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www.archipelago.org

an international journal of literature, arts, culture, politics

KATHERINE McNAMARA *Editor and Publisher*

The Times Literary Supplement (London):

“To coincide with the [London International Book] Fair, a new on-line journal of ‘Literature, the Arts and Opinion’, Archipelago, is launched into cyberspace from Charlottesville, Virginia, joining the relatively small number of serious literary periodicals on the trivia-stuffed World Wide Web. Archipelago (<http://www.archipelago.org>) is published and edited by Katherine McNamara....

“Ms. McNamara’s first editorial for Archipelago adopts a more old-fashioned tone, and ends with the curiously old-media invitation to readers to download the magazine and see how it looks in real, as opposed to cyber, space: ‘It will appear on paper as we have designed it, and fill about fifty pages. We urge our readers then to pass the journal on to other readers.’ Next they’ll be saying, ‘I have seen the past, and it works.’”

USA Today on-line guide to hot sites: Cool Archipelago:

“If you’re serious about literature, seriously consider a visit to Archipelago. Poetry, fiction and essays. Artists and writers from the USA and abroad, including conversations that aren’t likely to disappoint you. Ain’t the Web cool?”

Publishers Weekly: “Web Watch,” Calvin Reid:

“It’s the first anniversary of Archipelago (www.archipelago.org), a fine online literary journal edited and published by Katherine McNamara, the widow of Atheneum publisher Lee Goerner. She is also the author of a forthcoming narrative about an Alaskan journey, *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, from Mercury House. Among Archipelago’s contributing editors are Benjamin Cheever and Larry Woiwode. It features short fiction, poetry, essays and a series of interviews on the current state of publishing with the curators of such notable imprints as Marion Boyars and Cornelia and Michael Besie.”

The New York Times, Technology Section, Benjamin Cheever:

“Archipelago (www.archipelago.org) is one of the sites I visit (and contribute to).”

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Small Press Review: “Jewel”:

“Of the variety of surprises which may follow the lifting of a magazine cover, few match the deep pleasure hidden beneath the top page of the Archipelago literary assemblage. To begin with, there is no finer type or page layout to pull the physical eye into the works.... Poems, conversation, more stories from other lands, and recommended reading, sparkle from this jewel of the small magazine industry.”

Web del Sol <http://webdelsol.com/f-bodega.htm>:

“[I]t is disconcerting, almost troubling, to stumble upon a Web publication so unified in general outlook and tone, so cohesive in its literary taste, and so exacting in its selections of work, that I lose my usual impulse to grab the next hyperlink out of there. (Or, at least, to keep another Netscape window open.) Archipelago is just such a site.

“Katherine McNamara strikes one as a disaffected “insider”— a fine, poised, scrupulous editor driven onto the Web by the agglutinous corporatization of contemporary publishing. Archipelago has a samizdat quality, in that its editorials deal almost obsessively with the decline of serious literary art in print venues. One has the impression that, in a better world, Katherine McNamara would be working for Knopf.

“Yet with Archipelago she has managed to create, in Siberiaspace, all the essential qualities of a brilliant literary journal (especially since the magazine is offered also in downloadable PDF): a subtle, elegant intuitive design supporting texts that may often be dramatically different in style or structure, but share the same high literary tone....”

Martin Earl, “Cyber Rambler http://webdelsol.com/LITARTS/Cyber_Rambler/

Archipelago is one of the most intuitive sites I have come across. It seems to have no agenda, but rather to have created a context, an ambience, in which a real variety of literature can flourish. McNamara's skill as an editor is apparent in every issue, and each one is full of surprises....

Katherine McNamara sees reading (historically one of the first markers of individual space) as a simulacrum for living. If a web site were a state of mind, this one would be suffused with the sepia-toned nostalgia of the solitary reader in her "continuous effort to make sense of things" in a "world full of signs", as she creates a book of her own out of a generous appreciation for modern and contemporary literature.

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Cyber Oasis:

“Archipelago – this is the find of the month. Literary ezines should head in this direction – nice layout and meaty literary stuff – Read the remarkable (and long) interview with Marion Boyars.”

Eclectica:

“This is the strongest web-only publication of its kind that I have seen, combining creative and critical work that would be at home in any of its prestigious print counterparts. Although some web literati might condemn this ‘zine as being too ‘staid’ or ‘intellectual’ rather than being ‘fresh and avant garde’ (and it commits the digerati-sin of promoting its PDF version for reading on paper—a feature that I think more zines should offer), I don’t find the former to be true and the latter is hardly a black mark. If quality intellectual material is a web-sin, I don’t mind—I will just continue reading Archipelago and say a few Hail Mary’s in the morning.”

“Thank you so much for this timely and cogent interview [with Cornelia and Michael Bessie]. As a younger editor who has every intention of emulating such luminaries among my predecessors, I find this conversation to be truly illuminating.”

Jim Schley, Editor-in-Chief, Chelsea Green Publishing Company,
www.chelseagreen.com

“I wanted to take a moment to thank you for a great site. I saw you on Book TV a few weeks ago, and have been poking around on your site ever since—what a pleasure! Thanks for all the hard work you and your staff have done.”

Mark Holmes, VP, Programming & Content Development, national-
geographic.com

“You have a superb magazine, and it elevates all who engage in online publishing of serious work.”

Michael Neff, Editor, Web del Sol,
www.webdelsol.com

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“I will tell you this: Archipelago is the best I’ve visited. The things you do publish have importance, have literary value; the standards are high – and I like the international commitment very much. I feel the presence of an editorial intelligence in the selection of the works on view. I like that Archipelago feels like a traditional print journal (despite its single concession to the new media: the surf sfx).”

