

# THE EXPANDING SPECTRUM

## *Literary Magazines*

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A FEW YEARS AGO it was still possible to group Canada's literary magazines into loose categories labelled university quarterlies, small independent reviews and little magazines. Since 1967 an explosion of publishing activity has blasted the categories. So many and so various are the literary magazines in Canada today that it is easier now to speak of an expanding spectrum the bands of which blend into each other like the colours of a rainbow.

At the extremes of the spectrum are the academic journals and the alternate press periodicals. In between range many kinds of university-based journals, numerous independents large and small and a great variety of little magazines. Each band of the spectrum has expanded year by year and though many of the magazines are short-lived, new ones appear at an astonishing rate. An exact count at any one time is impossible; but it is safe to say that close to one hundred literary magazines are currently being published in Canada.

For perspective it is worth remembering that in the early Sixties, when literary outlets in Canada numbered under twenty, the founding of a new magazine was regarded as a great risk. Doomsters were quick to say that the reading public was not large enough, not enough talent existed, standards would surely fall. During the mid-Sixties it seemed that the nay-sayers were right. It was a drab period and few magazines survived it. Since 1966, however, the number of new and successful magazine ventures has confounded all the prophets. Before surveying these developments, a word about the fortunes of those magazines founded prior to the mid-Sixties.

Notable among the magazines which flourished and died in the Sixties are *Yes* (1956-70), *Delta* (1957-66), *Alphabet* (1960-71), *Evidence* (1960-67),

*Edge* (1963-69). The short unhappy life of *Parallel* (1966-67) should be noted; a successor to *Exchange* (1961-62), it represented the second failure by Montrealers within a decade to establish a national "quality" magazine. The long life of *Culture* — founded in 1931 and for many years the only bilingual scholarly review in Canada — came to an end in 1971. Some magazines died because their work was done; others failed in the competition for grants. A few enjoy a ghostly or phoenix existence: *Tish*, for example, which thrived in the early Sixties, is being reprinted in toto by Talon Books; *Island* (1965-68) gave way to *Is* which has been transformed from a tiny magazine devoted to the "occasional" poem into a handsome serial anthology of new poets. *Open Letter* (1965-) is in its third of a series of incarnations. Begun as an in-group poetry newsletter, it now appears as a sober triquarterly review dedicated to changing the course of criticism in Canada.

Of those magazines which survived the Sixties, the established university quarterlies are the most stable. *The University of Toronto Quarterly* retains its position as the most scholarly and continues to offer its valuable annual review supplement "Letters in Canada". *Queen's Quarterly* and *Dalhousie Review* (which celebrated its fiftieth year in 1970) still keep many pages open to creative work and reviews of Canadian authors. *Canadian Literature*, ten years old in 1969, maintains its exclusive devotion to criticism and review of Canadian letters; but though it has doubled in size during the Sixties it has, regrettably, dropped its annual bibliographical checklist. Among the independents, *The Canadian Forum*, fifty years old in 1970, has adopted glossy covers, a thematic scheme and a more relaxed attitude towards poetry selection and book-reviewing. *Saturday Night*, after many vicissitudes, appears to have achieved a new stability. Celebrating its eighty-fifth year in 1972, *Saturday Night* has recently increased its literary content considerably in both quality and quantity. *The Tamarack Review*, ten years old in 1966 and staple fare for readers throughout the Sixties, began to waver in its quarterly schedule in 1970 and has since temporarily suspended publication. *The Fiddlehead* had its twenty-fifth birthday in 1970. Flirting for a time with a monthly schedule and critical commentary, it has now settled back, though much enlarged, to its original quarterly status and its emphasis on new poetry and fiction. *Quarry*, an independent quarterly since 1965, pursues its electric policy, but has recently announced a triquarterly schedule. *Prism international*, too, now appears three instead of four times a year.

Among the little magazines, *Blew Ointment* (1963-) persists in its prolific, erratic displays of neo-dadaist pyrotechnics. *Imago* (1944-), dedicated to the

long or serial poem, feels that its work is done. Now in its nineteenth number, it will fold shortly or be absorbed by *Iron* (1966-). *Intercourse* (1966-), the only little mag that ever laughed at itself and its readers, has recently been transformed into a Buddhist-oriented magazine which will absorb another short-lived Buddhist poetry magazine, *Sunyata* (1966).

