

considerably bigger than we could have afforded a year or two back.” Future Waywiser titles include a collection of literary essays by Mark Ford, a novel by Matthew Yorke, poetry collections by Jeffrey Harrison and Ian Parks, as well as Wilbur’s six-hundred-page *Collected Poems 1943–2004*, which was published in the United States by Harcourt last December.

Before *Germes* was published, Waywiser and BTL survived with the help of a grant from Arts Council England in 2002, small donations, and unstinting moral and financial support by Hoy’s hardworking girlfriend, architect Evelina Francia. So far, Waywiser and BTL have stayed afloat in a diminished U.K. poetry market, when

“My single greatest challenge as an independent publisher in 2005 is finding new readers. When I’m not editing, I work as a professor at a state university in rural Missouri. Each day, I teach classes filled with intelligent, well-meaning intro literature students, many of whom cannot name a single American poet and don’t open so much as a newspaper for pleasure. It is teaching, a job I love, that also makes me understand the very small value our culture places on poetry and writing. At Pleiades Press, our print run for each book is fifteen hundred, which is not bad by small-press-poetry standards, but insignificant compared to the big New York publishing houses. While we receive a staggering number of submissions, we have no full-time employees, a tiny advertising budget, and a staff made up almost entirely of volunteers. We just can’t afford anything more. Since few poetry books get more than a handful of reviews—almost never in the mainstream press—it’s very difficult for us to bring news of our books to possible readers. So, like most small literary press editors, my ongoing struggle will likely be finding new readers on very limited resources.”

—Kevin Prufer, **Pleiades Press**
(www.cmsu.edu/engphil/pleiades)

other unsubsidized small presses—Michael Hulse’s Leviathan Press, Anthony Rudolf’s Menard Press, and David Pemman’s Rockingham Press, to name three—have called it quits.

Hoy expected an easier path to financial security when he started publishing books in 1998. “I fondly imagined that all we’d have to do was advertise the BTL books in one or two places, and we could then rely on the reviewers to do the rest. After all, here we rein-depth interviews with some of the world’s finest poets, accompanied with bibliographies I thought most academic libraries would give their eyeteeth for, along with career-spanning lists of quotes from reviewers and critics. The combination would be irresistible. All we’d have to do is sit back and wait for the orders to roll in. I was badly wrong.”

But he didn’t turn his back on the poets whose work he values, including those on the far side of the ocean. “I’m not a gentleman publisher, indulging a whim. I want to publish literary works I truly believe in and to make a living from it. To many peo-

“My single greatest challenge as an independent publisher in 2005 is trying to manage the physical number of hours necessary to keeping an ever-expanding workload under control while also keeping the press performing at the highest level. After all, this is a labor of love, and considering how much we all really do love it, we could easily work every last hour of the day away. This is, of course, dangerous. Hence the need, or I should say desire, to forever protect and preserve our original inspiration, excitement, and love for what we do.”

—Jennifer Chapis, **Nightboat Books** (www.nightboat.org)

ple that will sound quixotic or just plain crazy.” To the authors he publishes, it sounds heartening. Mark Strand is grateful for Hoy’s eagerness to publish his work: “I still doubt that there is any interest in my work in England, which makes Philip Hoy’s desire to publish me both amazing and endearing.”

DAVID R. GODINE

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING

By Joshua Bodwell

DAVID Godine entered the world of independent publishing by rolling up his sleeves, setting metal type by hand for hours on end, then standing, ink-covered, at a letterpress. In the late 1960s, after receiving degrees from Dartmouth College, where he studied bookmaking and typography with the printer Ray Nash, and Harvard University, Godine went to work at Gehenna Press in Northampton, Massachusetts. Using the



skills he learned at Gehenna, where he worked with its founder, Leonard Baskin, and master printer Harold McGrath, Godine opened the doors of his first printing shop in 1970 to publish, according to the slogan of David R. Godine, Inc., “books that matter for people who care.”

Today, Godine sounds almost sur-

JOSHUA BODWELL is a fiction writer who makes his living as a newspaper reporter. He lives in Cape Porpoise, Maine.

R. Godine, Inc. outgrew the barn in Brookline and moved to an office on Dartmouth Street in Boston. Rockwell left the press to focus on cross-country skiing, participating in the 1972 Olympic Games and eventually working as an Olympic coach in the sport. Hidy went on to his own career in design (and has designed a number of stamps for the U.S. Postal Service).

