Over the course of the last decade, American publishing has begun a significant shift. Since the late 20th century, it has been dominated by roughly five major publishing houses. It is clear that this organization however, is neither effective nor sustainable. These houses, due in part to financial restrictions, have become increasingly unable or unwilling to publish exciting literature. Major presses are experiencing a heightened pressure to sell their books, and have slowly stopped printing literature of risk. As a result, smaller independent presses have erupted across the country. These presses, which are nearly all not-for-profit, are able to take the risks that the larger presses are not. These small presses are where I have turned for much of my reading.

The collection I am submitting consists of fifty books, each published since 2009, and each released through a different independent publisher. My collection includes twenty-five books of fiction and twenty-five books of poetry. Additionally, I have read every book listed, which I feel is a necessary component to any collection of literature. While I do own more books that fit these criteria, I have included those which I feel best embody the spirit of independent publishing. These books are, in large part, those which the major presses would be least likely to publish.

My collection began in early 2009, when I first discovered what exciting things were happening in contemporary literature. I was first introduced to this scene by local author Mike Young, who was at this point a teacher of mine. This discovery sparked a love in me which the prevailing literature of academia had been
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previously unable to. I have since begun to design my undergraduate degree in Creative Writing, and have engaged avidly in literature, both as a reader and writer. I read over 100 books in 2010, and have done my best to buy those books that I loved the best.

Independent literature can be an expensive passion. I am a firm believer in libraries; I use them for much of what I read. As an undergraduate struggling with the costs of college, they make sense. Small independent presses however, simply do not print in large enough runs to make it to most libraries. Additionally, independent literature is a cause that I fully believe in. The people running these presses are not profiting from it. In fact, most are losing money. They are publishing books because they too, have noticed the ominous lack of exciting literature from the major publishing houses. For these reasons, I buy many of the books I read.

If awarded this scholarship, I have a number of plans for the future expansion of my collection. For one, I will continue to support the presses I love most by buying their books. I would also like to expand my collection to include more works of translation, and books published outside of America. I know that there is great literature happening across the world, and it is a shame that the scope of my reading has been somewhat limited to that which is physically near me. Finally, I would like to begin a collection of print literary journals. I religiously read a number of online journals, and find that much of the newest and most exciting writing happens in these places. The money would go to a similarly good cause, as literary journals are the primary way young authors gain recognition in hopes of publishing a full-length book. Both the gift certificate and the cash prize would go a
long way in expanding my collection, and in supporting the general cause of contemporary literature. I have no doubts that the future of publishing lies in these independent presses, and I plan to keep up with them every step of the way.
Works Cited

   
   This is a collection of brief prose pieces. I would consider them prose poems. I heard Lizzy read from this live and bought her book on the spot. These poems are absurd and funny, told with a fearless voice. While exercising a consistent tone and arch throughout, it impressed me the way their fearlessness morphed from poem to poem. They did often hit a similar note, however, I laughed out loud several times while reading this, something that I do not do often. This book was the first I had heard of Small Desk Press. It was very nicely put together, with a fun cover sketch of a boy and girl in monster masks going down a slide.


   While this press is not one of the major presses I have excluded from the list, it is fairly big. The book was the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award. It later won her the Pulitzer Prize. I read this book right after reading an essay by Gordon Lish on periodic sentences, the idea being that the most exciting part of a sentence is left for the end (closest to the period). While the essay focused on this as a tactic for fiction writers, I found myself constantly noticing it work here. These poems look like Eileen Myles’ on the page, although I would venture that they are even more lyrical. For all their wisdom, these poems frequently surprised me.


   Granted, Dial press is technically a division of Random House, but I included it nonetheless. This novel was separated into four sections: June, July, August, and Labor Day. This felt useful in the books organization. This was essentially a story about the struggles of growing up, condensed into a single summer. The book focuses on an interconnected group of recent college graduates and the evolution of their respective relationships. It was at times funny, at times sad. While the story was at times a tad predictable or sappy, Beachy’s attention to detail was right on target.


   This was as much an exercise in ventriloquism than it was a book. It is a collection of stories, the majority of which are fairly innovative via form. The stories jumped quickly between genres, often blurring multiple in a single story. The final story, *An Index Of How Our Family Was Killed*, is an alphabetic list of sentences. The variety of styles this book employed was impressive, to say the least. I cannot say I have seen such a variety of styles in a single collection anywhere else. The book came out in tandem with Aaron Burch’s *How To Predict The Weather*, something that I have seen more of recently from independent presses.