THE PROLIFERATION of little magazines in the Fifties was due in part to what has been called the mimeograph revolution — a cheap and easy method of production which encouraged numerous scruffy, ephemeral mags. The introduction of photo off-set printing in the Sixties has had much wider significance. For example, the physical appearance of magazines in every band of the spectrum has improved. Even a small amount of capital and reasonable care with the original script can now ensure a legible, attractive magazine. Photo off-set allows for much greater freedom, too, in shape and size, typography, graphics and illustrations. Colour, also, though more expensive, has been employed by many journals in recent years. Even many little magazines sport vari-coloured pages and bright covers (*Black Fish*, for example) and many indulge, as does *Is*, in lavish photography and psychedelic effects. The improved appearance of magazines generally has led to more of them being placed, and found, on library shelves and in bookstores where they attract a considerable number of readers who would otherwise never see them. (This doesn't apply to *The Ant's Forefoot*, an elaborate production which is a foot too long to fit any bookshelf. But such exposure is not as important to the little as it is to the small magazines which depend on sales and subscriptions to supplement their grants.) Needless to say, an attractive appearance is no guarantee of quality or stability and many editors, enamoured of the possibilities, rush into publication only to find that they cannot sustain the effort beyond a few issues. Photo off-set is only relatively less expensive than previous methods. Production costs continue to rise and so do those of mailing and distribution which are particularly expensive in Canada.

Apart from university-subsidized or consumer-based magazines, therefore, those with small presses to back them up have the best chance of surviving. It is not surprising that along with increased numbers of new magazines there has been in recent years a proliferation of small press books. Many of these, due again to the advantages of photo off-set printing, are handsomely designed. They have a greater possibility of reaching reviewers' desks than do the magazines themselves.

Furthermore, contributors to the magazines are often attracted by the possibility of having a book produced and will frequently contribute financially to a small press for that purpose. The proceeds from small runs of a successful book can be ploughed back into the production of the magazine. Thus, especially among the independents, the development of the small press is linked with that of magazines.<sup>1</sup>

In the practical realm, then, facility of new means of production has been responsible not only for the improved appearance of established and new magazines but also for the launching of related literary enterprises. Other less tangible factors have contributed to the nature and expansion of magazine activity in recent years. Most obvious is the new nationalism; and though this topic has a snowballing tendency to pick up everything in its path, it does prove useful in explaining the origins, nature and fortunes of many magazines.

Especially in Centennial Year, and since, governments at all levels in Canada have encouraged cultural development by providing financial aid in the form of grants, subsidies, cash awards and prizes to a degree unheard of in the past. Such support of talent and enterprise has enabled many magazines to survive otherwise fatal financial crises and has slowed down the process of attrition which free competition normally ensures. Also, the general reading public, in a wave of intensified national feeling, has become curious about its literary past and interested in its present writers. One magazine in particular is central to this development. *Canadian Literature* (viewed at its inception in 1959 with widespread scepticism) has served throughout the Sixties to reflect and to stimulate the growth of a national literary consciousness without ever capitulating to mere chauvinism.

Other magazines have responded to nationalism in various ways. A few are avowedly anti-American, not only excluding American contributors but also attacking any evidence of American influence in Canadian cultural affairs. Every wave of Canadian nationalism has had an anti-American component; the latest expression of this feeling has been exacerbated by the presence of large numbers of disenchanted emigrés from the United States. Since these recent immigrants tend to be young, often talented and enterprising, they frequently impinge on magazine activity in Canada. A count of contributors to several magazines will yield a surprising percentage of writing by Americans now living in Canada. Furthermore, several successful magazines have been launched by Americans, notably in Ontario and British Columbia. Canadian editors who suspect Americans of being carriers, however unwittingly, of a dread, infectious cultural disease, are

resentful of their presence, especially if, as is often the case, the immigrant regards Canadian literature as a regional expression of North Americanism. When it comes to the competition for Canadian grants and awards, such concerns can become bitterly acute.

