

## 15. Once more unto the post-box (II)

In terms of actually getting into print, the short story writer and the poet – through the small press network – are in a stronger position than the novelist or the autobiographer, though the financial gains they stand to make are infinitesimal. Some magazines will actually pay for work that appears – say £5 per poem, or £15-£20 per story – but the vast majority are run on a shoestring by a single editor who simply can't afford to pay contributors. Most are lucky to be able to pay the print bill. You will, however, receive a complimentary copy of the issue that your work appears in.

Small presses are an integral part of any poet's or short story writer's apprenticeship and, if you're lucky, the career path goes like this:

- Once an editor has taken a piece from you, the chances of them doing so again are improved – it means that you are writing the sort of work that they want to publish
- If one editor likes your work, this will give you confidence to send work to more magazines, with a covering letter saying which magazine(s) your work has already appeared in. This shouldn't make a difference to the final decision of a good editor – they will still only accept what they actually like – but it should ensure that your work is read more attentively, not just skimmed.
- Once your work has appeared in a number of magazines, it may be time to approach a small press that produces poetry or short story collections, not just magazines (with luck, it will be a press in whose magazine your work has appeared several times).
- After that, it's up to you – but bear in mind that very few mainstream publishers produce collections of short stories. Fiction writers may have to switch to novels.

There are more than 500 small press magazines in the UK, most of them publishing poetry but some reserving space for fiction writers. To find out more about them, why not invest in a copy of *The Writer's Handbook* [Ed: Barry Turner, Pan Books] or the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* [A&C Black], both published annually. Each lists a large proportion of the small presses in the country – plus some abroad – and tries to give an idea of the sort of work they publish. Alternatively, if you're *only* interested in small presses, try the relatively newer *The Small Press Guide* [Forward Publishing]. You'll get a far better idea of a magazine's suitability, however, if you select a handful of the most likely looking candidates and send off for a specimen copy (if you tell them why you want it – to see if what you write might be suitable for them – they may agree to send you a back issue at a reduced rate). Look on it as an investment, not an expense.

One rule is sacrosanct – and this applies whether you are sending work to a publisher, an agent or the editor of a small press magazine – you must always accompany your work with a stamped self-addressed envelope ...and make sure the envelope is big enough to take the manuscript if you want it back. Small press magazines receive hundreds of submissions each year, and they simply can't afford to subsidise such costs.