

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

John Sankey surveys little-mag publishing
Towards Print: the Editor on 1953
Editors Write · Addenda

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EDITOR

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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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A SURVEY OF LITTLE MAGAZINE PUBLISHING

by John Sankey, editor of The Window

The editors of all the magazines listed in Trace received with the last issue a detailed questionnaire asking for facts and comments on the publishing side of their reviews. It is hoped that this examination of the returns will provide useful information for present and future editors as well as being of general interest, since this is the first inquiry ever into the practical side of little review publishing.

RETURNS

Approximately one-third of all the current little magazines published in English returned forms — a very large sample from which should be expected a high degree of statistical accuracy.

LONGEVITY

32 per cent of the magazines were founded before 1946 (a few as early as 1919), 40 per cent between 1946 and 1950 and 28 per cent since 1950.

FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE

Monthly or bi-monthly 7.5 per cent. Quarterly or three-per-year 67.5 per cent. Less frequently 25 per cent. A comparison between the subscription renewal figures of these groups shows no significant difference,* but answers to another query show that if a magazine is much delayed beyond its usual frequency, subsequent subscription renewals do then fall.

**The phrase “no significant difference” here means that the difference between two samples is within the usual statistical margins of random variation for the size of the samples. — ED.*

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Editors were asked what proportion of their total sales were by direct subscription, and the answers showed little difference as between the small poetry magazines and the larger reviews. The average was 50.3 per cent and the average renewals on expiration 59.4 per cent. Practically all the publishers had found it worth while to send renewal reminders, apart from the original notification, and 30 per cent of them send two or more reminders. Apathy and forgetfulness rather than disapproval are major factors in lapsed subscriptions. An important divergence from the general proportion of sales by subscription is that of the few (10 per cent) magazines that meet all their costs without any form of subsidy. These magazines sold on average only 26.2 per cent of copies by subscription, the rest being sold through single-copy distribution. This will be examined in detail later. Two factors having a favourable effect on subscriptions, bookshop sales and announcements of special features, were each mentioned by 20 per cent of editors, other factors being negligible. It appears from the qualified tone of answers to this section that the general goodwill of a periodical has more effect than any detail variable. The effect of raising the subscription rate was slight. Only 20 per cent of magazines having changed price noticed any effect, and of these one-third showed an improvement in renewals with a higher price. This is not to say that price can be disproportionate to size.

SINGLE-COPY SALES

Editors were asked if they had noticed any marked fluctuation in single-copy sales and to a remarkable (66 per cent) extent they had found these substantially unchanged from one issue to another. Only 10 per cent had noted an improvement from displaying the names of well-known authors. Special issues had sold extra copies of 12 per cent of the magazines but in general bookshop sales, once achieved, are a remarkably stable factor.

CIRCULATION

Editors were asked to leave out this answer unless they would give the true figure within fifty copies (in this and other details the returns from individual magazines are held in confidence). In respecting this proviso 44.5 per cent of the editors abstained. Of the remainder the average paid circulation was 809. Those in the United States and Canada showed 737, and in the British Isles 958. This difference is probably due in part to the extreme difficulty of getting any form of patronage in England, so that reviews must either build a good circulation or close down. The British figure is also likely to be slightly weighted by a preponderance of answers from large reviews. Despite safeguards there is a possibility of optimistic returns here. The artificial inflation of circulation is an editorial mental habit of long standing, in Europe anyway. The present writer lacks personal experience of America.

The percentage of magazines in each (arbitrary) circulation-group is as follows:— Over 1500 . . . 15 per cent of magazines 1000–1500 . . . 10 per cent 500–1000 . . . 42.6 per cent Under 500 . . . 32.4 per cent

The larger reviews, selling for over fifty cents or two shillings and having 48 pages or more, have an average circulation of

1310, and even so these show an average loss of 39 per cent. For a typical large quarterly this represents about £320 per year, a striking illustration of the difficulties met with in publishing the larger literary review. A small poetry magazine could normally clear costs on a paid sale of 800, at a typical price, but the larger review needs a sale of 2000 or more, possibly supplemented by advertising revenue. About 40 per cent of reviews do not print enough copies to clear costs even if they sold out. (This is approximate as some replies showed misunderstanding of the question as put.)

