

Separating the “Bookfellow” from the *Bookfellow*: *A. G. Stephens and the Australian Magazine Reader*

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Between 1899 and 1925 A. G. Stephens made several attempts at producing a literary magazine for Australian readers — the *Bookfellow*. In the pages of this magazine he energetically promoted Australian writing and attempted to educate Australian readers about the developments in literature that were occurring overseas. But the time was never ripe for such a locally-produced magazine in the Australian magazine market and so the *Bookfellow* appeared sporadically in several series: 1899; 1907; 1911-1916; and 1919-1925. Despite Stephens' significant reputation as a literary critic and publisher, the *Bookfellow* as a venture in magazine publishing has eluded extended analysis.¹ To address this absence, this paper examines the relationship between Stephens and Australian magazine readers in order to better understand how the *Bookfellow* was situated in the Australian magazine market. Stephens was very conscious of the importance of the reader to the health of his magazine, but he was unable to rely on Australian readers to support the everyday running of the *Bookfellow*. The magazine readers that Stephens hoped to attract to the *Bookfellow* were not moved; and those that were could not provide enough commercial support for the magazine to operate as a viable publishing enterprise.

The chances of sustaining a locally-produced magazine in Australia were slight because of the overwhelming competition from overseas periodicals. In 1898 one commentator listed more than eighty foreign periodicals that had been readily available to Australian readers in the previous decades, providing a choice that left little room for the local product.² Most of the reading matter sold in Australian bookshops and borrowed from libraries was produced in Great Britain, a situation that remained relatively steady for the first half of the 20th century.³ The consumption of magazines and other periodicals follows the same pattern. While a few Australian magazines like the *Australian Journal* achieved a higher circulation than many imported magazines, Australian readers were spoiled for choice. In 1930, Alexander Gray, General Manager for Gordon and Gotch (Australasia) Ltd., the major distributor of periodicals in the region, estimated that the company's wholesale department delivered “between 400 and 500 imported publications” and handled “well over 1,000 different oversea” publications in their subscription department.⁴ Library catalogues and bookstalls all reflect this domi-

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nance, showing large holdings of British publications, followed by American then Australian publications. While not mentioning strictly literary magazines, Gray calculated that the average circulation of the thirty-four (un-named) "principle popular reading magazines imported" was approximately 3316, giving some idea of the numbers with which Australian "reading" magazines had to compete. These thirty-four magazines were supported by large-scale production and international circulation that reached 150,000, making them virtually indestructible under Australian conditions. For an Australian magazine to provide something of the same quality and variety a similar circulation would be required. But with a population yet to reach seven million in the 1920s, such a prospect was virtually impossible. With British periodicals like *Athenacum*, *T. P.'s Weekly*, *Bookman* and *John o' London's* to compete with, Stephens faced an enormous challenge to get the attention of readers whose eyes were strongly fixed on the London market.

Bookfellow — 1899

The first issue of the *Bookfellow* appeared in January 1899 as a publication of the Bulletin Newspaper Company. By 1899, Stephens had established a reputation as one of Australia's most influential critics. He was recruited by J. F. Archibald in 1894 for the weekly *Bulletin* after working for several years as a journalist and editor in Queensland and England. Before long he asserted his literary opinions and claimed the inside cover of the newspaper for the purpose of noticing books and relaying literary gossip to interested readers. By 1896 this section was known as the "Red Page" and Stephens was writing longer reviews of local and overseas titles and reappraising Australia's literary traditions. In subsequent years he commented on most of the Australian writers that emerged at this time and he assisted many of them by featuring their work on the "Red Page." Also engaged in the book publishing ventures of the newspaper company, he oversaw the production of twenty-six books, bringing to print almost "every Australian author of importance from the 1890s and the first years of the twentieth century."⁵ Stephens "was at the center of a new, predominantly younger and native-born literary network that extended across Australasia,"⁶ but this failed to completely satisfy the thirty-three year old literary entrepreneur. In 1898 he convinced the proprietors of the *Bulletin* to sponsor a small magazine that would extend the scope of the "Red Page" to serve cultured readers and book-buyers with a more concentrated literary tone.

Stephens used the *Bookfellow* to amplify his "Red Page" attempts to demonstrate how Australian literature was positioned in relation to the rest of the world. His frustration with Australian reading culture was evident in a "Red Page" editorial for 23 January 1897: "It is hard in Australia to get even a nodding acquaint-

ance with recent foreign literature other than British, for the books never reach us. Is there a single Australian who could pass an examination in Huisman, Maeterlinck, or Verhaeren? — to say nothing of Verlaine or Baudelaire or others comparatively far-back." The *Bookfellow* served to correct this indifference by providing readers with commentary and extracts from the works of authors like those mentioned and many others, assuming an audience willing to appreciate continental literature mixed with the best of British and Australian writers.

