

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

Cid Corman on The Little Magazine

Towards Print: the Editor surveys the season

Ridgely Cummings: Poetry and Old Age

October

1952

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TRACE

EDITOR

TRACE

No. 2

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

October 1952

Edited by James Boyer May

A READING EDITION

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This reading edition preserves the issue's poetry, fiction, essays, correspondence, reviews, and other literary writing in their printed order. Advertising, subscription matter, mastheads, the magazine's own contents pages, annual indexes, address lists, and the running trade directory are omitted as reference apparatus.

The text was checked against newly rendered source pages. Poetry lineation, stanza spacing, shaped indents, and hanging continuations for long lines are retained; prose continuations are joined without false paragraph indents. Conjectural readings are enclosed in square brackets, while original spelling and punctuation are otherwise kept.

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THE LITTLE MAGAZINE

by Cid Corman (Editor of Origin)

The little magazine has always been a conviction and an enthusiasm (a wing and a prayer). It has needed both to face the continual lack of funds and the careless love of philanthropists. But, whatever the headaches involved, the enthusiasm requires precisest evidence and the conviction must be open enough and live enough to give boosts to the going concerns of contemporary creativity. I am not thinking of one magazine, of course, I am thinking of many.

It is important that the little magazine remain the headwater of art. (And I don't mean the 'arty.') There is no other source possible today. A commercial press (or any other such medium) cannot consistently afford to risk effrontery. The paying audience requires (it is alleged) the insulated frame, however empty what is framed. On the other hand, avantgarde doesn't reach definition in the word 'eccentricity.' I see no point either in defending dadaism or surrealism at this late date, nor Ezra Pound. These are back-roots. What lives, persists. There is no defense against reality, nor even the most bruited or intricate illusions. The little magazine helps define, by presentation, what fertilizes human civilisation. These verbs, please note, are present tense.

Intramural criticism, common amongst the little magazines, is an expected and healthy exercise. Provocation is a nice edge against passivity. But when the provocation is sheer vituperation and private vilification, which it often is, the act is mere spasm. Another kind of laziness. And it is laziness, within and without, that the little magazine must fight and guard against. The fight for craft is an act of survival. It is a concomitant of any serious artistic effort. Form substantiates the artistic object. Neither craft, however, nor magazine policy are moulds into which

contributions must fit. You cannot have imagined Homer, with exactness, before he existed, unless you were Homer. But you might have been ready for him.

I am not concerned with attacking specific magazines. My central concern for the little magazine is that, in a strictly non-physical sense, it has become — with few exceptions — little. The literary element has become a closed circuit. It has become another specialisation, with its private jargon and suspicion of outsiders. The point is that writing these days must stay alive to the scope of current awarenesses as well as the fundamental and inextricable immediacies of self. These awarenesses reach back toward comparatively untouched, but living, potentials and forward on the crest of developing sciences. These are the creative stimuli. Art must accommodate this world and be open to it. It isn't a matter of writing down or up; it is a matter of growing into the openness of event. The little magazine is not to be the retreat of professional individualists. It is to be the explicitly open emotional and intellectual coherence of persons reacting to self and the breadth of human condition.

This may seem a program beyond the means of the little magazine or its intention. I don't think so. It is devoted to the most active of commitments, change. And yet it is equally to be informed by a passionate intelligence.

The creative involves life, all that gathers and can be gathered to this present with impetus and cogency, in a representative act and does not stop at the purely 'literary.' It implies the imagination, as coherency, as the organizing inventing factor.

The subject and object of all avant-garde action, which particularly includes the little magazine, is the creative. This means to discover, to rediscover, to resource and renew our coherencies.

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

One of those pronouncements seemingly obvious enough that any sensible person might have framed it (though none had, with such apropos succinctness) was Herbert Read's in *Art Now*: "Positive criticism begins as an impulse to defend one's preferences." And much recent criticism assuredly typifies degenerative trends back to that elementary beginning; some even of the critical writing which doesn't evidence personal pettinesses, still is subjective stuff, inspun on poles of pat prejudice and latterday dogma. Seldom are evaluations broad-loomed in fair patterns to give account to whatever traditions the creativities being analysed portend (in the sense of Alexander Pope's use of this word). Critics usually aren't trying to discover whether these are threads for honest contributions, nor whether they may not lend validity within special designs of their authors. Instead, they cover with their own no-doubt-adroit manipulations what might be appreciations for possibly true shades of originality.

