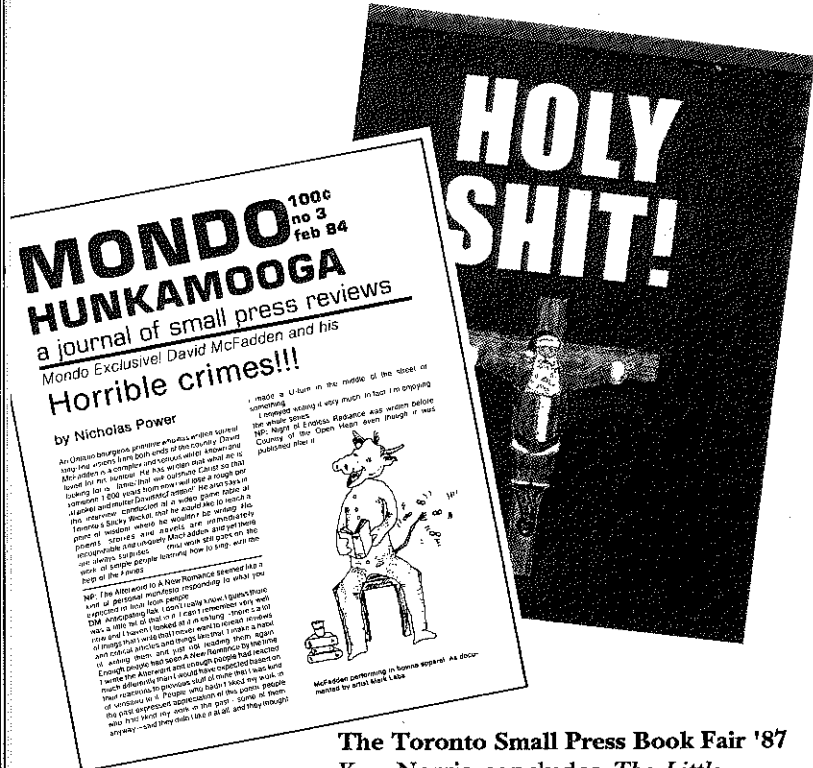


BUY THIS MAGAZINE!



JUNCTURES

The Toronto Small Press Book Fair '87 Ken Norris concludes *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80* - to date the definitive history of alternative literary publishing - with a discussion of *The Front*: "The ultimate aim of the little magazine is literary revolution, a call to a new order. If it succeeds, the old establishment is put aside and a new beginning is made; if nothing else, a few voices are heard saying something that was not said before. In its editorial intentions, *The Front* shares much with magazines that preceded it: the hope of forming a 'front' against the accepted literary norms of the day."¹

As with most of the magazines included in Norris's survey *The Front* is now history; however, its editor, Jim Smith, has emerged as not only one of Toronto's finest political poets but also one of its most committed activists. Smith's current vehicle is *The Front Press*; in association with the Artists and Writers Action Committee, he is publishing a series of chapbooks, issued monthly and available by subscription. Twelve pages in length, xeroxed and saddle-stitched, each book will feature the work of a different Toronto poet. Yet what makes this venture truly unique is that all revenue from the series will be donated to the Ministry of Culture in Nicaragua and the Enrique Lihn Writing Project in Chile. This is but one example of the way in which the "literary revolution" posited by Norris is changing its direction.

The *Front Press* was one of more than 40 book and magazine publishers exhibited at the Toronto Small Press Book Fair this past May. For eight hours, amidst the cacophony of local sound poets and jazz musicians, the Toronto literati crowded the Innis College pub to hawk the most unusual assortment of literary wares ever as-

sembled in this city. Organizers Stuart Ross and Nicholas Power sought inclusiveness: established, mainstream publications were bartered alongside the ephemeral alternative chapbooks, "lit-zines," broadsides and objets d'art more characteristic of the small press movement. Thus the quarterly *Waves*, typeset, perfect-bound and celebrating 15 years of publication, sat a few feet from the student journal *SCAT!* - packaged in a cardboard box, its poems, stories and essays printed on looseleaf, pamphlets, doilies and microfiche. Publisher jwcurry's *Curvd H&z Press* featured an odd assortment of poetic ephemerae, reproduced by every means imaginable on everything from scrap paper to post-cards; at the next table, *Stubblejumper* - Canada's only lesbian and gay male press - displayed an eclectic line of books, finely produced in a more conventional format. However, while varying greatly in form, content and purpose, each of the presses has a common concern - distribution.

