

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

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Lawrence Barth: Little Magazines and Tyranny
Towards Print: on the dangers of sanity
Opinion, by S.E.M. · Editors Write

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JAMES BOYER MAY

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EDITOR

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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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LITTLE MAGAZINES AND TYRANNY

by Lawrence Barth (U.S.A.)

Two sinister items recently have appeared in the literary field. In Cleveland, Ohio, city and state laws have forced from bookstalls and newsstands these books, among others: Freud's General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Apuleius' The Golden Ass, Maugham's Cakes and Ale, Steinbeck's The Wayward Bus. In Washington, D.C., the State Department has requested (which in today's atmosphere means, in effect, "ordered") publishers to certify that books for export are not written by "Communists, fellow-travelers, or persons who might be considered controversial."

Just like that do we go down the road of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany.

Fascism has been a long time arriving in America. Even today we may not have arrived, on the sliding scale of repression, at that semantically-indefinite point. But we can realistically state that America is rapidly becoming fascist. With a ghastly humour the bigots are establishing a tyranny in the course of opposing tyranny: that of the tragically degenerated Soviet Union that once suggested the hope for a rational society.

Today the Soviet government's snooping, denouncing and jailing, its horrible automaton-manufacturing school-system and vast emphasis on militarism and building weapons are in essence matched by the psychotic building of murder machinery here, by our congressional thought-control committees, our intense atmosphere of prying and name-wrecking. People in omnibuses and parks no longer speak aloud about anything that could be construed as "controversial," in what our ancestors once proudly called "the land of the free."

To be in every way realistic, however, the picture should not be oversimplified. It's complex, full of contradictions. The

healthy impetus of the Thirties and Forties is still somewhat with us. Trade unions, though still attacked, are much more widely accepted as a normal part of American life. There is an increased spirit of friendship between Negro and White, Christian and Jew, that barely existed before 1930. In literature, the rise of the inexpensive paperbound book has brought a wide reading of good work, alongside an appalling rise in the reading of trash. Orwell's extremely important 1984, showing a future totalitarianism such as America seems heading for, has sold over 750,000 copies.

Yet, mixed as the picture is, the anti-life forces are gaining, because our people are paralysed by fear. In the publishing field this is reflected in a clear-cut contrast. During the depression the mood of Americans became one of energetic struggle for something better than the crumbs and garbage of life, and publishers were surprisingly bold in supporting them. Today 95 per cent of the publishers have shut their doors to everything but sadism, slop, and drivel.

How to fight back? True, there seems to be only a handful with the heart and patience to attack once again the massive problem of the conditioned human irrationality, which on the part of politicians creates the tyrannies and on the part of their victims passively allows them to continue. But the upsurge of the Thirties points to a high-tension struggle-power cocooned in Americans. This waits to be stirred to emergence by warmth of bold, realistic speaking out.

A primary means of fighting back lies in publishing media sometimes scorned as unimportant: the little magazines. What they do, what they have always done, largely, is to go in the opposite direction; this is their highest value. In the Twenties, they led in breaking through the Victorian walls about literature and other arts, in spreading the psychological understanding that came with Freud; in the Thirties, they led the process of opening the public mind to

the economic pig-pen that a profit economy can make of human lives, and more sensitive to the fact of organised (and unorganised) fascism. Today, in a mixed period, when people vaguely distrust politicians without quite recognising the basic irrational nature of politics, itself, the little magazines are islands where ideas may be developed to try to solve human problems by other means than killing off the human beings who have them.

Editors, of course, are human (this will surprise some people) and there isn't a little mag without its ripe faults. These range from analysing and re-analysing Eliot, Pound, and Joyce to distraction, through a warm and sincere social view presented with corny ineptness, to the old attractive dead-end of trying to escape problems through occultism or other magic. But scores of them (one or two perhaps a bit beyond the "little mag" definition) render a decent service in many fields. In psychology, *Neurotica* and *Complex* do a steady job of digging below the surface of masks and rationalisations; the *Orgone Energy Bulletin* digs still deeper, and adds new sociology. *Furioso* prints, among other things, badly-needed smarting satire; *The Humanist*, *Progressive World*, *Anvil*, *Approach*, *Retort*, *The Appeal*, *The California Quarterly*, *Inferno*, and *Goad* dig away at irrational society, each with its own mental eye. Their conflict of vision is great, and in that fact lies much of their value.

