enough money to finance publication of the entire issue. As a consolation 
prize, contestants typically receive a year’s subscription to the journal, 
another clever editorial tactic that boosts exposure of the magazine. 
If the authors of this book sound skeptical of contests, it’s not because 
we haven’t been on the winning end. Both of us have won contests and 
been pleased when friends and strangers have recognized our accom-
plishment. We simply yearn, unrealistically perhaps, for a publication 
climate that is more communal than individualistic, that acknowledges 
shared achievement as fully as personal triumph. However, as long as 
writers continue to hunger for fame, and as long as editors and publish-
ers (q.v.) at cash-strapped university presses, nonprofit presses, and small 
presses desperately require funds to produce their work, contests are 
likely to remain a staple of the literary landscape.

**Contributor’s Copy**

The contributor’s copy is the coin of the realm in the kingdom of the 
small and literary press. In exchange for the right to publish an author’s 
work, the editors of a vast majority of literary magazines “pay” the author 
with one or more complimentary copies of the magazine. While the 
standard payment is one to three copies, some publishers give their 
contributors up to ten or twenty copies and also provide offprints of the 
author’s piece. (Those journals that aren’t even willing to ante up a single 
contributor’s copy—even if they have legitimate financial reasons for not 
doing so—are generally shunned by writers with established reputations.) 
To many new writers, this situation is a source of grave wonder. They had 
assumed that when they were finally published the financial reward would 
be commensurate with their happiness at seeing their name in print. Alas, 
that is not the case, and the disappointment they feel is likely to be com-
pounded by friends’ and relatives’ astonishment at the paltry compensa-
tion literature receives.

Yet, in a sense, this arrangement is beneficial to all parties. Writers 
have the pleasure of seeing their names in print, and they may attract the 
notice of more influential editors and publishers (q.v). Moreover, the con-
tributor’s copy provides a writer with a window on the literary scene, help-
ing him to assess the current market for his work. The minimal payment
may even seem ironically appropriate. After all, to an author who has
invested a great deal of time, energy, and imagination in a piece of writ-
ing, almost any financial recompense is likely to seem inadequate. The
contributor’s copy is, therefore, merely a fitting symbol of the meager
value the larger world places on serious art.

For publishers, the contributor’s copy is a godsend. It allows them
to indulge in the pleasure and prestige of running a magazine without
having to worry about paying to fill their pages. The major investments
for editors and publishers of print magazines are printing and mail-
ing; for editors of e-zines, the only expenditure is time (see “Electronic
Literature”). Still, one might ask why someone would go to any trouble at
all to produce a magazine when there is no monetary reward. One answer
may be that many editors are also writers themselves, and their journals
allow them to engage in the mutual (if often unspoken) back-scratch-
ing—you publish mine and I’ll publish yours—that has become such a
prominent feature of contemporary literary publishing.

Though contributor’s copies quickly come to seem inevitable to most
literary writers, an important question does arise: How much is literature
of this sort actually worth? While both authors and publishers might argue
that, in a spiritual sense, the answer is “a great deal,” viewed from a financial
perspective one’s response has to be “obviously not much.” Granted, maga-
zines whose sole payment is in contributor’s copies can usually claim to be
more serious than their commercial brethren. Because their modest out-
lays are often covered in part or in full by universities or government fund-
ing agencies, they can focus on publishing work that will be well received
by the literary cognoscenti rather than by the general public. Nevertheless,
authors who are not affiliated with institutions of higher learning and must
earn their living through writing clearly cannot afford to subsist on a diet
of contributor’s copies, and charges that literary magazines have become
effete, out of touch, and self-important are not without merit.

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According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, which was
founded in 1970 to promote worldwide protection of industrial property
and copyrighted materials: