



A Print Magazine Report
By
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Fact Sheet

Magazine: The Feathertale Review- Bound & Online

Editor: Brett Popplewell

Web Address: <http://www.feathertale.com>

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Email: bpopplewell@feathertale.com

Frequency: The Review is published annually. The Web site publishes a new story, poem, and cartoon once a week.

What They Publish: Humor only. Short Fiction, Flash Fiction, Poetry, Cartoons, Sketches

Submission Guidelines: Send all submissions as Word or PDF attachments to submissions@feathertale.com. Artwork as JPEG or TIFF attachments. Stories for the Web site must be 1,500 words or fewer, and anything longer will be considered for publication in The Review. If intended for The Review, be sure to include the word 'Review' in the subject line of the e-mail.

Reading Period: All year. Anything published on the Web site is automatically in the running to be published in The Review.

Response Time: 6 weeks to 2 months

Contributor Payment: No payment for the Web site, but an undisclosed amount of money for publication in the Review.

Cost: Single Issue-\$10 Subscription-\$25

Why I Chose *The Feathertale Review*

It was on our class trip to Quimby's bookstore when I first saw the cover of the third issue sitting at the top of a pile on our instructor's lap. There was no way I couldn't notice it, with its bright and lively cartoon of a monkey looking at his stopwatch as he waits for train to work. I immediately went to the rack, pulled out a copy for myself, and flipped through. The first things I noticed inside were the expertly drawn cartoons and sketches that accompanied each story and poem. I was hooked instantly by the strange cartoons of Queen Elizabeth playing a kazoo and even a short comic in the middle of the magazine. Of course, the pictures drew me into the stories. I was pleasantly surprised to find that *The Feathertale Review* was strictly about humorous stories and poems. It's the only literary magazine I've ever seen that devotes itself to a wide array of humor.

After reading the table of contents and skimming through the magazine, I found that just that one issue included six short stories, six flash fiction pieces, and numerous poems. It was the reasonably short length of each piece that allowed for a bunch of quality stories, poems, and drawings to make it into a single issue.

Better yet, the Web site updates every week with a brand new and hilarious story, poem and cartoon. For a somewhat new journal like *The Feathertale Review* to be able to maintain an annual print journal *and* publish new things online every week, shows the amount of dedication Mr. Popplewell has for his publication.

Comparison of Issues Over Time

	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3
	2006	2007	2008
Prose*:Poetry**	9:10	11:14	14:17
Prose Writers M:F	8:1	10:1	11:3
Antagonists M:F	9:0	11:0	12:2
POV 1st:3rd	6:3	5:6	6:8

*Includes nonfiction, essays, and flash fiction

**Includes 'Monkey Banters' and lists

I didn't realize until I did this chart that there were hardly any female prose writers compared to male prose writers. But there were a lot of females in the poetry category. The same goes with the protagonists, but that's to be expected if most of the people writing the stories are men. The issues have a good balance between prose and poetry.

Of all the contributors in all three issues, only a handful mentioned anything about publishing novels or stories in magazines. The bios are meant to be humorous, so it's hard to tell if some of the authors are just leaving out their past publishing credentials on purpose. If not, then *Feathertale* publishes lots of stories per issue by writers who have never been published before.

Story Reviews

Issue 1(2006)

“A Distinct Lack of a Cooking Stove” by Iain E. Marlow is a third-person, plainspoken story in an exotic setting. Rick and Dave, tourists in Peru, lose their money to prostitutes. They hatch a plan to swindle cocaine and cash from drug-runners who have been softened by a love for French existentialism. After days in the jungle, Rick and Dave are captured by the drug-runners. The leader forces them to write a new French existentialist novel. After Rick ruins their success by saying that Hemingway was a journalist, which the drug-runners hate, he and Dave escape to the Canadian embassy with a bunch of coke.