And why do critics overlook certain significant new writers? Usually, no question, they've not read same! Never have genuine artists been this widely compelled to find print in small-circulation periodicals. They're dispersed among dozens of little-read magazines virtually unknown to recognized 'important' contemporary judges (who, for this reason, no longer merit such designation). This, plus regressions in judging methods, inevitably produces false-premised surveys of the state of modern literature.

For, contra wailing choruses about dwindling creativity, 1952 has seen a revival suggesting an Elizabethan (II) flowering. Unaware commentators of misnomered advanced schools don't apprehend this. And other critics, with popular larger audiences, mutter mournfully over pessimistic inferences based on products of those few writers who have

proven acceptable to fashion magazines or long-established literary media . . . plus the scattering who do find book print . . . Chiefly, critical chatter from aperies of neo-academic garblings of conjectures from surrealised mists across post-war skies. These supposed signalings are from what might be named Sartred psychoneurotics; and having this long refused recognition to virile new principals, these critics neo-dogmatically compose rituals for weak imitators of Pound, Proust, Joyce, James, Firbank . . . lame annotators of Freud, Jung

A superficial lack (perhaps better lacking) today — and yet important as partial explanation of this anomaly — has been that of geographical focal centers. No altar-places, no sacred precincts endure. Today's poets wander no Provence, old Albion has lost her worshipped bounds (as keep, at least — the dispersed Goddamns not now mainly members of the armed forces or diplomatic services), no longer is Boston's metaphysical drawbridge sole entry for Pegasus to America hinterlands, nor Cable's South the only new-world-mysteried tradition Both the locations for acts of creative writing and locations providing backdrops for story and song, along with places of publication — all are scattered. Earnest small magazines find breath in London or in far Australia, the tablelands of the U.S. Rockies or sated Paris; and, as to styles and treatments — they rove south and north and everywhere between more-traveled parallels. The latter chiefly are the mere smart caustic ribald lines by which sceptic later Forties had supplanted hampered realisms which failed because just feinting improvements on disillusioned — yet, of course, deceived — Thirties. And earnest new writers also are printed in some rather larger periodicals — in unpredictable India and predetermined Boston . . . wet Soho and dry Texas plains . . .

Without having had opportunity to examine it at this writing, mere revival of such as Poetry and Poverty (28a

Belsize Square, London, N.W.3) verifies the foregoing. And Merlin appears (in Paris, by grace of U.S.A. financing) with refreshingly-announced expectations of publishing the 'essential' and rendering no cant 'lip-service' to little magazine esotericisms — also, to be both self-supporting and to pay for material. What noble marks! Fervently, we hope Editor Alexander Trocchi not only continues with the good taste of No. 1, but that he has the essential practicality to realize these proclamations.

And bravely, in the metropolis of vast scant-populated Australia, Language (Box 5097, G.P.O., Sydney, N.S.W.) edited by Geoffrey Alan Mill, with tenets the antipodes of those semanticists of whom the title brings thought. His editorial quote from Roy Campbell's *On Some South African Novelists*: "You praise the firm restraint with which they write — / I'm with you there of course; / They use the snaffle and the curb all right, / But where's the bloody horse?" Wonderful!

Even Meanjin (U. of Melbourne, Carlton N.3, Victoria), older endeavor blackly called conservative by Australian rebels, doesn't merely gild dead petals. Recently, both stimulating new art and reading, while Editor C. B. Christesen restates fealty to independent creativities of Australians.

Departure (Merton College, Oxford) professed forward intent in its first; but didn't actually 'depart' until a second and more exciting issue. While announcing no 'case' for a new movement, Alan Brownjohn declared with connotative belligerence against any 'aggressive'-ness. Possibly this, plus lackadaisical remark he'd not found any 'decline' in English poetry since the war, sufficiently spotlighted why he failed to print much that justified the title in No. 1. That he and John Adlard produced such significance as No. 2 exhibited, without a 'creed,' certainly lends justification to their original position, however. Like most editors, they declare original

prose vastly rarer than good poetry.