Norman Lock (Norman Lock writes for stage, radio, film, and literary reviews)

“I want to say ‘thank you and hooray!’ for your marvelous series about the changes in the publishing industry. I am one of the producers of OregonLive’s new Books section, and I’ve made a point of drawing our readers’ attention to Archipelago and to the series itself....Your series on publishing is so important. Thank you, thank you for your efforts and creativity in producing it. It’s a marvel.”

Cathy Young, Producer, Books Section, OregonLive, /www.oregonlive.com/books/)

“Just a note to say that Archipelago’s web page is a fine, useful, downright readable sight. And a good magazine, too. So good I was hoping you were in NYC so that I could work for you. But alas, you’re out of my commuting range, so I will just pass on the compliment instead. I’m looking forward to the next issue.”
-e-mail to the Editor

“I think of Archipelago as the Paris Review of the internet.”
-e-mail to the Editor

C-Ville Weekly, Charlottesville, Va., April 6, 2004 <http://www.cville.com/www/archives/2004/04-13-2004/asp/3.asp>

The call of the Web

Katherine McNamara brings quality publishing to the Internet with www.archipelago.org

Katherine McNamara has just returned from driving Michael Ondaatje to the

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airport after a weekend of “book festivaling” (now officially a verb). They’re old friends, her late husband having edited one of The English Patient author’s books. Clearly, McNamara, who lives in Charlottesville, is not just one of the masses who went from lecture to lecture at the Virginia Festival of the Book buying books and getting them signed. No, she is the founder and editor of the Web journal www.archipelago.org, an online, nonprofit quarterly, the spring edition of which came out April 6.

Archipelago is the online equivalent of the Paris Review, DoubleTake and The Atlantic Monthly, all rolled into one. Having started with only 12,000 unique visitors per year, the website today draws around 14,000 unique visitors per month and has published everything from an interview with Umberto Eco at Prague Castle to Senator Russ Feingold’s speech on why he voted against the PATRIOT Act. It publishes well-known and unknown writers from around the world, McNamara’s only requirement being her sense of quality.

As she relates in Archipelago’s first issue, McNamara christened the site as such because she tried to place where a “literary colony” might currently exist and decided that “if one exists at all, geographically and culturally it would be an archipelago... evoking rock-ribbed peaks with green life clinging to their slopes, rising from some vast, erosive ocean.”

This bleak attitude is, in many ways, McNamara’s response to the commodification of trade publishing in the 1990s, which she witnessed through her own experiences, as well as those of her late husband, Lee Goerner, an editor at Knopf. She saw the practice of nurturing young writers over time tossed out the window in favor of “the big splash,” thus alienating serious readers that publishing houses had by then come to view as “niche marketing.” This made McNamara fighting mad.

“I didn’t like what I saw happening,” she says. “I thought I knew something about what should be offered or what could be offered, so why not do it?” Thus, she launched Archipelago in 1997 to glowing reviews from everywhere from the Times Literary Supplement in London to USA Today.

While the website has always been international in perspective and tackled major issues, since 2000 Archipelago has become notably more politically outspoken. This new focus is mostly due to McNamara’s reaction to Bush’s preemptive war doctrine. She remembers thinking, “I’m not going to be a ‘good German.’ It’s so important from this moment on to register as much opposition as vocally, as clearly as possible.”

Since then she has applied the same “get up and go” attitude she took in creating Archipelago to her criticisms of the Bush Administration and the Iraq war, expressing herself in Archipelago’s endnotes. “There seems to be so little comprehension here of how we’re viewed from outside,” she says. “So it’s nice to have Archipelago to formulate my own thoughts about this.” —Nell Boeschenstein

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Bookwire (www.bookwire.com) "Flap" Nov 13, 1997:

Archipelago

Sometimes it seems that people are only too willing to gripe about how publishing is going down the tubes without offering any real assessment of why it's happening or what can be done about it.... One person who has decided to delve a bit deeper into the subject is Katherine McNamara. As an author (her forthcoming book is Mercury House's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*) and the widow of Knopf and Atheneum editor Lee Goerner, McNamara said that "when Atheneum was closed down I had a closer look at New York publishing than any writer should want to have." So she's decided to look into the changes through Archipelago, her not-for-profit "International Journal on-line of Literature, the Arts, and Opinion."

In the most recent issue, McNamara launched a new series of "conversations" with legendary publishing professionals. "Was publishing ever so good as it's said to have been? What, indeed, was 'gentlemanly' about it? I thought I would ask some notables of an older generation what they thought about these matters. In turn, they recounted experience, spoke of writers they published and did not publish, took note of the social and political hierarchies of their occupation, talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism, ruminated on the importance of language. They recognized that times have changed, but did not agree, necessarily, on why and how," writes McNamara in her first piece. The first "Institutional Memory" focuses on Marion Boyars of the British house Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd. "My goal in publishing was to give voice to exciting new ideas, you see, ideas which excited me. This list is a reflection of my own interests: I want to share these ideas. Many of the writers we published have become modern classics," said Boyars. Next up -- on December 15 -- are Counterpoint Press' Michael and Cornelia Bessie.

McNamara's own take on current publishing trends -- and people -- is very clear. "The art of publishing real books has been eclipsed by the conglomeration and restructuring of the industry. The art of editing is in decline," said McNamara. "Inside those corporations are quite scandalous attitudes about editing." She added that she has also noticed a change in the lifestyle and manner of publishing professionals -- which is in part

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caused by the business of publishing. “The older generation had a genuine love of books. Books were an absolutely solid foundation of their lives. They were always talking and arguing about what a good book is. [Now] people are employees and they’re frightened - - anybody can be fired.” But she is not giving up hope as she still sees some of that old spirit in small and independent presses and “is still in New York a bit.”