

Apple Valley Review



**Magazine Report
By Esmeralda Jaime**

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: Apple Valley Review

Web Address: www.applevalleyreview.com

Founded: Spring 2006

Founder: Leah Browning

Editor: Leah Browning

Non-Profit: Yes

E-mail Address: editor@leahbrowning.net

Frequency: Biannually

Contributor Payment: None

What They Publish: Short fiction, poetry, and essays

Submission Guidelines: Unpublished submissions ranging from 100 to 3,000 words are accepted. No genre fiction. Simultaneous submissions are not allowed. E-mail submissions to editor.

Mission Statement: The *Apple Valley Review* is an online literary journal. It is published twice each year, once in the spring and once in the fall. Each feature contains a collection of beautifully crafted poetry, short fiction, and essays.

Why I Chose Apple Valley Review

The first time I heard about *Apple Valley Review* was during my Fiction Writing and Publishers class. My teacher was talking about independent literary online magazines. He mentioned something about an editor who was running a small online publication in Wisconsin. His comment stuck with me as I fished through the Newpages.com Web site. I checked out *Apple Valley review* and was immediately impressed by the high quality of work that Leah Browning published. Each fiction piece I read had some sort of tragic tone to it, but the beauty within that tragedy is what stood out to me. I like to read things that have hope in them and this magazine was a true representation of that.

Issue Comparison

	Volume 2, Spring Issue	Volume 3, Spring Issue	Volume 4, Fall Issue
Prose Writers M:F	10:22	6:9	4:14
Protagonists M:F	6:13	4:9	0:3
POV 1 st : 2 nd :3 rd	5:0:4	2:0:0	3:0:0
Prose: Poetry	11:21	2:13	3:14
(writer) Emerging: Established	14:7	5:10	9:7

I noticed that there were a lot more female protagonists, but this was expected since the majority of the prose writers are female as well. I found it interesting that a lot more fiction pieces were published in the beginning then in the later issues. This was probably due to the lack of fiction submissions. Poetry has always seemed to outnumber prose which is usually expected in any literary magazine that accepts both. This would be a good literary magazine to publish emerging writers.

Story Reviews

Volume 4, Issue 2

What I know by Kathleen Thomas is a first person plainspoken short story told in a domestic setting. An unnamed narrator talks about her mother's instability within her personal and romantic life. "I know she hated that job, the blue smock she ironed each morning and then wore for long hours each shift stocking shelves, checking out customers. I know she hated smiling when she wasn't sure if anyone noticed. But he must have noticed, the cigarette man." The narrator talks about what she knows about her mother, what she doesn't, and what she can only imagine. Her mother's a single parent. She knows her mother's been lonely. She wonders if the man she brought home the other night made her feel whole in any way. The story ends with the daughter's unanswered questions, but also with an affirmation of what she truly does know. "She said she liked lilies, was going to have a house, plant a bed of lilies. I know she told him that; she told everyone she met about the lilies."

The pace of this piece is dictated by the narrator's thoughts of what she knows and of what she doesn't know about her mother. The innocent narrative voice adds to the tragic tone of the story as she starts to realize how her mother's been struggling to get them back on their feet. Because it is told in the first person we see and make judgments about the mother through her daughter's eyes. She doesn't say how she feels, but because she's telling and showing the reason so we infer what's unsaid: her mother is lonely and tired.

Water by Elaine Barnard is a first person narrative of a woman in an industrial setting in Vietnam. An American woman comes in to the masseuse narrator's office for a full body

massage. As she massages the woman, she tells her made up stories of where she's from, Ho Chi Minh City even though she's from Hanoi. "Hanoi was a place they saw every day, so it did not interest them. Many people have died. Others were homeless, wandering the streets of Hanoi like ghosts. Even the dogs seemed to pity them..." The masseuse uses her hands to give her the same relaxation that water gives and here she fantasizes about running away with her boyfriend. The woman leaves her a small tip, one she could probably buy a couple pieces of bread and fruit with. She tells Tony, her boss, that she's leaving. He says, "For girls like you there is nothing." She takes her 10,000 dong and heads out searching for her lover on the motorcycle who is nowhere to be found.

The first person narrative stimulates the reader's sympathy towards the protagonist's struggle in life. The pace of this piece gives the reader a visual of the slow-moving time that passes during her routine at work; what her massage technique is like, and what kind of conversations she's supposed to have with her costumers. Through the narrator's fantasies, we hear her frustration. It's a perfect depiction of what situational imprisonment feels like.

