

Oxford American (Issue 55)

Reviewer: Jeffrey Brennan

Editor: Marc Smirnoff

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Website: www.oxfordamericanmag.com

What They Publish: Fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, essays, and comics

Submission Guidelines: Material must be from and/or about the South. Standard Formatting (SASE required).

Please include your pay scale for each piece.

Description of Publication: Southern based literary magazine, publishing a very well-designed magazine on the quarterly for almost a decade. Features very accomplished contributors, most of whom have published novels (yes, plural).

Percentage of Prose Per Issue / Amount of Prose Published Annually: 45% / 16 stories a year.

Prose Reviews:

A Fable with Slips of White Paper Spilling from the Pockets by Kevin Brockmeier is a plainspoken, magical realistic story in a domestic setting. The piece is a distant third-person narrative that tells the story of a man who finds God's overcoat in a second hand store. He buys it, and shortly thereafter finds little slips of paper in the pockets. The slips have short pleadings written on them, and the man notices that he is able to tell who they come from by mere proximity. This goes on for weeks, until one day, he sees God lounging at a hotel pool and tells him to take the coat back, but God refuses. Eventually the man grows attached to the coat and enjoys an increased bond with his fellow man. In the end, he accidentally leaves it in a coffee shop and it later winds up generating fortunes in a Chinese food restaurant.

I think this story thought it was a lot deeper than it actually was. For all the posturing at hints of a universal connectedness, it is nothing below its surface. This "fable" has the same far-away, detached narrative voice expected of the style, but it doesn't even offer a comment on life, let alone a lesson. I was disappointed in the read throughout, as it rambled its way to an inconsequential and unfunny ending.

Surrender by Jill McCorkle is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. It is told through a close, third-person narrator, and is about Rose, a woman dealing with the loss of her son and forging a relationship with the wife and toddler he left behind. Rose doesn't care much for either of them, and thinks her son could have done better. The story focuses on an afternoon in which Rose is left alone with her granddaughter who relentlessly draws her grandmother's "nursers" and "front door." Rose is appalled by the lewd portraits and reflects on her son, thinking that he never behaved that way. The mother arrives and sees that her daughter is wearing out Rose, so she says she'll take her away. The mother is upset, because her husband had told her what a good mom Rose had been to him, but she is intolerant with her granddaughter. Rose realizes the way her behavior is hurting them, and asks them to stay.

Summarizing this story doesn't do it justice. The emotional level it reaches without telling you what to feel is astonishing. This is a story about grief, told through inaccurate memory, misplaced anger and unrealistic expectations. Rose doesn't hate her daughter-in-law or her grandchild, but her rejection of them is a reaction to her son's death, and ultimately, accepting them is also accepting her loss. Great piece; one that gives everything on the surface to tell what's going on underneath.

Rating: 4. With only three to four stories an issue, and the fact that they're written by established, experienced authors, I can only give this publication a 4. New writers, especially those from the South, have this to aspire to, but I would consider it somewhat unrealistic to think of it as a career starter.