The first issue of the *Bookfellow* appeared in January 1899 subtitled *A Monthly Magazinelet for Book-Buyers and Book-Readers*, giving a clear indication of the type of reader Stephens was hoping to reach. Inside the small fourteen-page magazine,⁷ readers encountered literary gossip on Australian, British and European writers, extracts from various sources and advertisements for *Bulletin* publications. Brief articles on writers such as Swinburne, Tennyson, Dumas, Rossetti and W. E. Henley accompanied features on Australian writers such as Roderic Quinn, Ethel Turner, Henry Lawson and Mary Hannay Foott. Many of the shorter notes on Australian authors were clearly linked to advertisements for *Bulletin* publications, demonstrating the promotional function of the magazine. An instructional function was also incorporated with regular commentary on unfamiliar foreign writers and competitions to uncover the best translators of French poetry or the best exponents of the quatrain. Stephens also recruited the poet and scholar Christopher Brennan to contribute a series of articles on the "Newer French Poetry," emphasizing the didactic aims of the magazine. Brian Kiernan has argued that "[t]hrough the 'Red Page' readers gained the sense of being acquainted with a literary culture that was simultaneously national and international and of 'A.G.S' as an eclectically informed and fearlessly opinionated authority."⁸ The same could be said for readers of the *Bookfellow* who were situated in relation to the magazine as a small Australian interpretative community. But this community was far too exclusive, making it hard to operate a locally produced literary magazine without financial loss.

In 1899 the *Bulletin* had a circulation around 100,000, providing Stephens with a large framework onto which his "Red Page" fit, and offering readers a literary section to complement the many other sections found within the weekly newspaper. Undoubtedly many readers ignored the "Red Page," turning immediately to the sections that most interested them, but for a relatively small readership, the inside cover was the attraction. Stephens was unable to attract this readership in enough numbers to his external publication in order to achieve the profitable publication that the proprietors of the *Bulletin* most certainly required. Stephens announced the closure of the *Bookfellow* in its May issue, citing the difficulties of supporting the production of a small magazine:

In spite of hundreds of kindly notices, and subscriptions weekly increasing, the *Bookfellow* does not pay, and it is not likely to pay unless advertisements are obtained; and, except the class of advertisements which would be a desecration of the shrine, these things which no *Bookfellow* can stand without appear to be unobtainable. . .⁹

This note suggests that any potential advertisers saw the readership addressed by the magazine as unsuitable (either in numbers or purchasing power) for an investment in advertising. The only advertisements that appeared in the *Bookfellow* were for *Bulletin* publications and they likely did not pay, leaving Stephens with no income to develop the magazine and not enough readers to break even.

The number of readers Stephens needed to attract to make the magazine viable gives some idea of the readership he hoped were waiting expectantly for a publication such as his. Stephens summarized his position in the final issue of the *Bookfellow*, submitting the expenses of his small magazine for his readers:

To merely print the *Bookfellow* costs for 2500 copies about £25; and to fill as per sample is worth at least another £30 — total £55. Take 2500 *Bookfellows* at 3d. and many are sold at 2d. to booksellers: multiply and subtract according to Colenso; and the result is — Loss. It would take a sale of at least 5000 — allowing for sundry deductions, and calculating on the lesser proportionate cost of the greater quantity — to repay cash expenditure; and there is still much worry and anxiety unpaid for. A sale of 5000 at 6d. would be encouraging enough; but that is judged not possible at present.¹⁰

Stephens must have been selling well below the 2500 copies he cites at the beginning of his calculation for the *Bulletin* to withdraw its support. But, exacerbating this, Stephens' character probably played some part in the short life of the *Bookfellow*. On 31 May 1899 Christopher Brennan wrote to John le Gay Brereton, "I had heard a week ago that the *Bulletin* people had put their feet down on Stephens and demanded that he should attend to the work for which he was hired and enjoy less posing as Literary Tonard."¹¹ The bottom line was much more important to the proprietors of the *Bulletin* and Stephens' desire to educate and stimulate a small group of readers was far too impractical to continue. Such a publication had no place in the market for magazine readers at the end of the nineteenth century.