Prose in recently-established *Nimbus* (20 Shipley Hse., Albion Ave., London, S.W.8) is better vindication for Editor Tristram Hull than the poetry; and yet, a tendency toward indiscriminate publication, almost evincing confusion from mere volume of submissions. Let every editor beware interpreting abundance of matter in terms of the virility which only implements it! Yet, though failing in selectivity as re poems, this one prints much deserving attention.

Now that *Nine* (69 Grosvenor Rd., Tunbridge Wells) continues with Peter Russell, alone, once again is proven one good cook is better than any bevy of same. This magazine gains in vigor and purpose, since losing other editors to *Colonnade*. Not in disparagement of those departed — simply that no publication develops proper individuality without some one individual at the helm.

Miss I. R. Orton moves in her own manner with *Night-Watchman* (30 Healey St., S. Wigston, Leicester), a manner particularly characterised by persistent optimism, though not a Pollyanna variety. A fairly tough order, for she also demands social realism and emphasises content (vs. presentation). A determined selfconscious endeavor worth watching.

Over in U.S.A., another new one definitely slanted as re world problems, *Four Winds* (3 Liberty St., Gloucester, Mass.), though first issue permits almost contradictory expressions — no doubt by reason of Vincent Ferrini's 'international' intent. Space too for other than English-language writers. A stimulating attempt to give account to all doctrines, and yet asserting one of its own — some degree of respect for every sincere pleader.

The new *Talisman* fails of pointedness; and neither do contributions hint unhailed major talents. Dismaying unevenness of quality, ranging from tired recountals of long-worn changes to novel pieces of mere technical

virtuosity — and yet, the editorial catholicity by no means precludes that this project may bring more exciting material in future.

Better, in *Gambit*, though this isn't necessarily from better intentions nor even from superior editing — perhaps from their wider contacts in a metropolitan location. Using all types, this one inclines to stress (besides elements of limited popularity in experiment for its own sake) topical attitudes and novelties bordering the superficially 'cute' . . . yet, honest originality in not a few.

With a double #6 & 7, *Inferno* (P.O.B., 5030, San Francisco, Calif., U.S.A.) broadens purposes and contents; while *Resistance Magazine* (Box 208, Cooper Stat., New York 3, N.Y.) continues stressing exclusively anarchistic ideas, with first appearance in over a year. Latter, by the way, is obtainable free for the asking.

EDITORS WRITE

(Since this is not to be a department of testimonials for Trace, but to provide helpful information and publish constructive differences of opinion — once and for all, our thanks for the amazing scores of congratulations from all about the world.) —
ED.

Thomas H. Carter: "You'll . . . notice that I've been using a large percentage of criticism. Frankly, I'd rather give the space to creative work; but I'm simply not getting any that's good enough for me. When I edited Spearhead, I didn't hesitate to use something just because it happened to appeal to me; but with Shenandoah, I attempt to apply certain critical standards. . . . I personally much prefer experimental poetry to traditional . . . but . . . just because a poem is experimental doesn't mean it's good. . . . It looks as though wouldbe contributors are just plain not putting enough time on their products. The same thing is true for fiction, which, by the way, is the hardest to come by (and) there are very few taboos in fiction these days, as far as I'm concerned. . . . I'm in the peculiar position of wanting nothing more than to further creativity, and being forced by lack of good materials towards an academicism which I distrust intensely. But, for every important writer that the big quarterlies help to stifle, there are literally dozens of half-baked talents that refuse to learn their craft." (Washington & Lee University, Box 722, Lexington, Virginia, U.S.A.) August Derleth: "The suggestions I have . . . : by no means include critical articles. I have abandoned a dozen little reviews because of the criticism, which is too much for us. I prefer genuinely creative prose or poetry. 2) Give a little more space to descriptives in the directory." (Arkham House, Sauk City, Wis., U.S.A.) F. H. McDonald: "I like much your whole Trace idea for publishing sharp, incisive, witty, helpful and damaging

comment on little magazines. In honesty, I must add that I feel your effort to categorise and characterise fails, as I think any such effort must.” (Approach, Wallingford, Pa., U.S.A.)