Some magazines are aggressively pro-Canadian. Subtitles such as "A magazine for independent Canadian Literature" are common. Editors often flatly state pro-Canadian policies. Some, like *Northern Journey*, indulge in lengthy polemics, signed with maple leaves, on the need to preserve Canadian culture. Others, less blatant, nevertheless focus on some aspect of Canadian experience. *Copperfield*, for example, "an independent Canadian literary magazine of the land and the north" firmly believes that "the Canadian mythos is solidly entrenched in the heart of the land itself" and that the only way to be aware of it is "to live it, to attune oneself to the landscape." *Copperfield*, which derived its name from the rich fields of copper ore in the region of Temagami, feels the more justified in its nationalistic policy whenever Canadian readers assume, as they often do, that the title "must have something to do with Dickens". *White Pelican* is another magazine which emphasizes Canadian culture and recently devoted one whole issue to Canada's North. *Porcépic's* first issue contained a long essay on the Canadian wilderness and the proper response of writers to "the monster".

Still others are devoted to the bicultural aspect of the new nationalism. Many established magazines have opened their pages in recent years to writers in both French and English. One quarterly, *Ellipse*, was founded specifically to bridge the gap between cultures. It offers interlingual translations of French and English poets along with parallel translations of critical commentary. (Occasionally the poets chosen, French or English, are from outside of Canada). A new bilingual review, *Le Chien d'Or/The Golden Dog*, also hopes to span the two founding cultures, focussing more closely on Quebec and Eastern Canada.

A few magazines have emerged in direct response to the growing need for certain kinds of outlets for Canadian authors. *The Canadian Fiction Magazine* prints the work of "writers residing in Canada and/or Canadians writing in other countries". The *Journal of Canadian Fiction* was founded on the premise that there is a Canadian imagination: "We accept its viability and have chosen to limit our scope to its expression in (prose) fiction". Quite a different need is met by *Jewish Dialog*. This magazine "was started in the belief that Canada needed a high quality magazine devoted to contemporary Jewish arts and letters. . . ."

A totally different reaction is displayed by another group of magazines. Claiming that international exposure is a mark of sophistication and maturity, *The Malahat Review* was founded in 1967 to celebrate Canada's coming of age. Easily the most elegant magazine in Canada today, *The Malahat* publishes a large number of eminent authors from other countries along with some established Canadians. With varying emphases, several other magazines share similar views — notably *Prism international*, *Contemporary Literature in Translation*, *West Coast Review* and, most recently *Exile*.

ANOTHER FACTOR contributing to the increase in magazine activity may be traced to the universities. During the Sixties these institutions multiplied rapidly and spawned numerous colleges from coast to coast. They enjoyed several years of affluence due to swollen enrolments and lavish governmental support. The additional staff required to cope with expansion was perforce recruited largely from the ranks of youthful scholars eager to publish and young enough to share many of their students' enthusiasms. Significant changes in curricula also ensued, which shifted the emphasis from the traditionally academic pole towards the creative — witness the number of drama, fine arts and creative writing programs that have been introduced to campuses across the country in the past few years. During these years also most universities acquired a Writer-in-Residence whose presence tended to generate publishing activity. Furthermore, especially the new universities and colleges were eager to lend their support and often their names to hopefully prestigious magazines of one kind or another. The result of these factors in varying combinations is that the universities in Canada became the patrons of numerous literary magazines ranging from lavish student publications through a variety of periodicals generated by English or Creative Writing departments to a few more or less impressive scholarly reviews. As examples of the latter two categories the following have appeared since 1965: *The University of Windsor Review* (1965); *The West Coast Review* (Simon Fraser, 1966); *Wascana Review* (Saskatchewan, 1966); *The Journal of Canadian Studies* (Trent, 1966); *The Malahat Review* (Victoria, 1967); *Mosaic* (Manitoba, 1967); *Catalyst* (Toronto, 1967); *The Far Point* (Manitoba, 1968); *Pacific Nation* (Simon Fraser, 1969); *Tuatara* (Victoria, 1969); *Ellipse* (Sherbrooke, 1969); *The Antigonish Review* (St. Francis Xavier, 1970); *Ariel* (Calgary, 1970); *Event* (Douglas College, 1971); *Impulse* (Erindale

