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SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE LITERARY
MAGAZINE

These “Notes” were completed with the generous assistance of Richard Burgin, Speer Morgan, Bradford Morrow, Marco Roth, and Robley Wilson.

- 1684 *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* is begun by Pierre Bayle in France. Though it might not be recognized as such by today’s definition, the magazine is widely regarded as the first literary magazine due to its editorial focus on literature.
- 1711 First issue of British daily newspaper *The Spectator* is published, regarded as a literary heir to literary magazines and public interest journals. Brought out at the height of early 18th century coffeehouse reading culture and during the “Grub Street” surge in writing and publishing, each paper was believed by editor Joseph Addison to be read by twenty people.
- 1815 The oldest currently publishing American magazine, *North American Review*, begins publication in Boston under the editorship of William Tudor. The magazine ceased publishing in 1940, but was revived in 1964 by Robert Dana (at Cornell College) and later flourished for thirty years at the University of Northern Iowa.

- 1817 *Blackwoods* magazine is founded by William Blackwood. Originally begun as the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, Blackwood soon fired the editors and renamed the publication. In its more than seventy year publication history, *Blackwoods* was a strong proponent of romanticism, fostering the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. The first publication of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was serially in early 1899 issues of the magazine. (The magazine published its final issue in December 1980.)
- 1819 Yale faculty members begin the literary quarterly *The Christian Spectator*. In 1892 editor Henry Farnam changes the magazine's name to *The Yale Review*. Today the magazine stands as the longest continually running literary quarterly in America.
- 1840 Literary magazine *The Dial* is begun. Edited by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the magazine sets the groundwork for literary magazine formats to come. The magazine ceases publication after just four years.
- 1889 One of the oldest British literary magazines being published today, *Granta*, is founded as *The Granta* in Britain by students at Cambridge University. After sliding into financial difficulties in the early 1970s, the magazine was reborn as simply *Granta* in 1979 under the editorship of Bill Buford.
- 1892 Academic literary journal *The Sewanee Review* begins publication at University of the South. Unlike *The Yale Review* mentioned above, *The Sewanee Review* never under-

went a name change, and so is regarded by some as actually the longest continually running literary quarterly.

- 1908 Ford Madox Ford begins *The English Review*—assumed by some to be the first contemporary English language literary magazine, as its primary focus was not on the publication of reviews or cultural essays, but instead on the publication of new works of literature.
- 1911 First incarnation of *The Masses*, popular socialist literary magazine begun by Piet Vlag. In its short life span the magazine becomes a focal point for both literary socialism and working class realism. Reborn as *The New Masses* by Michael Gold in 1926 and it attracted such writers as Upton Sinclair, Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, and Richard Wright.
- 1912 Harriet Monroe begins *Poetry* in Chicago. This is the nation's longest continually running independent literary magazine and has published in its pages nearly all of America's most significant poets of the past century. It is credited as being the only serious venue for poetry during its early years.
- 1914 Wyndham Lewis publishes *Blast*, arguably one of modernism's most influential literary magazines, even though it only ran two issues.
- 1918 Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* publishes sections of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in installments, four issues of which were seized and destroyed by the U.S. Post Office. In 1920, the magazine is charged with obscenity by a United

State Special Sessions Court for publishing Joyce's work and its editor is fined \$100.

1922 Hemingway publishes his first story, "A Divine Gesture," in the New Orleans literary magazine *The Double Dealer*. Throughout the following decade Hemingway continues an active, though often contentious, relationship with literary magazines. William Faulkner, Jean Toomer, and Thornton Wilder also had their first pieces of writing published by *The Double Dealer* during this same year.

— *The Fugitive* is begun in Nashville by John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, and Allen Tate. Robert Penn Warren soon joins the magazine's staff. The magazine and its editors were highly influential in the development of Formalism, Southern poetry, and American poetry in general.

— "T. S. Eliot launched *The Criterion* as a quarterly in 1922, almost lost it for want of funds in the fall of 1925, resumed it as a quarterly over the Faber imprint in 1926, made it a monthly in 1927, cut it back to quarterly appearance in June 1928, and then issued it steadily until New Year 1939"—as summed up by Herbert Howarth in a 1959 issue of *Comparative Literature*.

1927 *Transition* magazine begun in Paris. Malcolm Cowley calls it, "The last and biggest of the literary magazines published by the exiles." The magazine runs James Joyce's "Work in Progress" serially—an early version of *Finnegan's Wake*.

1930 Ezra Pound publishes his essay “Small Magazines” in *The English Journal*. Though certainly biased by Pound’s own aesthetic vision, the essay quickly becomes a classic study of the English language literary magazine.

1931 Martha Foley begins *Story*, the first magazine dedicated to short fiction. The first issue had four stories out of it chosen for that year’s *The Best American Short Stories* annual. By its tenth year the magazine had published over a thousand works of short fiction.

1934 Ezra Pound convinces young James Laughlin to stop writing poetry and become a publisher. Two years later, while still a Harvard undergraduate, Laughlin launches New Directions Press, which publishes the *New Directions* literary annual, which introduced American readers to a range of talented yet largely unknown international writers.