The small mags have a long history of first-printing writers; and they are doing it today — patient editors with passion and honesty. Nevertheless the mortality is high; probably every week one little mag dies somewhere. Some of the finest and most useful have given up fairly recently, including *The Minnesota Quarterly*, *Decade*, *Twelfth Street*, *Literary Amateur*, E. Haldeman-Julius' *The Critic* and *Guide*, the New York newspaper, *Daily Compass*, and *Matrix*. The last-mentioned kept going for fifteen years, introducing good new writers by the score, and never once

had the money to graduate to letterpress from the mimeo reproduction that was utilised with such skill. The callous attitude toward little mags was once related to Matrix thus: "An editor at one of the (book) publishing houses said frankly that the publisher took it for granted that there would 'always be the little magazines' to help writers . . . and while these magazines were doing a good job, there didn't seem to be any need to support them, because they always seemed to be around under one name or another, anyway."

The doggedness required to continue under such conditions is one of the important qualities needed in the present and coming years to hold out against the book-burners and political neurotics who are increasing their power day by day. And it's precisely the noncommercial basis of these magazines which ensures that they will continue to print the rational and unconventional material that's immediately dropped back into return envelopes on arrival at a commercial magazine office. Further, new small mags are being born as rapidly as others die — a situation that didn't exist in the Forties. America's churning, groping quality of the Fifties is well reflected in this fact, and this ferment forms an important healthy tissue within our societal sickness.

Even under the worst of conditions, many of the little magazines will find ways of continuing to say "Nevertheless, it moves." Nothing is more important right now — before the tyranny grows still stronger — than to start supporting the morale of the small presses with money on a large scale.

A friend has urged: "Be practical — these magazines are less than a drop in the bucket. Their circulations run about 300-1500 each — what's that against the millions of readers of even a single commercial magazine?" The answer: (1) the difference between morale and hopelessness for even a minority of its people can mean the difference between life and death for a nation; (2) many people eventually look for

truth, no matter how obscurely it may be published; (3) when they do finally search out publications in which they can find realistic enquiry, circulations of even the tiniest publications will swell; (4) the small press' primary function is a pioneering one, and pioneers are always necessarily few in number. Its concentration should be to stimulate the thinking of not only a few general readers, but particularly that of 'opinion makers,' such as editors of mass circulation magazines. In some cases such editors have intelligences considerably above the level of the conventional myth-ridden material they're forced to turn out, and they are capable of gradually introducing more realism into mass publications. (5) It is standard procedure today for the conformist press to blame the rottenness in human life exclusively on Communists and Russia. The U.S.A., in turn, is supposed to be pure — or, at worst, to have just a spot here and there that easily brushes off. The small press, by its inherent open-minded nature, can help people face the simple truth: that the rottenness of life is the product of the deep-seated neurosis which the entire human race in all countries, societies and classes, has inflicted on itself.

That's one man's opinion. The next reader may say "You're screwy — now listen —" Good! The clash of ideas, above all, is valuable, because it develops our living. In that spirit lies the ability of the little magazines to face the mounting tyranny and to struggle steadfastly for the liberty to speak and grow.

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

Perhaps an appropriate subtitle for this may be *On Dangers of Sanity*, part of its impetus having been provided by reiteration of the term 'syndrome' with reference to small literary magazines, by a 'books' columnist. In fact, he's seldom referred to any of these without a semi-indulgent smirk over what he nevertheless professes may be the harmless irrationalities of little-magazine editors and contributors. No attempt will be made at formal rebuttal of this careless and/or puerile notion in a journalist whose remarks hold less significance than most of the experimentation he ridicules; yet, taken in conjunction with other condescending treatments of original writings which make difficult (at least, uneasy) reading, his dismissal of all off-trail writers as 'nuts' does provide springboard for exaggerated retort as re misunderstanding criticism in general.

