

34th Parallel (Issue 5, January 2009)

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Editors: Martin Chipperfield and Trace Sheridan

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Web Address: www.34thparallel.net

What They Publish: Short stories and poetry from emerging artists.

Submission Guidelines: E-mail submissions only. Fiction of 1,500-3,500 words (1,500 max for online publication), one poem at a time. Paste submission in the body of the e-mail or attach as .rtf, .txt., or .doc. Simultaneous submissions accepted and should be marked as such. No previously published work.

Description of Publication: A quarterly print and online publication focusing on emerging writers. Open to all genres, they look for work that's "written well that communicates a sense of wonder, reality, tragedy, fantasy and or brilliance." The magazine is available in color or black and white, and includes interviews with publishers and agents in addition to fiction, poetry, and art. Online edition features different content than print editions; a second piece is often solicited from accepted authors.

Prose Per Issue: 50-75%, 15 pieces per issue.

Prose Reviews:

I Think I'll Call You Mister by Sam Palcko is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting told in the third person. A substitute art teacher talks to a student whom he only taught once at a café. She shares with him intimate, unbelievable details about her life before accusing him of thinking she's crazy. In a flashback, it's revealed that the narrator, Jeff, had been warned about Jodi having "an overactive imagination." After a lot of Jeff's internal monologue, he says to Jodi that she should, "settle down." Jodi's father arrives abruptly, and she kisses her former substitute on the cheek before getting into the car, telling her father that Jeff's "just some guy I met at a party last weekend."

Sam Palcko admits in his included biography that this is not only his first publication, but also the first time he'd submitted anything—he's a former history major. The holes in this story would speak to this if his bio didn't. What do these people look like? What does the space look like (I didn't know they were outside until the end.)? How did Jeff happen upon his former student at this café and why did he sit down with her? Even if the reader is to assume Jodi is a needy liar, how does the author explain and/or justify Jeff's behavior? And a pretty, yet vague bow on the end of a rambling piece without any action does not a story make. After reading this, I'm not sure what I was supposed to come away with; I suspect the author isn't sure either.

The Last Stall on the Left by Valerie Z. Lewis is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting, told in the first person. A young girl (age is never explicit; we know she is not old enough to buy cigarettes) is doing cocaine for the first time in the bathroom of an all-ages club with a new friend, Jenny, who she only met a few days prior. After losing her virginity two weeks ago, the narrator has had a change in attitude, evidenced by hanging out with this new girl (whom her friends don't like) and doing drugs. As the narrator tells Jenny about how she's been hurt by the boy, pretending she doesn't care, she breaks down and begins to cry, upset that he's the last person she kissed. Here, Jenny leans in and kisses the narrator, which is surprising, but enjoyable—a sweet, quiet moment—so the narrator can feel better.

This piece is an example of the other kind of work this magazine offers: work from writers who've published previously. Lewis not only has previous publishing credits, but she is also a writing teacher at a NYC community college. While this piece is obviously about coming of age, finding one's self, "high school stuff," the author doesn't saturate the work with melodrama or teenage clichés. The narrative voice is young and innocent, perfect for the narrator and clearly not just the author's own. The appearance of drug use in the piece doesn't come off as shocking for the sake of being so, it just reinforces the fact that the narrator is going through changes. The story is complete within itself and doesn't leave a lot of loose ends and questions (unlike the previous piece).

Rating: 8. This young journal (it's only 5 issues along) prides itself on being run by two writers who understand how hard it is for emerging talent to break into publication. They also want 34th Parallel to become an institution of excellence, a place one would be proud to be published. However, the prose writing represented (at least in issue 5) is clearly divided between well-written pieces by mildly seasoned writers and chaff. It's my hunch that the editors are making too great an effort to represent several unpublished writers in each edition simply by virtue of being unpublished.