This story was highly entertaining, mainly due to the increasing ridiculousness of the plot. Marlow opens strong by setting up Rick and Dave as opposites. “While Dave slaved over a degree...Rick smoked pot and had sex with journalism students.” The POV was mostly pulled back-“Rick and Dave were three days into Colombia when they realized they were being followed”-but Marlow would, every couple paragraphs, show specifically what each character was doing. Besides a few abrupt internal POV jumps, the story’s quick pace made it a fun read.

“My Best Friend Patrick” by Claire Griffiths is a first-person, plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. Patrick’s best friend, also Patrick, stops showing up at school. The narrator goes to his friend’s neighbor’s house, where he is told that his friend’s mom ran away with a “Prossie” or prostitute. Patrick realizes his friend’s mom is a lesbian. At school during a soccer match, a new kid takes the friend’s place as goalkeeper. Patrick resents this and beats up the new kid, calling his mom a Prossie. The nuns suspend him for two weeks.

This is a really fun piece, and Griffiths gets Patrick’s voice strongly out there in the first paragraph-“He’d probably be the Patron Saint of Biscuits, or some crap like that.” At the end, when the narrator says “that’s the most interesting thing that ever happened to me,” and when the story is signed ‘*By Patrick Fitzpatrick, Year 1*’ you realize that it’s supposed to be a school report.

Issue 2(2007)

“Three Astonishing Tales of a South African Minibus Taxi Driver” by James Clarke is a third-person, plainspoken collection of three disjointed stories in an exotic setting. Together, a reckless taxi driver, takes a bus full of nauseated passengers from the suburbs to Johannesburg. Next, he reports back to his boss after test-driving a new, sixteen-passenger bus the company is considering using. Together likes the hinged door, because a sliding door might chop off body parts of squeezed-in passengers. Then, at an F1 track, Ferrari loses its only car to a pit crew of chop shoppers. Together’s brother Innocence knows a guy, so he ends up racing for Ferrari in his minibus taxi, beating everyone, but getting disqualified for having a Cessna engine in his bus.

All three short stories are quick, funny reads, but the only thing that stays the same is Together, instead of any running plot. A few times Clarke addresses the audience directly: “We are witnessing (dear reader)” and “...his brother began (he told me)”. These instances did seem unnecessary and jolted me out of the story. But, because the title lets you know there are three separate stories, you know exactly what to expect from the beginning.

“Showbiz” by Greg Santos is a first-person, fantastic, plainspoken story in a domestic setting. The narrator starts to feed a squirrel some bread crumbs in the park. When the narrator snaps his fingers, the squirrel perks up and starts singing a song called “Che gelida manina.” He takes the singing squirrel to a friend, who says it sounds okay, but that he’s heard a muskrat who can sing the whole Dexys Midnight Runners’ discography. The narrator takes the squirrel back to the park. When he leaves he feels a nut hit his head.

This piece is funny and pretty absurd, but the narrator’s confidence-“my friend Rick...knows a thing or two about gifted rodents”- makes the singing squirrel perfectly acceptable. Santos does a good job of letting the reader know that the narrator isn’t just crazy by introducing another human character.

Issue 3(2008)

“The Customer is Always Right” by Benson Lee is a third-person, realistic short story in a domestic setting. It opens with Nuno, the busboy, scraping puke off a dirty table in the restaurant where he works. He goes back to the chef, Armando, who discovers maggots writhing in the vat of that night’s special soup. Luis, the manager, gathers all the employees to tell them to get the already-served soup off the customers’ tables without them noticing. Nuno and the waiters are mostly successful, but one fat teenage girl refuses to let Nuno take her soup. He watches her eat the maggots. In the end, the staff celebrates their close call by dancing in the kitchen.

The story was highly entertaining, mainly due to the over-the-top characters, like Armando, the death metal snob. Lee packs in a lot of characters, but their hilariously strange dialogue (“Right on, Sir Gay!”) and the quick pacing save it from ever feeling hectic. I loved how the all-knowing narrator’s voice is apparent from the first line, “Busboy Nuno Triple 6- as the nametag proclaimed in stained and dulling Dymo- found himself with a squeegee in hand.” The voice stays consistent throughout.

