

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

Ellen Edelman: Prognosis for Little Mags
Towards Print: editors state their motives
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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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PROGNOSIS FOR LITTLE MAGAZINES

by Ellen Edelman (U.S.A.)

Little magazines, the vehicle of the avant-garde, are living provocative indications of the next decade's important trends and personalities. Names of those who have used the quarterlies as a ladder to recognition make an impressive 'Who's Who' of belles-lettres: Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, W. C. Williams—to name but a few.

These magazines should be more widely read and discussed than they are now. The dearth of reader-support should be a source of anxiety to writers, critics, and all who have an interest in contemporary literary growth.

It is not the fault of the editors nor of the dormant public that the little magazines have not been able to cull all available reader resources. As we shall see, the public is justly indifferent. It is the substance of the little magazines that discourages readers.

Our culture is rife with would-be poets who find their most valuable outlet in the little magazines. Many of them must re-examine and refine their creeds and technique. If not, they will stifle one of the best literary outlets of our time.

* * * *

Ours is an explosive age. All the arts reflect chaos and hostility. The painter takes the subject, i.e., thesis of his painting and abstracts it. He deliberately exaggerates, distorts, explodes reality.

Contemporary taste in the arts demands the dynamic, the angry, the forceful. Calm and symmetry are condemned. So are factualism and naturalism. Nor is pictorial art the only art that has taken on a convulsive nature. Music, theatre, poetry, et al. have become marked by the neoteric erraticism.

Music and painting can be abstracted and still be artistically valid; poetry cannot be abstracted and survive. This is because of the innate nature of the medium with

which the poet works: language. He must have a conscious, imaginative understanding of his medium. He is limited and inspired by its rules and values.

This artist-medium relationship is not so obvious in poetry as it is in many other fields, especially the visual arts. It is commonly understood that a sculptor's original idea is often changed when he chooses a piece of wood. Indeed, it is an acceptable practice to let a piece of wood suggest subject, composition, and style. The most important corollary is the need for constant sensitivity to the medium; it is not advisable for an artist to consider himself bound to his medium, but he should be challenged by it.

Language is not so very different from other artistic media. It, too, has texture, sound-colours, dramatic values, emotional colour, and many other characteristics which can be used by a competent and sensitive poet to create an infinite variety of opera. In addition to these freedoms, a poet is subject to certain technical considerations which are responsible for the difference between his approach and that of a musician or sculptor. Language, the subject of an entire philo-science, is too exhaustive to define here; but much poetic bungling, both in the direction of bathetic versification and of super-experimentalism, could be avoided with the recognition of the nature of words as communicative tools.

Thus, an artist who chooses words as his form of expression must endue his opus with comprehensive meaning. This does not interfere with his freedom of choosing form, technical devices, innovations, or sound-texture. He must, however, appreciate the basic nature of his medium. If he feels—as do many experimental poets—disinclined to abide by the limitations of language, he must not pretend to be a poet.

Perhaps contemporary poetry would be better off if many experimental poets reconsidered their purposes and took up one of the arts that are connatural with their objectives.

Often after reading a meaningless sham poem, I have wished that the author had turned his creative energy into a watercolour or a hooked rug.

* * * *

Indeed the little magazines will be better off when they can oust unintelligible poetic attempts. When they become outlets for communicative literature, they will gain greater reader-support, for there is a dormant poetry public waiting communication. It is capable of appreciating subtleties, allusions, imagery, and sound-nuances; this public enjoys thought-provoking magazines; but it demands pith.

No matter how much the editors wish to ameliorate the substance of the little magazines, there is nothing they can do to replace second-rate manuscripts. It is up to the individual poet to accept the challenge, to achieve new strength in his technique, and to align the already-present vigour of modern poetry with meaning.

This re-establishment of approach is not for the sham poet who is content to spew words on paper, letting them fall where they may with no regard for comprehensibility. His poetry is dead as soon as he has finished typing it; its purpose was self-entertainment. It is just as esthetically valid as the cut-paper ducks that kindergarten children make, and its significance ends with its creation.

