

Black Clock

Issue 10: Spring/Summer 2009

Editor: Steve EricksonWeb Address: www.blackclock.orgWhat They Publish: fiction, poetry, and creative essays

Submission Guidelines: *Black Clock* prefers writing that “is audacious rather than safe, visceral rather than academic, intellectually engaging rather than antiseptically cerebral, and not above fun.” One submission per reading period, submitted electronically. Manuscripts should be sent as attached, double-spaced Word documents with name, address, phone number, and e-mail on the first page. Reading the magazine before submitting is highly recommended.

Description of Publication: Striking dossier published in print twice a year by the California Institute of the Arts. The topic of Issue 10 is Twenty-First Century Noir, and contains work by both widely-published and emerging writers, as well as edgy artwork and a list of seventy “Essential Noir” items. Most published works are either short stories or excerpts from novels.

Prose Per Issue: 85% prose; Issue 10 contains 17 stories and 3 poems.

Prose Reviews:

The Double-Goer by Howard A. Rodman is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting, told in the third person. Ahab’s (it seems to be Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick*) landlord, Cowling, is trying to collect the ship captain’s overdue rent, and Ahab tells Cowling that they must go collect his large bank draught from the Customs House. On their way back, the two men come across a Polish immigrant, Adnopoz, in possession of a rare gold coin. Adnopoz is actually Ahab’s partner in crime, and helps Ahab conduct an elaborate scheme to rob Cowling. Ahab then bids adieu to his partner and goes out to find himself a prostitute. Through his reflections on his past, we learn that he is not Captain Ahab, but that he made his living for years playing the part of the legendary character in a stage show. The show was famous, but went under when a diligent reviewer pointed out that the real Captain Ahab was missing his right leg, whereas the Ahab doing the stage production was missing his left. Ahab’s prostitute saw the show once and loved it, and she has very passionate, intimate sex with him. But before orgasm, a large, spectral man dressed in a long, black coat bursts into the room and beats Ahab to death with his own fake leg. As the murderer leaves, the prostitute notices that he has the same gait as her now-dead customer, but that instead of planting with right and dragging the left, the large man does the opposite. This man, the real Ahab, then runs to a jetty and takes a skiff home to his ship.

This story has a little bit of everything, and turns brilliantly on deception. The crucial ruse in the story is executed from the very beginning, as Rodman tricks his readers into thinking his story is a modern day continuation of *Moby Dick*. The real genius of the story however, lies in how Rodman peppers that overarching dishonesty with several smaller, intertwining plotlines in order to create an entire world of deception that highlights the fraudulent Ahab’s trickery, so when the real Captain Ahab appears, his violent retribution is that much sweeter for everyone involved.

Daniel Duffy

November 2009

Farewell, My Zombie by Francesca Lia Block is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting, told in the first person. Jan Merritt, is a self-employed private investigator misses her son, Max. One day, a girl named Coco Hart comes into the office, and says she came to Jane because her father is a zombie, and she saw Jane in an interview where she said her son was taken by zombies. Coco's dad came back from the hospital after his stroke walking stiff and shuffling about, and he had greenish skin and didn't have a pulse. She also thought he was eating human flesh. Jane goes to visit Coco's Republican dad at his car dealership, and agrees with Coco that her father is a zombie, just like Jane's ex-husband's new wife, Kimmy, is a zombie, and John McCain and Sarah Palin are zombies. We find out that Jane is not really a private investigator, but that her ex-husband, Daniel, rented the office for her to give her something to do after Max died, "kind of like playing office when you're a kid." Coco eventually asks Jane about her son, and Jane says, "Everyone thought it was a brain tumor, but it wasn't like that. It wasn't like that at all. They wanted him, and they got him." Then Coco asks, "Do you think, maybe, you just might not want to look at what really happened?" and Jane freaks out, telling her to leave. Jane later apologizes, though, and admits she may be wrong about everything. She says, "If any zombie, or cancer, or whatever you want to call it, threatens Coco or any kids I know, I am going to kick that motherfucker zombie's ass."

This story is more about dealing with loss than anything else, and it accomplishes the conveyance of that debilitating feeling quite well. Through Jane's comments about the people she feels are zombies, the reader gets the sense that, after Max died, Jane came to blame his death on everything wrong with the world, be it war, environmental degradation, unequal rights, or faulty health care. For Jane, all of those issues boiled down over time to become a single, imaginary thing: the zombie. In Coco, Jane has found a person to relate to, and through Coco, it is possible that Jane has finally snapped out of her delirium, and found herself able to say "Farewell."

Rating: 7. *Black Clock* publishes some heavy hitters, but as a predominantly student-run magazine, they remain strongly committed to emerging writers, and publish several in each issue.