

TRACE

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

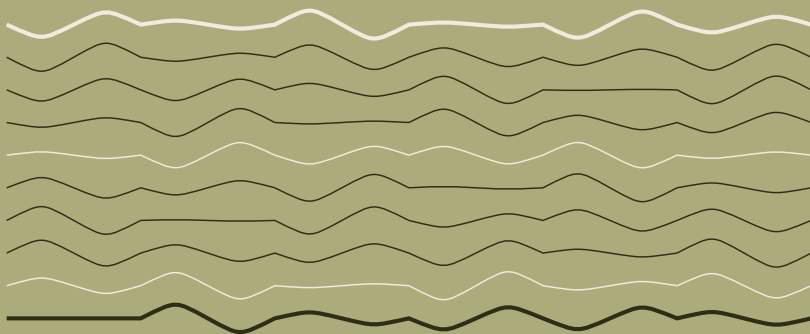
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TRACE

No. 6

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

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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.

CONTENTS

Towards Print 4

Editors Write 8

Adventures in Poetry Magazines 10

Addenda 15

ISSUE PP. 1-3 · SCAN PP. 3-5

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

From editors' statements, subscriptions to many magazines recently have increased. Better international interchanges among them have helped, by bringing support to more magazines (per reader) from those already familiar with percentages of to-now mutually unaware periodicals. This also has increased mss. submissions, with better ranges of choice for editors. But, beyond this, especially through libraries and schools reached by Trace, persons who formerly had no contact whatever with such poetry magazines and quarterlies have learned of them.

However, not in self-congratulation—to point out that Trace articles no longer should be addressed to specialists. Over half the readers now find certain reference almost a jargon. And this was hinted by queries about John Sankey's excellent Trace #5 article drawn from a first world-survey.

Thus, a belated bit of history. Most students date the phenomenon of noncommercial periodicals primarily devoted to amelioration of frustrations in their editors and among kindred spirits (yet among whom have emerged artists of international stature) from years just preceding War I. True, only a scattering so identifiable in their modern forms existed prior to that period, either in Europe or America. Not until the Twenties were they numerous; and they didn't appear in anything like their current ubiquity until after War II. However, the expedient of creating outlets for oneself (the artist) and friends dates from prior to Shakespeare, and even back to ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt, and Sumeria. Among cuneiform-indented bricks from the site of ancient Babylon, are described certain curious records involving what could well have been in essence "little magazines" of that era.

But, limiting consideration to the centuries subsequent to the invention of printing, casual observers fail to give

account to the ancestral relationship of early pamphlets, broadsheets, and certain chap-books, mainly under college auspices. Basic impulse behind over half the little mags is concern over social questions—else desires to preserve or foster special literary trends or traditions. Nor should be overlooked relevance of the fact that comparatively few people nowadays carry on voluminous correspondences; and with special note how past literary figures used to circulate multiple copies of letters with their views on the arts, sciences, and politics. Lively-minded men of learning frequently would spend years in interchanges of letters, before book publications. And certain types of diaries are part of the little-mag ancestry. Poetry which then circulated solely through correspondence is at least as important as many of those precious books and brochures, not only privately printed, but scarcely read outside personal acquaintanceships of their authors. The negligible library value of nine-tenths of these doesn't invalidate their importance in this respect.

Mounting costs and decreased opportunities for commercial placement of the experimental are so often remarked upon there's no need to comment that even established writers have turned to little magazines, in later years. Also common knowledge—that comparatively-large sales are being gained for pocket-books edited in most respects with policies cousin to those of characteristic little mags. Both these phenomena have drawn the attentions of thousands to periodicals of which they'd never otherwise have learned.

The last-mentioned trend closes the circle in part, expediting graduation (or ?) of many writers from the little mags. The first-mentioned tends to break down the unique definition of these magazines, themselves. Yet—as life prevails only in transmutation—these results probably are making possible the realization of the comprehensive

purposes of the entire movement. The little magazines are hereby prevented from gazing only inward upon their alleged neuroses, and are re-joined with the mainstream of culture—not to mention mutual benefit between artists tending to esotericism and those perhaps just-as-frustrated extroverts and pretenders after monetary gain. The entire development guarantees that little magazines (and as such) will continue lustily. The featured “names” both lead investigations where else may be the works of those other “no-names,” and (in some hoped degree) to ascertain the differences between what established writers publish there by personal choices and in big-circulation media for pay.

And thus, to the slightly-recognised educational services of little magazines in education. For, besides fact many more now are used in modern writing courses, nearly all the best of them perform educational functions wherever read—education defined as that which extends scope of appreciation, though not in every instance actually providing training for expression.