Despite this, the *Bookfellow* received an overwhelmingly positive response in the press throughout Australasia, showing how thinly spread the magazine's readership must have been. Reviews appeared in such publications as the *Evening Mail*, *Farm and Dairy*, *People's Newspaper*, *Freeman's Journal*, *Weekly Press* (N.Z.), *Western Post*, *Cycling News*, *Sportsman*, *Hot Lakes Chronicle* (N.Z.), *Queenslander*,

Australian Stockbreeder and many more.¹² Many reviewers noted the literary gossip of the *Bookfellow*, the *Daily Times* calling it "bright and gossipy." But the *Queenslander* saw this aspect negatively, hoping that "it may become a little more literary, and a little less flippant in tone." The *Starwell Times* saw it as "characteristically 'Bulletin'" and the *Caromundel County* emphasized the magazine's pedagogical nature, claiming that it "furnishes much more valuable information to the book-worm than is to be had by attending many Mutual Improvement Societies with a similar object." The *Melbourne Cycling News* portrayed the *Bookfellow* as a welcome friend for the more cultured mind, saying that

It is caviarre to the vulgar, and essentially a magazinelet for book-loving men and women, and much of it possesses that indescribable, personal charm that will go far to make *The Bookfellow* himself the well-beloved personal friend of many men whose habitation lies from Carpentaria to Otway . . .

Some reviewers saw the magazine like the *Melbourne Cycling News* reviewer as "essentially Australian all through," the *Dimboola Banner* noting that the first cover "conveys the impression that the magazine is thoroughly Australian — and that's what's wanted." But the *Starwell Times* reviewer looked past the front cover to see some "sparkling literary criticism, which embraces English, French, and trans-Atlantic as well as Australian productions." Following the demise of the *Bookfellow* in May 1899 came several valedictory notes such as the *Farm and Dairy* mock obituary that declared, "He died from lack of advertising nourishment, deeply mourned by a too select circle of sorrowful readers." The *Worker* was more blunt, saying "Bookfellow spells bankruptcy, because the masses will not read anything stronger than the *War Cry* or Convention Bill. More's the pity." In subsequent series of the *Bookfellow*, Stephens would continue to face the difficulty of attracting at least some of the masses to his magazine in order to foster a readership which he could use to sell advertising space. The positive reviews show that the *Bookfellow* could serve a valuable function in Australian reading culture by filling a void with a national literary magazine. But Stephens found it hard to fulfill the necessary functions of publisher and editor in order to stabilize his literary project.

***Bookfellow* — 1907**

When the first series of the *Bookfellow* ceased production, Stephens returned his attention to the "Red Page" and consolidated his reputation as Australia's premier literary critic. New books continued to come from the *Bulletin* presses under his watchful eyes, but the commercial uncertainty of these projects brought

him off-side with James Edmonds, the new editor of the weekly newspaper. By 1906, the relationship had soured and Stephens was looking elsewhere to fulfill his literary dreams after being left out of plans for the *Bulletin's* new monthly magazine, the *Lone Hand*. He left the *Bulletin* in November 1906 in order to open a small literary bookshop that he called The Bookfellow. To help promote the bookshop and continue his work in promoting Australian literature and educating Australian readers, he resurrected the *Bookfellow* as a weekly magazine during January 1907. Neither the bookshop nor the magazine survived the year. Nevertheless, for the eight months of its existence, this second series of the *Bookfellow* saw Stephens attempt to attract the broader group of readers that his earlier series needed.

The type of reader that Stephens hoped to attract to his weekly magazine is seen in a letter prepared for potential advertisers. Dated 3 January 1907, a draft of this letter shows Stephens formulating the ideal readership for his magazine. He begins, "The Bookfellow is designed as a ~~high-class~~ magazine which may be read with pleasure by intelligent men and women everywhere, while preserving a specific Australian character <and appealing definitely to book-buyers>."¹³ The brief inclusion of "high class" and the addition of the appeal for book-buyers hint at the function of the magazine and the type of reader that advertisers would address in the pages of the *Bookfellow*. The qualities of the magazine are spelled out more clearly in a later paragraph where he offers advertisers "Publicity Among People Who Have Leisure to Study Your Advertisements and Money To Buy Your Goods." For this to work, Stephens needed to produce a magazine that would attract a strong middle-class readership to which advertisers could sell their products. Intelligent people of leisure with money to spare became the target audience for the *Bookfellow* in 1907. Stephens was obviously aiming at the top end of the market to stabilize the financial situation of his magazine, but his abilities as a businessman would fail him as he struggled to secure enough advertisers to make up for a consistent lack of sales.

Trying to reach as wide an audience as possible while at the same time attempting to leave space for original Australian content, Stephens produced a magazine that addressed itself to a variety of readers. H. M. Green suggests that "in trying for a wider than a merely literary and critical appeal Stephens fell between two stools."¹⁴ During 1907 Stephens attempted to maintain a balance by filling his magazine with many illustrations, portraits and photographs, and surrounding this text with original verse, interviews and reviews.¹⁵ The most frequent contributors of original verse were James Hebblethwaite, Roderic Quinn, Hugh McCrae and John Shaw Neilson while contributions were also received from Louis Esson, Will Ogilvie, Bernard O'Dowd, Mary Gilmore and New Zea-

landers such as Jessie Mackay. The poetry of Mary Gilmore and Jessie Mackay was featured in a regular back page "Little Anthology," but this was not limited to Australasian writers. Canadian Wilfred Campbell and American Ella Wheeler Wilcox were also featured, suggesting that this space was used for the promotion of books inside the Bookfellow bookshop. Few works of fiction were published and those that were sometimes cribbed stories from overseas periodicals such as E. L. Sabin's "Puppy Love" taken from the *Philadelphia Post*. The major work of fiction, however, was the serialization of *The Lady Calphurnia* written by Albert Dorrington and Stephens. But the magazine did not survive long enough to see the serial through to its conclusion.

