



know the pivotal role that “Rosebud” plays in the classic movie “Citizen Kane.” In the early '80s, movie director Steven Spielberg paid around \$60,000—then the highest figure ever paid for movie memorabilia—for one of the Rosebud sleds that had been used on the set. He said that he would hang it over his typewriter to remind himself of the importance of cinematic quality. Rosebud magazine editor Roderick Clark seems to use the name and essence of “Rosebud” as the catalyst for quality in publishing. In fact, the magazine’s tagline is “For people who enjoy good writing.” And Clark has aimed to deliver on that promise for 15 years.

When Rosebud founder John Lehman first approached Clark, he told him: “Rod, I’ve got a job for you. I want you to help me create a magazine with short stories that will be distributed coast to coast.” “John looks kind of like Hemingway with a dash of P. T. Barnum, and at the time, I thought ‘This man is certifiable,’” says Clark, a freelance writer who worked previously in magazines and small presses. “I knew what he was saying was impossible. But it was as if I were a scientist and somebody had approached me and said ‘I want you to create an anti-gravity machine.’ Once I got over the initial shock,

I wondered...if it were possible, how would it be done? I began to think about what such a literary journal would look like, and that’s how we created the paradox we’ve lived with ever since.”

Clark is ready for revelry this anniversary year. “We plan to celebrate for all of 2009, and we intend to be fairly shameless about it,” he says. “Fifteen is quite a thing for us. We have no parent foundation or university or deep pockets, so essentially, the finances of every single issue ride on

the previous issue, and we have to produce covers of high enough quality that the issue looks great on the shelves of Barnes & Noble and Borders. That’s a big responsibility.”

Visually, Rosebud seems impossibly slick for a literary magazine from such a humble background and homestead in a little 140-year-old farmhouse in Cambridge. The front and back covers are emblazoned with vivid, electric art images. In each issue, the inside back cover, features a sketch by Rick Geary, a notable illustrator whose work has graced the pages of such literary icons as National Lampoon, MAD Magazine and Rolling Stone. Between the covers, the magazine is chock-full of well-crafted tales and poetic expressions, covering every imaginable topic from aliens that resemble Antonio Banderas to Lothario ice trappers. “I really love a great variety of textures in the magazine. I think of a magazine as a quilt, and I like a composition of content that carries a lot of synergy and a lot of contrast,” Clark says. “I like to create an issue that is more than the sum of its parts.”

Rosebud embraces all genres, but the one constant is stellar prose that grips the reader within the first paragraph. “Lots of horror writing is garbage, but so is lots of self-described ‘literary fiction,’” Clark says. “If you want to say fantasy can’t be literature, what do you do with half of Shakespeare? We think writing ought to be judged on its quality, not on its category.”

The result is a magazine that’s stocked in more than 900 bookstores in the United States and Canada and is available in Great Britain and Japan, too.

Along with Geary, Rosebud has managed to attract the attention of many other high-profile writers. Contributors include the likes of horror hero Stephen King, science fiction master Ray Bradbury and feminist science fiction writer Ursula K. LeGuinn. And there have been plenty of unknown writers published in the past 15 years. “We’re the biggest little literary magazine in America,” Clark says.

Located 100 feet into Jefferson County from the Dane County line, Rosebud embraces its Wisconsin roots, publishing a growing number of Wisconsin writers. "The irony is that in our first two years, we sold more issues in New York and California than anywhere else," Clark says. "Over time, we're getting more readers and more submitters in small towns and rural areas. We're regional in the sense that Rosebud believes that literature comes out of people and places, and to that extent, it's nice to be anchored in our own space." WT

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