In remote context, Emmanuel Mounier asserted (Personalism): "Adaptation is necessary, but to adapt oneself too well is to become enmeshed and finally immobile." The symptoms leading reputed authorities to comment disparagingly on little magazines are simply rebellious refusals to adapt works to current (mainly popular) custom. These writers reject coat-and-conduct money of regimentarian editors, starvingly contriving to elude the wheedling or bludgeoning critics who would press them into the redcoats of letters which these martinets so admire that they, themselves, never break ranks to explore rough terrain for understanding of those who won't endure 'one-two-three' on smooth avenues. Yet, the bushfighters — in their most diverse tactics — have traditional meanings, if never formulating neurotic routines to become victims of the types of compulsion complexes suffered by many eminent editors

and commentators.

For, the not-unexpected countercharge is that undesirable fixations in these allegedly-sane pundits indicate their chronic disease graver than the fitful acute lapses of the creative minds they've diagnosed. Some critics possibly are victims of that most dread hallucination involving delusion of an 'only sanity' — the same which establishes dictatorships and utilises torture chambers?

But always — in all branches of endeavor — stubbornly unique personalities have been disparaged, coerced, and penalised. Also, they've been shunned, feared, and hated. And those who attack the unconventional gain the plaudits of low common-denominator audiences, those unleavening masses with nothing to contribute to humanity beyond results of the common act of generation. This explains such unsubtle condescension as this columnist's 'syndrome;' and yet, this does not controvert that such intolerance is related to graver manifestations of fasci-communistic trends. Dangers from indisputable literary authority are like dangers from strong centralised political control. Just as public administrators should tolerate elements all but inimical to general welfare, literary primates should concede that crude violations of accepted canons may not utterly and never be of any possible remote value.

At the moment, the principal grievance of the orthodox against little magazines concerns phenomena of mixed categories. They demur at the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between a prose poem and poetical prose, of deciding whether a piece is more short story or more essay, or mainly a chunk of matter out of an author's subconscious, and so to be studied as autobiography . . . whether a play is chiefly a projection for actual drama, or a fable in dialogue, or perhaps holds enough poetry to be read primarily in lyric recital. . . . And, of course, no single critic agrees with another what constitutes a novel.

They've nearly overlooked that this always has been the case in the arts, except in stagnant intervals when formal rules grow paramount and individuality rarely expressed. This period may comprise the most diversified achievements in the history of present humanity. Virtually everything is being attempted, and every combination — not only in literature, but in painting, sculpture, music, the dance. And of them all, literary experimentation has been reaching most-limited audiences — through little magazines. The past tense; because a few little magazines grow big, and their multiplying numbers may ensure adequate hearing through their sheer ubiquity.

Narrowness is another characteristic of contemporary criticism. And the integrity of today's criticism seldom remains unimpaired by hopeful self-service; and despite the gross volume of comments, honest reactions, particularly to poetry, are exceptional. This means insufficient valid interplay — so many opinions shaded by selfish pretenses and/or bigoted attachments. Debates between critics often are just personal quarrels stemming from competition for academic prestige. Comparatively little discussion concerns the writings supposedly analysed, or even the (somewhat trumped-up) principles championed.

As a result, the real values of hardy singularities are accorded scarcely as much recognition as certain critics' exhibitionisms! Creative writers, themselves, often are denied very rights to meaningful uniquenesses . . . while their critics fail to transmit meanings beyond their own well-catechised discipleships. True, they may not actually succeed in regimenting anyone; but what wasted energy! Their comments would have greater significance even if they disregarded all measures about which men of letters generally agree — provided that this would then allow exaggerated focus to some genuine creation. For, while any individual without a society would be nothing and every

individual's role in every society is comparatively minor, the issue is sincerity (or its lack).

And so, finally, to concede that most writings which critics discuss are of relative inconsequence in the long term, while pointing out that another characteristic of contemporary criticism is lack of humility. The posturing with which little-magazine people frequently are charged is surpassed by posturings of most their accusers. Furthermore, several times the numbers of the latter prove to exercise large (thus, assuredly dangerous) influences on bodies of opinion; and the very typical crankiness of the undangerous little-magazine personages proves a saving identificatory element. No potential czars of belles-lettres exist among them. . . . Wherewith, to detailed consideration of some new magazines, some recently at new turnings . . . and centering upon England . . .