The articles, interviews, reviews and other miscellaneous articles provided readers with general interest topics in short, uncomplicated prose. Stephens opened each issue with an editorial, covering such issues as "Australian Education," "The Artist and the Commonwealth," "The Absolute Necessity of Immigration" and "Australian Literature." This was complemented by many general articles on such topics as sailors' chanteys, scene painting in Australia and the Australian Crawl, or Robert Kaleski's ongoing series on dogs. Interviews with theatre managers and politicians were published and reviews of books from around the world also appeared but with a particular concentration on Australian titles. Other regular sections in the magazine printed theatrical notices and cribbed articles from local and international publications. And trying to make the reader a contributor to his pages, Stephens organized regular competitions that required the composition of "unadjectival" eulogies, drawings, ghost stories and a translation of a villanelle by Joachim de Bellay.

Like the first series of the *Bookfellow*, the 1907 weekly magazine attracted a predominantly positive response. The *Barrier Truth* told its readers that the new *Bookfellow*,

is to be an illustrated extension of the best features of the Red Page; a representative utterance of Australian literary opinion; a voice proclaiming that the people is bigger than any section, and Australia greater than the parts; a patriot paper zealously guarding in its covers the work of the best pens in the commonwealth. We want such a medium to interpret Australia's blessedness and glory, to quicken its sublime destiny, to ripen its children for the magic morrow.

In Toowoomba the *Chronicle* had a closer look at the contents: "The magazine is of that character that we would expect from A.G.S. It combines Austral-Anglo-American features of an individual type. The prose and verse and illustrations are each cosmopolitan, with capitals in Australia." The *Dungog Chronicle* praised the

accessibility of the paper: "It is a powerful creation this magazine, all the more welcome, for its equal accessibility to Bill with the wedge and maw up among the fern and mahogonie as to Harcourt with the fountain pen among office stools and ledgers." Such a positive response emphasized the magazine's potential to reach a large diverse audience. Other literary magazines were operating in Melbourne at this time. Melbourne's *Native Companion* (1907) and Adelaide's *Gadfly* (1906-9) addressed a literary culture, but didn't seek popularity to the same extent as the *Bookfellow*. Stephens sought longevity by establishing a strong relationship with the general public and his literary friends and acquaintances.

Some of the latter readers were the poets whose careers he had helped to establish on the 'Red Page,' now a space against which the *Bookfellow* could be measured. The New Zealand poet Jessie Mackay clearly expressed her preferences in a letter welcoming the new weekly:

The "Bookfellow" is exactly what I always wished and doubtless many another a Red Page without the unspeakable "Bulletin" tacked on ... I am so glad that Australasian literature is really here, and going to get the grimy thumb marks of the Bulletin off it at last — it seemed hard to do. You are giving your life to it are you not? You have done so much to shape and guide it, and breathe an undying soul into it ... More power to the "Bookfellow"! But please don't club the poor young poets very hard. Old or young they're tender.¹⁶

Jessie Mackay reflects the voice of the small group of readers who subordinated the larger purpose of the *Bulletin* to its literary section. Those readers who sought a medium that would celebrate their achievements and give them the opportunity to reach a broad yet discerning readership — a readership that might also buy their poetry in book form. Mary Gilmore also wrote congratulating Stephens and predicted that "The 'B' will cease even as a tradition to represent Letters (in Australia) be no more than a mere weekly. 'The Bookfellow' is wider and bigger and if possible more individual than the 'Red Page'+Bulletin but the loss of the latter-as-it-was leaves a sore spot where we call the heart."¹⁷ Without Stephens at the editorial desk, the 'Red Page' lost its power among supporters of Stephens. The *Bookfellow* offered itself as an alternative, but without the support of a parent publisher it could not continue with such a consistently small readership.

Potential readers might have been troubled by an alleged lack of quality tied to the editor's concerted attempt to reach a popular audience. The *Clipper* in Hobart missed "the 'matey' intimacy of Stephens little old Bookfellow" and the *Sydney Stock and Station Journal* wondered whether Stephens could live up to his reputation. In Melbourne, *Life* took this a bit further:

We must confess to uneasy doubts as to the chances of life which the "Bookfellow" enjoys. It is a fiddle with one string, a bird with one note. Its interest is Literature — literature, it must always be understood, limited to fiction and a single type of poetry. And will the average Australian pay threepence a week for a journal which gives him only a dozen pages, say, of criticism and gossip — no matter how good — about novels and second-class poetry?

