

# Jules Chametzky's Memo (October 23, 1958)

*From which sprang* THE MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW

NOTE BY DAVID R. CLARK: Some forty-five years ago, Jules Chametzky wrote a memo describing a possible magazine, a description which *The Massachusetts Review* made real. Ten years later, when the *Review* had survived and proved successful, I sent the memo to Jules and John Hicks, editors, for preservation, saying, "Looking through an old file yesterday I came upon the report which Jules, as a member of the English Department 'Publication Committee' sent to me, its Chairman, on October 23, 1958. Already spreading beyond the Department, we had been meeting with Fritz Ellert, Head of the German Department, Paul Gagnon of the History Department, and Bill Deminoff, editor of *The Massachusetts Alumnus*, to plan the launching of a magazine. Jules's memo then is the first document in the history of *The Massachusetts Review*, and you should preserve it in a gold casket."

Here, courtesy of Bill Thompson, University Archives (the golden casket), is the memo, just as written, with all the marks of a hasty note in a busy time—abbreviations, words left out, incomplete sentences and so forth. But when no *Massachusetts Review* existed, Jules here brilliantly put his finger on what the moment required.

Some of the names and abbreviations should be glossed. "P.R." is the *Partisan Review*. "N.E." is of course New England. "E.E." stands for English Essays. "Ross" refers to Ralph Ross. "Beryman" is the poet John Berryman, and "Leo" is Leo Marx, professor of English at Amherst College. They were both members of the faculty at the University of Minnesota, where Jules had finished his PhD. and been an instructor (1950-1956). "F.S." is *Faulkner Studies*, a publication that Jules co-edited 1953-1954 at the University of Minnesota. There is a reference to me in the memo—"David's plan: publish inexpensively useful monographs

or studies that can be sold at a profit here and elsewhere, i.e., build up capital in this way." My focus was on cost. I wanted a magazine, but because of my concern with expense it would have been a meager one, probably an offshoot of the *Alumnus*. But when we presented the idea to Sidney Kaplan, he, much experienced, would have nothing to do with it unless the magazine would be as large and exemplary, as well designed, as it is. From Sid's entrance all followed. But the idea of the thing was Jules's. Here is his memo.

OCTOBER 23, 1958

### SOME NOTES ON PUBLICATION PROBLEMS

Our first assumption is, or has to be, that a publication sponsored by—or under the benevolent wing of—the English Department is a desirable thing.—From our point of view as critics, scholars, writers, teachers, the desirability of such a publication needs no comment. We may have to demonstrate to others that it will serve as a stimulus to departmental creativity, and morale and redound to the credit of the U. at large.—If, then, it is a desirable thing, two major problems are:

- 1) What kind of publication should we aim for, and
- 2) How do we go about getting it

#### I. Kind of publication:

Capitalize upon our geographical position, our position as a department in an expanding state university, the interests and abilities of our staff, our newness in the field (unbound by previous commitments, dogma, axes to grind), awareness of our liabilities: no "angels," our exposed and vulnerable position—in the university, the state, the academic community.

Considering our assets, several suggestions may be offered:

- 1) A purely scholarly publication
- 2) A journal of literary criticism

- 3) A purely literary journal, i.e., fiction, verse, belles-lettres
- 4) A combination of these three
- 5) The last suggestion in addition to articles in related fields—  
a review that may include society, history, philosophy

My own feeling is that alternative five (a review) is our best bet, in that it affords great latitude. We can search for the best talent in several fields, we can get more intra-university support, we can appeal to a wider audience. We can avoid being a catch-all competitor of the *New England Quarterly* or *Partisan Review*, however, by narrowing our interest and approach in several ways:

1) Primarily: each issue can be a special issue, i.e., devoted each to a specific problem such as: a) the N. E. Mind and the World of Fiction and b) New (or relatively unnoticed) Writers from New England and c) Writers and Scholars as Teacher—from William James to?

- 2) Localizing our contributors
- 3) Limiting contributions to excerpts from book-length works-in-progress
- 4) any other suggestions would be welcomed

Now the real problem is:

## II. How to get such a publication going?

- A. Funds
- B. Staff
  1. Composition
  2. Responsibilities
- C. Control and administration

- A. Money from
  - 1) school,
  - 2) department,
  - 3) private sources
  - 1 - no—not yet
  - 2 - almost nothing
  - 3 - who?

Can a private publishing concern sponsor the enterprise? It can raise money through David's plan: publish inexpensively useful monographs or studies that can be sold at a profit here and

elsewhere, i.e., build up capital in this way until enough is accumulated to publish a minimum of two issues of our real publication. I say 2 because by then we should realize enough in form of subscriptions (50 library sales, 50 to colleagues, and friends, and people from selected lists of other publications) to pay for a 3rd issue. If by then we don't get support from an outside agency (or are not swamped by dozens and dozens of new subscriptions because of the magazine's excellence) we might as well fold up before our 4th issue. This support may be forthcoming; we should not despair beforehand—it has happened before and can happen again. And if it doesn't, we will still have made something. The key, really, as always, will be the usefulness and excellence of our publication.

If it is good and useful, it won't be allowed to dip (so we can't too gimmicky in our approach)

Job then is to start this small E.E. type publishing venture need discussion of things to be published. Contact Ross, Beryman, Leo? costs to be incurred (look for credit from printers) canvassing of willing angels to support the corp or partnership advantage of a corp: printer can't sue us

B. Staff – Nucleus to work on a small publication from Pub. Com. Responsibility—leg-work, canvassing printers, securing lists of interesting people and essays—for large-scale publication, we worry then.

C. Control – can a number of us be incorporated as a private group?

Incorporating cost may be prohibitive. If a partnership (as was F.S.), each partner liable for debt. If we don't incorporate—can have as private publishers anyone who is willing to risk it so can use the group as consultants. The more independent initially, the more flexible—and the more likely something will get done. Avoid meeting-itis and bureaucratising.

Now, none of these alternatives offer us a chance to contribute something original or necessary. We need not compete with

*PMLA*, *Hudson*, *Sewanee*, *PR*, or any other of the established journals that fit one or another of these categories—even if we could compete our effort would be redundant (and probably doomed economically in any case)

So—let us examine our assets more closely:

The chief thing: the geographical and academic center we occupy

by this: neither the inbred gentility of the Ivy League Schools nor the corporate giantism of the largest public institutions the flexibility of our personnel and program

a center of regional activities?

a clearing house (work in progress?)

a publication devoted to New England or the Northeastern schools of all kinds—by subject matter? or by school?

how different from *New England Quarterly*?

A necessary stress on being different. This not really a superficial consideration. We need to justify our existence: if no need, let's drop it. One often finds, however, that there are unarticulated needs—our job, perhaps, to articulate such a need in this area?

(if such a publication serves merely to bring people in this area closer together, i.e., a place in which ideas may be exchanged, where people discuss those engaged in investigations, research, activity of interest to them within driving distance—then it will perhaps already be justified?)

Perhaps inquiries should be directed to people in area. (Actually, of course, with continued emphasis on publication as a necessity in struggle for professional survival, most people in the field would welcome any new outlet. The pressure to publish is enormous, the outlets are insufficient: another unstated (unstateable?) premise on which we must operate. But in this case, self interest coincides with larger interests, i.e., Univ. and Dept. prestige)