Poetry that has been deliberately abstracted for effect has a similar short duration. After all, 'abstract' connotes the deletion of meaning because of the artist's preoccupation with some other facet of his technique. If the artist is working with words, the very definition of 'abstract' is irreconcilable with his medium.

The super-abundance of these and of all other poetic trash in little magazines is determined by the poets themselves. Editors, contrary to common opinion, are not free to fill their pages from the kind of manuscripts they want. They are stopped by a shortage of first-rate poetry.

It is the lot of editors to await the advent of a trend toward recognition of the ethical seriousness of the poet's craft. But it is the individual poet's means to salvation from the miasma of lunatic experimentalism and literary oblivion. The individual poet must re-examine and re-approach his art; then, with the availability of rejuvenated and forceful manuscripts, the little magazines can claim their rightful place in the public eye and in our literary heritage.

(Editor's note: Readers no doubt find themselves asking: 'Communicate what to whom?' Yet, meanwhile perhaps conceding considerable validity to Miss Edelman's central thesis; for related sentiments reach this desk daily, along with ideas of those who believe that literally every creative manifestation deserves place (which some little magazine somewhere can afford), provided it's sincere and not utterly unknowledgeable. And the borderland where endeavors are made to extend those same 'limitations of language' may expectedly be a chaotic landscape? Reactions to this article are invited—but must be concise.)

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

A representative collection of the replies received from editors, what appear to be their franker statements of personal intentions, herewith is appended. Nothing could better justify this feature's title; for, to the degree that they are candid, these explanations also must hold clues to trends.

W. Price Turner (The Poet): 'My motive was twofold: first, I was dissatisfied with the state of English published magazines; second, I wanted to be in on the actual adventure of reading poetry as it was being written. Both thoroughly selfish reasons. It was easy for me at this distance from London to avoid the cliques. I made it clear that my disapproval of editors who include their own poems in magazines, reviewers who show off wit at the expense of poets, and pompous 'policies,' were permanent features of my editorial outlook. This attitude was even more popular than I expected. It also made me quite a number of enemies, whose reactions I still unashamedly relish . . . My motive for continuing is the humbler one of belief that I am doing more good editorially by demonstrating personal taste than I could do creatively by devoting all my time to my own writing. And after two years I still get a kick out of opening each day's batch of submissions!'

Elinor Brown (The Archer): 'Why? Arnold Davidson wanted a magazine for Writers' Rendezvous. He named Wilfred (Brown) chairman of a committee to estimate costs. The committee got exactly nowhere—so we started on our own. And can't afford to quit!'

William J. Margolis (The Miscellaneous Man): 'I have two primary reasons: I want to convince other people of the validity of certain ideas and ideals I hold; I want to do this by finding others, with whose ideas and ideals I find large

measure of agreement, and let them, from their variegated backgrounds, get these ideas and ideals across. (There is such a variegated audience that it requires a variegated presentation—and I might learn things to improve or change my convictions!) And, secondly, I want to learn to present my ideas and ideals, myself, and this task can be both efficiently and pleasantly accomplished as an adjunct to editing a magazine—I must learn to write and to recognise good writing. Underlying both of these, is a desire to live, and in a society which promotes this with at least some degree of creativity. In summary, I suppose I'm a propagandist, and one who'd rather learn to write in the school of a little magazine office than in a university. As a pacifist, I'm very disgusted by the conservatism of pacifism. And as a relatively young person (26), but not too young, I want to find, to make, an activity that will give me both satisfaction and responsibility.'

Alan Swallow (P.S.): 'During the Thirties, while in college, I had tried a little magazine of my own and served as editor of a couple of college literary magazines. I was determined to go on with one at the first opportunity. . . . The little mags seemed exciting and definitely worthwhile. As a young poet, I was particularly interested in the problems of publication of my fellows and determined to do something about that. Thus was born a concept that the little publisher was an extension of the little mag movement and actually more in need at that time. When these factors ripened, I borrowed enough money for a small hand press and got started.