Others such as the South Australian *Critic*, the Wagga Wagga *Advertiser* and the *Barrier Miner* each saw similar weaknesses in the paper, and others wondered whether the *Bookfellow* lived up to its name. Reviewers in the Toowoomba *Citizen* and the *Newsletter* complained about the non-bookish content, particularly Robert Kaleski's series of articles on canines. Such criticism and poor sales forced Stephens to reconsider the package he was producing for Australian readers. But rather than change his editorial policies, he changed the name of his magazine to *Australia* in May 1907, including the following comment:

Magazines are interesting quite apart from us. They are like children, and develop really at their own sweet will, not at the editor's. Every number adds substance to the shadow which originally existed; and presently you will find the magazine talking on its own account, and talking back. Things 'go in', not necessarily because the editor approves them, but because the magazine demands them. . . . A delicate reference to Frankenstein would be in order; but we shall dodge it.¹⁸

The "demands" of the magazine were obviously commercial and Stephens the editor and publisher had to respond in order to maintain the health of the publication. The "delicate reference to Frankenstein" that he partially withheld must reflect his frustration at the lack of control he had over the magazine's fortunes once it began its weekly circulation.

Giving the magazine a more general character was one of the strategies Stephens tried to make the magazine live, but such a position did not sit easily with some of Stephens' peers, showing how difficult it must have been to make editorial decisions in the face of commercial necessity. In July 1907, Frank Morton wrote to Stephens, wishing him well with his renamed *Bookfellow*, but offering some sharp criticism.

All my heart is with you regarding the Bookfellow that you have re-named Australia. I think that the change of name was a mistake, and I think that in the long run you will think so. The Bookfellow was a fine title, attractive, distinctive, and especially A. G. S. Australia is too big and vague. And you feel it: altho' you wouldn't admit it. You don't strive to lure the gaping mob to the hills like you did in the early numbers, but are becoming content to feed them on the

flat. Fact is, the paper has not the snap it had. You are becoming, my dear, too respectable.¹⁹

This correspondence and Stephens' editorial comment demonstrate the dynamics at play in the production of an Australian magazine in 1907. Frank Morton, who became the voice of *Triad* magazine when it moved to Sydney from New Zealand in 1915, offered a straight-backed assessment of the product of his friend's energy. An accomplished poet and journalist, Morton could be seen as a model for Stephens' ideal reader, but the uninformed "gaping mob" was a large part of the community of magazine buyers that Stephens needed to attract in order to pay his bills. Stephens needed to produce an attractive cultural commodity that could form a distinct group of readers to which his advertisers could promote their products. The second series of the *Bookfellow* failed to do this and ceased production in August 1907.

1911-1916

These earlier failures did not dissuade Stephens from persevering with magazine publishing, and, after a number of years as a syndicated journalist in New Zealand and Australia, he made a third attempt to get the attention of Australian readers. From December 1911 the *Bookfellow* appeared as a monthly magazine with, for a short time, a trade supplement, indicating Stephens' interest in the book trade as an alternative circle of readers for the magazine. In June 1912, Stephens declared that four thousand copies had been printed, one quarter of them sent to publishers as the trade edition.²⁰ Stephens was well aware of the limitations of the *Bookfellow*, writing to George Robertson in 1912: "I am aware of the defect of the *Bookfellow* — it wants another eight pages of popular matter and more illustration — will do that when I get the money; haven't enough capital at the moment."²¹ With a goal to improve the magazine by adding more popular material, Stephens was emphasizing his concern about circulation among a wider group of readers, readers who might be interested in the catalogue of Angus & Robertson. The want of capital is reflected in part of his comments on a proposed tariff on imported magazines where he stressed the importance for local publications to operate "independent of extra-Australian competition." Maybe thinking of his newly relaunched enterprise he concluded, "The combination of brains and money necessary to found and sustain such a magazine has hitherto been wanting."²²

In order to sustain his magazine, Stephens provided a miscellaneous collection of material from Australia and overseas, continuing the cosmopolitan tone of the earlier series. The twenty-six page issue for 15 November 1913 gives an idea of the type of material provided to *Bookfellow* readers. Of the twenty-six pages,