While a few bookstores in Toronto stock small press publications, their chain stores, for the most part, do not carry small press magazines. It was this situation which, in 1984, prompted writers Stuart Ross and Nicholas Power - publishers of *Proper Tales* and *Gestures Press* respectively - to launch *Meet the Presses*. Held at the Scadding Court Community Centre on the last Sunday of each month, *Meet the Presses* showcased a varied selection of alternative publications. Contributors to each press gave brief readings; however, the emphasis was on sales, distribution and networking. A table could be rented for \$10 or shared for \$5; admission was free. Attendance varied with the weather and the schedules of various sporting events but was generally high. I attended half a dozen of these events throughout 1985 and came across magazines I'd never seen before nor have encountered since. As to their effectiveness for grass-roots networking, I can only attest to my own experience: flogging my chapbooks of poetry one Sunday, I chanced an introduction to a Coach House Press editor which resulted directly in my first commercial publication.

Meet the Presses lasted one year; citing "burn out" and a lack of time for their own writing, Nick and Stuart finally called it quits. It took the prompting of the organizers of this year's pair out of a "grateful retirement." I set out early that Saturday morning intending to define the state and aims of the little magazines of the eighties. Instead, my satchel bursting, I left the Book Fair with more questions than answers. Space does not allow for an examination of the 20

different publications I gathered; however, a brief and admittedly superficial description of a few might suffice to give some sense of the various directions in which Toronto's literary magazines are heading.

I have described the format of some of these publications. Indeed it is the means by which the smaller, alternative magazines are produced which distinguishes them not only from mainstream literary publications but from the bulk of mass consumer culture. Little magazines are radical in that they demystify the publishing process. *Push-Machinery*, edited by Daniel f. Bradley, is composed of half a dozen photocopied sheets, neither folded nor bound but hand stapled at the top. Poetry and collage are reproduced directly from the author's manuscript, the contributors ranging from established writers to the as yet unknown. With a print-run of 75-150 copies, *Push-Machinery* appears whenever Bradley has enough new material; it is distributed by hand and word-of-mouth. *Industrial Sabotage* is just one of the many publications, some of jwcurry's eclectic, perhaps eccentric, *Curvd H&z Press*. Publishing poetry, fiction and collage, curry has for several years expanded the formal horizons of literature. Visual, concrete and language-oriented works form the bulk of each issue. Materials, shape and manner of reproduction vary with the content; among other printing techniques, curry has explored colour xerox, silk-screen and rubber-stamps. Like *Push-Machinery*, *Industrial Sabotage* is cheap to produce and appears irregularly. Without the government funding that some literary magazines receive, it is free of restraint. While they lack the distribution of glossier, subsidized journals, small press publications allow the individual to take the means of production into his or her own hands.

Yet, in a country where the print-run of any literary magazine rarely exceeds two thousand copies, the materials and means of production are not enough to distinguish the truly alternative, little magazines from mainstream periodicals. As Frank Davey noted as early as 1962, the major difference "is still that little mags are published by engaged writers. . . Often, if not always, the little magazine reflects the presence of a group of writers of similar interests who are meeting, arguing, fighting, writing, almost every day - a group charged with literary energy that seems to keep continually overflowing into and out of their mimeographed pages."¹ Davey cites the example of *Tish* - an anagram for "shit" - an "engaged" little mag of the sixties whose editorial stance and stable of

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writers have had a lasting impact on the course of Canadian literature. In 1987, *The Shit*, edited by Norman Chadwick and D.M. Owen, carries on the tradition. Yet, where *Tish* was mostly concerned with pure poetics, *The Shit* is openly political. Anarchistic, irreverent and - as its name implies - willing to shock, each issue is a declaration of war on all that is mediocre, hypocritical and complacent in Canadian writing and society at large. Publishing manifestoes, tirades and editorials, *The Shit* also features an expanding group of poets, prose writers and artists who might otherwise go unpublished, as well as well-known writers with work for which no other outlet exists. Perhaps one of the grottiest magazines ever produced, *The Shit* continues to challenge the prevailing hegemony of excremental culture.

Equally engaged and engaging is *Rampike*. Whereas government support - with its concomitant restrictions on the rate of publication and format - has caused the stagnation of so many literary journals, editor Karl Jirgens has continued to print work that forces the reader to question the nature of discourse itself. Funded by the federal and provincial governments, published in a somewhat phallic, yet cutting, 17 by 6 inch vertical format, glossy and perfect-bound, *Rampike* distorts the conventions of genre, language and content. Past issues have featured Laurie Anderson, John Giorno and Jacques Derrida, as well as such innovative and committed Canadian writers as Rosemary Sullivan and Nicole Brossard. And, with a growing international reputation, Jirgens usually sells out each printing of two thousand copies. Defiantly postmodern, *Rampike* might just be directing the course of the little magazine into the third millenium.