(A NOTE: Queries have been received why the Directory doesn't distinguish between pay and no-pay markets. But, besides the dubious value of indefinite indication—by reason of the wide variation in amounts paid—this wouldn't be entirely fair to periodicals whose financial condition just temporarily prevents their paying. Only a weekly bulletin could supply up-to-date information. While some just commence paying, others (for the usual adequate reason) discontinue. Besides, Trace now circulates more to educators, librarians, and non-creative readers than among professional writers. Generally speaking, the large quarterlies do pay, from nominal space rates to rates comparable to big-circulation magazines. Many poetry magazines pay, though typically just enough to help with the postage. Prizes, when offered, are mentioned. A few small magazines limit pay to leading pieces. Others compensate

only writers of established reputation, apparently on the theory that amateurs find print, itself, sufficient compensation!)

EDITORS WRITE

John Forbis: (Having used remarks by Nelson Algren, a non-editor, last issue, he's here answered by another non-editor. Mr. Forbis was one of scores who retorted.) "I wonder how long I would have continued writing had it not been for the attention, criticism, encouragement, and publication I received from little magazine editors? . . . For this reason, I cannot let an irresponsible statement like Nelson Algren's . . . pass by unbitten, or at least un-snapped-at. . . . 99 per cent! A very stern and arbitrary judge is Nelson Algren. To damn all save a tiny one per cent of little magazine material with a wave of one great knotted arm . . . fierce and godlike, Mr. Algren! In the same omniscient spirit, others often damn 99 per cent of current commercial writing out of print. The unfortunate truth is simply that both damnors may be fearfully near correct. . . . But the really sordid aspect, the genie in the bottle, is not the percentage of good to bad, but this easy, offhand spirit of irresponsible damnation. . . . These are not criticisms, because Mr. Algren is obviously speaking from a sentimental rather than a factual bias—an odd posture for one who holds the burden of Realism so proudly on his shoulders.

It is not important that Mr. Algren be refuted—refutation is available in such outstanding print as *Transition*, *Spearhead*, *Horizon*, *Story*, *Partisan*, *Hudson*, *Antioch* and plenty more; it is unspoken in the careers of at least half a hundred writers who not only sell, but make literature in the bargain, and who began in the littles—what is important is that Mr. Algren be chastised for his unrestrained mouth. (Good God, Algren, must we extend this passion for undocumented accusation and broad, bland generalities even to the periphery of art! Let us leave that sort of thing to Caesar, if you please.)"

W. Price Turner: "What I miss in most of the poets . . . is internal discipline. Discipline in conception and creation. I do not go for the supposed 'experimentalism' which is only unrevised jottings, unpolished, either loose in rhythm or staccato and ragged, almost always to no more effect than a mistranslated innuendo. The ideal poet, from my point of view, is one who can use every trick of the craft to express himself, without reminding the reader of any other poet. I have ten times more respect for a poet who can juggle with assonance, half-rhyme, alliteration, and counterpoint of rhythm, than the lazy writer who imagines that he is advancing contemporary poetry by attempting to publish incompetent incoherencies of coy or aggressive meanderings. . . . I am not against any attempts to advance the frontiers of poetry, I am merely against the publication of those which demonstrably fail to advance anything, unless neurosis." (The Poet) Kenneth Lash: "I admit having a strong suspicion that much good work never gets out in the open; in fact, my editorial note, as can be seen by its tone and incompleteness, is more a challenge than a pronouncement. (As re a recent NMQ plaint re lack of good mss.) NMQ is wide open to whatever it considers superior material in any field (e.g., we'll publish a good, well-written article on penguins or politics, if we find them; since good brains and writing skills are independent of subject matter). You might also add the important fact that we pay, not as much as we'd like, but more than most, e.g., \$25-50 for stories and articles, \$5-\$7 for short poems, \$40 for a Poet Signature, \$1.50-\$2 per magazine page for reviews." (New Mexico Quarterly) (To writers: Similar American quarterlies which pay include: Accent, Georgia Review, Kenyon, Sewanee, Southwest Review, Virginia Quarterly, Western Review, and Yale Review.)

ADVENTURES IN POETRY MAGAZINES

by Alex Jackson

In America, if not universally, Poetry, like the Theatre, is another “Fabulous Invalid”; ailing, declining, but still hardy enough to keep breathing—at times with the passionate intensity of a play which turns out to be a smash hit! This, however, is not about poetry, but poetry magazines—the diverse theatres where poetry’s troubadours play their little runs, frequently not so little.

Except to poets, the least appreciated of literary publications is the poetry magazine. And even poets (who mainly support the stepchild journals) are ignorant of the field as a whole. Since few subscribe to more than two or three, if that many, they do not know what goes into the others—else magazines which publish only such as the Petrarchian sonnet, would not receive free-verse copy which automatically eliminates itself. Nor would experimental magazines be deluged with traditional verse while magazines like *Wings* and *The Lyric*, which print only rhymed verse, receive *vers libre*. This capsule monograph, then, is intended as a sort of American-Canadian Baedeker of poetry magazines.

