

The Handshake (Fall 2011, Issue #2)

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November 2011

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What They Publish: short fiction, interviews, conversations, experimental essays, road trips in photographs

Submission Guidelines: Will accept conversations and interviews of 5,000-8,000 words, experimental essays and fiction of 2,000-5,000 words, and essays of 36-48 photographs each accompanied by a short narrative. Essays must be a vibrant work of writing that is based on experience as opposed to authority or conjecture. Photographic essays must be shot on the road, either in transit or after arriving at a specific destination. Query the editors as well concerning ideas for future nonfiction projects and blog posts.

Description of Publication: A tri-annual print publication centered on cultural experiences and innovations procured from the Chicago area. All of the essays and interviews have a foundation in Chicago life and its artistic inspiration in musicians, artists, photographers, and writers. Their mission is to resurrect the New Journalism that captured the American readership back in the 1960s. An online publication features fiction, essays, and interviews along with video interviews with working class folks (in tribute to Studs Terkel) and blog posts by guest writers.

Prose Per Issue: Each print issue of The Handshake contains one conversation between two artists, writers, comedians, or musicians; one interview with a cultural icon of sorts; one experimental essay (in tribute to David Foster Wallace); one short story by either a well-established or emerging author; and one road trip in photographs (in tribute to Hunter Thompson).

Prose Review:

Plans by Lindsay Hunter is a plainspoken, realistic short story set in a domestic setting. The unnamed teen narrator gives retrospective accounts beginning with the time when she kissed her workshop teacher. She describes her teacher's desire for her and how he was able to restrain himself. Not caring one bit about her teacher's reaction, the narrator continues to recount other moments of serendipitous moments: stealing a coral lipstick from a grocery store, how she wore it the night she had sex with a boy and then gifting it to her mother afterwards. Finally, she recalls one night she snuck out of her house to meet a boy. The boy was going out with a friend of the narrator's, but that didn't matter to her. Parked along a dirt road, making out, he called her a bitch, and although she didn't want to accept this name he had given her she gives herself to him anyway.

The simplicity of the story and the narrator's uneducated vernacular depicts a believable portrait of a teenage girl lacking direction in all aspects of her life. The narrative flows without any transition between accounts being recalled. From the opening line, "I kissed a teacher once," captured my attention right away. Each successive story begins just as abruptly: "I stole a coral lipstick from the grocery store," and "I went over to a boy's house one night when my momma had the TV on." Her apathetic tone towards her deviant behavior adds to the intrigue of her character, making it an interesting read.

Trial Cycle by Oliver Hunt is a personal essay written for a general audience. Addressing the reader directly with the second person point of view, Oliver gives us an inside look at the life of being a pedicabber in Chicago, a profession he has held for the past four years. A pedicabber is essentially a person who pedals a three-wheeled passenger vehicle around the city, much like a typical cab driver. Throughout the essay, he argues that there has been an increase in the number of pedicabbers in the city, which is leading toward an "all-out taxi war." He goes on to describe how difficult pricing can be with so much competition congested in one city. A few pedicabbers work on tips alone, hoping their riders will have the courtesy to pay an honest amount of money for the service. In his ideal world, a fair rate would be agreed upon for all pedicabbers, such is the case in cities like Kansas City "where the fare is two bucks per block." On the flip side, he argues that tight regulation and route control could take away from the appeal of pedicabbing. If some get cut, who is to say who can keep their place in the business, and who gets turned down? This is one of many questions he poses regarding the future of pedicabbing in Chicago.

What I found so appealing about this essay is that not only did I learn what pedicabbing is, but I also learned that there are so many political and cultural dilemmas currently circulating around the business. Originally, I thought, "So what, it's only pedicabbing. Who cares about such a seemingly unimportant occupation?" But when you read this article, you get an in-depth viewpoint from someone who loves the "art" of pedicabbing, the freedom it provides, the stories shared between driver and passenger. His lyrical language describing this graceful form of travel is rather endearing. "You feel the rise and drop," he writes. "You take in the sky, streets and air completely. Everything surrounds you. You feel the weight of the people you're pulling as they experience it with you. There's a transaction that goes beyond the money . . . a shared awe in the giant diorama you're rolling through." His passion for this profession and its small significance is heart-felt and informative.

Rating: 8. The Handshake publishes both experienced and emerging writers. Their cutting-edge style and originality is both inspiring and appealing to contributors and readers alike. The writing is engaging and the style is free of constrictive conformity.