approximately half was taken up by advertisements. Ten pages of publishers' and booksellers' ads kept readers informed about the newest titles from overseas, and local publications were given full-page promotion in ads for the Bookstall series and Angus and Robertson's Australian list. In addition the *Bookfellow* promoted Australian books that could be obtained from "All Good Booksellers." The remainder of the issue comprised of reviews and excerpts from new books, reflecting the target audience of book-buyers and book-readers that Stephens always had in mind. The reviews covered a variety of publications. Opening with reviews of new edition of Robert Allot's poetry and a book on Japanese culture, the issue continued with a close examination of George Russell's (A. E.) *Collected Poems* and a one-page sample of the contents which amounted to the publication of nine poems. This was followed by a review of Australian poetry, Frederick Macartney's *Earthen Vessels*, and summaries of the contents of magazines such as *The Poetry Review* (London), *The Irish Review* (Dublin), *Poet Lore* (Boston) and *Poetry and Drama* (London). In summarizing these reviews, Stephens provided readers with the latest commentary on subjects such as Greek poetry, Robert Bridges' appointment as poet laureate, strikes in Dublin, selections from the Italian writer Armando Palacio Valdes and a condensed version of F. S. Flint's article on Futurist Poetry. These reviews covered seven pages, leaving around five pages for Stephens' literary gossip in "Under the Gumtree" and further reviews of new books, including a two-page excerpt from Arthur Marinas' forgotten collection of stories, *An Adventuress in the Far East*. In this issue only one column is provided for original Australian literature, that being John Shaw Neilson's "Let Your Song Be Delicate."

The contents of the *Bookfellow* reflect Stephens continued attempts to satisfy the magazine market into which he was sending his magazine. Occupying at least half of the magazine, advertisements address the readers of the magazine with their wares or services and provide much needed income for the running of the business. The reviews reflect Stephens attempts to educate readers about developments in overseas literature while allowing enough movement to include more popular titles so that booksellers can make the best choices when ordering books for sale. Onto this framework of book business is grafted original works of Australian literature, most noticeably those writers of lyrical verse whom Stephens accepted as valuable contributors to the cause: John Shaw Neilson, James Hebblethwaite, Hubert Church and Arnold Wall the most frequent contributors during this period. But a twenty-four page monthly magazine with such content was still not enough to attract sufficient readers and Stephens had to accept assistance from other sources to keep the magazine running.

The published commentary on this series of the *Bookfellow* is less than in previ-

ous series, suggesting a diminishing interest in its fortunes or a growing sense of indifference to Stephens' opinions on literature. The essential role of Mary Gilmore as patron of the *Bookfellow* during this period shows that the magazine could not have survived on its own, indicating a lack of sales and a related reduction in advertising. By 1913 the magazine was in deep financial trouble with the printer, Morton's Ltd., demanding payment. Beginning in November 1912, Gilmore provided regular loans to support the magazine and took responsibility for the lease of the *Bookfellow* office in the Australian Chambers in October 1913.²³ She also agreed to act as guarantor for the sale of £10 debentures in the magazine with the goal of raising £1000, but the sale was only able to raise £200, leaving the assets of the *Bookfellow* at the mercy of Morton's Ltd. A takeover was aborted when the magazine was "sold" to Gilmore with Stephens retained as editor at £4 a week. But by January 1916 Gilmore was forced to call in Stephens' loans, leaving the magazine vulnerable. Stephens, always in debt with printers, replied asking her to reconsider: "There is no way of getting you out without stopping the paper, i.e. stopping my chance to make it good. I will liquidate assets gradually and it will take time. Given a fairly free mind I can raise your money and Morton's too. Meanwhile if you can spare me running round every day for a few shillings that will be a great help between cheques."²⁴ But with the withdrawal of support from Gilmore the magazine could not support its own production and was forced to cease production for the third time in March 1916.

1919-1925

By 1919 Stephens reputation was a shadow of that which had been sustained during his years on the "Red Page." The state of his reputation was made clear by Mary Gilmore in a letter to E. A. Vidler, asking for support: "So far as Sydney goes [John Shaw Neilson's *Heart of Spring*] has been practically unnoticed. Those in touch with the critics here say that the fact that A. G. S. has praised it will ensure its being ignored or scantily noticed by others."²⁵ When Julian Ashton discovered that Stephens' daughter, Constance, had become a journalist he warned her, "If you become such a terrible critic as your father, you'll be hounded out of Sydney."²⁶ A. G. Stephens and by extension his *Bookfellow* were pushed into the periphery of Sydney's public sphere, having little impact on the critical opinion of its day. And so with little cultural capital, it was destined to struggle in the market place. Nevertheless, Stephens was able to maintain the magazine through another six years with the support of friends, family and a few loyal readers.