By 1975, Godine was splitting his time between the press in Boston and the Book-of-the-Month Club in New York City, where he ran the Quality Paperback Book Club (QPBC) division. When he arrived, the QPBC had roughly thirty thousand members. By the time he left, there were nearly a hundred thousand. Godine says his time there was the greatest education he ever got in publishing.

“It wasn’t really until I came back from the Book-of-the-Month Club, in 1976, that I perceived our role as being publishers first and printers second,” he says. Many printers were making the jump from letterpress to offset technology, and Godine decided to opt out of printing altogether. “There was just so much capital involved in offset,” he says, “and I felt like my future didn’t lie in being someone who manipulated machinery.” Go-

dine still keeps an old Vandercook letterpress in his barn, but he says it’s used more for pleasure than business now.

Perhaps the most influential editorial presence at Godine during the 1980s, after the shift from printer to publisher, was William Goodman. A former editor at Harcourt and Harvard University Press, Goodman acquired books for David R. Godine, Inc. and was responsible for publishing such writers as the Irish novelists John Banville and Benedict Kiely.

With the help of Goodman, Godine built a list that he says he knew was “not the kind of list that a major house would consider buying. It’s so quirky.” Godine says the press staggered along and admits that he made some mistakes along the way. But he could afford them at the time. “Paper was cheaper...thirty-two cents a pound compared to today’s seventy-two cents,” Godine says. “Libraries still had big budgets, and most bookstores would buy directly from the publisher. Distribution wasn’t such an issue.”

At the time, Harper & Row distributed Godine’s titles, taking care of warehousing and shipping the books. But in the mid ’90s, Godine purchased a warehouse in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, staffing it with three full-time employees, and started handling his own distribution. “We do all the picking, packing, shipping, and billing now,” Godine says. “I think we’re quite unique in that.”

Almost every other detail of a book’s journey from manuscript to finished product is handled at Godine’s main offices in Boston. With a staff of four full-time and two part-time employees, in a small but comfortable office just around the corner from the Boston Common, the press handles its own production, publicity, and marketing.

Several years ago, Godine expanded his list by adding the Black Sparrow Books imprint. In 2002, Black Sparrow Press, an independent publisher based in Santa Rosa, California, went out of business after thirty-six years. John Martin, the press’s founding director, sold the rights to his biggest bread-

winners—Charles Bukowski, John Fante, and Paul Bowles—to Ecco Press, an imprint of HarperCollins. Martin all but gave away the rights to nearly two

“My single greatest challenge as an independent publisher in 2005 is making choices among the number of excellent manuscripts that we receive. Like other small presses, Apogee Press receives far more manuscripts that deserve publication than we can possibly bring into print.”

—Edward Smallfield, Apogee Press (www.apogeepress.com)

hundred of the remaining Black Sparrow titles to Godine.

“I paid a dollar for the stock, goodwill, and name,” he says. It was quite a bargain, but Godine says he’s not sure that the Black Sparrow titles have been financially beneficial. “If you look at the sales of Black Sparrow Books, compared to Godine, it’s a very small tail on a much larger dog.” Godine guesses that the books that went to Ecco Press must have accounted for as much as 80 percent of Martin’s sales.

“We’ve done an honorable job with it, though,” Godine says. “The books in the catalogue are available, and we’ve kept our promise to publish all the books that John Martin had already accepted.” He says that the future of the imprint is in good hands under the direction of Christopher Carduff.

Most books from the general Godine list—fiction, nonfiction, history, or translation—are released in print runs of three thousand to five thousand copies. Poetry titles are issued in lesser quantities: fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred. There are, of course, titles that far exceed expectations. *New American Poets*, an anthology edited by Jack Myers and Roger Weingarten and originally published by Godine in 1991, has sold over twenty-five thousand copies and is now in its seventh printing.

“My single greatest challenge as an independent publisher in 2005 is the same as it is every year. The challenge is not in getting enough short stories by original and profound writers to publish in the *Fish Anthology*—because we get plenty—it’s getting the public to read and buy the books in great numbers. I have been amazed when certain writers of short stories tell me they don’t read short stories themselves. Perhaps they have an insight into why the general reading public doesn’t either. Perhaps we need a new type of short story that will capture the imagination and put anthologies up there with novels on the bestseller lists. My task for the year is to find this new form.”

—Clem Cairns, Fish Publishing (www.fishpublishing.com)

