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Interview with Bryce Emley, Landon Houle and Rob Greene—Editors of [Raleigh Review](#)

Publishing since February 2010, Raleigh Review's first issue won several Best of the Net recognitions and has continued to gain in readership and reach since then. In 2011, the Review offered its first writers' workshop with Joseph Millar and Dorianne Laux, a series that has grown since then to attract writers from around the U.S. and abroad.

Interview by Laura Moretz

You've been publishing for seven years. What has been the most difficult part of building the review from then until now? How did you come to be known, and how would you like to be known in the literary magazine community?

Rob Greene, Editor/Publisher: Saying goodbye to staff members who've been good for us has been the most difficult part. Then again, the staff members who have been really good for us over the years that have had to leave have left us in better shape than they found us because they bring the new staff members up to speed and they don't leave us in a pinch.

Other than that, I can't say I think about the second leg of the question all that much, if at all. All the great artists I know are generous and are selfless. We all can't be takers in the arts. Some of us have to give and we all give a lot of time to make *Raleigh Review* happen. Focusing on the creative, one selection and one issue at a time, is more important than worrying about being known when it comes to our magazine.

How has the number of submissions grown from the first year until now?

RG: Our submission volume has grown with each open reading season. The standards are higher, of course, because our editorial teams are larger. To make for a less subjective selection criteria, we have kept up with having multiple readers on each poem and story.

Bryce Emley, Poetry Editor: Our average number poetry submissions has gone up pretty progressively over the last couple years. And then the last reading period saw a sudden jump of several hundred over our average, so we seem to be continually growing, which is great.

Landon Houle, Fiction Editor: Yeah, over the last few years, we've seen a dramatic uptick in the quantity and the quality of our fiction submissions. Every time we produce an issue, I think this is our best one yet, and as long as we can say that, we're headed in the right direction!

People like to talk about an aesthetic and how every publication has one. Can you articulate the aesthetic of *Raleigh Review*?

RG: Publishing accessible works that still challenge readers with emotional complexity has been our goal over the years. We also look to publish provocative works that can inspire empathy in readers anywhere in the world.

In Marty Saunders' review of Dorianne Laux and Joseph Millar's chapbook *Duet*, the reviewer writes: "The poems in this chapbook offer up an honest, no-frills view of what life gives us: pain, humor, sensuality, and song." This seems like it might describe the kind of work that *Raleigh Review* seeks. Would that be fair to say?

RG: That's a good question. Yes, Dorianne Laux (Prof. Laux to me) and Joseph Millar are our brilliant teachers, and the tone I set from the start of *Raleigh Review* (from February 21, 2010 and onward to the present day) comes from Dorianne and Joseph because they are my life teachers. Marty Saunders' brief description in his review that states "an honest, no-frills view of what life gives us: pain, humor, sensuality, and song" when it comes to *Duet* can certainly apply to our magazine as well. Yes, we look for concise wisdom on the universal themes of the human condition, and yes—we want to change those who read our magazine for the better. We want to save lives by making our readers laugh and/or sing through the pain of longing. We want to help our readers get over loss. We want to save our readers by empowering them. We want to help make our readers better spouses, better friends, better partners, better parents, better humans, better neighbors to all the world's citizens. We also want to challenge and entertain our readers.

I don't believe that's too much to ask.

What do you want poets and fiction writers to consider as far as fit when they think about submitting to *Raleigh Review*? Is the fiction aesthetic different than that in play for poetry?

LH: On the fiction side of things, we look for compelling and complex characters who can drive a narrative, and we also have an eye for sharply handled language and the well-wrought image. I'd ask a writer to take another look at the last page. In terms of final editorial decisions, so much depends on the white chickens. The beginning of a story engages, and so many stories engage early on, but it's the end of the story that convinces me.

BE: I'll answer the second part first. I think the poetry and fiction tend to make sense together; they usually sort of mirror similar themes, and a decent amount of play/variation in form, language, and voice crosses over the genres.

For the first part of the question, I don't think poets should think much about "fit" aside from Rob's descriptions of our aesthetics and mission. We've never published a concrete poem, but only because we've never gotten one we like. We've never published a poem about hockey or a Petrarchan sonnet for the same reason. Read an issue and you'll see a lot of variance in forms, subjects, and styles. But I'll say the first thing most of our readers look for is language. That's something I hope is consistent in our poems, a kind of intentionality, as in an intention to disrupt a common meaning or be astoundingly clear about something very complex, to use language as a tool for asking surprising questions and not just a necessary vehicle to make a statement. If you think your poems are doing that, we'd love to read them.

You have a print version and an online archive of the magazine where readers can sample the work you print. Why is it important to you to publish a print magazine?

