

Statement on Subpress for Jane Sprague's How(2) small-press feature

Subpress: go for it

Daniel Bouchard

Subpress popped off a Listserv one day and began to take shape and grow in another Listserv, specially created for it. That is, in the course of casual griping about how no one could get their book published, or about fellow poets growing weary while watching their manuscripts age, suggestions were made that we publish books ourselves. The discussion evolved quickly into process and finances.

At the moment Subpress is a dozen poets spread across the US, France and England. Our communication is and always has been conducted by email. I have never met some of my fellow-editors in person.

We began by agreeing to contribute our own money to a bank account. Everyone threw in one percent of their gross annual income. The disparity was wide but people agreed it was fair. We figured we had enough money to publish a certain amount of books per year. Because that number was less than the number of editors (18 editors at that time) we agreed to spread out our first publishing round over three years.

Each editor was allotted equal funds to edit, design, and produce one book in that first cycle. Editors with different skills for typesetting, designing, etc., volunteered their time to help when help was asked for. There were no editorial requirements or standards for choosing a book. There was no vote or veto process for whatever title an editor brought to press. There were no limitations on design or print specifications except those created by one's budget.

Sherry Brennan opened her first title to a contest. For his second title, Jordan Davis chose to edit a mini-anthology of poets who, if money was available, are worthy of having Subpress (or a press like it) publish their first full-length manuscript. After twice having our initial reason for beginning the press validated (i.e., no one else will publish them), I published my own two books. And so on. Subpress has produced 21 books to date. There are several titles in production.

Again, one of the more unique aspects of Subpress is our communication set up: all discussion (which includes, tho less often these days, voting on financial and procedural matters) is conducted via email. There is no office. There is no overhead. There are no scheduling conflicts for trying to get everyone into the same room or

the same city or region. It would be nice to meet all of the Subpress editors one day, but when I do I would rather not spend the time talking “business.”

There are drawbacks to this complete autonomy: despite the collective effort, Subpress has little to offer for marketing beyond a couple of print advertisements. Our “distribution” relies heavily on SPD because of requirements by national distributors that are above our resources. Mostly, the promotion of individual titles is left to individual editors. On the other hand, Subpress has never had an invoice it could not pay immediately.

By getting into print books we think ought to be published (the imperative, also, of The Objectivist Press), we are accomplishing what we set out to do. If one can find like-minded people with whom to begin a similar press, and not allow minor annoyances or conflicts drag you down, the model of Subpress, I believe, is not difficult to duplicate.

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23.XII.2005

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