Volume 3, Issue 1

You Are the Bad Smell by Kathy Anderson is a first person plainspoken short story told in a domestic setting. The realtor fully recognizes the smell that couples have when buying their first house together that screams, power struggle. "I can smell them in the air after twenty-three years in the business and four marriages of my own. The smell is unmistakable, like a rotting carcass by the side of a road." Two lesbian lovers have passed up the last seventy-eight houses they've seen. The realtor is tired and wants to be done, but after showing the seventy-ninth house, something changes. The more overpowering lesbian, Concrete Skull, wants it. The

realtor pulls out her best tricks and unfailingly they sign the agreement. When the radon test for the house comes back positive, Concrete Skull is sure that, just like her relationship, the deal is going to fail. "I'm forty-one years old. I can't make any more mistakes," she says. After telling her girlfriend, Long Suffering, that she's done, she crumples to the floor. Concrete Skull leaves and they wait for her to come back, "We waited for a long time until we felt the currents in the air settle down to normal rhythms and heard the birds outside in the trees begin to sing."

The story is told through the perspective of the realtor. She's had four marriages of her own, she's sold dozens upon dozens of houses and through her voice we can recognize her experience. "They were realtor cockteasers. They showed you what they had, stroked you until you were so ready you could scream, then pulled back with a perfectly good reason that was totally bogus because the real reason they did not buy any of the seventy-three houses I showed them was because they were sizing each other up. It had nothing to do with me." The story alternates between internal thoughts and dialogue. Through the dialogue and the structure, Anderson gives us the information we need about the characters, their personalities, and their desires. She gives the lesbian couple perfect nicknames that in the end make you realize what you knew all along. Concrete Skull cannot go through with buying and moving into a house with Long Suffering.

The Diary of Li Na by John Lowry is a first person short story told in a domestic setting. There's a couple on the subway fighting. They have reached the fourteenth avenue stop, the woman wants to stay on, but the man wants her to get off. He yanks her out to the platform, but her purse gets caught in the door. The guy who watched this happen is told he has to turn it in to the police. He says he will, but instead he takes it home and looks through it. He finds the woman's diary and after reading a few entries decides to give her the advice he wish he had.

“Above all, do what you want to do! Do not please people! Nature will bring life to a close. When you look back you must know that you have tried, that you have done what is right for you. I signed my name, Gran Wilkes, and enclosed my e-mail address.” He takes the purse back to the Lost and Found Department in the New York City Authority Transit. Later on that year he gets an e-mail from Li Na. She was inspired by his words, she has left her fiancé Ha, last weekend she took a trip on a hot air balloon, she moved to San Francisco, and wants to see a wild elephant before she dies. He is considering going back to his own fiancée when he sees Li Na walking down the street beside Ha and a child hanging on her chest like a papoose.

The story is told in the point of view of the man who finds the purse. We get a broader sense of who Li Na is by her journal and perhaps how he identifies with her. The articles he finds in her purse give a clear description of Li Na’s character; of how unhappy she is and how she lives her life just going through the motions. We get to know his character by what he leaves for her to read in her journal. The author successfully marries the pacing of the story with passing time, and in the end we are left with the realization that Li Na never changed at all, mirroring the narrator’s own life with going back to bad and broken things: his fiancée.

Volume 2, Issue 2

Family History by Peggy Duffy is a third person short story in a domestic setting. A woman’s husband, a doctor, is in critical condition. A clot blocking one of his major arteries, the doctors tell her, made it almost impossible to believe that it hadn’t been dislodged. She’s sitting beside him, comforted slightly by the rhythmic sounds of the ventilator. She’s too scared to touch him, to even hold his hand as she thinks back to the fight they had that morning. He puts his patients and the hospital before her and his own daughter. “You don’t get it, do you? What it is to be

responsible for someone's life. There's no clocking in and out." Sitting by his hospital bed now, she sees a different picture, one that could be without him.

The pacing of the story takes you from the present action to a flashback of what happened earlier on that day. We know a man has had some type of heart failure; his wife beside him is scared and can hardly keep herself together, then she remembers the argument. The argument ends up revealing each character to us. We learn a lot from their dialogue about the dynamics of their family life. He's too consumed with his patients and she doesn't understand why. The imagery that Duffy uses to portray the torn edges of their relationship, in contrast to what a torn and ripped photograph, gives the reader a greater visualization and understanding of the conflict the protagonist finds herself in now. She needs a dedicated doctor like her husband to save his life.

