

**Open City** Issue 24, Winter 2007-2008

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What They Publish: Fiction, poetry, photo essays, art, and translations by a variety of emerging and established writers.

Submission Guidelines: One story, or novel excerpt at a time, up to 5,000 words, simultaneous submissions accepted. The reading period is from Sept. 1 to May 31. The rate of unsolicited work published is 1 percent.

Description of Publication: A bound paperback book with a very contemporary look inside. Runs a lot of ads that take up the first 20 pages of the publication. It is a biannual publication run from a New York City bookstore with a huge list of donors. Open City is also an independent press that publishes novels and other books. It is easy to see they have money backing their journal.

Percentage of Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: 55.5 percent prose, or 10 pieces.

Prose Reviews:

*The Breather* by Jeff Johnson is a plainspoken story in a domestic setting told in the first person. The narrator is a man who tells about his obsession with breathing into “Intoxalocks”—a vehicle ignition system that will only start the car unless the driver’s breath is clean of alcohol. He goes around breathing into these contraptions and following his “accounts,” as he likes to call them, to the accidents that their drunken driving will ultimately get them into. The memorable names are of course the Admiral—who runs a pontoon boat into a dock at night filled with a bunch of cub scouts; Sergeant Sucrets who comfortably slams into a curb; and Trighe, a man who massacres an opposing car, then hides the remains in his backseat next to a babysitter he had to drive home. But the car won’t start, and we’re left with the narrator exiting his car to either breathe into the tube, or flag down the nearest cop.

The story is well-written. I want to gush on how I was entranced by the description of all of the drunken men, but even more is the deliberate stylistic choices of the author. For instance, in the last scene, the author pauses before the horrible crash, then picks back up at the narrator watching Trighe looking at the blood in the other vehicle. But more so, the comedy was so sadistically funny. The author pulled this off by the dialogue in the beginning about what cub scouts are doing on a dock at night, and he began to justify running into the dock as an “intervention of child penis tugging.” Each character was described with an economy of detail: “So here’s Trighe: forty-ish, confident but hapless. Brown hair—what’s left of it—blown dry.”

*Loss Prevention* by James Hannaham, is a plainspoken story in a domestic setting told in the third person. The narrator is named Art, a lonely man who lost his sister Angie—he left her at a nightclub with a strange woman and the next day she was found murdered. His family blames him and his alcoholism for her death, but Art’s Aunt Virginia talks to him on the phone. At the story’s opening, Art has turned over a new leaf and is working as a security guard at a place called Lamberts. On his first day he meets another agent named Gunsel, a former cop with a mental ailment that limits him to speaking in the third person. Further into the narrative we find that Lamberts is on the verge of closing, and has a horrible “roach” problem—a term to describe shoplifters. Art keeps Aunt Virginia on her feet by floating her money here and there, and she hopes to get a job at Lamberts, but when that doesn’t happen, she stops talking to Art. The next day she and her whole family appear, stealing things from Lamberts, and

get Gungel fired. But wracked by guilt, she brings the stolen merchandise back. While there, Gungel comes back wanting to reclaim his respect. Aunt Virginia she stabs him in the eye and runs away, leaving Art in the middle of the parking lot with nowhere to turn.

This piece covers a lot of ground in just seventeen pages. But the author gives us enough back-story to set the motives of Art, and his struggle to get back on his feet. This is done through the beginning pages, where we get quick slivers of images like him, “penniless, and pass[ing] out at the front door in the snow.” The story is a great example of showing versus telling—instead of the author telling how Virginia only uses Art for money and a job lead, he instead makes a little scene where Virginia, on a recent visit, would stop by to see if the Human Resources Coordinator had mentioned her interview (and of course she didn’t, as Lamberts is closing), and all this in under a page. The structure of the story reminds me of Chekov’s “Slice of Life;” we enter in the middle of a story already in motion, and end at a possible beginning of another.

Rating: 3. Even though this issue has two writers who just published their first story, the CLMP book tells us only 1% of unsolicited work gets published each year. Heart-breaking for emerging writers, however, I would suggest a subscription or perhaps a quick perusal of their website, because this is a top-notch literary journal that has been running for ten years and seems to be here to stay.