1966

Story of a Publisher

Alan Swallow

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq

Recommended Citation

Why does one do it? Why does one attempt publishing without alighting in the publishing centers? How does one get the arrogance, it may be called that, to feel that a mantle of destiny has fallen into his shoulders? The reasons are difficult to analyze. Probably the best I can do is to sketch a bit of intellectual autobiography.

I grew up on an irrigated farm in northwestern Wyoming near the town of Powell. Quite early I became an omnivorous reader of all the materials at hand. These consisted of popular magazines, popular fiction and nonfiction; in addition, I early acquired a tremendous interest in science and technology, particularly mechanics. And, like any another adolescent of the time, I fooled around a great deal with old cars and motorcycles.

My adolescent intent was to become an engineer, probably in the aeronautical field. I do not recall just when I first picked up an interest in serious literature, which early meant poetry and philosophy. There must have been some interest in the spring of the year I turned sixteen, because I recall that I rode into town to sell a motorcycle I had for a year or two. Then my parents took me to Gardiner, Montana, which is the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park, and that summer of 1931 I ran a filling station in Gardiner for a family which maintained a summer tourist business there. This business consisted of a grocery store and soda fountain in a large building and a filling station next door; it was my job to run the filling station. My hours were long in that I worked from six in the morning until eight or eight-thirty at night. But typical tourist business of that time was spotty, and there would be rushes of thirty minutes of hard work and then periods of fifteen or thirty minutes in which there wouldn't be much to do.

I did not have much money for books, but I discovered then the Waldeman-Julius publications. One could buy the Little Blue Books twenty for a dollar and the larger books ten for a dollar, and during...
the summer I bought probably two hundred fifty. I also acquired a few other books and magazines, including, I recall, Will Durant on philosophy and such magazines as The Thinker. I did a great deal of reading, then, during this summer, primarily in the fields of poetry, plays, philosophy, socialism, free thought. It was during that summer also that I first started to write poetry.

I was tremendously attracted by several things that I learned then: first, by the effort of Haldeman-Julius to provide good literature at inexpensive prices—and I suppose that there was planted a small seed of the idea of publishing at some time; second, through Haldeman-Julius publications of magazines and through reading other materials, I became aware of the group we call the "little magazines." I was certainly impressed with the idealism and the efforts of these magazines to put out a quality work without consideration for commercial results.

During the next two years, my senior year in high school and first year at the University of Wyoming, I became more and more interested in the "little magazines." I was sending out my own verse, and I had my first acceptances in two or three of these magazines during that period. In my sophomore year at the University of Wyoming, I decided to start a little magazine of my own. The idea was to start with local talent, in the hope that gradually the magazine could extend beyond the campus to reach for additional talent and more mature talent and also for reading response. The magazine was called Sage and was mimeographed. Several issues were issued during the year, and I had the help of a number of students. I particularly remember the help of Madeline Shorey, who, as a competent typist, did the stencils for the publication.

This idea was not a new one, and this pattern for the "little magazine" has been tried by many others since. I believe that in most cases it is not a sound idea for launching a magazine. At any rate, during what would have been my junior year at college I went to Laramie and registered, but shortly returned home and worked during that year in a bank at Powell. The reasons were confusion and uncertainty about where I was going with a college education and my personal future. During that year, of course, I had nothing to do with the magazine Sage, although some other students at the University did get out one or two issues, and that was the last of that particular magazine.

On returning to the University to finish two more years of under-
graduate work, I had the opportunity to do some editorial work with magazines. Ann Winslow, who was the executive secretary of the College Society of America, had moved to the University of Wyoming, and with her had moved the magazine published by the Society, called College Verse. My poems were appearing in the magazine, and under an NYA grant I was able to assist her with the work. In addition, there were two students' magazines—one called Wyoming Quill, sponsored by a local society; and a magazine of the student body which I edited at the time.

From these experiences I resolved that at some time I would return to publishing a magazine, but I also resolved that the next time would be under other circumstances. I wished it to be printed, and I wished to start less with a local situation and to be able to publish more mature writers whom I admired.

The three years from June 1937, to June 1940, were spent in Baton Rouge in graduate study at the Louisiana State University, and during half of that period my wife, Mae, was secretary for The Southern Review. A good many of us had arrived there because of the work of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks.

The last of those years, the school year 1939-40, I thought that possibly the opportunity had come for which I had been looking. On the campus were a number of promising young writers who had been publishing in the little magazines as I had been. Two of these students, Sheila Corley and Frederick Brantley, proposed that there ought to be an anthology of the writings by some of the students who had gathered to work with Warren and Brooks.

In the fall of 1939, then, I borrowed one hundred dollars from my father and secured a secondhand five-by-eight Kelsey handpress. I bought the necessary furniture and type cases, and also several fonts of type and some paper. This outfit was set up in the garage of the apartment where we lived. The library at the Louisiana State University, to my good fortune, had good holdings in the areas of the history of type, of printing and typography. I read all of these books I could to learn as much as possible in a short time about these materials, and I set out to print. The book being printed was an anthology, called Signets; An Anthology of Beginnings, and the procedure was to set one page at a time, print the copies on the handpress, then distribute the type back in the cases. Several of the students came day after day to aid in distributing the type in the cases.

I recall one of the exciting moments of the year. Corley and
Brantley told me of a new student on the campus by the name of Thomas McGrath, who was writing verse and had published a few things in the magazines. They brought me some of his manuscripts and I sat down by the wall of the garage and read them through. Reading them gave me great elation and a great shock to think that we had such a fine and exciting talent. Subsequently, after knowing McGrath, I resolved that my first venture, other than the anthology, would be a small collection of his poems.

