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The Little Magazine in Contemporary America

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Diaz Edits Book on Fate of Little Magazines

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015) is a sort of love letter in Joanne Diaz's 20-year relationship with literary magazines.

An associate professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan University, Diaz is co-editor of the new book, a collection of essays and reflections of 23 contributors or editors offering insight into the world of little magazines "during the most radical paradigm shift since the invention of movable type." Ian Morris, founding editor of Fifth Star Press and a former managing editor at *TriQuarterly*, is co-editor.

As idiosyncratic, small-circulation outlets, little magazines have served the dual purposes of representing the avant-garde of literary expression while also helping many emerging writers become established authors. Major writers such as James Joyce, e.e. cummings, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound have had their most widely read works published in little magazines. The book also includes discussion of how little magazines' editors promote the work of women and minority writers.

Diaz's personal association with little magazines goes back to the editorship of *Amanuensis*, her Massachusetts high school's literary magazine. Stints with *Washington Square* and *Ploughshares* led to a doctoral fellowship and assistant editorship at *TriQuarterly*, where she met Morris. After the fellowship ended, Diaz continued working for *TriQuarterly* until the print version of the magazine ended in 2010.

"I first developed an interest in little magazines for the same reason most editors do," said Diaz. "Most of us want to be part of a writerly community and contribute to public discourse in some way. Even as a 16-year-old who knew nothing about little magazines, I understood their power."

"Each issue represents a series of aesthetic decisions on the part of the editorial staff," she added. "Just as a curator selects objects for exhibit in a gallery or museum, so too do editors make important choices about how to share exciting new work with their readerships. The thrill of that enterprise has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life."

Though changes in technology and "the increasingly harsh financial realities of publishing over the past three decades would seem to have pushed little magazines to the brink of extinction, their story is far more complicated," according to the editors. The advent of globalization, smartphones and wireless technology might actually prove to be more help than hindrance to the future of little magazines, they write. For example, new online fiction magazine *The Drum* features free podcasts of writers reading their work. *Tin House's* website features short films.

"In this way, readers can also become viewers of video content that stimulates and inspires, thus continuing the conversation that the magazine initiates," the editors write.

Diaz said she hopes that readers of the book will recognize the need for little magazines and that they will subscribe to one.

"We writers want to be published in little magazines, but too few writers actually subscribe to one," she said. "By subscribing to a little magazine, readers can get a sense of the editors' priorities; of trends in style, form, and rhetorical approach; and of how literary tastes change over time. This is essential for the literary arts to thrive in our culture."

Diaz is now interview editor for *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and the author of two collections of poetry, *The Lessons* and *My Favorite Tyrants*. She joined the faculty at Illinois Wesleyan in 2008 after earning a doctorate in English literature from Northwestern University. She is also the past recipient of writing fellowships from the Illinois Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Joanne Diaz