Stephens' persistence is admirable, but without a significant readership the *Bookfellow* could not rise above an irregular publication in its last series. Borrowing £400 against his father's estate, Stephens relaunched the *Bookfellow* in De-

cember 1919. The final series never reached the potential of its predecessors with Stephens forced to recycle material and struggle with a regularly shortening list of advertisers. Christopher Brennan was brought back to complete his articles on French poetry begun twenty-five years earlier. Stephens also drew on his regular band of contributors, John Shaw Neilson, Hubert Church and James Hebblethwaite still the favourites. Some foreign poetry found its way onto the pages of the *Bookfellow*, including a selection of poems by Vachel Lindsay and an early version of Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning" as examples of new American poetry. Stephens framed such verse with comments like "There is excellence enough, but not the highest excellence in the mode of poetry."²⁷ Despite these attempts to retain the interest of his readers, the formula he had been applying since 1907 had little attraction in the 1920s. With a shattered reputation in Sydney (probably his biggest market) and an increasingly unattractive product, readers refused to pick up a copy of the *Bookfellow* and it quickly became insolvent once more.

By the early 1920s, Constance Stephens had consolidated her career in journalism and in 1923 bought the magazine from her father for the sum of £100, retaining him as editor. Stephens had tried to sell the magazine to the Melbourne publisher E. A. Vidler and had also tried to recruit the young Frank Johnson who had been involved in the production of the short-lived, Norman Lindsay-inspired magazine, *Vision*. Johnson politely declined, but candidly pointed out the magazine's limitations:

Frankly your only tangible asset appears to be your ability; it is not such a bad asset, but a page or so of it each month is sufficient for the literati to satisfy them that you are the only AGS. The remainder of your magazine must contain other contributions in order to satisfy the Australian inquisitive mind, which remains accurate only for the duration of a continuous spell of mild weather, it then becomes casual. You must know by this, that this is a newspaper country. Apply your ability accordingly . . . T.P.'s and John O'London's are successful in Australia; why not the Bookfellow?²⁸

Why not, indeed? Johnson's identification of the British literary periodicals popular with Australian readers, emphasizes the challenge faced by Stephens in the Australian magazine market. London-based literary magazines such as *T. P.'s Weekly* and *John O'London's* served Australian readers by helping them to engage with the literature they most frequently consumed. Even if these magazines had a small circulation in Australia, they could still survive because of their significant circulation in Britain and elsewhere. Based on a prospectus drafted for Frank Johnson, sales of five thousand copies of an Australian magazine were required to make a decent profit in the 1920s.²⁹ But such a figure was unattainable. In Janu-

ary 1924, the *Bookfellow* had only two hundred valid subscribers³⁰ and retail sales of four thousand eight hundred could only have been a dream given the increasingly poor quality of the product.

This poor quality and increasing irregularity saw the magazine drift into an irrecoverable position. A fire in the printer's office destroyed the issue for December 1921, beginning the irregularity of the magazine's last years. Publication was suspended in August 1922 until May 1923 when it appeared again for a further four months. After the issue for August 1923 fourteen months passed before another *Bookfellow* was published. In desperation Stephens sold to his mother for £100 the copyright to his literary, dramatic and musical works, and on 12 October 1923, his daughter took over the ownership of the *Bookfellow*. In her career as a journalist for the Sydney *Sun* newspaper, Constance Stephens developed an appreciation for the importance of advertising and the need for organisation. The state of her father's magazine business must have frustrated her. When he was unable to produce enough copies of the magazine for subscribers she had had enough. In a hastily written note dated 1 November 1924 Constance screamed,

You're fired! A publisher who can't see to it that there is at least a sufficiency of papers on hand for sale, who so utterly fails in his principle of the publishing business is no good to the *Bookfellow*. Attached is a list of a few whose demand for a current issue could be satisfied, a list that might have filled three slips instead of one, had more been available. Need I say again that you're fired!³¹

Stephens must have persisted with the venture because a formal letter was required to convince the editor that his career was at an end: "Please take notice that as from Friday, February 27, 1925 I will not require your service as manager or in any other capacity in connection with the *Bookfellow*."³² Revealing her regret, Constance wrote in her unfinished biography of her father, "I sacked AGS by registered letter and felt I had butchered his dream, a dream which began in 1899 with a dozen little booklets."³³

Stephens' dream could not be fulfilled under Australian conditions because of the competition for the few serious readers that existed at the time. A correspondent from New Zealand wished Stephens well with the *Bookfellow* as he prepared to make his last ditch effort in late 1924:

I hope that the "Bookfellow" may be a success this time. I take John O'London's. I am sure that the old Bookfellow of 1913-14 was a far better paper, and yet the Bookfellow died and John O'London's thrives still: proving that the six million Australasians, living under easier conditions, have not the same artistic tastes as have the forty millions at home where life is harder. And yet they say that leisure fosters Art.³⁴

John O'London's appears again as an alternative for the potential readers of the *Bookfellow*, stressing the significance of the presence of the foreign magazine in the Australian market. For twenty-five years Stephens tried to produce a magazine that could attract some commercial success to support his goals of educating the Australian reader about the place of Australian literature in the world. His limited success in a competitive market stresses the need to look at Australian magazines as a contributor to a larger international network of production and distribution, and to acknowledge the relationship between the habits of Australian readers and the success or failure of locally produced magazines.

