David Oshinsky, PhD  
*Publisher*