

Tattoo Highway, Issue 20, Theme “Detours”

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What they Publish: fiction, poetry, and art

Submission Guidelines: *Tattoo Highway* establishes a theme for every issue although they leave the theme open to the writer’s interpretation. They seek work which is eclectic, fresh, and has meaning beyond the surface of the story. They prefer shorter work which has not been previously published but they do consider longer works and occasionally accept pieces which have been featured in small print journals.

Description of Publication: *Tattoo Highway* is produced twice yearly and is a spectacularly designed online magazine which is of no cost to its readers. Contributors are not required to have been previously published and they host a contest called “A Picture Worth 500 Words” for every issue and the prize is a \$30.00 bookstore gift certificate for the winner in each category.

Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: The magazine was founded in 1998 and every year they produce a Summer/Fall issue and a Winter/Spring issue. The magazine is comprised of 30% fiction, 2% nonfiction, 56% poetry, 2% essays, 8% art, 1% translation, and 1% video.

Prose Reviews:

See My Hands by Dianne McKnight is a plainspoken, first person narrative set in a realistic and domestic setting. A young woman stands in the wine aisle at the grocery store contemplating the fancy champagne and their outrageous prices when she notices a frail, elderly woman staring at the hundreds of bottles of wine in utter despair. The elderly woman walks up to the narrator and holds out her withered hands which have been deformed by age and the old woman she needs a wine bottle in her price range with a screw top. The narrator, though just customer, pleases the old woman with her selection of an economy sized bottle of Merlot and watches the old woman pay and exit the store.

The piece is an emotional rumination on aging, and treasuring the simple routines as time works its evil magic on the human body. The story is raked with sensory details of the elderly woman’s body such as, “...knuckles, looked like the walnut halves inside the plastic wrap,” and “her shoulders looked as fragile as the wings of the white moths I’d seen the day before fluttering like snow over moss in the woods.” The contrast in age between the two characters is central to the story’s forward motion because they are both patient women who need something from the other. The elderly woman needed assistance with her wine purchase while the young woman happened to stop out of kindness which escalated to an observation and profound reflection by the young woman on the subject of the aging condition and its relationship to happiness.

Across the River by Kenneth Radu is a plainspoken, realistic, and subjective story told in a third person narrative in an exotic setting. Sam, a thirty-eight year old police station janitor, stands on a river bank staring from a distance at riots, gunfire, and blazes downtown Detroit, Michigan. As he watches the city burn, he reflects on his latest failed relationship and how he regrets his actions. Ruby, a Ford factory worker, had been his girlfriend for two years and they had even talked about marriage but one night she was late coming home from the factory and Sam slept with Ruby’s sister Loretta. Ruby walked in on the two of them after the deed was done, pulled a gun from her

dresser, pointed it at Sam and told him if she ever saw him again she would kill him. Ruby's apartment is downtown Detroit where Sam is watching the riots. He assumes she is shooting her gun out the window and he knows if he were to stand below her window, she would most definitely shoot him.

Against a literal backdrop of destruction, the story is a fascinating tale of failure, insolence, and regret. Sam is a middle aged janitor who understands his lot in life has been cast and his chances at finding someone to accompany him to death are slim. Ruby was the one person who could tolerate him and he went ahead and destroyed his future well-being in addition to betraying Ruby. Radu's successfully pulls off his metaphorical alignment of Detroit burning as Sam's life is engulfed in flames because of the level of information he offers about Sam and the circumstances which led him to destruction. His prose is impeccably detailed, carefully constructed, and teeming with imagery. As Sam stands on the bank he notes, "Grey and purple smoke rose higher than the skyscrapers, billowing between blocks and wafting into Canadian nostrils." In one sentence the reader sees the colors of the smoke and flame, the overwhelming magnitude of the situation, all whilst being geographically rooted in the scene. The pacing of the story slows as he reflects and watches Detroit burn and sped up as he relays his downward spiral. The story captures the 'oh shit' moment that we all experience when we realize how badly we've hurt ourselves and the people we love.

Rating: #8- *Tattoo Highway* is an excellent online publication which has flourished over the last twelve years. It features an array of styles with a full-flavored literary palate. This journal would be a good choice for the submissions of emerging writers.