In March 1940, the anthology appeared and the following month, McGrath’s First Manifesto, as number one of the Swallow Pamphlets. The reason for the pamphlet idea was that I still had the notion, gained from reading the Haldeman-Julius materials, that good literature ought to be put out at a very inexpensive price, and these pamphlets were projected at twenty-five cents each.

At this time, twenty-six years later, I am not sure that I can recall fully what was going on in my mind. Clearly, I was fired by the idealism of the little magazine movement. Yet the first two publications had been a book and a pamphlet, not a magazine. Somehow, I knew that the purpose of what I had done was to be able to have a little magazine, and I resolved that I would not have any period in my life in which I did not have active editorial, and probably publishing, control of such an outlet. And that resolve has been fulfilled.

Clearly, also, I had provided myself with some training. At this perspective of time, it seems that the training might have been hap­ hazard, yet it consisted of active selection of manuscripts, and it consisted of sufficient technical training that I knew I could put on paper in a workmanlike fashion some of the things I would be wanting to publish.

Another factor was at work. Perhaps my readers will feel this is a kind of mysticism, but I am sure that it is not. From my account so far, the reader will have perceived that I grew up in an environment of work. My original home was, indeed, very close to the frontier: the first water had been turned on the land, which I called my home, just a few years before I was born; my grandfather had homesteaded this land but had died before he could live on it; my father started farming it when he was seventeen; I was born two years later. I believe that I have one tendency which is significant in these facts; it is a tendency that I inherited, although I would not
That all persons who grow up in the environment will necessarily respond to the tendency. That tendency is to act upon one's beliefs and ideas. I value this inheritance probably more than any other. Translated to the situation in 1940 when I had finished two jobs with handpress, it meant that I would be compelled by my own character to act, that is, that I would do what I felt should be done, and those things that I felt should be done were informed by the idealism I have mentioned.

These factors—the somewhat haphazard training, the knowledge and skills sufficient to do, the flair for idealism, and the innate character trait toward action—fell into place at one time in a way which suppose is rare in one's life. (Another set of circumstances fell into place for me some fourteen years later, as I shall indicate.) These factors led to one other idea which I cannot spot exactly in time, but my concepts of publishing developed beyond that of the little magazine. His development, I suppose, has identified my publishing work since that time. As a poet, I was concerned with the problems of the poet. I realized that those problems, in the publishing sense, extended beyond the outlets of the little magazines. The ripened concept was that there was even a greater need in the realm of book publishing than there was in the realm of the little magazine world for the fort which was analogous to the dedication found often in the little magazines. The concept was what I later came to call the "little publisher." The term "little" refers, of course, to an attitude, not to size. The analogy is that book publishing should be informed by the same noncommercial dedication as characterized at least the best of the little magazines.

Thus was added to the factors already mentioned a particular idea of what I could do in book publishing. The excitement of discovering McGrath and printing some other impressive work drove this intention deeper into me. And for the next fourteen years I worked from these abilities and concepts. I had two years in Army service, but even during those two years, I worked actively as poetry editor of New Mexico Quarterly Review (as the magazine was then called) so that was never out of active decision-making in an editorial sense. Basically, the method was that I made a living as a teacher, first at the University of New Mexico for two years, 1940-42, and Western State College in Colorado for one year, 1942-43, and then after the war at the University of Denver for eight and a half years, from January 1946, to August 1954. The publishing was done part-time as
an avocation, technically. This means that during that period no money was taken out of publishing. Small amounts, such as could be taken from a teacher's salary, were put in. But at least ninety percent of the values that were put in were in the form of labor. This included, of course, continuous and incessant labor of my own; but at various times I had the help of my family, friends, and students who volunteered; and at two different periods, the help, in separate organizations, of Horace Critchlow.

To try to tell the story chronologically during those years until 1954 would involve so many strands that the story would probably be confusing. So permit me to project ahead the story of the magazine effort alone and then return to the book publishing.

Essential to the story are certain attitudes that I have had or that I have developed about the little magazines. The reader should recall that, in the first two decades of the little-magazine movement in this country, the chief effort was to publish creative work that was not acceptable in the commercial magazines: poems, short fiction, sometimes long fiction published over several issues, plays, various experimental works hard to classify. During the 1930's and the early 40's, especially under the impact of the Hound and Horn and The Southern Review, a different pattern developed, which I have called the "quarterly review" type of little magazine. The pattern for the "quarterly review" was to publish more nonfiction prose than creative work, although each issue normally contained one or more stories and a selection of poems. This type of magazine, together with the books which quickly followed, became the publishing arm of the revolutionary critical movement which so completely changed much of our thinking about literature, both in criticism and in the profession of teaching.

The "quarterly review" pattern became dominant and until very recently has remained dominant in the little-magazine field. The difficulty with the pattern is that in the hands of its second generation (of whom I must consider myself one), the critical materials became repetitious and dull; that is, after the tremendous illumination gained by the works of such men as Winters, Tate, Ransom, Blackmur, Burke, and other men of their generation, the magazines quickly seemed to be filled with minor developments on the old insights and often became dull. In the later 1940's, I published an
say about the postwar little magazines, and I felt that the need
of the little-magazine movement was to return predominantly to
creative work. Gradually, this has come about until today, with the
called "mimeograph revolution," the creative work seems to pop
out from almost every garret in America.