Grace Ross: “Though we pass up the surrealist and other obscure off-brand work, our stress will be on the modern forms, and the traditionalist label would not be a correct one for Quicksilver. We find nature poetry in the natural state to be pretty much on the boring side, and off-color attempts at realism are just as uninteresting.” (4429 Foard St., Forth Worth 5, Texas, U.S.A.) Louis Brigante: “Images and values expressed in one medium do evoke images and values in another medium. Approach is all-important in carrying this out. Thing is not to let one medium merely illustrate another. Each must be created independently. Affinity comes only on that plane where images or values handled are similar (evoked by like stimuli) or responsive (a set of literal i’s and v’s perceived graphically and translated visually after being conditioned by a separate sensibility).” (Intro, Box 860, Grand Central Stat., New York 17, N.Y., U.S.A.)

POETRY AND OLD AGE

by Ridgely Cummings (editor of now-suspended

Comprehension)

Last year I wrote an article entitled: “Does Poetry Appeal Exclusively to the Aged?”

The question arose from observations made at two gatherings, one of the Ina Coolbrith Circle in Berkeley, California, and the other in Los Angeles commemorating the 99th anniversary of the birth of Edwin Markham.

Without attempting to answer the question finally and dogmatically, I deduced from the evidence gathered at these meetings that, although many young people still write poetry, those who go to hear poetry read in public are almost all in the upper age brackets.

It was a moderately eloquent article if I say it myself and I will quote from it in a moment; but first I’d like to give the reactions of some of the authorities in the field to the question posed.

Loring Williams, editor of *American Weave*, a poetry quarterly published in Cleveland, wrote of the article as follows: “If I used prose, I would surely use this . . . but I do not. What you point out is all too true. What can we do to arouse a more active interest among younger people? ¶ We have high school poetry contests here and get some marvellous entries; but we never hear anything more of these promising writers after the contest is over. Our local organization offers scholarships to poetry courses in local colleges. They go begging . . . and, at every poetry turnout, the middle-aged and better, female predominates. . . .”

Next I sent the article to *Saturday Review of Literature* and got a pleasant letter of rejection signed by Harrison Smith. A letter instead of a printed form was encouraging and I put it aside, but can’t find it at the moment so am

unable to quote from it verbatim. I hesitate to trust my memory, but recall that Smith agreed with my thesis that “poetry should not be relegated to the complete jurisdiction of elderly ladies wearing Nineteenth Century picture hats and aged gentlemen with canes and hearing aids.”

The article next went to the editors of *Matrix*, a progressive quarterly published in Pleasanton, California. Back came the following reply: “. . . I don’t suppose you really believe this argument yourself, or you would not have so carefully refrained from mentioning younger poets, and where they are busy being articulate — even in Los Angeles, the home for the aged. And so your piece, while amusing, although you try for this a little too hard in spots, remains more of a personal anecdote than a full treatment of the subject. . . . S.E.M.”

Probably the portion of the article to which S.E.M. objected as overreaching for humor was the following, describing the “Man with the Hoe” celebration. It was straight reporting and if I had wanted to be cruel I could have made it a lot worse. One paragraph went like this: “An angular lady recited Shakespeare with considerable spirit, to the imminent peril of her false teeth. Another middle-aged lady dressed in green, wearing a blue veil on her head and carrying some green branches in her hand, danced an interpretation of one of Markham’s poems dealing with trees in the springtime. I stood up to see this performance better but later wished I had not, for it was so inept it was actually embarrassing. The dancer seemed to feel the same way about it and not once did she smile during her exhibition. From my standing vantage point I was able to reinforce my first impression about the advanced age of the audience. I did not see five people who looked to be under forty. The median age I would guess was sixty-five and several of those who spoke, contemporaries of Markham, were announced during the introductions as being in their eighties.”