CONTENT

The average utilization of space is as follows:— Poetry . . . 43.3 per cent Fiction . . . 22.6 per cent Essays . . . 16.3 per cent Criticism . . . 17.8 per cent

The 10 per cent of magazines that are self-supporting use their space as follows:— Poetry . . . 53 per cent Fiction . . . 23 per cent Essays . . . 13 per cent Criticism . . . 11 per cent

It will be noted that the non-fiction proportion is 10 per cent lower here than in the general average, but there are insufficient of these self-supporting magazines for a great deal of reliance to be placed on the difference. There is, however, a marked increase in the financial loss of magazines having a high proportion of non-fiction, and this point should be noted by publishers who cannot afford to subsidize.

SELF-SUPPORTING MAGAZINES

The factor in which this 10 per cent differs from the others is in its remarkable single-copy sales. Whereas all magazines together receive 22.8 per cent of their costs from this source, these magazines gain 62.5 per cent in this way. The proportion of costs met by subscriptions in their case of 37.5 per cent does not differ significantly from the general figure of 35.6 per cent, so their success seems mainly due to promotion and good trade distribution. In passing, it should be mentioned that three-quarters of the self-supporting reviews are in crown octavo size, so the “small enough for the pocket” factor seems still to be as effective as it was when many of the large circulation monthlies adopted this format.

Costs

The costs of little reviews under the survey are met as follows:—

Single-copy sales 22.8 per cent

Subscriptions 35.6 per cent

Advertising—

(28 per cent of magazines, average revenue
24 per cent)

Subsidy—

(14 per cent of magazines, average subsidy
31.6 per cent)

Donations—

(25 per cent of magazines, average donation
15 per cent total)

Editor or publisher pays—

(45 per cent of magazines, average deficit
34.6 per cent)

Most of the magazines with a loss draw upon two or
three of

the above sources. The total average loss of the 90 per
cent

showing a loss is 36.7 per cent. Only 14 per cent count
editorial and clerical time as a cost item.

AN IDEAL MAGAZINE FOR SELLING

As a diversion, one may draw a vague picture of a financially successful magazine based on as many factors as possible. (Some of these factors cannot be itemized here for lack of space.) A 48-page crown octavo magazine, it sells at not more than fifty cents or two shillings, almost three-quarters of the sales being through bookshops, and just over one-quarter by subscription. Most of the lost subscribers are replaced from new readers who see it in a bookshop. Otherwise the regular 40 per cent wastage would be its greatest headache. It has twenty-four pages of poetry, twelve pages of fiction, five of criticism and seven of essays, including the editorial. If it can summon courage to extract advertising from book publishers it can afford to pay nominal sums to its contributors, but probably not to its own staff. Adverts inserted in other reviews bring in manuscripts but few orders, and but for good bookshop distribution it would not be worth while to advertise in large circulation classified columns. Its concern is more with maintaining an individual character than with featuring known authors. Small enough to be carried in mackintosh pockets into pubs, it is there discussed, not always in appreciative terms.

PROBLEMS

“I consider my chief problem/s to be:—”

Financial difficulties 38 per cent Shortage of good mss. 35.6 per cent Time for editorial and clerical work . . 11 per cent Publicity and promotion 10.5 per cent No problems 12 per cent

Other factors mentioned by less than 5 per cent each of editors were lack of public interest, difficulty in getting advertising, and that writers miss press dates — will not read magazines — only want to appear in them.

That 36 per cent of editors list shortage of good manuscripts as a major problem gives the lie to talk of

“cliques keeping the new writers out”. The older-established magazines do not differ significantly from the others in this. There is no significant difference between those in the United States and those in the British Isles on these problems. (Too few magazines are published in other countries for them to be considered separately.)