While such magazines foment the "literary revolution," the small critical journals do much to question and shape the direction of the ongoing cultural discourse. Edited by Stuart Ross, *Mondo Hunkamooga* is devoted exclusively to reviewing small press books and magazines. Compact and cheaply produced, it appears with a remarkable irregularity (the first number was published in 1983, the fifth earlier this year); nonetheless, *Mondo Hunkamooga* is the only journal in Toronto to have engaged itself in this crucial task. While *what* does not restrict itself to small press publications, it is nevertheless an anomaly in literary publishing. A tabloid, *what* is printed six times a year, with 10 thousand copies distributed free in bookstores and libraries throughout North America. Periodicals without controlled circulation are ineligible for federal funding; to date, editors Kevin Connolly and Jason Sherman have relied on revenue from advertising, subscriptions, as well as a small Explorations grant, yet have still managed to get each issue out for two years. Like

Mondo Hunkamooga, *what* publishes essays, interviews and letters, as well as book and magazine reviews (*what* also publishes fiction, poetry and drama). Both are controversial and iconoclastic in the best tradition of the little magazine, challenging rather than indulging their respective readers. As well, both journals regularly contribute to the renewed discussion of the relationship between politics and literature - an issue noticeably absent from small press publications in Toronto since the 1930s. The second issue of *what* explored the issue of "art and politics," while a recent number (March 1987) contained a powerful interview with writer Brian Fawcett; throughout have appeared many similarly engaged commentaries and reviews. And the occasional columns in *Mondo Hunkamooga* by poet and activist Chris Faiers continue to challenge the complacency of all writers.

All the magazines mentioned have one feature in common: their editors are male. This situation is clearly evident to the women who have come together over the years to produce *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly*. As Makeda Silvera notes in her introduction to *Fireworks* - an anthology of poetry, prose and art celebrating *Fireweed*'s first eight years of publication - "historically, peoples not of the dominant culture have not had active participation in, or access to, arts journals, whether these have been part of the dominant culture or have emerged from the small presses."¹ Yet, in speaking of those not of the dominant culture, Silvera implies not only women in general but women of colour, working class and Native women and lesbians. It is *Fireweed*'s attempt to be inclusive, and the struggles, controversies and self-criticism that have resulted from this attempt that make *Fireweed* the intelligent, engaged and diverse journal it has become. Published by a collective (with occasional guest editors), *Fireweed* includes reviews and essays covering a wide range of topics and issues, as well as poetry and fiction free of any formal restraints. Given the status of women within the dominant culture, the survival and success of a journal like *Fireweed* points in a necessary direction to the further politicization of literary publishing to come. As Robin Belitsky Endres writes in "Why I Left 'The Left' to Write": "The women's movement, with its focus on the integration of the personal and social, paved the way for the reintegration, on a higher level, of art and politics, the goal of which is personal and social transformation."²

Admittedly, my discussion of these few magazines has been partisan in tone and intent. It would likely be fitting to close with some vague pronouncement about the future of literary publishing in Toronto. The reader, happy that the small press is alive and well, stifles a satisfied yawn. Instead, I will conclude with an appeal: subscribe to one or all of these magazines. If you don't like

those I've mentioned, bookstores such as Letters, SCM and This Ain't the Rosedale Library carry others. If they make you angry, write a letter or contribute to the magazines yourself. In the final analysis, the essence of small press is the doing. At the very least, as the organizers exhorted shoppers at the close of the Toronto Small Press Book Fair, "Go home and read."

Journals discussed:

A.W.A.C. Book of the Month Club,
The Front Press,
21 Hastings Avenue,
Toronto M4L 2L1.
Six chapbooks, once a month, in a limited edition of 40, \$30.

Push-Machinery,
551a Crawford Street,
Toronto M6G 3J9.
Query as to subscription rates.

Industrial Sabotage,
Curvd H&z Press,
729 Queen Street East,
Toronto M4M 1H1.
Published irregularly, prices vary;
pay what you can.

The Shit,
Martin Garth Press,
510 Front Street West,
Third floor,
Toronto M5V 1B8.
Query as to subscription rates.

Rampike,
95 Rivercrest Road,
Toronto M6S 4H7.
Two issues a year for \$12.

Mondo Hunkamooga,
Proper Tales Press,
Box 789, Station F,
Toronto M4Y 2N7.
Six issues for \$6.

what,
Box 338, Station J,
Toronto M4J 4Y8.
Six issues a year for \$6.

Fireweed,
Box 279, Station B,
Toronto M5T 2W2.
Four issues a year for \$12.

1 Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80*. (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984), p.179.

2 Frank Davey, "Anything but Reluctant: Canada's Little Magazines," *Canadian Literature* 13 Summer 1962). Reprinted in Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, eds. *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1970), p.223.

3 Makeda Silvera, ed., *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), p.8.

4 *Fireworks*, p.20.

Jones is a Toronto poet, critic and editor. He has published four collections of poetry, including The Brave Never Write Poetry, Coach House Press, 1985.