College, 1971); *White Pelican* (Edmonton, 1971); *Karaki* (Victoria, 1971); *The Capilano Review* (Capilano College, 1972); *The Journal of Canadian Fiction* (New Brunswick, 1972); *Exile* (Atkinson College, 1972); *Aspen Grove* (Brandon, 1972). Of these, only *Mosaic* and *The Journal of Canadian Studies* are wholly scholarly in orientation and do not include creative work.

Of the remainder a few, notably those generated by university staff members as individuals, have subsequently attained independent status with the aid of various granting agencies. On the other hand, some earlier ones, *Prism international* as an example, began as independents and later sought and won the support of a university. As for university student publications, the turnover is too rapid to list titles, but at any given time more than a score of them are extant. Some live beyond the student days of their editors to play a significant role, as did *Tish* and *Quarry*, in the development of literary history. Two new ones, each with nation-wide aspirations, have just come into existence. One, *Bruises* (John Abbott College, Montreal), is "open to all Canadian undergraduates". Another is *Scratch* (Victoria): An Anthology of Canadian Student Poetry.

When we add the university magazines founded prior to 1965 the list becomes formidable. Whatever the degree of dependence, the fact is plain that almost half of the magazines extant in Canada today either originated in or have strong associations with universities. Ten years ago this might have implied a heavy leaning towards the academic and scholarly. In fact, very few of these magazines fit either description. Most of them enjoy considerable freedom in their policies and many are devoted exclusively to creative work. It has been argued, however, that the mere proximity of the university exerts a conservative pressure, a subtle censorship in favour of the established and the traditional. While this may be quite proper to academic and scholarly magazines, it is not as healthy a sign in creative ones. These tend as a rule to be eclectic with ill-defined policies. And while they serve as extra outlets for established writers and show-cases for students' work, they most often lack a sense of unity, commitment or direction. The proof is that many of them could trade their list of contributors without the average reader noticing much of a change. It is this which marks them off from the little magazines in particular. The small independent magazines see them rather as rivals with whom they must compete for subscribers and, increasingly, for grants. For the time has come when the universities have begun to withdraw their support. Many a magazine harbouring in a university has protested that it is really independent because the institution does not supply it with money. However, as hidden subsidies such as phone and mail services, office supplies, secretarial help,

and time to devote to the magazine are gradually withdrawn such magazines must turn increasingly to outside agencies for support. The universities have entered a period of retrenchment and financial stringency; the next few years will tell how drastically this will affect the magazines now enjoying their patronage.

A third factor, accounting mainly for the proliferation of little magazines, is the extension of the network known as the literary underground. This network is elitist in the sense that it attracts not the many but the few; it is intimate in its mode of operation: subscription lists grow by word of mouth, personal letters, small advertisements in fellow little magazines, listings in small directories; and it is international in scope, being linked with similar networks all over the world. Little magazines are not usually found on library shelves or in bookstores. For one thing, they are by nature ephemeral; for another they do not feel bound to appear on a regular schedule, or to maintain the same format from issue to issue. None of them expects to make money; many of them are given away free; most of them are run on a shoestring, out of love, if not sheer altruism. Given such characteristics, the wonder is that little mags exist at all. In fact, they abound. That their survival is of the species rather than of the individual magazines is a sign of their significance. Little magazines are a true index of the vitality of literary culture today. While each is unique and few would care to trade lists of contributors, all little mags worthy of the name share certain attitudes. They are antipathetic to the literary establishment; they resist the pressures of commercial publishing; they are committed to new writing, partial to young writers and open to experiment in form and freedom of subject matter. The approval of the academy, financial success and popularity are not among their aims. Though it is true that many established writers began their careers among them, the little magazines do not function primarily as launching pads. Their function is that of the avantgarde, challenging tradition and convention, promoting new or neglected aesthetics, exploring new modes and genres; testing the potentialities and limitations of language itself. They are thus the source of new blood, the oxygenizing agents without which the literary system would die of hardening of the arteries. It is gratifying, therefore, to note that the increase in establishment journals in Canada has been paralleled by the extension of the underground network of little magazines across the country.

