

Matrix Magazine

Issue 83: Summer 2009

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Web Address: www.matrixmagazine.org

What They Publish: fiction, essays, poetry, and reviews

Submission Guidelines: Consult the submissions page on the Web site to note the topic of the upcoming dossier and to see a list of possible themes that you may want to engage with your submission. Manuscripts of up to 3,000 words should be sent as attached documents to the e-mail address of the upcoming issue by the appropriate deadline, both of which are also available on the submissions page of the Web site.

Description of Publication: Hip dossier published in print three times a year out of Montreal. The topic of Issue 83 is *Les Enfants du Terrible* ("The Children of Terror"), and contains work by both widely-published and emerging fiction writers, as well as poetry, artwork, an interview, a libretto, a recipe for a cannibal, a comic strip, and several book reviews. Most published stories are edgy in terms of both subject matter and execution, with a few of them bordering on experimental.

Prose Per Issue: About one-third fiction; Issue 83 contains 8 stories.

Prose Reviews:

Rivertown by Steinar Bragi is a plainspoken, experimental story in a domestic setting. The first person narrator is a kid, wandering through what seems like a post-apocalyptic scene after a carnival has left town. Adults are lying on the ground everywhere either asleep or staring at the sky mumbling, and all around it is quiet "like the district is waiting for something." The narrator sits in a tube on a playground, and sees that outside the tube, in the gravel, a man is passed out holding a black bottle. Embedded in the cork of the bottle is a tiny golden goblet "like sea-pirates drink from," which the narrator thinks will fit perfectly into his dollhouse. The narrator plucks the goblet out of the cork, then starts wandering around again, looking for more black bottles with goblet corks. He finds several, and also becomes friends with a girl who is wandering around looking for cigarettes and stubs for smoking. The two of them wander around and smoke together, but the narrator isn't much of a smoker. As they sit by the lagoon and the girl throws rocks at a big fish in the water, scaring it, the narrator's head starts spinning and he has a bunch of weird thoughts about "the fish, sea monsters, and pirate ships." Then he vomits and closes his eyes, and when he wakes up he's inside his dollhouse with the girl, and they "talk and try to organize something and drink from the goblets."

Though this story is definitely experimental in that it reads like a dream, it still plays out as a complete movement and comes to a full resolution at the end. Bragi manages to convey a whole range of childhood psychology and emotional angst using only a single page of prose, which is actually quite impressive. The narrator finding that he can't handle all of the cigarette smoking and essentially passing out serves as an excellent, albeit a radically surreal, passage to a future of sorts, where he and his new girlfriend are now living in a dollhouse together, doing things that adults supposedly do. Bragi's story is strange and unsettling, yet it has an absurd charm to it all.

Gutted by Matthew J. Trafford is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting. The first person narrator is a young boy whose abusive and impatient father takes him out to his shack on the beach to show him

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something. The narrator's father "was always trying to create the thing that would get him into the history books, show everybody that James Merrigan was more than they thought he was," and this time the father has caught himself a mermaid and wants to open her up to "see what makes her tick." The narrator is awestruck by the dead mermaid's beauty, and wants only to kiss her and pass his hand over her breasts, "the skin cool and slightly mottled like the outside of an egg." He starts to dream about her, and absolutely cannot believe that his father has started butchering her, cutting up her beautiful body to gawk dumbly at her insides. By the time the "big day" comes around and the father has some men coming out from the university to see the mermaid (which he has by then butchered), the narrator can't stand it. He lies in bed and thinks about how the scientists will laugh at his father "and the mess he made," then take the mermaid away to "cut her into many more pieces, stare at her under microscopes, and fill their vials with her blood." The narrator sneaks out to the shack in the night, kisses the mermaid's dead lips goodbye, douses the shack in gasoline, and lights it.

Stafford's story has excellent movement from start to finish, with the fate of an already deceased mermaid, who a boy only wishes to save from his father hanging in the balance for the entirety of the piece. The mermaid seems to represent a sort of beauty and innocence to the boy that he may also see in his mother, who, though she is in the house, is absent from the story except for when the boy speaks of how he would incur his father's wrath if he woke her up on their way out to the shack. The end of this harrowing tale is made even more poignant by the way Stafford uses a flashback early on to further illuminate the boy's history with his abusive and impatient father, and also by the way that the narrator's mother makes her only fully realized appearance in the tale when she puts her hand on the narrator's shoulder as he is putting on his boots to go out and light the shack on fire. More than a story about a mermaid, Stafford's is a story about a dysfunctional family struggling to relate to one another.

Rating: 7. Though it seems a bit difficult to keep up with the type of submissions that *Matrix Magazine* hopes to receive on an issue to issue basis, the magazine always ends up chock full of wonderful prose, much of which is submitted by emerging writers from all over the United States and Canada.