LH: I still love to hold books and magazines. Online publications are amazing because they are so easily accessed by so many people, but (and maybe I'm old-fashioned) the literary world still needs both forms, I think. We do most of our work for *Raleigh Review* via internet because our staff lives and travels all over the world. It's an especially nice reward, then, to get that issue in the mail, to unwrap it, to open it, to smell it, to read it, to line it up on a shelf, and I think the writers and artists we publish feel the same way.

BE: I think the physical existence of the object also suggests a kind of conscious design. If you have an online magazine you're probably going to kind of jump around and read the stuff you think is going to be good (and probably miss great pieces by the people you skipped), and most web-based mags aren't set up to be read linearly. That's fine. It's a different medium. But we put a lot of time and attention toward the order of pieces in our issues, and hopefully people can sit with a physical copy and read it through like a book and notice the movement.

In addition to publishing the magazine, you offer workshops for writers in the Triangle. Why did you begin to organize these? Now that you've offered them for several years, how do you think the workshops might make a difference in the writing community and community at large?

RG: Our workshopppers come from as far as the West Coast, New England, the deep south, and the midwest to study for a weekend at a time with our workshop faculty. Our workshops are generative in nature so workshopppers come ready to produce new works. Our workshop faculty are proven teachers and writers. We have an application process for the new students we take in, and one key question, along with the poetry or fiction (published or unpublished) writing sample part of the application, is meant to screen those applying to our workshops to make sure those who attend are readers as well. These steps make for a better educational experience for those who are selected to attend our workshops.

I read that most of your editors don't live in or near Raleigh. How did this come about and does it hamper communication when people can only "talk" by email, text, and telephone about editorial decisions? Also, why have you linked the name of your review to a geographical place?

RG: The best editorial staff members in America are located throughout America so we do not limit ourselves to just Raleigh when selecting new staff members. The answer to the geographical place question is Raleigh is home. It is a great place for life, and our hopes are for *Raleigh Review* to have a writers' house here one day that'll offer residencies to national and international writers.

LH: In some ways, our communication has to be even sharper, even stronger than if we were all living and working in one location. We have to be very clear with one another because when we're on a deadline (and we're always on a deadline), we can't afford too many misunderstandings or what we might refer to as dropped calls. And even when we're not in a pattern of constant communication, we have to trust that we're all doing what we need to do to reach the goal on time. It's pretty beautiful to see all of that come together in an issue.

Do your poetry and fiction editors make final decisions about their selections, or do they pass their recommendations on to the editor-in-chief for final decisions as the issue is built?

RG: Landon Houle and her team make the decisions on the fiction selections. Bryce Emley and his team make the decisions on the poems. Kat Cays selects the visual art. We (the entire staff) all vote on the cover art together. We have talented and generous artists working with us. They give so much of themselves to make *Raleigh Review* fun to run. Plus our editorial teams operate independently until we all come together to build the issues. We do stay on our editorial schedules for the most part, and we've never extended a submission deadline. We have a few weeks of play in

our editorial cycle when it comes to getting the issues together. With plenty of notice, we are almost always within the range for the release of our new issues.

If you had three wishes for the future of *Raleigh Review*, what would they be?

1. Our editorial teams will remain intact and will continue to operate independently for many years to come.
2. The ability to pay our writers, poets and visual artists more than \$10 per accepted title.
3. We get in our writers' house in Raleigh that'll offer national and international writers' residencies, readings, and workshops.

What's the best part about editing a literary journal? The worst part?

LH: The best part, for me, is being a first audience for so many hard-working and talented writers. Sharing a story requires a certain amount of faith, a faith that the work will be read with kindness, with generosity and curiosity, and a willingness to empathize with both the writer and, more importantly, the characters. It's a privilege to be on the receiving end of such efforts, and I don't take that lightly. I'm in Row A, Seat A of an otherwise empty auditorium, and that's pretty special. So then, of course, the worst part of editing is declining a submission that you know has taken so much time and effort and emotion. That is never easy, but we hope our submitters understand that any response from *Raleigh Review*, be it an acceptance or a decline, is sent with respect and appreciation for the writer and the work.

BE: The worst part is always rejections. I think a lot about how every poem we read was written by someone who believed in it and wanted to share it. I don't like the idea of suggesting to people their vision isn't valid; usually it's just that we can't see that vision like the writer did.

The best thing is finding poems we click with and just know people need to read. Getting those poems out in the world is why we do this. People send us poems wanting to be a part of what we're doing. Or they want \$10, which is a really terrible investment with a very low statistical probability of paying out. It's a great feeling knowing that people believe in us enough to trust us with their work. It's a better feeling to share it.

Laura Moretz has work published in r.kv.r.y quarterly literary journal, Cutthroat: A Journal of the Arts, and Stoneboat. She won the Rick DeMarinis Fiction Prize for "Philo Goes Home." Two of her stories have been nominated for Pushcart prizes. She is an assistant editor at Boulevard and the interviews editor for The Review Review. Contact her at reviewreviewview@gmail.com if you are interested in contributing interviews to The Review Review.

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