

IT HAS BEEN AN AMAZING TRIP



In the mid-eighties, after I decided to start a literary magazine, it was difficult choosing a name. Visiting Josephine Miles in Berkeley, I asked her what she thought of “Aileron.” “Isn’t that an airplane part? You might want to keep thinking about that.” As always, her advice was just what I needed.

My Ph.D. from CAL was in Shakespeare. I was drawn to his late romances; they were wildly imaginative compared to the rest of his work. In “The Tempest” I always loved the character of Caliban. I identified with him. Later I learned that in the history of Shakespeare production, he always reflected the zeitgeist. In the early 1800s, he was the romantic spirit, after Darwin, the missing link, after Freud, the id, in the twenties and thirties, the surrealist principle, after World War II, the rebellious fighter against colonial repression. What was not to like? The name Caliban embodied everything I wanted a literary magazine to be.

The eighties were a time when AWP programs were popping up like dandelions throughout the country. The workshops in those programs were helping students discover the beauty of sonnets, sestinas, and formalism

in all of its incarnations. Caliban was my response to what the literary landscape was becoming. George Hitchcock’s brilliantly cantankerous Kayak was my model. When he closed his magazine in 1984, George generously gave me the address cards of all his contributors. (This is one of the reasons I have often called Caliban “son of Kayak.”) Luckily most of George’s old contributors, a brilliant group, embraced Caliban. The print magazine ran from 1986 to 1996. I grieved over its closing, but it was just too expensive, especially after the NEA stopped offering grants to literary magazines.

In 2010, my wife Deanne, Daniel Estrada, and I revived the magazine in a digital version, Calibanonline. I was 65 at the time. I hoped to do 40 issues in 10 years, if my health and mental acuity allowed for it. And we are almost there. #39 in April and #40 in July will be our final issues.

Calibanonline, the new digital incarnation of the old monster, had two dramatic changes: an influx of amazing art from all over the world and a much higher circulation, with the visits to each issue ranging from 10,000 to 13,000. A large part of the magazine’s following was outside the

United States: Latin America, Italy, and Eastern Europe.

The catalyst for the new emphasis on art was Ricardo Pau-Llosa, poet, renowned art critic and collector. He sent out a notification to a long list of artists, suggesting that they send work to Calibanonline. I am forever grateful to him for that magnificent gesture. The old Caliban had wonderful color covers, but all of the interior art was half-tones or line drawings. With Calibanonline each issue is full of dazzling art, from a lot of different places, in brilliant high resolution color. The magazine has become a serious art venue.

Many of our current contributors are from the old print Caliban days, but there are also many young, exciting new voices. The loyalty to the project from all of them has been gratifying. They have made this trip worthwhile for writers, artists, and readers, who should be and often are the same people. When I look at the site and the rows of covers that are also links to each issue, they seem to be a deck of surrealist cards. These cards as portals will not disappear. The Calibanonline site will stay up permanently. All the issues will continue to be available for reading

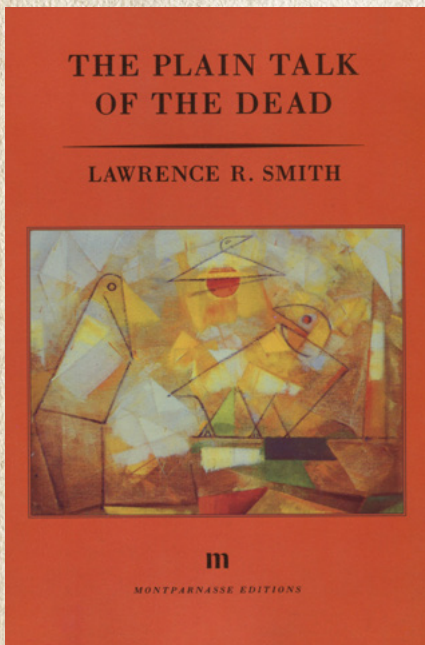
online or downloading as free pdfs. I hope this mini-library will continue to attract the attention it deserves. Each issue contains so many artists and writers doing innovative work. Finally, great thanks to my brother, Gary Russell Smith, who created the design for Caliban, Calibanonline, and a number of renditions of the literary monster, including the ferocious guy on the title page.

The fourth and fifth books in the Caliban's Bookshelf series are now available: Linette Lao's brilliant new poetry collection, *LUCK*, and a reprint of my poetry book, *The Plain Talk of the Dead*. All the books in this series are free downloads in kindle, ebook, or pdf.



Linette Lao's poems in *LUCK* spin with bodies be-dangled, be-dazzled—they're mesmerizing. "All mud and sequins, sawdust and spiders." Her poems conjure this planet's whirly-gig luck of the evolutionary draw, the surreal webs of intimacy and kinship in living systems. "We know how to lie like fossil in fern." What luck to have this small book now. With the nerve of a surgeon and the magic of poetry's justice, Lao opens up fabulous ecosystems and equivalencies, a reign of democracy in this collection.

—Janet Kauffman



Lawrence R. Smith, in *The Plain Talk of the Dead*, more than any poet I've read, sees and hears the presence of ancestors who are not only European but Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Pawnee, Mexican, African, Hawaiian. His surrealism is necessary, active, intelligent, and American. He opens his reader's eyes wide.

—Maxine Hong Kingston