As always, British experimentation is less radical than on the Continent and on an average less eccentric than in the U.S.A. Marked aberrations seldom have been fostered by the Welsh, Scottish, Irish, or English, despite emphasis on individualism and frequent (to the rest of the world) near-fanatical political controversies. Truth is, the crotchety independences of these islanders are entrenched in traditions (albeit they move by slow modificatory processes rather than through revolutions). For better or for worse, British education seems to 'take' more firmly than any other.

Even such an off-trail publication as Antony Borrow's *Glass*, lately revived and again appearing regularly, carries imbedded in fantasy-weirdest pieces echoes of often-remote tradition; and something of the same holds for *The Artisan* (if here, editorial interest remains rather limited to form). Obvious to casual readers are lines of tradition in less-experimental new mags, such as Jon Silkin's *Stand* and Irene Coates' *Poetry Periodical*; however, what's less venturesome in re forms and treatments is compensated (to

tastes of those who wish literature not to be escapist) by fact they're plainly concerned with contemporary problems. Miss Coates maintains desire to print "forthright, satirical work, as well as the experimental;" and Stand's editor declares necessity "to look outwards to the condition of the world."

Night-Watchman, to be sure, is frankly preoccupied with social-cultural matters . . . as are others . . . and yet, those oftenest called 'leading' smaller periodicals remain enwrappt not simply in tradition, but in mere novel syntheses — the pseudo-novelties comparable to picture-puzzle rearrangements. Despite its conceded excellence, this may occasionally be noted even in Poetry & Poverty. Other phases of this may be seen in Arbiter and The Poet (Scotland). Becoming less-bound is Departure (see Editors Write).

Parallel 'progressive-conservatisms' are found in Australia, in Southerly. Now more experimental, is Meanjin, as is the new Direction, which — notwithstanding declarations of revolt — to date actually has offered few really-radical pieces. New Zealand Arena remains predominantly conservative, as do most Canadian magazines — and on throughout the British world. . . .

Meantime, in U.S.A., the lines are very sharply drawn between new periodicals intent on startling originalities and those seemingly with no purposes beyond printing academically-acceptable material, imitative of older writers. No relevant parallels with the hybrid British examples exist. Only between the outrightly-conservative U.S.A. pubs and similar (much older) English mags may good comparisons be drawn. And this rather surprisingly indicates that every new British editor then has at least some live modern purpose, although none may be so forwardlooking as say Charles Gulick of Idiom (N.Y.). Nor even as editors of Ohio Intersection (less selective), nor Columbia University's Quarto (somewhat limited). For comparative material — and then, with long-familiar English media only — one must read

The Colorado Quarterly, else look into older U.S.A. journals like The Kansas Magazine, Western Humanities Review . . . or the best among the religious and special-interest publications (excellent examples being Keryx and Phylon).

EDITORS WRITE

Alan Brownjohn: "We shall be printing more experimental verse . . . though we shall still remain eclectic, and based on Oxford. . . . One of our worries in editing *Departure* is to give it a recognisable literary personality, and we are wondering whether in fact this is impossible for a magazine of our size. The most individual and attractive of the 'little' mags are the slightly bigger ones, where increased space gives a good editor 'elbow room.' . . . Many of the others make spirited attempts to conquer their size; others realise their limitations and, confining themselves, e.g., to poetry . . . do well. It would be a very difficult thing to publish a small magazine that was at once fully eclectic and had character."

Alexander Trocchi: "Vitally concerned with experimental innovation in contemporary writing . . . nevertheless convinced that the world situation obliges the literary magazine to take a stand on certain fundamental issues. Nonpartisan, Merlin believes however . . . that it must attempt to hit at fixed categories and combat that tendency in the human being to form rigid and uncompromising attitudes . . . and will bring before the public documents whose implications are fundamentally social. This vital role must be performed without compromise in the domain of art."