By the end of 1940, with my handpress equipment, I was ready
to launch a serious effort. In 1941 I published four issues of the
magazine Modern Verse, printed from handset type always—at first
in the handpress and later on the larger press I shall mention. The
title indicates the purpose: to publish poems. The only prose was a
small effort at reviewing. In this period, Dudley Wynn had become
ditor of New Mexico Quarterly and had changed the name to New
Mexico Quarterly Review, projecting the former magazine more
particularly into the "quarterly review" pattern. He asked me to be­
come poetry editor of NMQR, and I turned over the small subscrip­
on list for Modern Verse in accepting this position. From 1942
to 1948, when Dudley Wynn relinquished the magazine in order to
go to the University of Colorado, I continued as poetry editor. As I
look back on this experience, I believe that we had an important
magazine of the "quarterly review" type. The prose fiction selected
by Dudley Wynn was challenging and often very distinguished,
including the work of many persons now widely known. The non­
diction had, appropriately, many important materials about the
southwest, but also included literary criticism. In poetry, I was able
to have space which permitted me to publish even more poems per
quarter than I had been able to use in Modern Verse and also to
conduct a review section covering my commentary on some eighty
volumes of verse per year. Although a part of a larger magazine, this
effort was clearly one of the larger efforts concerned with verse in
the literary field of the time, and it would be a pleasure to have the
space to spell out the names of the poets who contributed.

As I was editing poetry for NMQR, I thought I detected a number
of poets working in experimental ways that were not merely offshoots
of the old experimentalism. I published some of this work, but it was
clear that with the eclectic policy I had for my poetry selections, I
did not have space for the job I felt they needed. On my initiative,
Meade Harwell and I sent a letter to the poets I thought were involv­
ed, proposing the formation of a cooperative group and the publica­
tion of a new magazine to concentrate upon this experimental work.
A group was formed and the magazine Experiment was begun. During its first or second year, I was its editor; it was continued by other hands until it now seems to have gone out of the picture.

After 1948, no longer having the poetry editorship of NMQR, I worked in various ways in the little-magazine movement. One of my objectives had been to try to find a means of being helpful to the best magazines. An early experiment was the publication of The Advance Guard for the four issues in the period 1947-48. This magazine did not publish creative material but attempted to give precise commentary upon serious literary publications in book and magazine form (my readers will detect an idea here which reached some fruition in the "current bibliography" sections of Twentieth Century Literature several years later); it also provided brief histories of significant little magazines. As my ideas developed, The Advance Guard became the Index to Little Magazines. Indeed, the first volume of the Index in 1948 was published simultaneously as the last issue of The Advance Guard. I had finally developed a project which I felt would be the most helpful one I could do for the best little magazines. This project has continued, and it is also being projected backwards to cover the historic past of the little magazines.

Active editorship in creative materials for little magazines was confined for a short time to minor positions as associate editor and advisory editor for various magazines. But, under my feeling that the chief effort in little magazines had to be the publication of creative work; once more, in 1953 I started my magazine PS (poems and stories). As the name indicates, this magazine contains no critical work, not even reviews. It is purely an occasional magazine and has seemed to average about one issue every eighteen months. I consider it primarily an adjunct to the book publishing, an opportunity to publish briefer things by some writers whose work interests me.

In 1955, with the help of some of my former students, as a cooperative endeavor, Twentieth Century Literature: A Critical and Scholarly Journal, was begun. It has been published continuously and just as it crosses its twelfth volume, the journal will be given to Immaculate Heart College of Los Angeles so that it may be institutionalized and so that, also, it will be assured a place without dependency upon my personal health and time. I have been proud that it has been the only privately sponsored critical and scholarly magazine in the literary field in this country. It has prospered and has become too
 территории a burden for me, taking too much time away from my publishing. PS, however, will be continued.

Now I can return to the much larger effort involved with book publishing under my concept of the “little publisher.” In the spring of 1940, after completion of the first two works with the handpress, and thinking about a first full book of poetry to offer on the market, had asked Robert Penn Warren if he knew any good poets who remained unpublished in book form. He suggested two, of whom one was Lincoln Fitzell. I contacted Fitzell, whose work I had seen in magazines and had admired, and entered into the first contract for a book of this nature.

The printing equipment and the new type and the plans for Fitzell’s book, In Plato’s Garden, were packed into the car and taken to Powell for the summer, inasmuch as I was going to the University of New Mexico that fall to begin full-time teaching. During the summer I kept working away at the printing of the Fitzell book—a page at a time—and I have always felt that this was one of the best printing jobs I ever did. All this was taken to Albuquerque in September, and the printing was finished in the fall. I was lucky to discover Hazel Dreis, surely acknowledged to be the best bookbinder in the United States at the time, in Santa Fe, where she had a binding shop. She became interested in the work and prepared a very nice case binding for the Fitzell book at as low a price as she could, and I issued the book that fall. This was followed immediately by some additions to the Swallow Pamphlet series.

The work to this time was poetry, as was the work with Modern Verse, and this is a good place to indicate some general attitudes about publishing poetry. A basic position I have had is this: it is not possible, volume after volume, to sell enough copies of a book of poems to pay commercial prices for production and to pay royalties. Of course, there will be individual variations, and an individual volume may do very well. Against this, if one is persistent and publishes book after book, many will sell very poorly indeed. Therefore, the publishing of poetry in our culture involves finding a means of making up this deficit. The means are several: so-called “vanity” publishing makes up the difference at the author’s expense; supporting the monetary loss by monetary gains elsewhere; seeking the help of an “angel,” which in our culture sometimes can involve not so
much an individual as a foundation or an educational institution.

