

Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet (Issue 25, May 2010)

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What they Publish: Short fiction, non-fiction, poetry, even a comic here and there. They are proud to publish at least two emerging writers per issue.

Submission Guidelines: Snail mail submissions only; email is strictly verboten. They do not accept multiple submissions, or simultaneous submissions, so limit yourself to one piece. Their response time is six months, so be patient. (If you haven't heard by then, get in touch and they'll get right back to you.) For fiction, their tastes tend to run speculative, but that does not mean they won't consider pieces that aren't easily categorized. No gore, porn or sword 'n' sorcery welcome, so if you've got a piece about Zombie Merlin makin' it with Morgana LeFay, look elsewhere. They recommend at least one rewrite, and would like submission in 12 pt Courier, double-spaced with numbered pages.

Description of Publication: The booklet itself is cheap; thick paper cover stapled over regulation paper. The aesthetics, however, are lovely: two column text blocks are broken up by the occasional comic, and in an amusing twist, tasteful little ads for novels and bookshops with graphics that make the book feel oddly warm and DIY. The works are all over the map, but fit the loose description of "speculative fiction." The work is a nice mix of heavy and light, with a certain askew loopiness pervading all the fiction. The pieces range from flash fiction to longer pieces, pages in length. The site is well organized, with each back issue broken down by stories and author bios. No excerpts, though; buy the book or nothing.

Prose Per Issue/ Amount of Published Annually: 11 this issue; 22 in 2008 (2009 year seems to be an aberration, with only one book containing nine stories.)

Prose Reviews:

This is Not Concrete by Ben Francisco is a third person tale, plainspoken and steeped in magical realism. The story focuses on Theresa, a college student on her summer break who is traveling with her stern, taciturn father Gregor, across the country on the hunt for The Concrete Man, a large dapper gentleman decked out in a black suit and bowler hat, replete with umbrella as cane. The pair are chasing him for divergent purposes: Gregor to avenge the death of his wife and child at the hands of The Concrete Man, Theresa to get her life and father back. Did I mention they're tracking him via Theresa's precognitive abilities and planning to kill him with an antique cannon bolted in the back of their van? The tale ends on a dispiriting note, however, with Gregor incapacitated and Theresa essentially alone, watching the Concrete Man recede slowly into a parking lot before noting, glumly, "There is more concrete in the world than there is of any substance made by man." Ouch.

Concrete is one hell of a story. For a magic realism tale, author Francisco really plays the story straight. The most ridiculous twists and turns the narrative take are played absolutely somberly, with nary a smile or wink to be found. This is a story where a nearly silent father and his psychic daughter attempt to kill a living statue with a cannon, yet stay at a Super-8 Motel and smoke Camel Lights. Despite this,

though, the reader is never knocked out of the narrative. This *Concrete* has a slow, sad pull to it, dragging the reader ever deeper into darker and colder places, like an Arctic undertow.

The descriptions are vivid and terse. The Concrete Man, for instance, is precisely what he sounds like; a slim man seemingly made of concrete. Quoth Theresa, “If you glanced at him quickly, he’d look like any ordinary man, but hairless and with an unusually pale complexion. It’s only when you look at him closely that you notice the grainy texture of his skin, like the rough face of a cinderblock.”

On the other hand, *The Famous Detective and His Telepathy Goggles* by Sean Adams is delightfully goofy. It is first person, plain spoken, steeped in magic realism, flash fiction and seriously deranged. Meet The Famous Detective, a man...well, famous for his detecting. The secret to his success? A big, ludicrous pair of “telepathy goggles” that allow him to read people’s minds. But what happens when the Famous Detective meets his match in a suspect who *also* owns a pair of telepathy goggles. It ends after decades of telepathic stalemate, the pair thrust into the future. The suspect is stunned, but our Famous Detective, ever-unflappable, remains cool.

Fantastic, fantastic, fantastic. *Detective* is deft and funny, mixing absurdity with a nice light touch that makes every paragraph a delight. In a scant nine paragraphs, we get brilliant insight into the Famous Detective, a self-consciously cool egotist who, with his goggles, can “solve three cases in twenty minutes.” But he’s sharp and pragmatic, too. Calling suspects into his office, he comes face to face with a beautiful woman, because when FD is on the case he “always makes sure on suspect in every batch is a beautiful woman.” After reading her thoughts and discovering that she finds the art of detection sexy, he has sex with her for an hour. He leaves the goggles on: “I know exactly what she wants and when she wants it...I decide from now on I will always wear the telepathy goggles while engaging in sexual intercourse.” That dry, deadpan sense of humor pervades the piece, lending *Detective* a jaunty tempo that never lingers on the bizarre too long, but is never a sentence away from new, amusing weirdness or a thoroughly cracked observation from our hero. The language is spare and clean, with every sentence seemingly calibrated for maximum effect; there’s not a stray word in the lot. In all *Detective* is a beautiful piece of flash fiction: short, sweet, vivid and memorable. That is strongly resembles a bite-sized version of Jonathan Lethem’s *Gun, With Occasional Music* only helps it further.

Rating: 4. Goddamn, but do I love *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*. It’s an elegantly designed, inexpensive booklet as simple in its design as the prose within it is bizarre and wonderful. But, for an emerging writer, I simply cannot recommend it highly. Why? Well, as they say right there in the submission guide, “We do not pay much. Neither do we publish often.” While the former is kind of a given in this racket, the latter is something of a blow. They only publish twice a year, it takes half a year to hear back, and from those submissions only “a couple” will be from emerging writers. Long odds for a limited return. Also, I find their lack of faith in the web...disturbing. (From their site, no joke: “This website, although we sometimes publish on it, is not a paying market.” Yowza.) The only reason I’ve rated them so highly is because the prose is so damned entertaining and well written. If it weren’t, *LCRU* would be a kiss-off of the highest order. As it stands, I still recommend it just for kicks, but I wouldn’t depend on them.