Louis Brigante: "Too much petty intrigue, skullduggery and sheer nonsensical prattle is being written in letters by publishers, critics, editors, and literary parasites — stuff that they would never write for publication. They feel smug and safe in the underground privacy of the mails, and in this safety they can freely practice snidery and irresponsible power. The sanctity of the 'personal letter' is a fallacy and miserable refuge for the frightened fatheads who dish it out on the sly."

Harry Hooton: "Prospective publishers are rarely impressed by the intrinsic aesthetic merit in work, but its associations. . . . I shall make City different . . . I should add here that my stocks in Australia aren't high. I am afraid, or rather I am glad in a way, that I have offended most of the local literati."

Charles Gulick: "Particularly the poetry (ref. to better quality of mss arriving at office of Idiom). . . . Experimental fiction seems to be almost non-existent, though . . ."

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OPINION

by S.E.M., a presently inactive editor of long experience

From time to time there are outbursts in various magazines as to what constitutes poetry, or fiction, or art. Sometimes these explosions are vicious in character; sometimes only mildly querulous, but a common note underlying many of them is the author's firm stand that his convictions alone are correct, sounded from the burning bush of Moses. This leaves those of us who hold contrary opinions in an awkward position. Ought we to stuff our real feelings hurriedly into an old cigar box, so as to appear to be Informed, one of the elect — never, under any circumstances, to betray that we have committed the nasty social error of disagreeing? Or should we steady ourselves against the bookcase and admit that we have other ideas, thence to suffer the slings and arrows of outraged critics, who are likely to smoke alarmingly because the only mind we like to make up is our own?

Suppose, for instance, that Mr. Piptwitch reads a poem. It does not rhyme; it meanders in erratic typographical design across the page; the meaning escapes Mr. P., and it does not fit into his notions concerning poetry. Therefore, says Mr. P. emphatically, it is not poetry. He does not mention what it might be, except to cover it with vitriol, as an effective method of getting it out of sight, on the theory, perhaps, that vitriol is prettier than the poem, or more acceptable.

In no way do Mr. P.'s feelings determine whether or not the poem is poetry. Someone else might insist that not only is it poetry, but that it is great poetry — but neither is it great on this account. Both these gentlemen are quite correct, and also quite incorrect — but only for each other. Neither has absolutely and finally decided the question, except to make known that one believes the poem to be effective; the other

does not. It could be that the poet wrote the verse to amuse his pet parrot, and that he thinks both these gents are soft in the head. It is nonsense to argue whether the poem is poetry. And so there they are, glaring at each other, fighting mad, not because the poem is not poetry, but because they cannot seem to accept each other's feelings.

Why is it not possible to accept all the opinions expressed as valid? Do not all shades of opinion make it possible for the undecided, as well as the sophisticate, to choose for himself? In this way we can get many diverse opinions from every side, among which we can all browse and adventure, selecting that which looks interesting. These ideas interact upon and against each other, multiplying, enlarging, or sifting out altogether in the natural course of things — a kind of artistic Darwinism, we might say — but all have an equal chance of survival because of their own qualities, and not because somebody thinks they are appealing, or ugly, or something else. This opens the door to the timid soul who is afraid of being ridiculed, and encourages him to speak out, and we need not then be limited to hearing the authoritative monologues of the pompous pundits of literature and art who are bold enough to say what they think (and who keep saying it deafeningly until their audience is bludgeoned into a coma) — but who are not bold enough to tolerate opposition — as if there were some remarkable virtue, or difficult intellectual effort, in liking ideas or people who agree with us. The fact that an idea is expressed by someone in no way makes it accurate, perhaps not even useful or desirable — except to him who expresses it — and in no way is anyone obligated to agree with him. What reason is there to believe any of his ideas, especially if he believes himself to be an Authority? Someone who is not an authority may have fresher insights.

We may argue — and violently too — about art as transmutation, as pictorial reporting, as simply mass, color

and line, or whatever — but is it not conceivable that art is all of these things, and not just limited to one — and more besides, as we learn more and do more? If art in all of its forms is to remain free, it cannot be pinned down absolutely by anybody in any one particular cubicle. It must be left free to change and show all possible facets. We have seen what can happen when conformity is exacted in Communist Russia, and what then happens to the artist. Totalitarianism in art is quite as objectionable as political totalitarianism.