To my mind, all of these are to be rejected. The dependency upon the author is not in the best interests of poetry or poets, and certainly there is no correlation between the ability of a poet and his ability to finance publication of his work. The second is presumably the method used by our large publishing houses, some of whom pride themselves upon sufficient literary taste to take a loss which will be made up by best selling books. It is to be noted that many of these publishers hedge on this matter in various ways, but it is also to be noted that after a period in which the number of publishers who thus prized their literary qualifications had declined considerably, their number has somewhat increased in recent years. The third method I have chosen to reject wholly. The reason is that I regard as significant the value of individual editorial judgment and I have therefore been wary of ever getting into a situation whereby a gift might impose a kind of control or obligation. And the sorts of other outside support usually involve the viciousness of "committeeitis," that is, the filtering of the judgment through a kind of averaging-out of several individual judgments. In our time, a vigorous publishing program for poetry has been carried on by Wesleyan University Press. To my mind, although I feel it is an admirable effort, the editorial judgments involved have been to some extent blunted by the advisory-committee approach.

Rejecting these, yet determined to publish poetry on my own judgments, the training I had given myself in printing was the answer, just as it was the answer to the problem of publishing the little magazine. My position was simple: by throwing in my own work without cost against the book, I could reduce the out-of-pocket expenses of producing a volume of poems to the extent that sales would earn back all that expense plus a royalty for the author. As my list has built, the average sales have increased, so that the dependency upon my own manual work is less. For example, whereas I set the first books by hand and thus saved composition expense, I now buy composition commercially. But for most of the books of poetry I still do my own work at the "stone" and my own presswork. It should be noted that in a pinch I could get out a book with almost no out-of-pocket expense. I have not taught myself to make paper, but I could do so; but I have, with the help of friends in the bindery, done every other process of getting materials and of preparing a book.
The idea has worked as well as the extent of the labor I could put to the books. This has been sufficient to publish for nearly twenty more volumes of poetry under a royalty contract, as I have publicly claimed, than any other publisher in the nation. At least or me and my basic position of action upon my judgments, I cannot think of another device as a solution to the problem of publishing poetry in our society.

Now, what of the taste and philosophy behind the judgments? If the judgment was generally faulty, all this work would have been a false, nearly useless, accomplishment. I have one interesting test for my enthusiasms; for it is the momentary enthusiasms which are key to endanger the independent judgment, so long, at least, as we may assume that the independent judgment is reasonably rounded on a useful critical position. That test is this: I normally will have handled the poems a good many times before a book is ready. I try to read each book, before acceptance, a minimum of twice carefully, and usually three times. This delays the final judgment sometimes, but it does protect the author and me from possible decisions on quick impressions and momentary enthusiasms. Then in reading proofs and in the actual pressrun—during which time I will be reading also—the work can become "old hat." By the time the process is finished, I know a great deal about the poems. If my enthusiasm remains after those trials, I issue the work with all the critical assurance I can command. I test my critical judgment against the laborious process of printing, and I cannot think of a better test. It reminds me of my early way of determining how much I would want to purchase something from the Montgomery Ward catalog; I would translate the dollar amounts into the number of hours of labor that I would have to put out in work to acquire the wanted possession. And I can think of only one title which, when I was through, had failed this test and I felt I had largely wasted my time. There have been a few other books, but very few, that I have not been proud of at the end of the process; these were books in which I would shorten my own process because of the strong recommendation or enthusiasm of someone else whose judgment I respected. These have not been bad, by any means, but in a few cases I confess that my own critical judgment did not sufficiently accord with other judgments. To put it another way, on an occasional individual volume, out of respect for others, I have succumbed to what I call the vice of "committeeitis" and in many of those cases I have been regretful.
An interesting sidelight to me: the method I have outlined makes me so familiar with the work that I am a little affected by the review comment that my books of poetry receive. I feel it in my bones, it were, that I am so much more inside these poems than the reviewer is likely to be. I respect many reviewers, but I know their handicap: And until I find that rare one who has come as close to the poems I have, I know that my judgment should not be effected by their review comments. I am betting my judgment for the long haul against the judgment of any reviewer or critic. This may sound a lot of arrogance, but I do not know how a person could possibly act on his judgments so continuously without finally taking the position.

With the proud position occupied on my list by the poetry of J. V. Cunningham, Yvor Winters, Edgar Bowers, Alan Stephens, Alastair Tate, and others who might be identified as working within the old traditions of English poetry, obviously my taste for the resources that tradition showed plainly in my editorial judgments. However, I have many times been annoyed by some public comment that would classify my publishing within this range. I have been eclectically I have published the work of experimental writers, including at times special efforts that linked poetry with drawing (although I think this is very clearly a fruitless endeavor); I have published a good many people working within what seems to be considered the "modern temper," as some of the characteristic definitions of poetry a thought of today. I have been proud to publish Thomas McGrath who is, in a sense, none of these. Indeed, I find that most of the critics who wish to categorize are themselves working with a narrow definition and might approve one or another book that I have done but because I have done so many others not within that definition they feel that I have not worked hard enough for those particular notions. Shift the notions from critic to critic, and you cover the spectrum.

