

## Editorial

### My Evergreen Reviews

I returned home from a visit to a local bookshop with some new literary magazines—new to me: four copies of *The Evergreen Review*. These well-read survivors testify to an era when the literary magazine briefly commanded the scene. Volume 5, No. 18 (May-June 1961) for instance opens with a dozen pages of miscellaneous advertisements and features work by Brendan Behan, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, and Octavio Paz. The contributor's notes are interesting for what's not notable: in only one of the twelve is a "prize" or "award" mentioned (Aiden Higgins won an *Observer* short story contest in England), and not a single academic credential or sinecure is found worthy of a boast. The entry that stands out? "Mack Sheldon Thomas, who is currently serving a jail term for possession of narcotics. . . ." By contrast, the contributor's notes in most American literary magazines today are litanies of MFA degrees, colony visitations, sinecures—and "awards." Many (most?) of these magazines are published on-line only, cost nothing to the reader, and feature sound or moving images as well as words on a screen. One journal invites me to enjoy a podcast interview "about influences, mentoring, and creative writing programs"; there is a special section for "News of Previous Contributors' Awards." In the USA we call that "inside baseball." The literary magazines of 1961 probably have more in common with those of the 1860s, when writers such as Anthony Trollope launched the *Fortnightly*,

than with 2014. In 2014 we have academic quarterlies, legacy literary magazines—such as *The Paris Review* (and of course *Stand*)—and a pixelated, immeasurable, and inchoate online sea.

The truth is that readers don't care much about the awards, at least beyond the Nobel, Booker, Pulitzer, etc., which help structure "to read" lists for readers and "to promote" lists for publishers and bookstores. Things such as the "Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award," or "AE Coppard Prize for Long Fiction," or "Zone 3 Press First Book Award" are for writers. In America many of them will have jobs in universities and need awards for their c.v.'s, annual evaluations, and promotion reviews; they are symptoms of the transition from the kingdom of the reader to the empire of writers who profess but do not live by their pens.

As a reader, then I have some nostalgia for a world in which the *Evergreen* could structure one's field of vision. It's no wonder that I turn back to another from my cache; Vol. 3, No. 10 (November-December 1959) is a sheer delight. Who can resist the first sentence of Jerry Tallmer's "Bye Bye Blackbird"?

I am sitting here on this lovely late Friday afternoon early evening, the block's smallest kids are happy-screaming through all the back yards, my wife Louise is making the big first experiment with veal scallopini on the double hot-plate, I'm on my second vodka tonic, she's on her second vodka tonic, and now over the radio comes the news that some poor miserable misbegotten angel of mercy at Metropolitan Hospital, the second or third hospital she finally got into after damn near dying like Bessie Smith while being kept out

of other loving Christian joints in New York City in 1959, has turned in Billie Holiday for possession of narcotics, a little powder in her purse, that's heroin, man, that's criminal, that's practically Devil's Island; and while the Lady is dying there, or close to it, so says the radio, the cops have booked a charge against her (by telephone) and have posted a guard around her room and are giving her the good old business; if you don't think they do it you don't deserve to think, come on, Billie, come on, sister, come on, you're goina kick the bucket anyway, you might as well make it easy for yourself, where'd you get it, who brought it in, who, where, how, *who?*

It's time machine, it's 1959, Billie Holiday is not a reference in a workshopped assignment, she's alive, she matters, and Tallmer's essay is hot and indignant and also has a great photo—and while I read it I notice that the *Jazz Review*, Harper & Brothers, Charles Tuttle, Beacon, Yale, Harvard, the Russian Tea Room and the Tibor de Nagy Gallery paid money to have their advertisements in my gaze. And somebody coughed up a buck to take this issue home. My *Evergreen Review* #10 also includes Samuel Beckett's "Embers." Unlike Nobel laureate Beckett, however, Tallmer was not a familiar name to me, and one of the pleasures of the backfile of any journal is seeing the patchwork of names and writings, and (thanks to the internet) going on excursions to find out more about the ones one doesn't know. (Tallmer, I discover, was for decades the theatre critic for the *Village Voice*.)

Looking at my *Evergreen Reviews*, one also loves their amateurism—that they were not born as part of a job description. The masthead for the epoch-making second issue ("The San Francisco Scene" with Ginsburg's "Howl") has only three names—a few more came later. By 1970, the *Evergreen* had 40,000 subscribers and 100,000 sales over the counter, and it maintained a political edge: in '66 it published Ho Chi Minh's prison poems, and two years later anti-Castro Cubans bombed its offices after it ran a cover of Che. I am enamoured as well of them physically—the quality of the glossy paper for the covers and black & white photography, the size and weight, and the traces of the time that has passed between their newness and my second-hand purchase: old subscription cards, old subscription rates, advertisements for extinct businesses, the frayed and browned pages themselves. The palpable expressions of time passing paradoxically make the contents ever green, at least for me. (*Evergreen* reappeared online in 1998, edited by one of its founders, Barney Rosset—but in 2013 was suspended. See <http://www.evergreenreview.com>.)

*Stand* in the 1960s shared a milieu with American magazines such as the *Evergreen*, but unlike it, *Stand* is still publishing. The tables of contents (and cover images) of the new series, which began in 1999, have been on-line for some time—but now there is more. Thanks to the hard-work of the *Stand* team over 5,500 contributions to *Stand* have now been indexed by author, title, and genre (1952-2014), and they are available at [www.standmagazine.org](http://www.standmagazine.org). It's a list rich in the well known—Samuel Beckett's "Dieppe" appears in 1961 (5.1), Wole

Soyinka's "Pens for Hire" in 1999 (n.s. 1.2)—but there are also listings for works by writers who went on to different careers. That issue from 1961 has a bold green and black cover designed by Elaine Lewis, and (unindexed) a flock of advertisements from publishers, and also Hardy's ("Official Outfitters to the Leeds University Union"), the *A la Bête Noire* coffeehouse in Oxford Street, and Wallace Arnold Tours ("Moscow and Poland in 1961"). Most back issues are for sale directly from *Stand*, and purchasing them will not only connect you to the past, as did my *Evergreens* but support the future of *Stand* as well.

David Latané

## JOHN WHALE

### *Swift*

The first shock  
was seeing  
its unfamiliar  
brown wings  
ruffled and cramped  
on the asphalt.

The second was  
the jerky life  
among the feathers  
as a green fly-louse  
crabbed its way  
back to cover.

The third was  
the thought of this  
lone member  
of its species,  
bereft now  
of the host  
it had clung to  
so many times  
between the Sahara  
and the stars.