DELAYS

Many little reviews appear at irregular intervals and editors were asked to give reasons for delays, under three headings, as follows. Percentages are of those admitting delays:— Cost or production difficulties . . 55 per cent
Insufficient time and/or help . . . 51 per cent
Insufficient material that’s publishable . 32 per cent

No delays 14.5 per cent
No reply 9 per cent

(Here and elsewhere if the total is greater than 100 per cent, some of the editors gave more than one reason.)

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The effort of maintaining a large subscription list without the help of bulk sales of single copies is almost insupportable and is not assisted by advertising to any marked extent. Neither are the time and cost of circularisation attractive to unpaid part-time editorial staffs. The only safe foundations for little reviews are good trade distribution or a hefty subsidy from a constantly flowing source. The greatest help that could be given to these reviews would be for the better bookshops to display samples and to order copies of those which arouse interest. The book writers of the next decade are the review writers now. The large circulation periodicals could greatly assist by noticing (however briefly) new reviews when they are born instead of when they die, for without that mention thousands of potential readers will never know of the existence of these reviews. In this way interest can be stimulated in the smaller cities and towns. England awaits the philanthropist who will distribute reviews efficiently all over the country, contending with trade rebuffs, unbusinesslike methods of editors and very small financial returns. The United States has such an organisation and it is to be hoped that a full coast-to-coast coverage will soon be possible there.

The editor of *Trace* deserves thanks for his constant and comprehensive documentation of this field, for which librarians, readers and writers must remain in his debt.

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

As always in any culture not dormant, 1953 literary events have been conflictingly varied; and little magazines, with related activities, have shown parallel contradictions. While attention to poetry has increased, with more verse drama presented than in decades, little-theater has in the main turned rather sickly. Publications of experimental prose, both drama and story forms, have seemed to lack relevance. More writing courses and conferences (especially in U.S.A.) than ever; but fewer young names gained prominence than during other years since War II.

Such developments of course easily may be explained (or rationalised?). For one thing, the end of a postwar period (ignoring Korea and peripheral fear of renewed wider slaughter) nears; and whereupon, daring elements are due to abate. The uneasiness from reactionarism in government/s has brought about self-censorships; and emphasis on poetry may indicate retreat into mystical chant, not understandable to the persecutory populace. And although not efficacious in the conceived purposes, many meetings and classes primarily may be compensatory for frustrated creators, themselves — who, mistakenly or not, try in such ways to build prestige and enlarge their prospects for audience for sincere works (to come! — always in the sky, pie!). Among magazines, the same is manifested by new editors who primarily are, or intend to become, known as writers — a higher percentage than at any time since the Twenties. . . . If one is too timid or is not allowed to mount a soapbox, one still may hire a modest hall. And other than figuratively, this is indicated by multiplying public readings.

Reference isn't intended to versifiers, dull imitators, nor to members of the anti-intellectual school (often anti any idea whatever!). These continue to say nothing which

matters. Valid poetry here is taken to comprise original and honest utterance concerning what's emotionally vital to a poet who is occasionally aware of problems relevant to contemporary reality. Meanwhile, it is possible, by confining consideration to academically-approved periodicals, to make it appear that all is settled (if not quite serene) and that there's nothing disturbingly neoteric which isn't trivial. Allusions will be made to specific magazines which, however, at least raise hopeful doubts.

That these same magazines are misunderstood and often unappreciated has been, besides from failure of liberal taste, from limited reader sympathies traceable to misconceptions about the artist in society. Seldom has this been more marked; and today's critics — catering to popular attitudes — seem not to remember that the creative artist never is so identified in society, though from it and of it. Just to glance at a few past lives is to learn that, no matter the periods of immersion in a workaday communion, the artist retires from the world to perform his own special creative rituals. Even stage performers — actors, dancers, singers — find measures of solitude, to conceive and to rehearse. But, along with Freudian psychology, has spread intolerant insistence upon so-called normality and social balance. The accepted (*viz.* most-read) critics stand at congested crossroads of the mass-press, demanding all writers to venture there and to shout plain messages in loud taxi-jargon. Does it never occur to them that numerous fine writers simply remain locked away, making soft-spoken recordings of their fond quiet wishes?