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Endnotes

¹ For introductions to Stephens' life and work see A. G. Stephens, *A. G. Stephens: Selected Writings, Perspectives in Australian Literature*. (London; Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1977), A. G. Stephens and Vance Palmer, *A. G. Stephens, His Life and Work* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1941). The most comprehensive account of the convergence of Stephens' personal and working life is found in Valerie Lawson, *Connie Sweetheart: The Story of Connie Robertson* (Port Melbourne: Heinemann Australia, 1990).

² Adam G. Melville, "The Book Trade in Australia since 1861," in *Proceedings of the Sydney Meeting, October, 1898* (Sydney: Hennessey, Harper & Co, 1899), 108-9.

³ Martyn Lyons, "Britain's Largest Export Market," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 20-21.

⁴ Australia Tariff Board, and Cunningham Turnbull & Scholl., *Report of Evidence: At Tariff Board Inquiries into Proposal of Duty on Books, Magazines and Fashion Plates* (Melbourne: Australian Booksellers Association, 1930).

⁵ Brian Kiernan, "A. G. Stephens," in *Australian Literature: 1788-1914*, ed. Selina Samuels, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1978-), 357.

⁶ Kiernan, "A. G. Stephens," 357.

⁷ The magazine measures 14cm by 12cm. The covers varied, but they were dominated by images of readers. Ironically, although the publication was known as the *Bookfellow*, most of the readers pictured on the covers were women, perhaps suggesting the ideal reader Stephens imagined for the magazine.

⁸ Kiernan, "A. G. Stephens," 356-7.

⁹ *Bookfellow*, 31 May 1899, 25.

¹⁰ *Bookfellow*, 31 May 1899, 25.

¹¹ Lawson, 26-27.

¹² All reviews are taken from Stephens' scrapbook held at the Mitchell Library: "A. G. Stephens Papers — Bookfellow Reviews," Mitchell Library MSS 4937/13.

- ¹³ "A. G. Stephens Papers — Bookfellow Reviews," Mitchell Library MSS 4937/13.
- ¹⁴ H. M. Green and Dorothy Green, *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied: A Critical Review of All Forms of Literature Produced in Australia from the First Books Published after the Arrival of the First Fleet until 1950*, Rev. ed. (London ; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984), 793.
- ¹⁵ Issues in this series of the *Bookfellow* were much larger than its predecessor: 34cm by 24cm. Subsequent series would retain the larger size, but were never consistent, probably due to Stephens' use of many printers.
- ¹⁶ Jessie McKay, "A. G. Stephens Papers," Mitchell Library CY 3461 760c.
- ¹⁷ Mary Gilmore, "A. G. Stephens Papers," Mitchell Library CY 3461 761.
- ¹⁸ *Bookfellow*, 2 May 1907, 4.
- ¹⁹ "A. G. Stephens Papers," Mitchell Library CY3461, 18 July 1907.
- ²⁰ *Bookfellow*, 1 June 1912, 149.
- ²¹ Lawson, 52.
- ²² *Bookfellow* (Trade Supplement), 1 January 1912, vii.
- ²³ The following figures are taken from W. H. Wilde, *Courage a Grace: A Biography of Dame Mary Gilmore* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 174-208.
- ²⁴ Lawson, 54.
- ²⁵ John Shaw Neilson and Helen Hewson, *John Shaw Neilson: A Life in Letters* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 2001), 79.
- ²⁶ Lawson, 68. A further indication of Ashton's attitude is found in a letter to Stephens dated 7 March 1914: "As I have no further intention of Subscribing to 'The Bookfellow' or of reading it, I am returning these numbers. Any future copies addressed here I shall put into the waste paper basket" ("A. G. Stephens Papers," Mitchell Library CY3461).
- ²⁷ *Bookfellow*, 15 August 1920, 162.
- ²⁸ Frank C Johnson, "A. G. Stephens Papers," Fryer Library MSS 2/1361b.
- ²⁹ "A. G. Stephens Papers," Fryer Library MSS 2/263.
- ³⁰ Letter from A. G. Stephens to E. A. Vidler, "A. G. Stephens Papers," Fryer Library MSS 2/4035.
- ³¹ Lawson, 86.
- ³² "A. G. Stephens Papers," Mitchell Library MSS 1104/273. Stephens continued to fight for his magazine, planning a syndicate to help pay the printer's bills. Contribution were promised from friends such as J. J. Quinn, John Le Gay Brereton, Perceval Serle and H. M. Green. See "A. G. Stephens Papers," Fryer Library MSS 2/261a.
- ³³ Lawson, 86-87.
- ³⁴ Letter to Stephens from Wallace A Elliot, "A. G. Stephens Papers," Fryer Library MSS 2/880a.