The highest concentration of little magazines is in Toronto and Vancouver, where the variety and rapidity of turnover defy description. The search for catchy names is getting harder all the time. One of Toronto's most recent has settled for *another poetry magazine*, a title which carries some sense of exhaustion.

But almost every region in Canada now boasts at least one little mag. To name a few — Nanaimo, B.C., has just spawned *Island*; Victoria has *Tuatara*; Burnaby, *Black Fish*; Prince George, *54 Forty*; Ganges, *Earthwords*; *Repository* comes from Seven Persons, Alberta; *Vigilante* from Calgary; *Salt* from Moosejaw; *Mainline* and *Black Moss* from Windsor; *Wagtail* from Sarnia; *Other Voices* and *The Stuffed Crocodile* from London; *The Oyster in the Ooze* from Ottawa; *Floobards* from St. John; *Urchin* from Fredericton. Upon examination, many of these prove to be edited by students and/or professors. Their distinction from the usual university magazines stems from their partisan alignments. A full list, including a score each from Toronto and Vancouver would run close to sixty titles all of which existed some time during the past five years and about half of which are extant.

Montreal, a centre of little magazine activities for several decades, is currently rather barren. Since *Yes* and *Delta* died, no magazine of comparable stability has appeared. Of those most clearly committed to underground activity *Ingluvin* appears irregularly; *Jawbreaker* lasted for only three issues; *Intercourse* is undergoing transformation; *Tide* is sporadic. Each of these had some unity and sense of direction, however — qualities which are sadly lacking in a recent venture called *Booster and Blaster*. This magazine is an attempt to foster a poet's cooperative whereby anyone who wishes may submit copy plus the money required to reproduce the pages involved. The copy is then circulated to all contributing members any of whom may then send in critical "boosts" or "blasts" plus the cost of the pages involved. Someone then volunteers or is elected to put the package together. The pages are reproduced, as received, by photo off-set, and stapled together with a cardboard cover and sold, if at all, for fifty cents. As an exercise in democracy the first issue was a thorough debacle. The poets pulled themselves together long enough to put out a slightly improved second issue and a third is envisioned sometime this year. Only poets resident in Montreal may participate. A brave effort to revive the poetry scene in Montreal but a sorry lesson in how not to start a little magazine. Most recent examples of little mags from Montreal are *Anthol*, *Moongoose* and *Bruises*, all originated by students.

AT THE RADICAL FRINGE of the little mags is a group of publications which are best viewed as products of the counter-culture. Here we find the most extreme experimentalism, represented in magazines like *Ganglia*, *Gronk*, *Blew Ointment* and *Elfin Plot*. A more recent example is a phenomenon

called "Intermedia" in Vancouver which since 1968 has been responsible for several short-lived magazines and an ongoing circus of mixed-media happenings. These involve tapes, discs, films, comic strips, postcards, exhibitions, festivals, poetry readings and theatre, and involve artists from many different media. Many such experiments (and they are not limited to Vancouver) are designed to free the creative imagination from traditional modes of expression and from the limitations of one medium.

The literary implications are significant. Visual, concrete and sound poems, for example, are attempts to liberate poetry from the tyranny of the printed page. These artists reject the concept of literature as something in a book — in fact they specialize in non-books. They attack language itself, wrenching its syntax apart, releasing the magic of its separate words, their sight, sound and texture, making their component letters dance, and forcing them into imaginatively fruitful alliances with various other arts. While much of the fractured syntax, phony spelling and typewriting antics is exasperatingly juvenile, the full effect of serious experiments along these lines is profoundly subversive. Language, as it has existed for centuries, has been the prime vehicle of culture. Traditional values are enshrined in its conventional grammar, syntax, idioms. To tamper with these, to unhinge and disarticulate language, therefore, is to commit an act more radical than most political revolutionaries dream of.