This intemperate critical climate is but one reason why the progressive minority of teachers, editors, and writers should devote energies (besides what cash they can afford) to helping their own best aids, the smaller literary magazines. If a decent percentage commence doing this, the results may be astounding; for, to this point, incredibly slight support

has been offered even by those who would benefit first from lustier little mags. As an editor writes in this Trace (in the vein of dozens of others), active support of writers, alone, would multiply circulations of the better magazines in this category.

Recent reports of sales of poetry books have been better than in a long while. Indications too that so-called off-trail prose sells better than would be deduced from latterday shunning of the experimental major houses. The fact is — and particularly in U.S.A. — that these publishers select with book-clubs and best-sellers in view; and many valid mss. which wouldn't have spelled losses have gone without print. Lists have bulged with mediocre also-ran candidates for multiple printings. This is why many little mags have been launched with fair success, the last couple of years, why many small book houses have survived, and why 'vanity' publishing becomes no longer the disgrace it once was. Yes, there's a larger market for intelligent work than most commercial editors (with minds still in the Twenties) seem to realise. Witness recent sales of a little-mag cousin, *Discovery* (Pocket Books Inc.) in U.S.A. corner drugstores.

Not just beginners, but established writers of international fame have found outlets closing — publishers rejecting their best mss. when they've not met suggestions for revisions fancied would result in broader appeal. This has brought more important names to the little mags. Needless to add, these placements have not been made through commercial agents, who understandably are apathetic about low- or no-pay publications, whereas authors wish at least to be read, if unpaid. The authors (most of whom have arrived where they afford, financially, to do as they please) want to keep their names before the (allegedly-dwindling) discriminating minority whose approval promises them survival after death. Everyone's salvation in this regard is primarily a private worry; but never before have conditions

been such that virtually no one has serious regard for any individual's purely-literary reputation, other than himself. And never has it meant less to command merely-large reading public . . . and perhaps one of these years, some bone-headed bigtime publisher abruptly will discover that discriminating readers have not dwindled — just have had no choice but to divert attentions to those less-circulated media where reasonably may be found what the discriminating care to read.

Confusion, meanwhile, is rife. For one thing, increased writer-conferences and short-courses are looked upon by book houses as evidences of some vast increasing potential in production (à la belt-plan?), while a few frank answers from participants in these activities reveal them chiefly to be another phase of efforts by writers to publicise themselves! Intelligent teachers well know that writing essentially can't be taught — also, that brushing elbows for a few weeks with people of reputation scatters scarcely any star-dust on the anxious sleeves of beginners. To speak of valuable mutual influences at these hectic gatherings is simply twaddle. Even the brochures, with their careful tabulations of the accomplishments of the brighter lights, reveal the truth. While any statement like that in a notice of the Utah Writers' Conference concerning a writer's "function as man working among men" — when even the half-aware understand that a writer develops as a writer only in the proportion to which he is able to detach himself — surely is preposterous. Like the gift of prophecy (to which Kenneth Rexroth rightly has compared genuine authorship, in his introduction to *The Dragon and the Unicorn*), creative ability can be strengthened neither by old nor new dogma, and certainly won't stay uncorrupt, if offered by the pound's-worth. The same Utah brochure also asserts there "is plentiful evidence that writing need not cease to be an art in fulfilling its practical functions and in vigorously exploiting its

commercial possibilities.” Need more be remarked?

But — on to some magazines among which, along with the already-known, reasonably should be found significant youngers who haven’t under these circumstances — burst into bright fame.

