

KIRBY CONGDON

"FIFTY YEARS OF POETRY"

A BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF HIS
POEMS, PROSE POEMS
AND CRITICISM

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INTRODUCTION TO YEAR 2000 UPDATE

When I first considered updating my 1993 bibliography of the poems of Kirby Congdon to include all of those appearing from 1993 to the year of new millennium, my plan was to follow the original format and deal with poems and separate publications only. But as I studied the chronological listing of the poetry, I realized that the block of time covered was over fifty years, (hence the subtitle "Fifty Years of Poetry.") And I further realized that in those fifty years, Kirby's contributions to the concept of "The Poet," was more than just the publication of some 300 separate poems, with reprints in magazines and anthologies making a total of over 780 poems published to date. Indeed, his life and his contributions, in both poetry and prose, have become a living symbol of a chosen vocation, that of the vision of the Poet as a philosopher of the human condition.

Furthermore, an analysis of the dates of the all of his works, prose as well as poetry, presents a fascinating picture of a developing talent and devotion from the earliest tentative poems of the fifties in newspaper columns and separate magazine publications to the maturing years of the sixties and seventies, when KC first began to comment on poetry and poets in a variety of periodical articles, reviews, and letters. This realization has led me to add a new, and important listing of selected prose writings by KC, all dealing with literary subjects.

Once again the chronology is telling. In contrast to the lengthy listing of the published poems in the fifties, in the early sixties for his prose items I can find only a few brief letters discussing poetic matters in newspapers and in the Columbia College Alumni magazine. However by 1963 this begins to change. Kirby is now participating in coffee house readings and is an active member of the avant-garde poetry circles of

Manhattan. Indeed the sixties become for him, as for so many others, an eye-opening and exhilarating life experience. In 1964, with his partner Jay Socin as publisher, he edits the first issue of their mimeographed periodical, MAGAZINE. Containing prose articles on the current "underground" publications as well as several pages of poems by local poets, this is the first of five annual collections of works from the Interim Press by these fledgling writers, and about the exciting activities of the mid-sixties in the poetry world. (See description of MAGAZINE 1 to 5 on pages 71-72 following.)

It's of interest, I think, that in the first issue of MAGAZINE in 1964, Kirby's emphasis is on presenting the poems of other members of the coffee house circles and introducing the mimeograph publishers and the bookstores distributing their works. He has little to say about the poets or poetry, but he does indulge in brief comments, sometimes rather tart, on items quoted from commercial and academic world of publishing. These are signed, appropriately, "Crank". But in the last few pages of the magazine, Kirby presents his own views in detail and under his own by-line, on a theme that is to recur frequently in his later prose writings. This article is titled: "A CRANK LETTER to Deans, Librarians, Editors and to People who Read."

In a sense, this presentation of his views in an organized and clearly argued format may be said to have opened up the floodgates for his further prose contributions. The MAGAZINES that followed offered KC the opportunity to express himself in a variety of ways, not only through exercising his editorial responsibility in choice of reviewers, but also in his own, often pointed and sharp descriptions of other underground publications, as well as many of the commercial products of the day. It makes interesting reading to follow the evolution, so to speak, of KC's prose comments from MAGAZINE TWO through MAG-4 (1967), when approximately 68 pages of that 126-page volume are his own personal reactions to the current state of poetry and the poet.

In 1972 MAGAZINE 5 appeared in a new format which in its own way signaled the end of the mimeograph revolution, at least for KC. It was a boxed collection of 10 pamphlets, created by computerized photo-type and photo-offset. In effect these pamphlets were limited editions of separate publications boxed as a single publication. (See description on p. 72 following.) Here, KC's main prose contributions are limited to a reprint of his "What is Poetry For?" (1969) and his devastating analysis of the National Poetry Festival at the Library of Congress in 1962 (at the height of the mimeograph revolution), under the title, "The Frightened Enemy." He also includes a brief introduction to Joan Colby's poetry pamphlet and acts as moderator in a symposium "by mail" with five other "poet-publishers."

But by this time, Kirby had moved from presenting his critical comments in his own Interim publications to the wider audience to be found in other periodicals, both specialized and general. From the seventies on his letters, essays, reviews, and articles appear in such varied venues as Americas, COSMEP Newsletter, Margins, The Book Review, Contact II, and The Small Press Review, as well as in more localized publications in Brooklyn, Fire Island, and Key West. True, his poems remain his first concern, but the reader of this bibliography will find that Kirby Congdon was not just a writer of poetry, he was also a student and a judge of poetry and its place in today's world.

PREFATORY NOTE TO THE 1993 BIBLIOGRAPHY

While this bibliography is based on my own personal collection of works by Kirby Congdon, it could not have been compiled without the close cooperation of Kirby himself, who has been most patient in providing me with his own notes and photostat copies of published material. These items would otherwise be almost impossible to locate today, given the nature of the mimeograph revolution in which Congdon played such an important part, as writer, editor and creative participant. Short-lived and transient, the little "little" magazines of the sixties were ephemeral products which for better or worse have mostly disappeared into attics and trunks, and only a handful of research librarians of that period had the foresight and judgment to start collections early enough to be of much use today.

Consequently, this bibliography not only serves as a record of a person who is a remarkable poet in his own right, but, especially in its listing of first publications of Congdon's poems, it also introduces us to that "underground" world of the poet in the late fifties and sixties. Most of Kirby's poems which originally appeared in those passing publications were later reprinted in more substantial imprints, but somehow the immediacy of the initial printing adds a touch of historical excitement for the reader lucky enough to have the original in his hands.

At any rate, let me say that for me, compiling this bibliography has been a task of great personal pleasure.

Ray Longtin, Feb. 1993

Addendum, October 2000:

It is certainly worth noting that, true as the above statements concerning the ephemeral nature of the mimeograph revolution may have been seven years ago, today literary historians have caught up to the realization that the "Beat Generation" and

their lesser known colleagues in the underground poetry world of the sixties have their own special literary importance. Kirby Congdon now has an impressive list of major university libraries who are actively searching for his early publications, all listed here, and the Rare-Bookstore prices of his works as well as the other publications of Crank Press, Interim Press, and Cycle Press indicate that there is, today, a definite commercial stake in this most anti-commercial of poets!

This work is divided into four sections: I. Individual Titles: Poems and Prose-Poems. (Presented in alphabetical order, with the publications chronologically sorted.) II. A Listing of Separate Publications (Poems and Prose). This includes both the poetical works of Congdon and his prose writings which have appeared exclusively under his name. III. A Chronological Listing of the First Publications of the poems. IV. A Selective Listing of Congdon's Prose Writings on Literary Subjects.

Every attempt has been made to standardize the form of citations, but in many cases, again because of the nature of the publications, it has not always been possible to locate such details as page numbers, some dates, and other information. To clarify the source of the information, I have included in parentheses as follows: (rl) or (rlph) - citation verified by Longtin based on original analysis or on photostat; (rlow) - citation based on my own copy of the work; (rlphkc) - citation based on photostat and Congdon's notes; (kc) - citation by Kirby Congdon.

Ráy Longtin
October, 2000