

**Blackbird** (Fall 2006)

Reviewer: 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 three submissions per reading 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 plainspoken, realistic story set in a domestic setting. It is told through a subjective, close-up first-person point-of-view. The narrator is a girl who has lost a lover in the war in Iraq, Lance, who was also her neighbor. 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." This is a very strong hook. There is much left 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 died. These are effective in pulling the reader through the story, but leave the reader wanting more in the end also. It is a strong story that will be better the second read, as more details are uncovered.

*The Guest* by Ahmad Saidullah is a plainspoken, realistic story set in a domestic setting. It is told through an objective, distant third-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. They send her to an asylum.

The story begins with a strong hook, "Huma had gone mad. Or so Mrs. Siddiqui feared." This pulls the reader in immediately. The language brings lightness to the feeling that the subject is very heavy. 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, as Huma is.

Rating: 4. The writing is high quality, intriguing prose. This magazine would be an excellent place to be published. The pieces are often longer, and the authors all have several publications to their credit. 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.