A man by the name of Horace Critchlow was a graduate student at the University of New Mexico that school year of 1940-41 and I became acquainted. He was somewhat older than the usual graduate student and had a bit of money. He was keenly interested in the publishing and thought he would like to work with me on it; so I bought out a small plant of printing equipment which a man b
used as a part-time activity in the basement of his home. It consisted of a Chandler and Price 10 x 15 press, type cases and furniture and several fonts of type, mostly adapted to job printing. We installed this equipment, together with what I had, in a garage we rented near the University and formed a partnership called Swallow and Critchlow. For something like a year we published together under that name. We had an idea that we could pay for some of the cost of publishing by doing odd jobs of printing for hire. In much of the time available at the press, I printed letterheads for a church, stationery and invitations for sororities, one leaflet for a boy's ranch, and similar work. We called this press facility Big Mountain Press. We bought linotype composition from a Baptist publication in Albuquerque, where a preacher ran a linotype.

While Critchlow and I were working together, we had the notion of expanding beyond the realm of poetry. Particularly interested in the problems of the literature of the West, we thought this expansion might move in that direction. We published two books, one of them paperbound, and the other, both hardbound and paperbound (and thus perhaps one of the many, many precursors of the "paperback revolution" which is usually attributed at its start to Anchor books) on which first appeared the reincarnation of the word "Sage." We called these two titles, "Sage Books." One consisted of translations, Three Spanish American Poets; the other, the anthology Rocky Mountain Stories edited by Ray B. West, Jr.

In 1942 Critchlow was called into the army, and we had to break up the partnership. We decided to dissolve it on approximately the way we had gone into it—that is, I kept my handpress and the type I had had, and the titles, since I knew I would be going on with publishing, and Critchlow took the larger press and the other equipment he had purchased. That equipment was moved near Santa Fe and then, I discovered later, landed in Denver during the war.

That fall I went to teach at Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado, and during the following school year I issued a few titles, all poetry, using the handpress.

In the fall of 1943 I went into the Army for a little more than two years. When I was in the Army, I was not able to issue any books, although I did continue the editorial work for the New Mexico Quarterly Review. I came out of the Army late in 1945 and arrived in Denver in January 1946, to teach at the University of Denver.
I had been thinking about a new idea for my publishing. I thought that it was possible for a small personal publisher to cooperate with a commercial firm, and drew up some plans which were submitted to a number of New York publishers during the winter of 1946. My idea was that I would do some of the smaller things as before with the small press and with the Alan Swallow imprint in Denver, but that certain types of books might well make a go of it on the commercial market through a joint arrangement with a New York publisher. William Morrow and Company was the first to take an interest in my plan, and in May 1946, we concluded an arrangement for joint publication under the imprint The Swallow Press and William Morrow & Co.

The first joint imprint title appeared in 1947 and during the next four years some twenty-one titles appeared thus. A number of these were poetry, but others provided an extensive experience with literary criticism, literary bibliography, and fiction. I may as well use this reference as an opportunity to talk about these types of books, just as I have previously talked about my philosophy in publishing poetry.

One of the first two titles in the joint imprint was In Defense of Reason, by Yvor Winters. This was followed by critical books by Alan Tate and Wallace Fowlie. They demonstrate that I have been interested, if I publish literary criticism, almost exclusively in books which had what I would call a "seminal" position. I have had very little interest in many of the books which are often published as literary criticism. One of these is the ordinary collection of disparate essays of a person who happens to have published a number of articles in the quarterly reviews. Another is the usual study of an individual writer. I have felt that the publishing situation for such books is fairly well provided for; particularly did this become more true when Ford Foundation funds became available to university presses. I have considered this a happy circumstance. The problem of the "little publisher" in this whole realm, it seems to me, is to keep from frittering away his time and energy over the useful but derivative. At least I have wanted, and I am proud to have achieved, in the three critics mentioned and also later in publishing the criticism of J. V. Cunningham, the publishing of books with these characteristics: a definite and "seminal" point of view, that is, a type of criticism informed by new critical thinking as well as containing useful scholarship and useful commentary on the individual works. I am interested in what I have called the "whole critic," that type of critical work which
demonstrates a union of aesthetic and critical ideas with the ability to see the particular literary work. The publication of the Winters criticism began here and continues on into the present; I have dictated elsewhere that I feel that he is the outstanding example of the "whole critic." Tate's work, although it is a collection of separate essays and although Tate has not provided a fully stated critical position, certainly suggests these qualities. Fowlie was breaking new ground in attempting a rationale for surrealism and other modern movements. Then Cunningham came along with the most succinct arguments of position and detail that I have ever seen.

I have violated this editorial stand by doing an occasional book about a particular author. I recall particularly the book on Sherwood Anderson by James Schevill (published at the University of Denver press) and the recent book by R. K. Meiners on the work of Allen Tate. The reason for doing these, which seem outside my editorial position, is that I believe that each made a particularly needed contribution which might not have been published elsewhere and thus fell within the special functions of the "little publisher."

As an offshoot from my position about literary criticism, I have had a considerable interest in literary biography, particularly that type which can provide some biographical information while at the same time providing some useful, although brief, critical awareness of the writer's work. This accounts for the publication at various times of such a series as the English Novelists, so far as I know, the first series of such compact books in our time, and the volume on Frost written by Elizabeth Isaacs. Considered either as biography or as criticism, such volumes are of secondary values. But as a working teacher, I have been interested in the very considerable values of such books when they are well done. I may say that I have been glad that this type of book, now proliferated in several series such as thewayne series and the Minnesota pamphlets can now seem to be done successfully without the need of a special dedication of the "little publisher." My only other passing comment on such books is that I wish they were not so rigidly conceived in pattern, but I suppose if one must face the task of being certain that dozens and dozens of writers must be covered, one somehow has to shepherd the effort. It is not, frankly, the kind of editorial work and editorial judgment in which I would have any interest.

