

**Tin House** (spring 2008)

Reviewer: Ryan Sabin

Editor: Win McCormack

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Web Address: [www.tinhouse.com](http://www.tinhouse.com)

What They Publish: Fiction, Poetry, Essays, Interviews, Book Reviews, Recipes.

Submission Guidelines: Submit one story or essay at a time, 10,000 word limit, to Tin House, PO Box 10500, Portland, OR 97210. Include a SASE. No electronic submissions. Include page number and name on each page, the word “end” on final page. Cover letter should have word count, what type of submission (fiction, essay, ect).

Simultaneous submissions accepted, inform immediately if accepted elsewhere. Only unpublished work. Reading for unsolicited work is September 1 to May 31. Work should relate to next issue’s theme—check website.

Description of Publication: Tin House is a quarterly literary magazine that comes out the first week of December, March, June, and September. It is a high quality bound journal beautifully put together, well designed inside and on the cover with pictures, art, borders and various fonts. It contains an eclectic mix of fiction, poetry, essays, and other random material such as recipes that are told as how to stories. Each issue focuses on a theme: the current issue’s is OFF THE GRID, dealing with things outside of the mainstream, with people and situations on the edge. They have a new voices section that publishes a story or poem from an emerging writer.

Prose Per Issue: About 20%, with six actual fiction stories, but counting essays as creative nonfiction and the recipe as a story, it brings the percentage up to 33%.

Prose Review:

*At the Broken Ridge* by Ron Carlson is a plainspoken first person story set in a realistic setting. A husband and wife have built a time machine, and they’ve traveled back in time. But they can only go back in the town they live in, and they can’t change the past. They realize that mankind isn’t ready for time travel and decide to destroy the machine and their research, but instead they encode their research and the husband memorizes half and the wife the other. They move onto their next project: studying continental drift. They head out early in the morning to Broken Ridge, an escarpment outside of town. While driving they discuss time travel, wondering if it’s better to see each other’s past or tell the stories to one another. They decide they like the stories better. They hike up the trail to Broken Ridge, and the pinewoods around them are quiet and empty. They walk along a creek to the cliff face and Lorraine spots clothes lying on a log in the woods; they head in the opposite direction. They reach the top of the ridge, stopping to have lunch. Lorraine asks her husband if he still remembers the code. He says he’s replaced it with a song, and he hums it for her, but he can’t hum, and she says he hasn’t replaced the code with that. They both know they want to still travel through time, and the husband thinks about how it would be nice to come back to this day. He asks his wife if she’d like to make love up on the ridge. It ends with her leading him off into the woods, speaking his name, Ron, for the first time in the story.

The story is put together by many simple sentences, such as “The chips were salty and tasted very good.” It gives the story a certain feeling, a sense of the quiet town in which these two characters live, the empty ridge they travel to. Carlson uses the plural first person many times, letting us know how alike these two characters are in their thoughts and actions. At the same time, they do have separate identities. The dialogue is natural and expresses the characters’ personalities. Being first person, we get more of a sight of the wife than of the husband. He knows his

wife so well he can tell what she's thinking. It seems like the story is being told just to each other, as if we are peeking in at their private lives. Most description is of scene and action, and the characters are defined more by these than by any physical characteristics. I particularly liked when the wife quietly put her hand on her husband's arm and pointed to the clothes in the woods. There's a connection between continental drift and time travel: continental drift has changed the face of the earth, but the husband and wife can't change the past. It's interesting that we don't know the husband's name till the end. I wonder if I think the story is more clever than it actually is.

*Intermodal* by Baird Harper is a plainspoken first person story set in a realistic setting. The narrator spends his Friday evenings with his father, who's been kicked out of the house by his mother. He shows up in his old Dodge Diplomat with a velvet picture of Jim Morrison in the backseat, and takes his son back to the portable freight container he's converted into a "bachelor pad" in the old shipping yards in Chicago. The overseer, a self-mutilator the father derisively refers to as the German, lets him stay there and siphon off heat and electricity from his guardhouse. The son isn't allowed to tell his mother his father is living there. They fix the place up a bit, the father trading part of his car for a hot plate, a lamp, and other old things from a pawnshop. The German wants the father to pay monthly rent, but the father tells his son he's moving back in with his mother and him soon. Asking about her, he finds out that she's out to dinner with another man. He's upset and wants to go find them, but his car won't start. The German comes by again, asking for the monthly rent, and the father beats him up. They end up sitting by the river, the father defeated, apologizing to the German. Next week, his father disappears, sending postcards from far away places like Yosemite, but postmarked in Illinois. The son goes back to the shipping yard, but everything is gone.

The father is the main character of the story, seen through his son's eyes. Harper uses dialogue and action to effectively portray this odd character. From the things he tells his son—such as lying to women, and that real men hide their pain—we get a sense of who this man is. I love the sight of them leaving the pawnshop, the father stealing the lightbulb from the sign for his new lamp, yelling as he twists it because it's so hot. His car, his living space, the way he cons the pawnshop owner: all this adds to his character. Despite this image of everything being okay, if not a little weird, things fall apart in the end when the father realizes that he won't get back into the house, that his wife has left him for good this time. It's dramatic with the fight, yet simple with the father saying, "Do you know how many Indian restaurants there are in this city?" It's all done through the dialogue and the action.

Rating: 3 The quality of the prose is high, and they publish only four times a year. Most of the writers have many credits to their names. Even the emerging writer has been published before. Also, the work has to match their theme, adding to the difficulty. This is a worthy goal for down the road.