'Current attitudes, after fourteen years, might be summarised as follows: '1. Conviction of the significance of this activity. '2. Discovery that I have a method of keeping a small press going and, although wanting at times to give it up for

my own work, determination to see it through for a time. (No other small press going when I started in 1940 is, to my

knowledge, still going at this time in the U.S.) '3. An attitude expressed in some lines from some poems, "Series for My Friends," written about the time I left the Army in 1945 and published in my little book, *The War Poets*:

And I, who read and printed words, Worked warm within that marvelous air.

'Pretty? Perhaps. But I find I best know the good poems as I dwell over them in printing. I think a few critics might learn to do something of the same, for a lot of it when you put it to that test, isn't worth the labour of printing. And sometimes I've been ashamed of my initial enthusiasms when I put them to that test!'

Rexford Sharp (*The American Bard*): 'To explain the deep urge or reason which impels me to continue publishing a poetry magazine requires the review of some personal history. I am not and never have been fundamentally interested from the literary angle.

'Thirty-six years ago, my father began publishing poems he had been writing and largely consigning to notebooks for many years. What started as pamphlets of his own poems, grew in less than two years to a true poetry magazine, *The Country Bard*, which published the work of others. But my father was very specific in the sort of poetry he wished to encourage. Its theme should be what is found in life all around us, the finding of the Divine in all the common aspects of life. His was a protest against the volume of poetry of futility, perverse introspection, etc., which even then was growing in expression.

I knew of his work, though at that time, as a young man, I did not attempt to analyse it as explained above. I respected his love of poetry, but was not interested myself at that time, nor for many years to follow. I married, we had a daughter, and then after a very few years my wife was taken by death. This was in 1932, fourteen years after the beginning of *The Country Bard*.

I know now that this was the turning point of my entire incarnation. I began to seek an understanding of the fundamentals of life, and found vast fields of information, which until then, had been non-existent to me. I refer to esoteric and occult teachings. Many new ideas came to me, or perhaps, according to my present belief, I should say were reawakened in my outer consciousness, though already present in my spiritual awareness. Among these ideas, was the thought that creative work of any kind is a direct channel for the expression of the life of the inner side of us, and that the purpose of physical incarnation is gradually, step by step, to bring about a fusion of the outer and the inner man, or as more commonly expressed, the Higher and lower selves or aspects of our being. And of all creative work possible to achieve, nothing stands higher than the possibility of expressing through poetry the Eternal Truths of Being, and thus making the possession of such Truth by the concrete mind an accomplished fact.

I was now ready, though all unknowingly to myself, to take over the continuation of the publishing of the poetry magazine when my father died three years later in 1935. Even then, in fact not until recent years, have I clearly expressed my motives. But I did feel a response when my father's friends expressed the idea that it would be a wonderful thing to carry on his project and I felt it would be a true service to deserving and fine people and a way of service for me, since I was not engaged in any of the very large number of activities which are open as fields of service to humanity. So, I started in with the help of others experienced in the technical side of poetry.

"Strangely enough, the project, which could have so easily "fizzled out," prospered enough to pay its own way, and year after year I have gone on and on, and the initial enthusiasm has never faded. This is one of the strangest things to me, this drive that keeps up my interest in the work. I have never

written poetry myself, nor as yet experienced any great desire to do so. I have continued my studies in spiritual philosophy, which to me gives all the answers to all the questions one could ask. I love to encourage would-be poets to continue their efforts at creative work, not for what they might ever give others, but for what they do for themselves in coming closer to the fountainhead of Understanding, Being, Truth, Life, and Purpose. As one writes creatively, the intuition comes more and more into activity, and this I define as an immediate understanding of what comes into the field of attention, without depending on a process of intellectual reasoning. And thus one moves on the road to union with the Spirit and Source.'

