Our Stories Online (Vol. 1, Issue 3) Reviewer: Matthew John

Editor: Alexis E. Santi April 2007

Web site: http://www.ourstories.us

What they Publish: Fiction

Submission Guidelines: Fiction under 7,000 words using online submission form only. No poetry

Description of Publication: Professional looking online journal, published quarterly. Issues are free online and archives are available indefinitely. Each submission is reviewed and personally responded to by editors with comments and suggestions on how to improve the story so that it will be acceptable for publication.

Percentage of Prose Per Issue: Each issue consists of approximately six stories.

Prose Reviews:

Shoot the Swans by Patti Smith-Jackson is a subjective first person story set in a domestic setting. The narrator – Lisa – is a twenty something woman who begins the story by finding her best friend's father in law sleeping in her bed. Lisa was a bride's maid in her friend's wedding. She hooked up with the bride's stepfather there, but the incident is largely passed over as she then talks about her boyfriend, a Southern Illinois hillbilly nicknamed 'Dub'. Dub likes to spend his time hunting turkeys, and although Lisa is sure that her circle of friends will exile her for consorting with such a low class individual she agrees to go hunting with him. Although the two of them find a turkey in the wilderness, they don't succeed in bringing it down, and retire to Dub's cabin in the woods. Once at the cabin Lisa again thinks about her friends and what they'd think about her boyfriend, while Dub cleans his rifle and calls her pretty.

I've got to say that I was really frustrated by the lack of anything resembling forward motion from this story. Although Smith-Jackson's language, description, and tone are all very captivating, the absence of anything concrete in the story causes the entire event to bog down in its own magnificence. None of the events in the story seem to have a significant impact on the main character, and so they fail to impact the reader as well.

On Earth as it is in Heaven by Jennifer Reimer is a subjective first-person story set in a domestic setting. The narrator, Dana, is teaching his son Isaac to surf. However as the two get closer and closer to the beach Dana recalls his past as a surfer and a lifeguard, and thinks about how dangerous the ocean can be and how much he wants to protect Isaac from it. Dana thinks about a dead girl he had to pull out of the ocean once, and thinks of her dead body in comparison to what Isaac's might look like. In the end Dana and Isaac get into the ocean, and it's Dana that is overwhelmed by a massive wave while Isaac rides it calmly to shore. Dana then recovers from the wave's force, and everyone is happy.

It seems like Reimer went out of her way to ensure this story contained as little dramatic or compelling action as possible. The narrator's internal thoughts seem to drag by as Reimer attempts, unsuccessfully, to infuse a common action like surfing with an undue amount of mortal danger. Then after all this build up, nothing bad happens, and the characters live long and prosperous lives.

Rating: 10 Although I'm very impressed with the amount of effort the editors are willing to go through to encourage aspiring authors, I was very disappointed by the actual story content of the magazine. However, since feedback is an

essential and encouraging part of the submission process I think that any magazine that guarantees you a personalized response based on your story is an automatic success even if they reject you.

Our Stories Reviewer: Katelyn Stanek

Editor: Alexis E. Santi November 2006

Web Address: www.ourstories.us

What They Publish: Short stories, flash fiction and interviews

Submission Guidelines: Writers must submit online using the magazine's submission form. Stories should be 7,000 words or fewer and must not have appeared in any other publication. *Our Stories* accepts submissions year-round. There is no pay for contributing authors. Submit at: http://www.ourstories.us/submit.php.

Description of Magazine: A simple, easily-navigated online literary magazine focusing on "emerging" writers. The submission process is central to the magazine's mission; all submissions will be reviewed carefully and responded to by an editor. Even stories that an author does not want to submit for publication will be looked over by the editorial staff.

Prose Per Issue: The entire magazine is devoted to prose, with the exception of the occasional interview.

Prose Reviews:

Airplanes by Christian McLean is a realistic coming-of-age story told from a first-person point of view. It takes place over the course of one day, in which two teenagers on the cusp of adulthood (an unnamed narrator and Steve) hang out at a local beach. Steve, an airplane aficionado, spends much of his day naming the planes he sees flying overhead instead of going to work. As the lazy day ends, a tropical storm moves in, and the narrator runs through Steve's house, noting all of the cancellations that must have occurred at the airport due to the weather.

The story is plain-spoken, and at first, it seems to have little plot. On the surface, it is an account of one ordinary day in the lives of two unremarkable boys. But as it is written, *Airplanes* is a deep look at the friendship between the narrator and Steve. Its simplicity and unremarkable storyline are actually very endearing, and give the story a unique authenticity.

Just an Old-Fashioned Love Song by Jenny Di Placidi is a poetic, story in second-person that tells of a domestic setting. It follows the trajectory of a relationship between a narrator and her ex-boyfriend from the time she falls in love with him to the time he leaves her. At first, the narrator notes that the relationship is happy, but she soon discovers that the differences between her and her lover are more disturbing than she imagined. Eventually, when she finds out she is pregnant, she tells her boyfriend that he is free to leave her, which he does. In her memory, this event takes place during the winter, as the entire ordeal leaves her feeling cold. But when she is forced to remember it more clearly, she realizes that he left her in July, making her truly mistrust her memory of the entire relationship.

The story moves very quickly, stopping at a few points to dwell on the details of this dysfunctional relationship, but never delivering any traditional "scenes." Instead, it jumps from moment to moment, focusing on the narrator's interpretation of her memories and on her feelings surrounding her past romance. In this way, the piece is successful, as it manages to encapsulate the arch of emotion in the narrator's relationship in very few words.

Rating: 9 out of 10. *Our Stories* features many first-time writers and actively encourages submissions from those who have yet to be published. But even with this liberal submission policy, the stories that appear in this magazine are entertaining and high quality.