

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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THE FIFTH COLUMN IN PHILISTIA

If a "little" magazine follows tradition it appears about eight times and then vanishes. For tragic reasons the mortality rate is very high. Second hand magazine stores are graveyards bulging with copies of strangely named periodicals—single numbers and complete runs. Still, they continue to appear and to disappear. The individual representatives may be weak but the form itself is hardy.

The reasons for this impermanence are well documented. They all boil down to the fact that, by its nature, the "little" magazine appeals only to a very limited group which can rarely support it. The designation **little** more correctly refers to the audience than to the size of the publication. The mass appeal of commercial publications is wholly lacking in them. But consider, the record they have rung up despite this.

They have brought to the fore virtually all of the great literary figures of the past thirty-five years. Hemingway, Moore, Eliot, Wilder, even recent Nobel Prize winner William Faulkner were all first published in little magazines. Writers like Sandburg, Pound, Lindsay, Frost Stevens, Fletcher, and Crane, did not attain the followings they merited until after their little magazine appearances. Dynamic personalities like Harriet Monroe, Margaret Anderson, Dr. S. J. Watson, and Gorham Munson have continually appeared to work through these publications and to bring vitality to the literary scene.

Perhaps what is most important is that from the very outset the little magazines have been involved to the

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last line of type in every major creative movement of the past four decades. They have taken sides with a vigor that frequently spells their doom when the battle goes against them. In this respect, their influence cannot be overestimated.

In recent years, however, a great many voices have been raised against these magazines. They are charged with being snobbish and undemocratic. It is not possible to deny too much the charge. If little magazines are to stand for only the best in writing that bespeaks an interest in a minority of the writers. If they stand in the van of artistic controversy they do so with little company other than their own kind. But this is not through choice. If, primarily, they appeal to intellectuals that is no fault of the publications themselves. Such readers are highly critical. It is doubtful if they would be consistently taken in by a sham designed to flatter them as a group.

The reasoning which promotes these charges is very important to us. We can not answer them once and for all. . . .but we have some ideas.

It just **may** be that the difficulty arises in a different quarter than the one charged. Perhaps it can be found in the general indifference of the public to matters of art? Perhaps in its lack of concern for the young writer? Or in its smug refusal to listen to unproven poetic voices? It may also be the final desperation of creative thinkers everywhere and in all fields who have been thrown together pell-mell in their final attempt to get away from the black apathy of Philistia.

Fortunately the urge to write (or compose or paint) is basic in men. There have been countless attempts to suppress the arts, to control or direct them. In recent years the preferred technique has been the slow freeze in an atmosphere of inattention. It doesn't work and it never shall! It just **may** be that factors like little magazines and the people who read them have had considerable influence in the survival. Let's see that they always do.

R. H. G.

THE INSTANT CHANCES

The bobcat in the thicket harbors death;
The big-eared hare runs after life,
Ends in blood, or by a twitch of twig,
A shift of wind, swerves out of death.

Roused by the agile weasel from its sleep,
The bat swoops through the burning day,
Hangs by the hooks of the hunting hawk,
Or finds a chink and shudders back to sleep.

The hopeful spider moors his silver span,
Snares a fly and feasts on azure flesh,
Or nets a wasp and takes the savage sting,
Lies limp and lost beneath his tattered span.

For my part, I would have been a panther
Or a deer, a goshawk or a thrush,
Living the instant chances, than member of
The swarming breed that brings the holocaust.

Joseph Payne Brennan

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GEORGE HERBERT

On this high day, the birde of throat and earth,
I contemplate the fury of perfection,
And for my Self and my divine election,
I ask your prayers to sing my second birth.

I see you wearing Love's annoying smile,
teaching saints and martyrs how to sing
(at Bemerton a bell begins to ring,
at Bemerton the bell rings broad and pale),

pausing at the moment of surrender
to write a little verse to make God happy,
nodding to the Christ, serene and dapper—
and your surpliced heart flaming up like tinder.

O high firm day, O catholic generation,
listen to the bell at Bemerton
saluting Herbert's fathers' Father's Son,
and teaching all the mice the use of patience.

Albert Paris Leary

POEM

"non amittuntur sed praemittuntur"

When our faint loins and eloquent tongues were mingled,
the dancing blood behind my eyes turned white;
we lay more painfully aware than singing,
more truly filled with fear more sharp than light.

When our young quivering thighs were burnt to sleep,
and feet became no part of what we were,
whirling about the room more swift than fleet,
and all the seasons of the rhythmed year

danced, danced into our holier parts,
 assuaging all the pleasant moment's grief—
 we spoke our sacrament too new to parch,
 more poised than when we stood upon our feet.

We sank through years of rug and months of wall,
 falling faintly balanced by our pain.
 We felt the light within us break our fall
 and hold us high, trembling at the place

of understanding. I laughed into your mouth.
 Then, waiting for our eucharist to fade,
 too near to touch, more far away than out,
 we waited for what each would never say.

Albert Paris Leary

SOLO FOR A DEAD PLANET

Through the wild fingers of cities
 where vultures have more than cannons to eat
 a parade of monsters
 run amok through empty sewers
 walls of buildings vibrate
 with poison eating below the belt
 chewing away at elevator shafts
 and diplomats open eyeballs
 the whiskey bottles crash endlessly
 as rats ramble through nightclubs
 tearing away
 the last G string
 everything's naked now.

Leslie Woolf Hedley

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TWO POEMS FOR MELANCHOLY

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A dog howls its death outside the house
A train sends its terror through the air,
It is night and water drips from faucets—
When it was summer I dreamt of hills
And orange flowers threw radiance.
Living chants its usual cry,

The simple beast remembers loveliness
And the stairlanding whispers;
Old love remains in the curtain—
It is no wedding veil.