Derek Maggs (Zebra): 'Personal egotism has something to do with it. It pleases me to see people reading, and have people criticise and praise, something that I, with no resources worth speaking of, have created. And then there is the awareness that commercial journals, however good and varied they are, cover the contemporary literary scene imperfectly for the mere reason that they are commercial. Many of the people who write for the little magazines can't or won't write for the commercial ones. This does not mean they are bad writers, of course. People who start these little magazines are often, like myself, in this category, and are sufficiently interested in non-commercial writing to try to create vehicles for it.'

Anonymous: 'My attitude to this is somewhat mystical; as though the magazine were to grow and almost take on its own selfhood out of the chemicalization of the work in it and a complex of my attitudes and sensibilities in their selection and arrangement. What I mean is that one doesn't really edit in an entirely conscious manner—the thing grows—and I would feel as though writing "What I intend to make my child into, and how I am doing it."'

Kaylaine Miller (S/SCScribe): 'One of my main reasons for being editor is that I love to organise. I like reading mss and seeing new work. I like the association it brings me into with other people, mostly students at this point, who are interested in literature—original. And I like to know writers, and have the feeling that I know someone important. Through them, I feel vicariously important.'

Carl Hartman (Epoch): 'People send in things, you write letters about them; this has a use and a place which I claim significant. . . . Any teacher of writing, perhaps himself a writer, feels that a close contact with other people who are writing is bound to be helpful, if not necessary to his own teaching (if not to his own writing as well).'

Bill Lovelady (Blue Guitar): 'We publish Blue Guitar because the need for magazines with high esthetic criteria remains largely unfulfilled. Masquerading under literary banners, half the little magazines strive more for social ends than esthetic ones. Of the other half, embarrassingly few demonstrate recognisable critical standards, apparently making impressionistic reaction the first, rather than the last, step in the critical process.'

'Further, Blue Guitar provides us with a platform from which to make statements about art which are impinged upon only by our own standards.'

Anonymous: 'My purpose in becoming a little magazine editor has been selfish from the start, primary motivation being the desire to promote myself, my own ideas, and to become famous—thereby to defeat those intense feelings of frustration which otherwise almost surely would drive me completely mad. Self-expression is not enough; and it is in fact only ameliorative to the degree that one is heard and thereby grows to exert influence upon as much of environment (both the physical world and the world of the human spirit) as possible.'

These all really point to essential practical soundnesses of procedures—in whatever degrees may be, given the idealistic (even when called ‘selfish’) intentions. The statements indicate much more soundness, at least on the editorial side, than usually acknowledged in studies of this field.

Healthy sturdy wills are at work; and the mainly-positive intentions of these editors make for the very inter-reactions toward new changes which both are the justifications and the power impulses of all life. Continuous inspiriting quickenings of new darings may be anticipated; and this sort of selfishness also is commendable—the sort which impels people to strive to fulfill their highest duties by realising themselves to the fullest.

EDITORS WRITE

Yonosuke Nakano: 'Among intellectual men we often find proud ones called "Tengu" (a braggart) in Japan who never listen to what others talk and go on artlessly and straightforwardly, such persons are found among literary men also. Those devoid of human consideration have some relations with evil or ghost spirits. They themselves may have great self-consciousness and conviction and look firm as a rock, but there is no foundation in reality.' (The Ananai)

Jessie L. Perro: 'Montana Poetry Quarterly welcomes amateur poets of all ages, likes to have schools send poems as often as they can (sponsored by English teachers). Poems of all types are used, no free verse or blank verse unless sponsored by a teacher of English. . . . I am trying to reach the amateurs and help them gain their goal in the poetry field. . . . I give all of them a chance that I possibly can.'

