

Phoebe (Vol. 35, Issue 2)

Reviewer: Matthew John

Editor: Kati Fargo

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What they Publish: Poetry, Fiction, Art, Interviews

Submission Guidelines: Manuscripts must be postmarked between Sept 1 and April 15. No formulaic writing, romance writing, or greeting card poetry is accepted.

Description of Publication: Neatly bound, professional-looking print magazine. Published twice a year, with annual poetry and fiction contests deadlines on December 1. Subscriptions cost \$12 for one year or \$20 for two. Sample issues are \$6.

Percentage of Prose Per Issue: Mostly composed of poetry, this issue contains only four pieces of fiction, though they do not appear to be limited in length. Almost half the 120 page journal is devoted to those four stories. Poems vary in length from a short paragraph to a couple pages.

Prose Reviews:

It Would be Life by Joshua Ferris is a subjective first-person story told in a domestic setting. Jack is an aging college professor and writer who one day begins to receive a flood of barely coherent e-mails from an old colleague he thought long dead. Frustrated by the constant spam and more than a little curious as to the source, Jack tracks the e-mails down and discovers that his old friend had his brain frozen and hooked into the Internet after his death. The two are able to converse via instant messages and discuss the fate of the quasi-deceased Michael's wife Victoria. Jack informs Michael that Victoria died in a tragic car accident, but we later find out this is a lie as Jack himself wed the widow Victoria after Michael's seeming death. Now Victoria is sick with cancer and Jack decides to uproot Michael's brain from its eternal Internet life and place Victoria in his place, leaving Michael dead for real.

There's absolutely nothing this author did in this story which I didn't enjoy. Although the nature of the story is very fantastical, Ferris manages to use a down-to-earth tone for both his narration and dialogue that never leaves the reader with a sense of confusion or bewilderment. Descriptions are crisp, vivid, and to the point without ever bogging down in technical or overly poetic details. The plot moves at an engaging pace. Ferris grabs on to the reader, picks them up by the ears, and never lets them down until he's good and done with them.

Stephan by Tammy Walters is a satirical story told in a domestic setting. The narrator, Claire, is about fifty years old and has just given birth to her first child, Stephan. Claire was a ballet dancer in the glory days of her youth and wishes to recapture that artistic nature in her child. To this end, she purchases Stephan all manner of musical instruments and lessons, though he shows no aptitude at any of them. Finally, at the age of five, Stephan locks himself in a bathroom and finds his true artistic medium: portraits made of his own feces smeared over the bathroom mirror. Claire discovers this art and instantly applauds Stephan's success. She switches him to a high fiber banana diet and insists that he create as much art as possible. But Stephan is a lonely brooding artist and doesn't perform on command. This leads to Claire wondering where Stephan could be hiding all of his works, a search around the house for feces, and finally, the revelation of Stephan's masterpiece, a sculpture made entirely of discarded banana peels. When Claire finds this sculpture Stephan opens his mouth to speak his first words, words which Claire claims to know before they are spoken, but alas the story ends abruptly before the audience is let in on the secret.

I really enjoyed the whimsical, over-the-top nature of the story. Walters emphasizes the absurdity of the situation by having all the characters act as if feces painting were the most natural thing in the world. I think that although the story was very well put together, a few of the more odorous details of the story fell by the wayside, perhaps a victim of the author, or editor's internal censor. It does seem at some points like there could be just a little juice squeezed out of this delicious fruit of a story, especially at the end where the whole thing climaxes in an emotional cliffhanger. Perhaps the ending implied something I simply didn't grasp, but I definitely would have liked to know what it is that Stephan was going to say and what it is that brings closure to this piece.

Rating: 4. Although the fiction in the magazine is wonderful, none of the contributors appear to be emerging authors. Everyone Phoebe publishes have several writing credits, including novels and awards.