Thus while some of these activities are spurious and may be regarded as nonsense games which the young play to bug their elders, it would be folly to dismiss the phenomenon totally. Much of it reveals on the one hand a dadaist judgment on existing values and on the other a serious attempt to find new, redemptive modes of seeing, doing and knowing. Many of these artists are fully conscious that they are engaged in what they call "the language revolution" and they have been at it for some time. Some measure of their success may be noted in the fact that concrete poetry, once considered a freakish aberration confined to little magazines, is currently found on the pages of many "establishment" magazines. Possibilities for the future are indeed bewildering. But insofar as these radical experiments may be called literary it is clear even now that traditional categories and standards are not applicable or relevant. We shall have to learn new measures of judgment if we must cope with this phenomenon. In the meantime the curious may write to Mr. Poem of the Poem Company in Vancouver for copies of the tiniest poetry magazine in the country. It is issued once a week. Or to the *Elfin Plot* whose elves use many kinds of magic in their plot to lift the poem from the page.

It should be noted that the counter-culture is responsible for quite a different kind of magazine activity. What used to be called (in the Sixties in the United States) the "underground" press has surfaced and is now better described as "alternate". (As such it is dealt with elsewhere in this collection).<sup>2</sup> For our purposes here, however, it should be noted that while most alternate periodicals are social or political in emphasis and aim to change their readers' thinking patterns about community affairs, ecology, sexual mores, ethnic problems and so on, many of them do include a literary dimension. This being so, they often serve as regional outlets for local talent; and sometimes, as in the case of *The Georgia Straight* and *The Mysterious East*, they sponsor important "new writing" series and book review supplements. Others, like *Square Deal* in Charlottetown, have spawned small presses devoted to literary expressions of regional experience. Many Montreal poets, for want of other outlets, are appearing in *Logos*. There are also numerous hybrids among the magazines. *Alive*, for example, is deeply concerned about "an independent Canadian literature". *The British Columbia Monthly* is a weird and saucy mixture of social criticism and West Coast literary narcissism. In other words the alternate press overlaps, to a degree, the band of little magazines at one extreme of the literary spectrum.

The counter-culture is also, at least in part, responsible for the new humanism which characterizes many of today's magazines. This accounts on the one hand for a general loosening of categories, a broader range of interests, a relaxing of taboos, an openness to fresh ideas. On the other hand, combined with the new nationalism, the counter-culture has encouraged both regionalism and personalism. Many magazines, once afraid of being thought parochial, now flaunt their regional concerns. Photographs of old buildings, landmarks, scenery, sketches of local "characters", poems, stories and articles about the region or community are often featured. This can be folksy or campish; but more often it adds the warmth and depth of the ordinarily human to a literary enterprise too long marked by dry imperialism and cosmopolitan anonymity. It is not surprising that fiction is being given more attention recently. More than lyric poetry, which is subjective and individualistic, fiction explores inter-personal relationships. And lastly, almost all of the new magazines, short of the purely academic journals, have evinced an increasing curiosity about the lives of their authors. Minimally this may mean only an extension of the biographical data entered in "Notes on Contributors". More characteristically, however, the new magazines devote pages to informal interviews, vignettes of their authors, personal histories and reminiscences, intimate correspondence, and photographs both candid and casual. These

practices, along with the increasing tendency of writers to allude, in their poems and stories, both to things Canadian and to the work of fellow-Canadians, serve to develop a strong sense of literary community heretofore unknown in Canada. Tempting as the prospects are, one wonders at the delightful audacity of *Northern Journey* which includes two pages of perforated detachable stamps with photographs of contributors on one side and brief biographies on the other. Are we to envision a time when high school students will trade Canadian Authors Cards instead of those of Hockey Players? If that time ever comes, we shall have to insist that the chewing gum, too, be "Made in Canada".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This relationship is closely discussed by Sarah McCutcheon in "Little Presses of Canada", pp. 88-97.

<sup>2</sup> See "Underground or Alternative" by Anne Woodward, pp. 29-34.