The defender of conventional art, whose tongue boils in his mouth as he furiously declaims against modernism in any form, traces all the ills of society to it, and beseeches return to the good old days, as if yesterday was idyllic. Why, one asks? And in what way are his denunciations valuable, except to himself? And how far back should we go? To cave paintings of Cro-Magnon Man? To tribal chants? To native drums and crude whistles? To Egyptian psalms? To Sappho? To Aristophanes? Or to the Venus of Willendorf?

We need to be exposed to all types of poetry and literature and art and criticism. For how can we know the so-called good art if we are not also exposed to the so-called bad? Do we not sharpen our perceptions, our taste and discriminatory sense from sampling all the choices offered? Without such opportunity, someone else must do our selecting and thinking for us, as is the case with political ideas in many countries, and while this may be flattering to the chooser, it educates nobody, and makes artistic yesmen of us — a situation which already exists in Russia, whose people have no way of checking the approved selections against others of different design.

Most poets and other artists pride themselves on being individualists and, as individualists, it is not useful nor rewarding to stress sameness in poetic form, or to look for it — but to keep sharp watch for that which really is different and unique — and to permit it — for others, as well as for

ourselves. We may think what we please about the choice but, as individualists, we must also allow others to think what they please, of our choices, as well as their own. We may have a low opinion of some of the work that appears in various magazines and books, and it is needful to express it without being destructive, but our opinions do not make the work low. We can be authorities only on what we ourselves prefer. The simplest way for the dogmatist to deal with poetry which he does not care for is — don't read it. But on this account, he ought not to try to prevent others from reading or writing it, or denouncing it as a sort of horrendous evil, after the manner of the theologians, who can recognize only blacks and whites, angels and devils, heavens and hells, and try to force the rest of the world to accept one or the other, on pain of punishment, or banishment, as if there were no other alternatives.

ISSUE P. 16 · SCAN P. 18

ADDENDA

by the Editor

Repeated Trace assertions there's a worldwide stirring (literary), with small presses and (increasingly) those of the more progressive schools taking the initiative by printing new talent in pamphlets and periodicals, are being confirmed. . . . Near the Editor's doorstep this spring appeared an example of university revival, California Literary Review, announced as an initial annual publication for prize prose and poetry from the four widely-separated state campuses, and much student work. . . . In the far Pacific, The Handcraft Press recently put forth the collection 13 New Zealand Poets . . . Departure (Oxford) supplements the magazine by intermittent issues of poets-in-pamphlet. . . . In Canada, Contact Press continues active — recently, Love the Conqueror Worm by Irving Layton, and Shake Hands with the Hangman, Raymond Souster . . . The Round Quarter Series (Intro, N.Y.) prevails, latest a booklet of the graphic art of Charles Virga, Line Unlimited. . . . In Philadelphia, the new Whetstone Books (Albert Saifer) announces a contemporary anthology in which "experiment will not be looked on askance." . . . Although now concentrating on The Scottish Journal, the publishers intend to continue Poetry Scotland in broadsheet form. . . . Besides several portended British and Continental anthologies, new collections pop up all about the world; and in U.S.A., numerous prize contests are being launched, prominent among them two annual book contests for poets, the Swallow Poetry Book Award (\$250.) and New Poetry Series Publication award (Denver 10, Colo.) . . . Poets everywhere also are eligible to compete for the New York State single-poem award (\$50.), queries about which may be sent Lucile Coleman, 166 Park Ave., Port Richmond, Staten Island 2, N.Y., U.S.A. . . . Worthy examination is the Israel

Argosy, edited by I. Halevy-Levin, each autumn and spring, printed at the Jerusalem Post Press (available through Zionist Organisation). . . . U.S.A. restricted is a new Arkansas State Poetry Day Contest — query Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni, Villa Rosa, Fayetteville, Ark. . . . Down in Australia, Leon Stone announces definite continuance on annual basis of the little-mag hobby periodicals, Koolinda and Coe-ee (3/4 to: Elgin Street, Gordon, N.S.W., will bring back numbers to those interested).