

INTRODUCTION/Bill Schermbrucker

Nobody could forget the scene of Pierre's quitting. "As for the future," he said, "*well*, I leave that to *you!*" He strode to the far end of the pool, shed his garments, pissed a golden arc through the fence, then turned and dived in, and seemed to stay under water an impossible length of time. We all looked at one another inquiringly.

The magazine was known and respected across the country. We had a faithful body of subscribers, and steady funding. My job was to consolidate rather than innovate. The departmental editors got more autonomy, and I encouraged them to prepare "special" issues, focussed on writers and artists who could profit from the emphasis. Several times, we broke the rigid design format, with pleasing effect—one of my favourite covers was #18, the cowboy in chaps running vertical, and the hairline box with the title on the right. For the Tim Porter cover (#12) we brought printer and photographer together, to achieve a rare silver effect with special screening. We did Fawcett's *Tristram's Book* as an issue—something I'd always wanted—with a limited edition of hard covers. And it gave me the greatest pleasure when Sharon Thesen announced that she had gotten Marlatt's "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" and Ondaatje's "Running in the Family," and we laid them out as an issue—with full colour inside.

We were never short of good work. Several of Audrey Thomas' stories that made up *Ladies and Escorts* came to us first—and I remember staring at the Spanish in "The More Little Mummy of the World," and thinking, "Can that be right?" Instead of *pequena* (little), she had written *pregunta* (question) for the association, no doubt with *pregnant*. Michael Ondaatje also made a slip, and had the Dutch whitewashing walls with egg *yolk*, but he caught it just before the press rolled. Proofreading made me feel useful, and meanwhile Sharon Thesen (Poetry), Ann Rosenberg (Visual Media), Penny Connell and Bob Sherrin (Fiction) brought in the work steadily. Most of the student editors were committed and of remarkably sophisticated judgment. There were surprises (for me, and therefore, I hoped for the subscribers) in every issue:

David McFadden's grainy poem about driving across the Second Narrows Bridge; Colin Browne's funny story, "The Cougar"; Cathy Ford's knockout piece, "Cut Flowers"; Brian Fawcett's politically informative "Seventh Serial Run." I pushed for coverage of the Wood Sculpture Symposium, and got a splendid piece; I pushed again for an experimental play festival going on at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, and we were put off with the line that there were no scripts — but I had *seen* scripts, I had *xeroxed* a good script. (To this day it remains a mystery why so few good playwrights are interested in magazine publication. We sat down with people from the New Play Centre, and made ourselves open for material, but nothing came of it.)

Publishing exciting material was the easy part of the job. The drain came from putting out energy to overcome unexpectedly negative forces: nasty letters complaining that we had no editorial policy; objections from the British Post Office that our shipping envelopes weren't the right kind; refusal to be considered a "magazine" because we published too infrequently; getting rid of a power-mad student editor who wrote inexcusable things to a contributor. Weeding out the 95% garbage that came through the mail and passing on the rest was a daily chore which required defending the editors from the assumption that they were creative writing teachers. One outraged writer amused me by writing to complain that his poems had come back too *soon*. In fact, a glance was usually enough, but I almost blew it with one manuscript from New York: the letters were spider-scrawled all over, and the sheets of paper mangled and dirty. Run-of-the-mill nut case, I thought, but fortunately I struggled to read some of it, and Sharon Thesen decided to publish the work — the poet simply had a physical disability.

In the office, there was a good feeling of teamwork, with Dorothy Jantzen, and with the student assistants Sue Benton and Sharon Bell. We got Dian Relke for a time as a regular employee, which enabled us to do big subscription and bookstore drives, and boost circulation. And then I knew it was time for me to get out, and concentrate on my own writing. Ann Rosenberg was ready to take it, and straighten out the finances for starters.