Still another offshoot from my critical interest has been, if I may say so, a demonstration of the usefulness of the "little publisher."

Published by UNM Digital Repository, 1966
This involves what I call "literary bibliography." A prototype testi of this kind of work was the volume Poetry Explication, first done George Arms and Joseph Kuntz and published in the joint imprint 1950. This compilation of critical references was a new concept as it was very hard to sell at first. I will say that at the time the joint imprint of Swallow Press and Morrow was given up and the title moved to Denver; we had some unbound sheets of this title which were remaindered because the sale had been so poor. But I could not leave this concept alone and persisted by publishing addition volumes of this type. Gradually, over a decade, the concept caught hold. When Poetry Explication, for example, went out of print its first edition, it was more in demand than ever before, and so we had the idea that these books should be revised approximately each decade, a simple reprinting would not have sufficed. Instead the time had to be taken to do the revised edition. Since then Poetry Explication has been through several printings as have its companion volumes, American Novel, English Novel, and Short Fiction Criticism. The series will be rounded out by the addition of two volumes of drama criticism this winter, and the intention is to keep each volume revised each decade.

Twentieth Century Literature linked up with this group of editorial ideas in that it, in its attitudes, eschewed the work primarily explication but demanded that its articles have something of critical awareness or scholarly contribution. Then it immediately projects itself into literary bibliography by its "current bibliography" section and by its publication of individual bibliographies. The latter feat made it feasible for me to issue some of the bibliographies also in books, since costs could be shared in the two appearances. Three or four years ago, College English had a survey of useful materials for the teacher and student, and of the thirty-five titles mentioned, I was proud that seven were Swallow publications.

I have approached the publishing of fiction also with some particular attitudes. One of those was in effect programmed by one of the first two books published under the joint Swallow Press–Morrow effort, a book I edited entitled Anchor in the Sea: An Anthology of Psychological Fiction. This attempted to point out a particular type of fiction that had been the concern of many of our finest writers recent times. I would say that my editorial interest in publishing fiction has remained somewhat close to that original concept.
except that, as I have gotten more deliberately into it in the last
decade, other ideas have become a part of the editorial concern.
Perhaps the best way that I can summarize the position is this: a
small publisher really should, if he can, stay away from the publica-
tion of fiction. The entire apparatus of the publication, reception,
and sale of new fiction is something outside his method of operation.
And the procedure I have outlined whereby one could manage a
continuous effort in the publication of poetry will not work for
fiction. The reason for this is merely mechanical: most books of
fiction are long and the small press will have to devote so much time
to a single volume that the printer could be doing several shorter
books with the same effort. I have done a few books of fiction in
which part of the manufacture was provided by my own labor, but
most of this work I have had to hire others to do because of the
factor of time. That is, the time that I had available for production
was centered on the poetry and I was unwilling to give up several
volumes of poetry for one volume of fiction.

Despite these attitudes about publishing fiction, I have persisted
in doing so. The primary reason is that I have from time to time
found works which I admire greatly and which for some reason were
not being taken up by the large publishers. Thus I felt compelled,
again by my judgment of value, to do everything I could to see that
some particular works were published. Besides individual volumes
that I could mention, chief effort has gone into such as these: the
making available of the historical novels of Janet Lewis; completion
of Vardis Fisher's gigantic Testament of Man and then pulling
together a good many of his works; the assertion of the value which
had been neglected in the work of Frank Waters; the publication of
the works of Anais Nin; the publication of two titles by Edward
Loomis and various works by N. V. M. Gonzales, Thomas Bledsoe,
Richard McBride, and quite a few others; doing several books by
Frederick Manfred at a critical time for him. How have I managed
it? Situations for individual volumes vary a good deal, but at this
moment I can say that I have not been hurt by doing this. I have
had to feel that with serious work the "little publisher" may not be at
quite such a disadvantage as it would first appear. Being devoted to
the works, he is prepared to neglect the immediate reaction, which
counts so much in the larger marketplace for fiction. In other words,
again he is asserting his judgment on a long range basis; he is willing
to expect that the better fiction is not completely subject to that
marketplace and that it will continue to sell instead of die. Some of the works have attained a steady sale, a few in quite good volume. An example of which I am particularly proud is the Frank Waters' novel *The Man Who Killed the Deer*. When I issued this at the University of Denver Press about 1951, then taken over by my imprint in 1953, there was practically no sale available. But I managed to continue a sale at an accelerated pace ever since until now in its two editions it has a very substantial sale; every year it is more and more accepted.

Incidentally, I believe that the University of Denver Press was the first university press in the nation to publish original fiction, not reprints.

In the joint-imprint plan I had thought that some of my titles would be able to assume the tremendous overhead costs involved in New York commercial publishing and, further, that a by-product of my work with some of the authors for my specialized literary imprint would be an occasional book of even more popular demand, which would be a money-maker for such a firm as Morrow.

Experience indicated that I did turn out two or three manuscripts of interest to them. But on the whole, the idea was not very satisfactory. I found that the authors with whom I was working were not very frequently commercially feasible in terms of New York publishing. I found, further, that despite the advantage of salesmen at the normal operations of a New York publisher, the titles in which I was specifically interested did not sell so well that they could stand the extra costs involved. So, by friendly and mutual agreement, in 1951 the joint imprint was dissolved with Morrow, and all the titles remaining that had been published thus were moved out to Denver.