Despite irregularity and unevenness (in content), Outposts in England and Experiment Magazine in U.S.A. continue exhibiting new poetry which matters. And both have been in existence long enough that they’re secure in past accomplishments. By some editors of newer magazines emphasising poetry, their editorial selections have been called too eclectic. Cid Corman of Origin, for instance, is absorbed in special types of expression and at times dangerously near to conformities which could form neo-dogmatisms. Jon Silkin of Stand follows a rather-more tenuous romantic strain than Dannie Abse of Poetry & Poverty, which in this respect lies between the former and Artisan (closer-related to Origin). Back in U.S.A. again, Judson Crews offers in The Deer & Dachshund much good and some bad poetry, while Ignace Inginianni’s Simbolica has similar unpredictable (as re quality) content, nevertheless predominately worthwhile. All these, in fact, are ‘musts’ for keeping informed about contemporary poetry. There’s also Beliot Poetry Journal, lately with an editorial uncertainty which some assert constitutes lack of integrity (nods to novelty for novelty’s sake). With comparatively little poetry — but that little of interest — has been the Boston Chrysalis. Brand-new and with a maximum of interest is D. Vincent Smith’s Olivant Quarterly. . . . And there are, of course, others as important as any of the foregoing (as re new poetry) recently noted in these pages — for example, The Window, Departure (England), Goad, Inferno, and Golden Goose (U.S.A.), Contact (Canada) etc. Points (France) in future issues will shift focus from poetry to prose fiction, Sindbad Vail announces.

A not-new magazine worth watching — having just started printing work of writers abroad and expanding circulation — is *The Fiddlehead* (New Brunswick). And, while remaining an exclusively U.S.A. pub, *American Poetry Magazine* has liberalised its policies to publish a wider range. *The Country Poet*, on the other hand, remains New England-concentrated and sentimentally (if tastefully) attached to scene. Different is *Different*, recently revived . . . and whose *Lilith Lorraine* is giving flight to the new *Fire-Bird*, for announced top-level poetry from best writers throughout the world. There are others, unseen at this writing — *Neo* and *Embryo*, both U.S.A. All this activity is cheering in view of the deaths among older magazines.

Of special note, because of marked religious interest, is the new *British Crux*. *The Wind* and *the Rain* soon will reappear — after long delay. At Oxford, *Arbiter* continues strongly a line less-definitely Romanist, and yet with choices indicating religious bent. And also of special (though of diverse) bias, must be mentioned *The California Quarterly*, rather Marxian under changing editorial control. The *Japanese Vou*, meantime, exhibits less preoccupation with political implications than in the past. No clue is given what may be the trend of *Interim* (U.S.A.), issuing too late to be read for this article, after a lapse of more than two years.

EDITORS WRITE

Jeremy Mitchell: "Good prose of any kind is difficult to dig out these days. We make a feature of trying to widen literate Englishmen's narrow national range of reading. . . . Next will cover contemporary Spanish literary scene. It is difficult to describe *Arbiter* as a 'little' magazine in the generally accepted sense, as we have published little experimental writing . . . We have not found much experimental writing that is both experimental and writing. Perhaps we aim at being a little big magazine."

A. Robert Rogers: "The *Fiddlehead* has been published by the Bliss Carman Society . . . founded by Dr. A. G. Bailey. Dr. Bailey . . . was not interested in slavish imitations of the past but believed that a tradition should unfold through constant experimentation. His vision has, in some measure, been fulfilled."

Robert Greenwood: "I have long felt that all serious writers, both established and beginners, should subscribe to at least four little magazines. For two reasons: (1) it informs them as writers; (2) and to help support these magazines. It goes without saying, I think, that these little magazines offer the one hope of publication and encouragement to the serious writer. Since they extend themselves to the serious writer, he in turn ought both to submit material and give subscriptions. . . . There is a general indifference on the part of these writers . . . I wonder how many of them actually subscribe to four little magazines? . . . I strongly urge . . . active support to little magazines. And if serious writers do not, I fear one day they may realise their one important media has (become) a victim of indifference. . . . So many fine magazines have, this past year." (from *Talisman*) Robert L. Peters: "There are two guiding interests in the publication of *Neo*. We are devoted to the furtherances of the

literary arts; we wish to defend the rights of freedom of the press and show false concepts as false.”