Christmas by Danielle Lapidoth is a first person narrative told in a domestic setting. It's Christmas day and everything's closed. A man is walking alongside his girlfriend through the empty streets. He takes the whips of the wind with his head held high because his father once told him it was better to face the wind directly. He's known that the past few weeks have all been leading to their break-up, a break-up he's been planning. "Past arguments and discussions, we are resigned, but I am also happy. I try not to let my happiness show, or induce guilt. I tell myself our split is mutual. Or: I tell myself you believe it is mutual. I don't mind thinking about how, instead of putting up a tree, I've spent the month carefully coordinating this finale, knowing it was designed to spare us both, in different ways." He wants to cut things off, but doesn't have the courage to tell her flat out and in the end we realize she knows this when she says, "I know exactly what you're doing."

The story is told through a series of descriptions. It establishes the place of solitude they face together on Christmas day. It gives snippets of the cocktail parties they went to in the past weeks, the lunch break that he's been missing because the streets have been plagued with suburban holiday shoppers. The strength in the story comes out through the struggle between the two characters.

Interview with Editor Leah Browning

Esmeralda Jaime: How did you get to be an editor? What made you decide to start your own publication?

Leah Browning: I've been reading literary journals and magazine fiction for as long as I can remember. When I was about twelve, a teacher recruited a group of kids to start a literary journal for our school. That was my first editing experience. Although we were quite young at the time, she took the experience seriously, and we did, too. Everything about the process of putting that journal together intrigued me, and from that point forward, the idea of one day launching my own print journal was always in the back of my mind. That was a daydream, though, not something that I thought would ever be feasible. I just didn't have the resources. In early 2005, I really began to take notice of online journals. They had never been treated as seriously as print journals, but that seemed to be changing. Many print journals were developing online components, and I had discovered a variety of excellent online-only journals such as *Blackbird* (from Virginia Commonwealth University). An online journal could operate on a shoestring budget, didn't have to struggle with subscriptions and distribution, and could reach readers all over the world. Suddenly, this seemed like a viable idea, and I started the *Apple Valley Review* toward the end of 2005.

EJ: How do you balance the workload of running your own publication with the rest of your life?

LB: Many journal editors have 9 to 5 jobs, writing or teaching careers, children, and/or other responsibilities, so I think we all have to find some sort of balance. I try to read steadily throughout the year so that I don't end up with a huge backlog, and so that writers don't have to wait six months to a year to receive any kind of response. Typically, I read submissions two or three days per week. Once I begin laying out the issues, though, twice a year, the journal takes over my life for many long days at a time. I expect that, though, and plan for it. Happily, my schedule is fairly flexible; I'm not working with printing or other deadlines, so if I end up being delayed, it's all right. My deadlines are mostly self-imposed.

EJ: How do you decide which work suits the criteria that you're looking for? Do you have any biases as a reader?

LB: Oh, absolutely. I think that every reader (and thus every editor) has very subjective opinions about writing. I tried to be really candid about my biases in the submission guidelines. I personally prefer work that is finely written but not so relentlessly highbrow that the average person would find it meaningless. That's probably my main criteria. I want the journal to be accessible to a wide variety of people, so I try to avoid erotica or extreme language. At the time I was putting the journal together, I had also become tired of the idea that writing has to be inordinately depressing to be considered literary. Even so, when I look back, it seems that almost every story I have selected for publication has some element of human tragedy. So I wouldn't say that I won't look at sad stories at all, just that I want to see something beautiful in them, too. And if reading a particular short story makes me feel like slitting my wrists, I am probably not going to print it. Again, though, these are just my preferences. If I send a story back, it doesn't mean that it's not good—just that I'm not the right person to champion it.

EJ: What should all writers know before submitting pieces to The Apple Valley Review?

LB: This is advice for anyone submitting to any journal. Please follow the submission guidelines and, ideally, read at least some of the work that we've published in the past. There are similarities, but each journal is a little bit different.

EJ: "What I Know," a short short by Kathleen Thomas, was one of my favorite fiction pieces to read. It truly is a beautifully crafted short fiction piece that cut right down to the bone of the story. For you, what are the elements in a short story that make it successful?