I replied to S.E.M. that I did believe in what I had written but that he (she) made a good point in saying it was not a full treatment of the subject and that perhaps I was generalising upon insufficient evidence. However I still had faith in the value of the article and put it in the mail again.

It went out and back, out and back, taking about three weeks or a month for each potential market. Each time it provoked comment, not always favorable. Elinor Henry Brown, co-editor of *The Archer*, a literary quarterly published in North Hollywood, thought it was impolitic to identify the poetry groups under discussion. She wrote: "I think most editors will balk at the naming of the groups. . . . Both groups you mention might have even a higher percentage of older people in them than most, it seems to me — though, admittedly older people have more time for 'outside activities' — and I know you aren't saying they shouldn't be encouraged to stay interested in poetry through the autumn years. . . ."

The article under discussion is lost. I haven't seen it now for three or four months, so it is probably buried in some editor's slush pile. The quotes I have extracted from it are taken from a carbon copy I was foresighted enough to make. But one of the letters it elicited is worth reproducing here, I believe, even though it runs to considerable length, because of its interest to other poets and because it comes from an important figure in the field. The letter is from Richard Wirtz Emerson, editor of *Golden Goose Press*: "Thanks very much for your kindness in letting us read your brief article on the appeal of poetry anymore (CQ) to elderly rather than young audiences. Received a short while ago a clipping from one of the West Coast papers reporting the 'ceremonies' attending the first reading of a new poem by a writer named Hugh Chisolm — and the pictures, if nothing else, certainly were a forceful, if not altogether pleasing, example of what you say. ¶ Generally your article is along the lines of editorial thinking

of Golden Goose. However notes of this sort are done almost entirely by the editors, so I'm afraid we won't be able to use this. . . . The increasing lack of support, if only by subscription, of these serious magazines by poets is rather discouraging — especially when we remember how necessary such magazines are to the encouragement, development and publicising of such poets. Without financial support the little magazines can't continue for very long, and without the magazines the poets — you see the irony. . . .”

It is a sad thing that our commercial culture seems to leave time and energy for poetry only to the very young who are still in school and being supported by others and to the very old who are being supported by their savings or the state.

Poetry can be a great comfort to old age; and those of us who aspire to express ourselves in this medium should be grateful for the interest that elderly people take in our creations. But poetry is not and should not be exclusively the property of the wise, mild, benign oldsters. There are many who have youth, freshness, virility, forcefulness and the desire to communicate these qualities to others of their contemporaries. They too deserve encouragement.

ADDENDA

by the Editor

In this regrating age, perhaps nowhere is printing still produced with the uncommercial artistry of that being done in St. Ives, Cornwall, by Guido Morris on his Latin Press, dating from one-room studio beginnings in 1935; and his exquisite Crescendo Poetry Series (30s. for 12 nos.) also serves contemporary literature. . . . An unique publication, The Shakespeare Newsletter (749 Franklin D. Roosevelt Dr., New York 9, N.Y., U.S.A.), with global coverage, expands in its second year under Louis Marder. . . . Inferno will attempt an hitherto-lacking information — through a series of critical appreciations of lessknown American poets. . . . Canadian poetry recently was aided in a volume titled Cerberus (Contact, 28 Mayfield Ave., Toronto — \$1) with new work by Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster. . . . Tampa University (U.S.A.) the past summer added another literary broadcast to mounting numbers of such — “Brief Visits with the Poets and Writers of our Day.” . . . Though behind with his periodicals, Glen Coffield continues his one-man labors on his mountain (Box 340, R.1, Eagle Creek, Oreg., U.S.A.) bringing forth an unusual related story collected by Gene Magner, who is curator of the poetry collection at Buffalo University. Titled Or, these are described as “shocking religious satire.” Also a new book by Pearl Bond (“most biting female in American poetry”) The Sensual Image (\$1). . . . First book under the Villiers imprint: Eight American Poets, Anthology, 1952, has been arranged by the editor of Trace. Poets are: Kenneth L. Beaudoin, Thomas H. Carter, George P. Elliott, Scott Greer, William Pillin, James Schevill, Felix N. Stefanile, Harold Witt. (4/6 — in U.S.A., \$1.)