Several other things had been going on: I continued to publish under the Alan Swallow imprint with verse and some fiction. I discovered that Mr. Critchlow was in Denver also, and that the press we had used in Albuquerque was in Denver in the basement of the home of Rudolph Gilbert, the Unitarian minister. I was able to make arrangements to use that press. Mr. Gilbert, in fact, was using it, as well as a treadle Pearl Press that he had, for the printing of church bulletins and programs. With both presses available, much more work could be turned out than with my small handpress. For several years I did my printing under those conditions, and a number of my students took an interest in the publishing and would lend aid, particu...
ROY OF A PUBLISHER

By John Williams, who learned to print and operated the press site often for a couple of years while he was studying at the University of Denver. A number of other students also aided in one way or another, either by printing or by folding printed sheets for binding the open-house gatherings I held periodically for students.

Critchlow also indicated continued interest and faith in publishing. With the Swallow Press arrangement with Morrow and with continuation of the smaller editions of the literary material under the Alan Swallow imprint, the spot that seemed to me wide open for similar activity and development of a market was that of regional books—books about the Rocky Mountain West. Critchlow and I picked up this idea from our brief beginnings some five years earlier when we formed the small corporation called Sage Books, Inc., to work in this field.

Then the University of Denver decided to make an effort in publishing, and founded the University of Denver Press. I was asked to become director of that effort, although it was to be part-time, once I continued to teach.

For a period of a few years, I was responsible for books coming out under four different imprints: Alan Swallow, Sage Books, Swallow Press and William Morrow & Co., and the University of Denver Press. This was reduced, of course, when the Swallow Press and Morrow & Co. imprint was dissolved. Because those titles came to Denver, the number of titles did not reduce, and the effort involved in the joint imprint was actually transferred to Denver and continued with the Alan Swallow imprint.

In 1951, with the death of Margaret Bartlett, Author and Journalist came on the market and Critchlow, Raymond Johnson—who had founded a firm interested especially in publication printing—and David Raffelock of the National Writers’ Club decided to buy the magazine. I was asked to come into the group to edit it. A part of the arrangement was to provide some space for the press, which I moved out of Gilbert’s basement, and for storage and shipping, which had become a real problem and had been informally handled through the aid of friends who would put books up and sometimes do some of the packaging. For a period of two years, then, that side of the work was handled in a building Author and Journalist had rented. In 1953 the Author and Journalist was sold to Nelson Antrim Crawford in Topeka, and it became necessary to make other arrangements for space. One of my students, Bruce Woodford, pro-
vided basic storage in the basement of a home he and his wife owned, and then later I rented a garage to store the books. That year we added to our home and provided a small room in which I could place the press itself and do the actual shipping, replenishing a small supply of the titles by going to the storage facility. This served temporarily until in 1954 I secured on a competitive bid the publication of the United States Quarterly Book Review from the Library of Congress, and with the income from this contract (the suspension of USQBR came in 1956), we added a building on the back of our property, which has been used since for printing and shipping and storage facilities. In 1953 Mr. Critchlow decided to leave Denver and ultimately moved to California, so again we had to dissolve our association.

The experience with Sage Books, Inc., and the University of Denver Press had interested me in the problems of a regional list; and I was determined to pursue it. So the arrangement was that I took over the stock of Sage Books titles and made the imprint itself—without the "Inc." since the corporation was dissolved—a sub-imprint of mine; and I have carried it on since, with approximately one-half of the publishing effort going into the books under that imprint.

In September 1953, the University of Denver, under stress of change and financial difficulty, had decided to drop the University of Denver Press operation. During that school year I worked at disposing of University of Denver Press titles. I was thoroughly convinced of the value of a number of these, for which we could not get what seemed to be equitable offers from other publishers; so I secured some credit, and entered into long-range contract with the University of Denver on some of them, and acquired a number of them to add to my list. Most of these tied into the regional effort of Sage Books, a field we had devoted much effort to at the University of Denver Press also.

I mentioned earlier that there had been a second time in which factors of my own character and determination as well as events around me seemed to "jell" into a pattern. This second period came in the spring of 1954. I had taken over solely the Sage Books imprint, I had brought together titles of the Alan Swallow and Swallow Press-Morrow imprints, and I had acquired some titles from the University of Denver Press. When these were put together, I had a fairly substantial list in one place resulting from those previous areas of
STORY OF A PUBLISHER

Throughout, under the stresses of time at the University of Denver, the Department of English had been reduced so much for the moment that I felt that I could not encourage graduate students to come into the writing program as strongly as I had before.

In that year, I resigned from the University of Denver and decided to cast my lot full time with the publishing. This was the first year that we had taken money out of publishing. I told my family that I did not truly believe that a person could make a living in this country publishing the books that I wished to publish, but I was mistaken. The living, of course, must be reasonably modest; but over the years the values have increased and the amount of effort in terms of number of titles and variety of titles has increased.

Since 1954 the effort has been channeled principally in the two imprints—Alan Swallow and Sage Books. These are, of course, the imprints for the literary works (poetry, literary criticism, bibliography, and fiction) and for what I call "books about the American West." The latter terminology is intended to be quite broad. I see a need for small editions in the narrow category, "Western Americana." But this work interests me very little. I have concentrated upon trade editions over a broad span, and even the references to the American West have sometimes been stretched a tiny bit. But the books have included a wide range from science through biography and memoirs to guide books, history, and even cookbooks.