D. Vincent Smith: “Every day the requirements (for Olivant) for material get a little higher. So much material, I cannot afford to accept sloppy work. . . . The only thing to do is cut down . . . and raise the restrictions ever higher.”

E. E. Walters: “. . . the function of this periodical (Embryo), to serve as a medium of conveyance for the expressions of those few who refuse to be thwarted by demands for complacency and conformity.”

Nelson Algren: (Though this didn’t come from an editor, it is printed as the first unfavourable reaction to the Trace idea) “What for? What you omit from your appraisal is that 99 per cent of the stuff published by the little mags should never have seen print at all. I don’t believe that little mags have any effect on American literature whatsoever. Because a magazine is little and non-commercial doesn’t put it close to truth as you assume. . . . There is a firmament where little mag editors meet little mag writers and little mag contributors, like a conclave of ghosts. It’s all so unreal, so unrelated to American life, I don’t want to go to that firmament. I’d rather stay on earth, even though I leave without a Trace. . . . So far as conformism goes, your Trace is strictly so — to the conformism of an outworn aestheticism, and so are all the other little echoes of Ezra Pound. You may follow them as you will — I’d sooner follow horses.”

ADDENDA

by the Editor

A message to publishers, preceding addenda about them: Because of extreme tardiness of many editors' reports, writers are submitting mss. simultaneously to several — in some cases, withholding them from the purgatories of these offices. General adoption of the former practice is sure to lead to confusion, and the latter eventually may prove fatal to boycotted magazines. Yet, writers complain that years otherwise may pass in getting mss. to print, with editors taking four to fourteen months on decisions! Some editors ignore all pleas for confirmation they actually hold mss.! Asking how many give serious thought to the responsibilities of being an editor, the current *New Broom* (Scotland) says: "This practice of 'going to sleep' on mss. has become a snobbish vice with serious repercussions. . . . Ill-mannered laxity in returned submitted work is more discouraging than severe criticism."

A major 1953 development has been the Poetry Public (P.O. Box 898, Chadron, Nebr., U.S.A.) project of L. R. Holmes — a monthly critical forum, with the idea of educating a larger poetry audience. . . . A new publication of Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd. (Elms Ct., Ilfracombe, North Devon, Eng.), *On Hot Summer Afternoons*, is poetry of importance by the American, Kenneth L. Beaudoin. . . . Poetry Manchester Publications (44 Walton St., Heywood, Lancashire, Engl.) announce a series of booklets, collected works of poets hitherto unpublished in book form. . . . Another recent appearance is that of Charlene Palmer, with *Long Stems Colored*, published by Golden Goose Press (Box 583, Sausalito, Calif., U.S.A.). . . . Contact Press (Canada) announces a selection soon of work by Cid Corman, Origin editor. . . . An unique project will be that of Inferno Press (Box 5030, San Francisco, Calif., U.S.A.) in a magazine

biographical collection, with samples of all types of work by the authors selected. . . . Fantasy Press (Swinford, Eynsham, Oxon, Engl.) continues The Fantasy Poets series. . . . Another special magazine will be a Leaves of Grass anniversary issue of Beloit Poetry Journal (in 1955) honoring Walt Whitman. . . . And special forthcoming numbers of Experiment Magazine will have poets of the Pacific Northeast, poets of the United Kingdom. . . . Story No. 4 (in book form) has been announced for this month. . . . A little-mag (Canadian Poetry Magazine) editor, Arthur S. Bourinot, has assumed editorship of Canadian Author and Bookman. . . . Another project with idea of convincing a sufficient number of poets to join in subscribing to selected book publications to make these at least pay for themselves is that of The Golden Quill Press (Francestown, New Hampshire, U.S.A.), called Book Club for Poetry.