When I turned to writing as well as reading poetry, I was faced with the all-important problem of where to submit. Five years ago, I knew that many poetry magazines were being published, but I was familiar with only two: *Poetry* (Chicago) and *Voices*. Not my fault so much as from the fact that the average poetry magazine, little publicised, is printed for, and is welcomed by, a small coterie.

After subscribing to almost all of fifty-odd poetry magazines found in a market list, I eventually sorted them into four loose divisions: “Low Standard,” “Medium,” “High Standard,” “Experimental.” Of necessity, many magazines are borderline, and hard to fit into any category; but one

could tell almost at a glance that the American Courier was Low Standard and American Weave High, with The American Bard offering a middle ground. In the easy-to-make column one can list Candor, Cornucopia, The Country Bard, Hearth Songs Journal (now, yearbook only), New Verse Magazine, Midwest Chaparral, Midwest Poetry Review, The Notebook, Prairie Wings, The Poetry Hour. Reflections, Scimitar & Song, Wildfire.

While others may fit into this general heart-and-hearth genre, I am speaking not of the entire field, but of the magazines with which I am familiar. Collectively, the verse published here is of low calibre. For every relatively-good poem (and some good poems do appear there will be another straight from the greeting-card shelf. Just a step upward is The Step Ladder; and somewhat more selective, if uncertain—The Kansas Magazine, Essence, and The Stylus.

As a group, such editors are very friendly to beginners, and often give helpful criticism, to the extent that they know what poetry is. Some do know. What keeps their magazines earth-tied is that, to please and/or keep subscribers, some of them will print that subscriber's bad contribution. Or if, like Candor, Midwest Poetry Review, Wildfire, the editor also runs a publishing business, he will remember (bad business man though he be) that a rejected poet will think twice about where to go with a book or brochure.

In an introduction to the poetry list from the aforementioned market list, the editors (who know the field thoroughly) say in part: "There are two reasons why most of the poetry in these magazines is second rate. First, the poet does not take his art seriously, and has not studied under a competent coach. He is unacquainted with the history of verse. with its growth and culture, and above all he does not know . . . the themes, the meter and the technique of the masters. . . . Second, the poet is often dated—people who seem to turn to verse long after they are mature. . . . Most of

the contributors are past their thirties, and more often their forties. As a group they are dated, living mentally in 1905 or 1910 or 1915. . . . They matured not in our day and age, but in another time, when Kipling, not Freud, was the literary mentor . . .”

At first, I considered this harsh; but after observing closely both editors and contributors, I regard the stricture as understatement. In a world of Katyan mass-slaughter, poets write (and editors print) cloying pap. Or, where they touch upon war, they give the impression that it will take only a few quatrains to dissuade conquerors!

The question of knowing what constitutes good poetry applies less to group two, magazines like: *The American Bard*, *The Archer*, *American Poetry Magazine*, *Different*, *Driftwind*, *Echoes of West Virginia*, *Fawnlight*, *New Athenaeum*, *Kaleidograph*, *Westminster Magazine*.

Clearly, poetry in *American Poetry Magazine* is better chosen than in the venerable *Bard*, *Kaleidograph* has a higher standard than *Echoes of West Virginia*: I lump them in the Medium group because in selectivity I think that the journals fall about midway between the first-step magazines and those at the top.

Critically, this group’s vast output might be called “newspaper verse,” but of sorts which might appear in the *New York Times* or the *Herald-Tribune*, not the indiscriminating small-town dailies. Here one will still find the trite rhyme, the done-to-death phrase, but some parts of the poems will have leavening features. If the over-all tone is essentially *Tin Pan Alley*, the fault lies more with the contributors than the editors, some of whom all but beg for a Beethoven note.

Poetry is currently whirling in a seeming contradiction. It is, unquestionably, an art that has been steadily losing grace. Quality magazines continue to curtail, or drop entirely, the use of poetry, even as filler. To the extent that

books of poetry emerge, they are published for other reasons than profit, and with few exceptions at the author's expense. The reverse side of the record, however, contains a more cheerful song. Greater audiences than ever turn out to hear poets read, and this cannot be dismissed solely as curiosity to 'see the freaks perform. Poetry Appreciation courses find eager students; more prizes than ever are being offered. And, of course, the volume of poetry seeking publication remains a Niagara.

