

Blackbird

Justin Hoffman

Editor: Gregory Donovan

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Web Address: <http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/>

What they publish: Fiction, poetry, book and poetry reviews, various non-fiction.

Submission Guidelines: Read between Sept. 15 and April 15 only. Only 3 submissions per period.

Description of Publication: This is an easy to read online magazine. It is published biannually.

Percentage of Prose per Issue: 25%, about 6 stories.

Prose Reviews:

Some Girl by Genanne Walsh is a plain spoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. It is told through a subjective, close-up 1st person point of view. The story is told by a girl who has lost her lover and neighbor, Lance, in the war in Iraq. She tells many memories she has of their growing up and about their families. Their lives were always interconnected. His father dies and something comes between the two families. His mother hates her now. In the end, she comes to the eye of the storm by telling his mother that he is dead.

This story starts out very strong with the line, "His mother couldn't remember my name." which hooks the reader instantly. What keeps them going is that the author leaves much to the reader's imagination in the details of Lance's life: an estranged aunt, a tree called the "Infamous Willow," and how his father's death. These are effective in pulling the reader through the story, but also leave the reader wanting more in the end. It is a strong story that is better the second read, as more details are uncovered.

The Guest by Ahmad Saidullah is a plain spoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. It is told through an objective, far-away 3rd person point of view. Huma is singing strange songs, and her mother believes she is possessed. Her father takes her to a psychiatrist, who says she is just under too much stress. She is 28, too old to marry, but they try anyway. His treatments do not help, and her mother takes her to several different witch doctors. They do not help either. Finally, her mother and a priest beat her spirit guest out of Huma, but in the end she does not improve and she is sent to an asylum.

The story begins with a strong hook, "Huma had gone mad. Or so Mrs. Siddiqui feared." The language brings a lightness to the heavy subject matter and the ending is well crafted. Huma should be cured, at least in the eyes of her family, but that is not the case. She actually suffers more at their foolish notions. The meaning of this story is well hidden in that ending, and crafted to the point that the reader gets it without being beaten with it, like Huma.

Rating: 4. The writing is high quality, intriguing prose. This magazine would be an excellent place to be published. The writing is often of longer pieces, but the authors have all been previously published several places. There are also not very many stories published each year. This would be a good place to try out with a few publications under your belt.

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By Andy Duggan

Editor: Gregory Donovan

October 2005

Website: "<http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu>

What They Publish: Blackbird publishes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

Description of Publication: Bi-annual, easy to read, payment upon publication. Blackbird is an easy to read online journal publishing strong prose from varying age groups.

Submission Guidelines: Blackbird does not read from April 15th to September 15th. They publish bi-annually. Send one piece of prose at a time, or two to six poems at a time. Simultaneous submissions are okay as long as you tell them and notify staff as soon as its being published elsewhere. Primarily interested in prose, short stories, but they do publish personal essays and memoirs. They will publish sections from a novel (a chapter) as long as it's self contained. No multiple submissions of the same genre, short plays, unsolicited book reviews or literary criticism. When submitting by email, include in the subject heading which editor your piece is going to. Type or paste your cover letter in the body of the text and be sure to include contact info in the email. Send email submissions to: transom@vcu.edu. When submitting by mail, it's all standard. A page sized manila envelope, SASE, and make sure to put what editor the piece corresponds to on the envelope. Expect a three to five month reading period. Don't contact until three months have passed. They don't publish previously published work.

Percentage of Prose: They publish four to five fiction pieces per issue pretty consecutively.

Prose Reviews:

Two Lives by Michael Croley. A double edged story. Two stories running simultaneous to each other, one seeming like the actual story, the other seeming like a commentary about how the story came about and how the writer came about, but both are works of fiction. First story is of a man reminiscing about his drunken father, the other about a writer coping with his life in law and in not writing and in home and the beauty of writing.

At first glance *Two Lives* looks like a documentary of itself, but it is anything but. It starts off with story, or at least the story you assume to be story about a man reminiscing about his father. The other is the part that looks clearly non-fictional but is in fact another fabrication weaved in among the structure of the aforementioned story. Taking a closer look at Michael Croley's photograph you realize he's not old enough to have written this non-fictional side of the story as of yet. The structure does many things all of which, I feel, lend to story. It creates a tension in the reader wanting to know both stories, while they run back and forth with each other sometimes crossing paths as well. Croley's use of sensory detail is far more generous than that of his character in the non-fiction break of the story. Croley also does interesting things with the POV and the tenses. Both stories are told in present tense. The non-fictional seeming side of things is told in first person, while the story seeming part is told in the imperative 'you.'

Brothers by Heather Burt. A story about the lives of one family, centered around Rudy, the main character, and the developing relationship between the brother he thought he wanted so badly. A distant third person story teller, almost screenplay in voice.

Burt's story of Rudy's coming to be has all the right elements of a terrific story, but there was this strange distance in the voice, in the way the characters were described, that seemed more objective than heartfelt. To me, it takes away from the emotion of the story. There are a lot of emotions, but I didn't feel them like I wanted to because of the emotionless voice of the narrator. I was stunned by the happenings in this story, the beauty of the prose in spots but flat out turned off by the way it was told. It was too formulaic.

Rating: 6 out of 10. Of the contributors to Blackbird, they range from graduate students, to professors, to established writers. The way Blackbird is presented is in a highbrow manner but it doesn't seem impossible to be published in, and on the whole, I really enjoy the prose they do publish. They don't publish as much prose as some other more emerging writer friendly journals, though at the same time I hold out hope that if you tightened up a story nicely you could be published here.