At night I may pray to the floating dusts
That one wore more than all live's worth,
But it is evening and who will remember
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
And of the Holy Ghost.

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Warm and soft your breast is
—My head needs such a rest;
Remove my pillow, now, I go to bed,
And make of space your room.

It is snowing or raining a hard wet rain,
Shadows from old graves seek a keeping,
Termites wander within, between my toes,
Spring is no more than one bedpost.

But wait! when I sleep come in soft gown,
Rose and green, and white arms,
Come a dandelion and a daisy—
I will weave a magic, a garland, and a charm.

Gene Magner

SEA-GULL

Will you know me now, indeed?
 Then count my fingers five upon your breast,
 My feet on the stairs' descent going One

Two

Three

What a little child you have in bed with you,
 Clambering toward the womb again.
 The moon was a sublimation, really.
 This red return was what he hunted for
 In adolescent haymows,
 Connubial rituals drowned in lost hotels.

Will you know me now?
 A sea gull came down one when I was fishing on a pier,
 on a piling.
 He was wilder than sunlight,
 Whiter than the white girl frozen in the blizzard bank.
 His wing went across my face, that close.
 He took the heart out of my mouth.
 I have been a sea-gull ever since.
 Ever since then I have been looking for that girl.

Will you?
 She is all I want, really,
 Whipping the heart out of my mouth,
 And her hair like rain,
 The red womb, the snow-breasted. . . .
 She is all I want.

John Dillon Husband

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THE TRAVELERS

How far have we come across the leagues of snow?
Where was it we began, and who will guess what end
On what long field or high plateau,
Plain for the world to see or gone to earth as foxes go,
We shall scrawl our final word upon the rock,
Croatan?

Or shall we be the ones under the golden star,
For whom the capricious heavens let their angels down
To sing hosannas in the sunset fire?
Shall we be the millionth couple through the turnstile
gate
Filling the blank check with the platinum pen,
The lucky-numbered foxes finding the break in the
fence?

The lady shuffles her cards with a pudgy hand,
And drinks her beer and goes
And these our fortunes oh the puddled table lie
Piled loose like forgotten stars.
What is it they say? Shall we open tomorrow's paper
And read? Or shall we throw the glasses over our
shoulder,
Walk in the creak and cold of the snow
Out to the world's end
Where the scarecrow whispers under the wind?

We cannot go home again, having been to the stair,
Having seen the empty moon searching the rooms,
Having heard the wind in the darkness fumble the
broken door.

There are no voices calling us now,

Nor directions on the box-top nor forecasts from the
 radio,
 And who will tell us the password into tomorrow,
 The set of the compass, the road not mined with de-
 ceptive stars?

Button your pockets over your courage,
 Get used to the door behind you closing,
 Pick up your feet.
 There's a jug of Spanish gold at the rainbow's end for
 you,
 A girl from a magazine cover waiting in a doorway.

The street ends here.
 Your tracks fill up with snow.

John Dillon Husband

VISITOR

Enough of death and burning violence
 Sits on that sofa smoking casual cigarettes
 To poison all the wells and bloody all the books.
 Yet so he sits, a man like you, in a gray suit,
 And says how the hills are like his hills at home,
 As if he had a home,
 There where the directed bombs came down
 And the detected agent died without his eyes.

And I think: This is what war always is:
 To sit in a later time with men like these,
 The walking deaths,
 Listening to music as the day burns down,
 Pretending that we have, both they and I,
 Excuse to live.

John Dillon Husband

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THE SILVER BEAST

from "The Silver Circus"

Cage him now, great paws and shining head!
And beat beat beat on the silly drum
Calling the people to hear and come
To come and hear before the beast is dead.

Be sure to anchor his paws!
Drive a spike in his head, a silver spike
To rivet the bright eye shining into space,
But also be wise, be wary of his claws,
Keep shy of the teeth, the golden teeth,
The red lips ruby tight.
They will nibble your skull to paper,
They will suck the marrow out of your tightest dream.

But look at him, look how he lies!
The silver spike shines in the sun,
The great paws are still, he will not rise,
He will stay peacefully there till he dies.

You will not need the cage with chromium bars;
And the littlest child can sweetly come,
The girls can scream in lovely delirium,
The masculine worldly males, the strong men's sons,
Can stroke the silver fur, can study the golden eye,
Can wonder what the grave beast sees
Looking so fixedly now into the trembling sky.

John Dillon Husband

CHANGE

His dry face
 furrowed by the rain of years,
 his sand grey eyes,
 worn by the sun:
 Working plowed-out,
 fallow ground,
 one crop failure every year.

What force of change
 had separated memory and desire?
 What shadow fell
 between that vision
 and that furrow on the land?
 The camera kept the question
 In the sand grey eyes.
 I could only turn the page;
 I could not make the separation
 Nor feel the sun blot out the shadow.

Varley McBeth

THE WEB

As children watch a spider spin its mesh
 of silver filament about an unwary
 and luckless moth or fly, and feel their flesh
 crinkle with fear—now I watch, though the quarry
 is no small winged thing, lacking disguise
 or choice; but I. And dread is the decision:
 whether, while there is time, whether to rise,
 snap the benevolent cords, shouting derision
 and flee, run shivering with some blind delight
 to exquisite destruction . . . or whether I
 will stay to see the heart snuffed like a light
 that burns but poorly, or let it die
 more slowly of itself . . . I only know
 the web grows closer, closes on me, so.

Velvia Hargis