LB: Well, you asked what makes a short story successful for me, and I feel I should emphasize that this is subjective. Off the top of my head, I'd say that I like a premise that intrigues me, a first paragraph that immediately draws me in, and writing that I think of as "clean." By that, I essentially mean readable prose. I don't mind if it's spare and elegant or more elaborate, but I think everybody's read a story where practically every word of every sentence sounds like it's straight out of a thesaurus. I love language, but sometimes less is more. Sustaining the momentum is probably the most difficult part. Writing a phenomenal first paragraph is tricky, but writing an entire story that doesn't fall flat at any point, and also ends in some satisfying way—well, I think of that as an acrobatic feat.

EJ: It is said that editors can read the first line or paragraph of a story and already know if the answer is going to be yes or no. For you, how true is this concept?

LB: Generally speaking, I would say that this is true, except it's more like "continue reading" and "no." I'm not saying that I actually do stop reading after the first paragraph, but my first instinct about a story does tend to bear out. I feel apologetic about this because I know how much effort goes into writing and rewriting every word of a short story. Of course the writer wants someone to appreciate the finished product. But I've actually received cover letters that say, in essence, "Please read all the way to the end. That's the good part." I can't put a note like that at the beginning of a story I'm publishing.

EJ: Has being an editor of other people's writing affected your own writing? If so, in what ways?

LB: I used to really obsess over submissions. I wanted to have the perfect cover letter, for example. Now I realize that the best cover letter in the world will never get a mediocre story accepted. There is also no one "perfect" format for the letter; it can be just the basics, and most of the time, that's totally adequate. (In fact, I prefer cover letters that are short and to the point.) However, that said, I've also realized just how important the cover letter can be. I mentioned earlier that I might have a quick, instinctive response to the beginning of a story. Well, that can happen with a cover letter, too. They are usually only a couple of paragraphs, and yet they often include misspellings and grammatical problems, comments that let me know immediately that the person hasn't read our submission guidelines, etc. These are not always fatal flaws, but they certainly don't bode well.

What else? I guess I don't take rejection so personally. I know that editors' time and page space really are limited. There have been times, too, when I have sent back a piece of writing by someone I think is quite talented because that particular piece didn't sing to me. A story that "works" for one person might not for someone else. And it's difficult (impossible) to edit and judge your own writing with an impartial critical eye.

As for whether I write less now because I love editing or because I have less time now, I guess it would be a combination of both. Writing is always my first love, but I find it more difficult.

EJ: What is your editorial process?

We accept unsolicited manuscripts, and I read year-round. The issues are not formally themed. With every issue, some common themes have emerged, but that has always happened organically. I'm looking for a variety of pieces because I like variety myself. I like the combination of poetry, short stories, and essays, and I like a selection of pieces that run the gamut: longer and shorter, darker and lighter, and on a range of different subjects.

When I'm putting together the table of contents, I do try to arrange the accepted pieces to highlight that variation, or to have smooth transitions from one to another, but I don't select pieces only for that purpose. When I sit down to read a particular piece of writing, I'm only looking at that piece. I want to find a story that resonates with me for one reason or another, a story that makes me want to shove it into someone else's hands and say, "Read this."

However, if I printed a short story on a particular topic in the spring issue, I'm incrementally less likely to be charmed by a story on the same topic when I'm reading for the fall issue. That's one way in which reading past issues can be helpful for someone submitting. It gives you an idea of a particular journal's style, but also lets you know what topics have already been covered in the recent past. In that respect, it's similar to submitting to any magazine or newspaper.

EJ: We all know this business can be competitive and often without pay. What keeps you motivated to continue doing what you do?

LB: Most of the time, I like it. There are challenging moments, certainly, but it's also been one of the most rewarding ventures of my life. I feel quite lucky. I enjoy almost every aspect of this process, from reading submissions to editing manuscripts to finishing the layout for a particular issue. I've also found an unexpected feeling of camaraderie; writing is a rather lonely job, and editing a journal can be much more collaborative.

I also feel like I am making—or at least trying to make—some small contribution to literature as a whole, and more specifically, to individual readers and writers. And that leads me back to one of the most fulfilling things of all: reading through manuscripts, and finding a truly amazing and beautiful piece of writing. I love the idea that I am one of the first people ever to see this piece, and that I have a forum in which to share it with a large group of enthusiastic readers.