These poems work much in the way that I see Michael Cera succeeding when he is doing whatever it is he does so well. They are funny, sweet, and surprisingly scary in how alone the speaker seems to feel. The voice is somewhat adolescent, but sneaky in its wisdom.

Magic Hellicopter is a great local press. This is only the second perfect-bound book they have released, but both so far have been superb, and they have a novel scheduled for later this year that I am greatly excited for. As great as they are, I do not see these poems being published by a major publisher. At the very least, a major press would have used different cover art. The cover at first appears to be a picture of a child throwing up in basin. Upon further inspection however, we see that he is actually bobbing for apples. And this is an excellent introduction to these poems.


This book just came out, and it is Sommer Browning’s first collection of poems. I have been a fan of hers for a while, and I was so excited to have this book in my hands. There are pictures too, which were drawn by her. The poems here are manic and hilarious. Birds, LCC has a very exciting lineup this year, including the first collection of Amherst’s own Emily Pettit.


Publishing Genius is one of my absolute favorite presses. They seem to always find something entirely different from anything they have published before. Their fiction and poetry is consistently excellent. In addition to their perfect-bound books, they have an extensive collection of free online chapbooks, an outdoor literary project consisting of stories of fifty words or less, and a literary journal updated daily Monday through Friday.

This collection by Mairead Byrne showed me how many different ways there are to be silly. I feel like the effect of these poems was maximized more in their delivery, or pacing, than in their content. This aspect of the poems is something I frequently try to imitate in my own writing.


Octopus books is run by two of my favorite poets, Zachary Schomburg and Mathias Svalina. Heather Christle is a Umass graduate and extremely gifted poet. I would follow these poems anywhere. Their logic is so delightfully flawed, I just want to be lead by them, whether it be to an igloo or a rodeo or a cave full of bats. I know that what I love about these poems is not so much where they take me as how. They take me beautifully.

Akashic Press is run by literary giant Dennis Cooper. I can absolutely see Cooper’s influence on these stories. They are violent and shocking. They focus on homosexuality, or sexual frustration, with brilliant honesty. Where these stories depart significantly from Cooper’s writing, is in their language. The sentences in this collection are searing. The writing reminded me at times of Gary Lutz, with its focus on each sentence as an entire unit. While the stories here are certainly alternative, they are expertly written and actually rather accessible. This is another great example of an independent press succeeding. I would be shocked to have seen this book brought out by any major press.


Here, Joshua Cohen has written an 817 page monster of language. Sentences of multiple pages in length were not uncommon. The story chronicles Benjamin Israeli, the last Jew on the planet. It shifts back and forth between events in this post-apocalyptic world, and a seemingly disconnected time, where a man struggles through ancient memories. This book is a contemporary epic, and I am so grateful to Dalkey Archive for releasing it. While a few major publishers potentially could have been interested in this book, it seems impossible to me, to imagine them affording to release something of this length. Dalkey Archive is an absolutely phenomenal press. They are where I go for much the translations I read. I am always excited when I hear they have a book ready for release.


This book was the winner of the Yale Young Writers prize, a prestigious poetry award. I read this book for a poetry workshop I took in the fall of 2010. The drear in these poems built on itself, until I nearly drowned in it. While I cannot say that I loved this, it was certainly a feat in the consummate control of voice.


CA Conrad is one of my favorite contemporary poets. I know Soft Skull Press more for its fiction than its poetry. *American Genius* by Lynn Tillman, released by Soft Skull, is one of my favorite books in recent years. Advanced Elvis Course is swervy and surreal, with perfectly measured poems. The project of these poems felt like more of an impediment than a useful focus. This was not my favorite Ca Conrad, but still, his writing always amazes me.


This book was cute in the best way, in maybe the only way that cute can work. It was a 100 page novella poem. The voice was shy and funny. The images were surreal and constantly shifting. J.A. Tyler of Mud Luscious Press is one of the hardest working people in independent publishing today. As a
writer, publisher, reviewer, reader, etc, he does so much to further the industry of contemporary literature. This distinctively small press in its cuteness. It was also a quick and definitely worthwhile read.

   As far as independent presses go, Graywolf is one of the largest. I read this book along with the new Matthew Zapruder, and they rhymed in an interesting way. Dobby is clever, and the voice in his poems are uniquely his. I feel like there are countless collections this book could be grouped into. It would not be out-of-place on a shelf with books by other prose-poets, language poets, or even some New York School poets. While none of these labels really matter, Dobby Gibson does absolutely deserve to be on a shelf with excellent poets, much like himself.