— *Partisan Review* is begun by William Philips and Philip Rahv. Goes on to be the most influential American political literary magazine of the twentieth century. Ceases publishing in 2003, shortly after the death of then editor William Philips. Though *Partisan Review* originally emerged from the communist John Reed Club as an alternative to *The New Masses*, but during its over sixty year history the magazine went through a great number of internal political disputes, running the gamut from liberal to conservative in its editorial bias.

1935 *The Southern Review* is begun by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren at Louisiana State University, becoming (both in this and its later incarnation) one of the most respected venues for Southern writing and literary criticism.

- 1939 In December, just three months after Britain and France declared war on Germany, Cyril Connolly (with Stephen Spender and Peter Watson) begins British monthly magazine *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*. The magazine became known for its wartime spirit, and Connolly struggled throughout the bombing of the Blitz to keep the magazine going. According to a 1946 *Time* magazine article, *Horizon's* eventual influence was “out of all proportion to its 10,000 circulation.”
- 1947 Princeton University Press publishes *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, edited by Charles Allen, Frederick Hoffman, and Carolyn Ulrich. This is the first major American study of the literary magazine and remains today an often cited reference on English language literary magazines in the first four decades of the twentieth century.
- 1952 First issue of *New World Writing* is released. Published by New American Library/Mentor, the magazine soon becomes one of the most important literary magazines of its time (the magazine ceases publication in 1959). Aside from the amount of significant writers it introduced early in their career—such as Jorge Luis Borges and Joseph Heller—the magazine was also influential in its hybrid format of literary magazine and mass market paperback, a format copied later by such publications as *The Paris Review*, *New American Review*, and *The Quarterly*.
- 1953 *The Paris Review* is begun by, amongst others, William Styron, Peter Matthiesen, H. L. “Doc” Humes, and George Plimpton. The magazine was initiated by its editors as a reaction against the largely critical and scholarly focus of most literary magazines of the time. Perhaps more signifi-

cantly, the magazine introduces interviews with writers to the literary magazine format—an addition copied by nearly all succeeding literary magazines.

- Stephen Spender founds the literary magazine *Encounter*, most remembered now for having been secretly funded by the CIA through the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Spender denied any knowledge of this and resigned as editor soon after the magazine's CIA connection became known. (Decades later, rumors begin of *The Paris Review* having been also secretly funded the CIA. Co-founder Matthiesen admits to having served two years in CIA, while using *The Paris Review* as his cover. Current editor Philip Gourevitch claims Matthiesen's CIA involvement was not a secret around *The Paris Review* office.)

1957 *Evergreen Review* is begun by Grove Press. Introduced the work of many experimental writers to American readers. First issue included pieces by Samuel Beckett, Jean Paul Sartre, and James Purdy. The second had work by Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Henry Miller.

- *Beloit Poetry Journal* releases its winter issue featuring poetry by British “movement” and American “underground.” Feeling the content of the issue inappropriate, Beloit College withdrew its support for the journal. *BPJ* continued publishing without changing its name and remains a significant venue for poetry today.

1958 *TriQuarterly* begins publication. After its 1964 redesign, the magazine became one of the most influential literary magazines for the remainder of the twentieth century,

largely due to the breadth and comprehensiveness of its theme-based issues.

- 1959 *Chicago Review* issues containing portions of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* are pulled from the shelves. Some *Chicago Review* editors leave the magazine to form *Big Table*. The first issue of *Big Table* reproduced the entire contents of the suppressed winter 1959 *Chicago Review* issue, which included Burroughs's excerpt.
- 1960 Saul Bellow, Keith Botsford, and Jack Ludwig release the first issue of *The Noble Savage*. Though, largely due to Bellow's influence and fame, the magazine publishes a good percentage of quality writing from significant authors—the first issue had work from art critic Harold Rosenberg, an excerpt from a forthcoming novel by Ralph Ellison, and poetry from John Berryman that would be included in his *Dream Songs*—the magazine's backer Meridian pulls the plug after just five issues.
- 1962 Edward Sanders begins anti-establishment *Fuck You, a magazine of the arts*, which claimed it was "Edited, Published & Printed by Ed Sanders at a Secret location in the Lower East Side, New York City, USA." The magazine was a seminal work of the Mimeo Revolution in American publishing—a proliferation of cheap, independent magazine and book production.
- Soviet literary magazine *Novy Mir* publishes Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Within a day all 95,000 copies of the issue had been purchased and Solzhenitsyn is catapulted into international fame.

1967 Theodore Solotaroff begins *New American Review* (changes to *American Review* in 1973). For a decade it is one of the nation's most significant literary magazines. Its first issue had writing by Philip Roth, Grace Paley, Anne Sexton, William H. Gass, Robert Graves, and John Ashberry, among others. Roth's story "The Jewish Blues" from the first issue of the magazine became a section of his popular and controversial novel *Portnoy's Complaint*.

1972 First issue of *Yardbird Reader* is released, edited by Ishmael Reed, Al Young, Shawn Wong, Frank Chin, and William Lawson. The magazine is a prime example of the burgeoning interest in world and minority writing throughout American literary publishing. In its five volumes, *Yardbird* published the work of a wide range of cultures, such as African American, Asian American, Colombian, Puerto Rican, Filipino-American, Franco-American, Anglo-American, North African, Kenyan, and Caribbean.