D. Vincent Smith: 'Anyway, as Shaw said: "the wrong road always leads somewhere." Worth one's consideration. (Olivant Quarterly)

Russell Roemmele: "'The Struggles, a publication for the expression of Existentialist, Anarchist, and Individualist thinking"—now, that is a large order to fill. Thus, I reject work only when it comes in contact with my biases. (I don't believe there can be such a thing as objective editorship. Isn't the editor a person, and therefore subjective? How can one print poems which have passed "objective editorship?" When I say I shall print all poems, I mean poems which are poems (not exhibitions of knowledge, limericks, etc.) But, of course, the poems will speak for themselves; what I say or do not say about them will neither add nor detract from them.'

ADDENDA

by the Editor

Although but remotely related, in more-obvious aspects, to biblio-critical accounts of creative works in small literary magazines and from small presses, many Trace readers will be glad to learn of the appearance of Section V of Geoffrey Handley-Taylor's *Literary, Debating and Dialect Societies* (Hinrichsen, Museum House, Museum St., London, W.C.1, 3/6). A large number of the societies noted in this series have creative writers among their memberships, and all of them are in some manner or measure helping to forward the cause of literature—while the public purposes often are much like those of editors of little magazines. . . . And, since considering projects not exactly in our scope—to mention (free for the asking) *The Pound Newsletter*, under John Edwards, Department of English, University of California, Berkeley 4, Calif., U.S.A. This is entirely devoted to matters of interest to Ezra Pound students, and to maintaining a bibliography. . . . An experiment in small-scale offering of poets' own readings from their own works is an initial U.S.A. issue of a large LP record (under trade-name *Pacifica*, auspices of *Inferno Press*) priced at \$4. It carries voices of six writers of Leslie Woolf Hedley's selection. . . . Among books of recent interest in re what's gaining verse attention, *Tiger Moon* by Jessica Lewis (Falmouth) and *A Summoning of Stones* by Anthony Hecht (MacMillan), each \$2.50. . . . Privately printed (Heron Press, Liverpool, 50c in U.S.A) has been Vincent Ferrini's *timeo hominem unius mulieris*. . . . First of a series of chap-books (*The Sparrow*) will be *The Twigs as Varied Bent* (*A New Survey of Little Magazines*) by the Editor of *Trace*—due next month. . . . *Vou*, an international Tokio publication previously listed in *Trace*, has assumed a more-condensed format, and the last two issues seen were printed almost altogether in Japanese. . . .

Also in Nippon, but completely bilingual, continues The Ananai (Shimizu City reaches), of social and religious interest. This one, a monthly mailed free to those requesting it, has not been in the Directories, because offering no writing of literary intention. . . . The Chadron, Nebraska, U.S.A. Poetry Public (of especial interest to all poetry readers, but comprising no original creative work to now) is appearing this year on a bi-monthly schedule and has announced plans for a new printed format with expanding circulation. . . . All correspondents of Olivant Quarterly are asked to address mail in care of the Editor of Trace, and also to make all remittances for Olivant payable to him. D. Vincent Smith is serving in the armed forces; however, he has announced his intention of continuing the magazine, with essential help—and, of course, cash-subscription support. Copies of the first Olivant Awards volume, Chris Bjerknes' First Communion etc also should be ordered through Trace (\$1.50).

Three questions have been asked, several times, by Trace readers; and they are set down in hope that sufficient others will respond, to provide an accurate notion of prevailing sentiments: 1. Shall writers rebel against unfair treatment by editors holding mss for months-on-end, by making duplicate submissions or by registering complaints (with evidence) so that these offenders may be blacklisted?

2. Should not editors of magazines suspending publication be considered under an obligation to arrange with their own choices of successors, to fulfill unexpired subscriptions? (Several editors of stable periodicals—for example, The Humanist—have stated their willingness to fill subscriptions in return for prospective future subscribers to their own.)

3. Would better tips in re contents of magazines be supplied in The Directory, if names of representative contributors (choices of editors, themselves) were listed in

place of the informal remarks of the Editor of Trace?