In 1959 I decided to enter the fashionable and rising field of the quality paperback. At first, the work of this type was concentrated in Swallow Paperbacks, that is, in the paperback offshoot from the Alan Swallow imprint. A little later, I added Western Sage Paperbacks, a paperback development from Sage Books.

The effort in paperbacks warrants a comment because of my particular approach to it. I had done occasional titles in paper where the form of binding seemed suitable for presentation of a particular work, and the Swallow Pamphlet series had been continued with occasional editions. But I had resisted going into the "paperback revolution" because I felt that it had an editorial position contrary to my own. That is, although it was extremely valuable to publish package works neatly and was relatively inexpensive, it was ninety per cent or more what I call "leach" publishing. I mean by this that editorial judgment is not extended to new work and the reputation of the
publishing is not standing or falling on the judgment of untired work. Instead, the scramble soon was on in the “paperback revolution” to find titles that had been published and made their reputations. That they brought many of these back into print is, aside from the price, the big claim that paperback publishing can make.

I began to feel, however, that because paperback publishing created, in part, a new market—the expansion of the college bookstores into trade-book departments, which primarily became paperback departments, and the creation of a new group of bookstores which handled paperbacks only—I should do all that I could to offer this market to my own authors. This was my reason for entry into the paperback field. With one or two exceptions, I have not sought the out-of-print book, and with one exception, I have not gone to other publishers to get paperback rights. Instead, the paperback titles have been developed from my own list, according to that philosophy.

Furthermore, with my bent toward asserting an active editorial judgment, I quickly became interested in exploring the possibilities of the “paperback revolution” for the original work, the untired work. This effort takes two forms: 1) to publish something originally and solely in paperback, as I have in the series called Poets in Swallow Paperbooks and Fiction in Swallow Paperbooks; 2) the simultaneous publication of many titles in both clothbound and paperbound form. The first of these two methods is quite difficult because the developer market is so closely keyed to the reprint, and the review media also so closely tuned to the conception that in handling paperbacks they are noticing reprints, that the “original” in paperback form has little place in the entire development. This is particularly true of original fiction, and after trying a number of original titles in paper alone, and finding that the stores could not make a place for them and that the review media took no notice of them as original contributions, I modified that particular plan and now publish a clothbound edition alongside the Fiction in Swallow Paperbooks edition. The original paperback works a little better in poetry, and the method adds flexibility to the presentation of poetry. Within a limited range, I now prize the technique. I can now, according to the way I see a manuscript of poems and the problems of presentation, publish in any form among the following choices: hardback, simultaneous hardback and paperback, paperback original alone, and the Swallow Pamphlet. I find this flexibility significant, and I wish that a similar flexibility will be available to other works. But in this sense, the “paperback
tion” has not demonstrated that it is a mature kind of publishing.

My work with fiction in original paperbacks had been with the long-standing feeling that the “little publisher” was needed in the area of short fiction, that is, the short story, novelette, and short novel, all of which find a difficult time in the patterns of large-scale publishing.

From my original entry into publishing fiction, I have been interested in this particular problem. I had hoped that the paperback development would be a help in solving the problems of presenting short fiction, and it is a disappointment that so far it has not been a help. However, I am not so sure that this picture will not be changed by patient and continuous work, since I cannot help feeling that at some time we will all become impatient with the lacks in paperback publishing and expect it to do more. To my mind, the form is there and sometime it can be more successfully used.

A word should be said about a third imprint, Big Mountain Press. As I have indicated, this name dates back to the days in Albuquerque in which Critchlow and I called our printing facility Big Mountain Press. During the years that we had the Author and Journalist magazine, we decided to do something about the vicious practice of vanity publishers. That something was to revive Big Mountain Press as a printing-for-hire facility so that those authors who felt compelled to self-publish would be able to secure a fair deal. The term for such editions is “private editions,” in which the author seeks book production and owns all books produced and all rights in the work.

We are aware that the “private edition” or the sometimes cooperatively sponsored book (I mean by this term, that a group might sponsor rather than the private individual) is essential to American publishing because certain works of specialized thought, of ideas not acceptable to our publishing market, sometimes of poetry, and of similar limited needs, would not make a place in the normal commercial market. Yet if they have inherent values, even of a local nature, they must not be denied a chance. Such books might be sponsored by institutional and governmental processes, but they usually are not. Advantage of this need had been taken by the group of publishers we call “vanity,” and quite a large industry had developed, which, to my mind, flourished at the authors’ expense.

Big Mountain Press developed in perhaps unusual ways because it was in a geographical area with rather little know-how in professional book manufacture. Therefore, it has become a service as much.
for institutional work as it has for the private edition. Universities, colleges, museums, historical societies, churches, other publishers, and other organizations, have sought it out as a means of getting professional production. A service of Big Mountain Press has also extended, when desired, to aid in distribution and selling of the books manufactured, this done purely on a commission basis. Once into such commission work, and having the only recognized trade publishing firm in a particular area, I have also handled distribution of other works on a commission basis, most noticeably the Bancroft Booklets.

The entire endeavor of my publishing has increased with such vigor that at times it has stretched beyond my abilities to keep as close to each detail as I would like. As of the present time, something between fifty and sixty titles are coming forth each year, of which approximately forty-five are in the two imprints Alan Swallow and Sage Books, normally about equally divided between the two, and in the remaining eight or ten, the service work is performed by Big Mountain Press. The size disturbs me, but so long as I have the time and ability to assert the center of the effort, that is, the editorial judgment of value in new work, I feel that the development can be only helpful. And certainly it does provide an assured, strong and flexible base: that the judgment need never fail merely because of lack of facility to back it up.