— Mark Jay Mirsky begins *Fiction* magazine in New York (layout of the magazine is designed by Donald Barthelme). The magazine becomes a major venue for experimental fiction writing from around the world.

— Herbert Leibowitz begins *Parnassus*, which soon grows to be one the premiere venue for scholarly writing on contemporary poetry.

1976 First Pushcart Prize annual published by Bill Henderson, begun in an effort to bring greater recognition to the small and independent presses.

- H. Rowell begins African American literary magazine *Callaloo* in Baton Rouge. It quickly grows to become one of the most prominent African American literary magazines.
- 1978 *TriQuarterly* and Pushcart Press together publish *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, edited by Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie. Intended as a follow-up to Princeton's study of the literary magazine thirty years earlier (see 1947 above), the book covers recent literary magazine history through essays by and interviews with a variety of editors and scholars in the field, such as George Plimpton, Robert Boyers, Gilbert Sorrentino, Leroi Jones, Karl Shapiro, and Anne Waldman.
- Poets Larry Levis and Marsha Southwick found *The Missouri Review*. Current editor Speer Morgan takes over the following year, and in 1984 the magazine becomes a pioneer online magazine by establishing a "pre-web" internet site, which it maintains for three years.
- 1980 *The Threepenny Review* begun in Berkley, California by the then twenty-seven-year-old Wendy Lesser. Though having almost no editing experience at the time, Lesser quickly turns *Threepenny* into one of the most respected literary magazines in the nation. The publication is printed in tabloid format on newsprint, allowing Lesser to keep the price low and the quality of writing high. Current issues are seven dollars.
- 1980 First issue of *The Quarterly* is released. Edited by Gordon Lish, it is of no surprise that the magazine remains influential in its promotion of literary minimalism in the forms of the very short story and dirty realism (a phrase

coined by *Granta* editor Bill Buford for a theme issue of his magazine in 1983).

- *Ontario Review* editor Raymond Smith begins Ontario Review Press, one of the first and most respected of a later widespread trend of book imprint start-ups by literary magazines. Many of these book imprints are begun in an effort to counteract diminishing literary magazine sales.
- 1984 Frank Davey, Fred Wah, and David Godfrey start *Swift Current*, regarded as the first online literary magazine. Technically, the magazine was a literary database loaded onto a VAX 11-750 computer located at York University in Toronto and made accessible by subscription to personal users and institutions. More of a creative commons than an editor-run literary publication, *Swift Current* nonetheless served as a forerunner to the now popular online literary magazine.
- 1986 The first issue of *Boulevard* debuts, founded and published by Richard Burgin, who also helped found *Boston Review* in 1975. The magazine becomes known for its aesthetic diversity and writer symposiums on such subjects as the Internet, writers in the university, and film.
- 1987 *Witness* is launched in Detroit and has since received much acclaim. The magazine is best known for its special issues focusing on contemporary themes of social interest, such as writing from prison, the holocaust, ethnicity, and aging.
- 1992 Marc Smirnoff's begins *Oxford American* five years after his car broke down in Oxford, Mississippi. Smirnoff decided

that the south needed a general interest magazine of its own in the same vein as *The New Yorker*. After the magazine ran out of money two years later, popular legal thriller novelist (and Oxford resident) John Grisham picked up the tab.

1995 *Mississippi Review* publishes its first full-content (not an advertisement for a print edition) online issue.

1998 Rebecca Wolff launches *Fence* and Dave Eggers launches *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* (commonly called *McSweeney's*). Both magazines soon develop popular followings and become representative of new trends in literary production.

2002 *Poetry* is given \$200 million by pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly. This is by far the largest endowment ever received by a literary magazine.

— *One Story* publishes its first issue, titled “Villanova or: How I Became a Former Professional Literary Agent.” This is the first literary magazine to devote each issue to the publication of a single piece of writing.

2003 Ted Genoways takes over as editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* and directs the magazine's editorial focus more towards that of a general interest publication by adding more journalism and photography. *The Paris Review* follows suit a year later, forcing out disagreeing editor Brigid Hughes and bringing in Philip Gourevitch of *The New Yorker* to take her place. Circulation numbers for both magazines soon begin to increase.

- 2004 First issue of *n+1* is published by Keith Gessen, Benjamin Kunkel, Mark Greif, and Marco Roth. Magazine fills the gap in literary/political magazine publishing left by the disappearance of such magazines as *Partisan Review*. Though sometimes criticized as elitist, the magazine is also applauded for publishing critical commentary of the literary and intellectual world, something other literary magazines tend to shy away from.
- 2008 Two longstanding literary magazine institutions, *Granta* (1889) and *The Southern Review* (1935), both hire their first ever female editors, Alex Clark and Jeanne Leiby, respectively.
- Taking their lead from the trend in commercial magazines, *Opium* magazine publishes the first literary magazine eco-minded Green Issue. The issue is thematically focused on the environment and printed on wholly recycled paper with none of the issues delivered by air.