



Introduction
By Jaime Clarke

Every worthwhile endeavor mandates an origin myth and in the case of *Post Road*, we have two: a fanciful one and a less dreamy narrative more closely resembling the truth. We like to say *Post Road* was founded on the equivalent of a bar bet—we knew someone who ran a print shop and had access, by virtue of holding MFAs from Bennington College, to a wide variety of writers and artists who were localized in New York and Boston, which felt like a head start on something, though on what we didn't know. While the foregoing is indisputably true, and accounts for the genesis portion of our myth, the reality is it has taken ten years, tens of thousands of dollars, and countless hours of volunteer labor—some by those other than we who can at least boast the limelight of the masthead—to seed, sprout, and grow *Post Road* into its place among some of the best literary magazines published today.

This anthology has afforded the opportunity to look deeper into that time in the late nineties when we first conceived of *Post Road*. Whispers of *That's what the world needs, another literary magazine* were tempered by our enthusiasm for the unprecedented bloom of literary magazines: *McSweeney's* had come to town; *Fence* was founded; *Tin House* opened its doors. This proliferation gave the impression that what the world did

indeed require was another literary magazine, and so we began building our ship on the docks, eager for the supplication of the sea. We went about researching how literary magazines operated. We used what contacts we had—Frederick Barthelme at *The Mississippi Review* and Askold Melnyczuk at *Agni*—and lobbed question after question. We learned about the dilemma of distribution, we learned about subscription drives and the importance of databases, we heard stories of production nightmares.

The staff was assembled in the fall of 1999. We knew we'd have the same mainstay features that other literary magazines featured—fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. We decided to add a theatre section; we wanted an art section but we knew we couldn't afford a color art section. Our art editor educated us about art that could be printed without color, and on regular stock rather than the glossy folio stock, which at that point might as well have cost a million dollars. We talked about the tricky classification of nonfiction. We wanted the nonfiction section to be creative nonfiction, but that left out a whole raft of nonfiction that was viable and relevant. We decided to add a criticism section, whose charge it was to publish social and cultural criticism, pieces not readily available in the slushpile but also not found in other literary magazines.

We took a breath and surveyed the sails. We looked at the other literary magazines we admired and wondered how our magazine would fit into the lit mag community—because we always viewed it as a community and not a competition. The reality started to set in that the reason other literary magazines published established writers, outside of the quality of their work, was that it lent the magazine some credibility, not to mention the marketing coup of being able to splash the established writers' names across the back cover, hoping to attract buyers. We realized we were

going to have to do the same, but we remained steadfast against becoming another venue for these very good but very established writers to publish their work. Simultaneously, we had a conversation about publishing book reviews. Book reviews in literary magazines aren't feasible because of their untimeliness, though some readers would no doubt enjoy them. The answer was serendipitous: we would give established writers a couple of pages to write about their literary enthusiasms, thereby publishing these writers without publishing their work and also publishing unique pieces about books and writers.

We still felt that we hadn't made an effort to draw in the general reader. Not everyone is interested in fiction or poetry—to the contrary: nonfiction books outsell fiction books in this country by an exponential value. So we created the Etcetera section, which would allow us to publish pieces of general interest: journals, letters, topical essays, translations, interviews, profiles, etc.

With the components of the magazine in place, the last decision was about editorial hierarchy. Again we looked to the literary magazines in our vicinity and most seemed to be an extension of their creator's personality. Without prejudice, we decided we wanted to run *Post Road* like a commune, subtracting the likelihood that the magazine could be easily identified with any one editor's particular taste or any particular style or literary aesthetic. So we gave each editor an allotment of pages and asked them to fill the magazine with what was good. Some argue that this lack of identification hurts the magazine, but we think we profit from the variety. And moreover, we've achieved our mission to give the magazine its own personality, rather than the other way around.

Naturally there were a thousand bumps along the way, a million problems we could've never anticipated; but there were bursts of joy, too, and in the end a sense of real

achievement. The publication of this anthology finds *Post Road* standing at the crossroads between the magazine's origins and its future as the magazine has begun a transition to Boston College, who will publish *Post Road* going forward. What follows is a sampling of the not-too-distant past, a representation of our ambition to showcase excellent writing in the guise of a traveling roadshow and bring happiness to those who might stop to look.