   This was the first book I had read from Tarpaulin. Johannes Goransson is incredible. This book is incredible. It is as visceral as any poetry I can remember reading. Goransson was major for me in my discovery of poetry, and this is a necessary addition to his body of work.

   I would summarize Muumuu House’s small body of publications as shy, deadpan, hipster literature. While this is a little too much of a certain attitude for me, it is impressive how Muumuu House has forged such a specific identity for itself. I think this is an interesting project for small presses, and one which I have not seen duplicated in such an exact way elsewhere.

   Amelia Gray is one of the most clever, bizarre, and easily identifiable writers writing today. I read her first book, AM/PM last year, and loved it. This book was full of more conventionally lengthed, though far from conventional, stories. They feature a serial killer named god, a talking armadillo, and man married to a paring knife, among other equally strange premises. Amelia gray’s voice is so pitch-perfect, so exacting, that these scenarios were pulled off flawlessly.
   FC2 (Fiction Collective 2) is one of my favorite presses for experimental literature. They employ a fascinating system, wherein every author who has been published by FC2 has a say in the presses future publications. Hence, the press really is a collective. As a tenet for publications, they search to publish literature of risk, that which is formally or
aesthetically experimental. Not only do I feel FC2 is a consistently exciting and fresh place for new literature, I would venture that it is entirely necessary to the current landscape of American literature.

   In this collection, Steve Healey constructs a web of poetic breathing. These poems oscillate and swoon and work and build sonic momentum they create. I heard Steve Healey read from this, and I’m not sure if I really liked it as much before I did. Coffee House is by no means a small press, and I am glad to see them expanding their repertoire to excellence in poetry as well as in fiction.

   Small Beer is a great local press, located out of Easthampton. One of its primary editors, Jedediah Berry, published a fascinating and, in my opinion genre bending, novel through penguin in 2010. This book disguises itself as something like conventional fiction. The language are simple, and the scenes are traveled through clearly. Its organization however, is clipped in the most bizarre way. The book jumps around in time and between narrators. It is a book of intense mystery, of perpetual cliff-hangers.

   I cannot say enough about Featherproof Books. Their books have to be the most gorgeous pieces of art object in all of literature. *Daddy’s* is fashioned in the shape of a tackle box, with the lip of the front cover connecting in the back, paralleling that of the spine. The book is read sideways, with the front cover facing the ceiling and the back facing the ground. I was torn between including this, Patrick Somerville’s *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature*, which has directions for one to cut and fold its cover into a replica of the solar system. Lindsay Hunter’s book consists of 24 short fictions, each one pitch perfect and consistently strong.

   I believe this is the first publication by Mutable Sound. Based out of Chicago, I know they released various music-related art. This book, A.D. Jameson’s first, is a collection of formally innovative stories. Throughout the collection, Jameson engages in an overview of contemporary fiction, a discussion its recent trends and flaws as he sees them. A.D. Jameson contributes to the literary blog The Big Other, and this was one of my most anticipated reads of 2011. It did not disappoint.

   This is another perfect example of literature that would never ever be published by major presses. There are whole pages in this book which contain only the letters B-R-H-M, in varying quantities. This book is a repetition of failed attempts to help a woman remember. It reminded me a
lot of novels by Jesse Ball, who is another contemporary fiction writer who I greatly admire. Fugue State Press is a tiny press, which publishes very experimental and avant garde literature. I am glad that they exist.

   Kevin Killian is an original member of San Francisco’s new narrative circle of writers that includes Dennis Cooper and Kathy Acker. These stories come from a tradition of writers that also includes Eileen Myles. They are frightening in their aloneness, sympathetic in their desperation. Through the impossible scenarios of his characters, Killian slips in graphic wedges of human mess saturated with erotica. Prior to reading this book, I had not even heard of City Lights Books, although from what I gather, they are pretty big. I found this book at Borders.

   This book was absolutely stunning. It is the funny, heartbreaking collection of letters, conversations, interviews, newspaper clippings, etc, of fictional character Jonathan Bender after his suicide. About Michael Kimball, Sam Lipsyte has written “(he is) a hero of contemporary literature.” I could not agree more. Michael Kimball employs a sort of tortured adolescent vernacular in his rendering of a world so entirely his own, it is absolutely unrivaled in literature, contemporary or otherwise. I know very little about Alma press. I have however, read everything that Michael Kimball has written. I always find it interesting when writers move from major presses to independent ones as they progress in their career, as Kimball has done here. Perhaps it is merely a coincidence, but *Dear Everybody*, which unlike his other novels was published by an independent press, is surely his most risky, or experimental, work.