The "name" poet still manages to sell, though often he or she will send a poem for free to the Higher Standard magazines—American Weave, Epos, The Lyric, The Lantern, Pegasus, Quicksilver, Voices, Wings—a motley assortment, to be sure; but in each, some of the poetry approaches and frequently reaches the hallowed precincts of art. Here, subtlety of expression is essential, and the cliché is seldom encountered. In each magazine, poetry all too often appears which would be best suited to the second or even lower division; but what is being discussed is the collective effect, not individual poems. No poet writes on one level only. Then, too, a poem which will annoy one reader (or editor) will greatly please another; and the rejects trickle down the line, so that the prolific poet will be found in all four groups as well as the shrinking commercial markets.

With exceptions of The Lyric, Recurrence, and Wings, editors of most magazines have no bars against free verse, providing only that the poem does not fall into the poet-talking-to-himself column. Experimentation has its magazines too, but in an entirely different listing.

For those whose tastes run to the avant garde, there is, aside from the historic Poetry (Chicago), a wide selection of magazines which I will again list alphabetically rather than attempt a quality classification: Approach, The Blue Guitar, The Bridge, Beloit Poetry Journal, CIV/n, Contact, Contemporary Poetry (now an annual), The Deer and

Dachshund, Embryo, Experiment, Fiddlehead, Goad, Golden Goose, Inferno, Intro, Neo, Olivant, Poetry Book Magazine, Simbolica, Three Hands, Variegation. Most of the college quarterlies also favor modern poetry, with the emphasis that today a poem should mean as well as be.

To this writer, discovering where the bulk of the poetry written today appears has been an adventure in friendship as well as an interesting exploration.

Do any pay? Some do, like the heavily-endowed Poetry (Chicago), founded by the late Harriet Monroe, and the magazine which spearheaded the Modernist Movement. The Lyric, no longer endowed, suspended payment. Recurrence and Variegation (same editor-publisher) pay twenty cents a line. Canadian Poetry Magazine makes token payment of a dollar a poem, as does Experiment (a co-operative venture), and then wonders how to pay the printer! American Weave also paid, but discontinued. Many of the magazines pay in prizes; but it must be stressed that all the magazines are essentially labors of love, with circulations averaging around three hundred, and subscriptions just about covering costs of production. A majority of the quarterlies (not listed, because not exclusively poetry) pay—some at high rates.

Today's jet-propelled tempo creates need for diversion, and Poetry offers escape (perhaps from the psychiatrist's couch). Thus, indifferent, bad, good, and excellent poetry is written—with magazines to match. Learn through a trip to the library which publications are closest to your tastes, then adopt a few "waifs" via subscriptions. You may be in for a pleasant surprise!

ADDENDA

by the Editor

Continued increasing interest in poetry is pointed by a number of impending anthologies, from Glasgow, Scotland (The Poet) to San Francisco, Calif. (Inferno Press), and on up to the state of Washington (Experiment), with another under Epos auspices down in Florida, and an anthology-like publication planned by Prima Publications (Leicester). Likewise, numerous book publications of selected writings of individuals—as Laurence Clark’s 39 Preludes (Villiers), Selected Poems by Leslie Woolf Hedley (Golden Goose Press), and forthcoming poems by Chris Bjerknes, a special Olivant No. 3 to appear in hardbound format. Planned, is a de luxe limited edition of English translations of the Greek, Phivos Delphis . . . an international anthology of selections from recent literaries (both, Villiers). . . . Those who have been collecting little-mag indexes should write Denver 10, Colorado in regard to further volumes now ready (Alan Swallow). . . . An early 1954 project of L. R. Holmes’ Poetry Public (Box 898, Chadron, Nebr., U.S.A.) is a special issue of new poetry by the PP membership. . . . The International Arts Issue of Aesthetics (Bombay, India) has been followed by a number concerned primarily with literary matters (either, through Trace). . . . An apology is due Wake, inasmuch as its demise was reported coincident with preparation of a then-slighted farewell issue, still available.

What can be a valuable feature, based upon a survey of another sort from that producing Mr. Sankey’s recent article may be featured in Trace No. 7, if editors reading this will promptly jot and mail to Hollywood office honest frank statements of personal intentions in publishing—if not publishers, their purposes in serving as editors. Please note that rationalisings will not meet the requirement—nor the usual generalised statements having to do with providing

print for worthy unpublished writers, discovering new talents, or preserving otherwise-lost genius for posterity. Required are summaries of real underlying reasons for carrying forward this work. And the degree of genuine disinterest by no means is necessarily to be gauged by the obvious fact that no one is devoted to this activity with notions of becoming wealthy, nor even of making a modest livelihood. Editors who do not wish to be identified with their statements will not be named. . . . The idea, of course, is that (while this may not be realisable in a selected specified single editorship), the average (or sum) of purposes must determine both direction and final achievement of this entire literary phenomenon. Stress upon honest answers does not question the basic sincerity of most editors, but warns against the sort of stock responses which every human being carries for the answer he's conceived as most acceptable to conformists. So—will the editors please supply the answers beneath what's perhaps already printed on their mastheads?