“A Monkey Crime” by Brett Popplewell is a first-person, realistic story in a domestic setting. The six-year-old narrator, Monkey, and his dad drive to the supermarket and the dad gives Monkey a wad of money. Monkey, unaware of what he’s actually doing, walks in, buys two T-bone steaks, takes them out to his dad, and repeats the process three more times. An old woman notices him and tells the manager, because there is a rule permitting only two steaks per family. The manager lets Monkey go. At the end, Monkey and his father go home and Monkey feels dangerous and important.

The opening line drew me in immediately and did an excellent job at establishing an older narrator looking back. “There is a defining moment in every rebel’s life when he realizes his could be a life meant for crime. For me, that moment came at the tender age of six.” The six-year-old voice is authentic. Popplewell puts us in the POV of Monkey so we don’t know what’s happening either, making an otherwise normal task seem suspenseful. Phrases like “a bat of out Kindergarten” make it funny and heartwarming, while making Monkey instantly likeable.

Interview with Brett Popplewell

Max Wentzel: Since Feathertale was originally set up by you and Lee Wilson as a small-house distributor for your anti-bullying comic books *The MISadventures of Bully-Boy & Gossip-Girl*, how exactly did the Feathertale Web site get started?

Brett Popplewell: That was in the summer/autumn of 2004. A year later we (Lee and I) began putting our plans together to expand Feathertale's operations and to make it more fun for us. We are both avid readers and brought different skills to the table. I was studying journalism at the time and was hanging out with a large number of wannabe writers. Lee was studying graphic design and was hopping around Toronto with a number of starving artists. We decided to take both those skills and experiences and put them behind an online publication that would somehow reminisce back to the longdead vintage literary magazines of the Inter-war years. We were by no means the first online literary journal. Nor the first online satirical journal. But we tried to carve ourselves out from the rest with a vision that we could somehow create a sort of bastardized illegitimate love child of Mad Magazine and the old Saturday Evening Post online. Feathertale.com went online in January 2006. Our goal is and always was to publish a humorous poem, a cartoon and a short story once a week online. The Monkey Banter section was reserved for my own sort of "poetic editorials".

MW: How did you go from there to putting out The Feathertale Review?

BP: By May 2006 we had already published dozens of stories, poems and cartoons on the site. We also had some excess money from sales of our comics, and instead of cashing out we put together the first Feathertale Review. It included the best pieces of short fiction, poetry and cartoons from Feathertale.com. We also put out a submission call to get longer pieces. We commissioned a few stories and poems from writers I'd met in Toronto's journalism community. By July 2006, we had a magazine mapped out on the walls of our apartment. Lee had commissioned artwork to accompany many of the stories and poems going into the Review from people he'd gone to school with. The idea was that Feathertale was to be a testing ground for them. Something they could use to advance their portfolios. We also paid them an honourarium, whatever we could afford. We paid the writers as well. In late July we brought a third person in on our team. Benson Lee, a copy-editor with the Canadian Press. He became the certified word geek for Feathertale. He's too busy to copy-edit Feathertale.com but he makes sure each Review is clean.

We published the first Review, a 68 page saddle-stitched magazine, in August 2006. We launched it in a converted pickle factory in downtown Toronto.

MW: Have all three of you lived in Toronto throughout Feathertale's lifetime?

BP: Two days after we launched I jumped on a plane and flew to Rwanda to work as a journalist for a month before moving to London, England to go to school. Lee stayed on in Toronto and for the next year Feathertale was just an online publication again. To this day the first Feathertale Review remains the only issue that we put together with all of us in the same city. We now have a fourth person on board, Corina Milic, who takes care of editing and selecting

poetry for the Review. Corina, Benson and I are all based in Toronto now. Lee has since moved to New York to work at the hub of the publishing industry.

MW: Since Feathertale publishes only humor-based stories, how often do you get submissions that have little to no humor?

BP: You'd be surprised how many non-humorous submissions we get in a day. A lot of writers submit to us without reading our publications or our guidelines. We get a lot of stories about rape, murder, incest, death in the Depression and suicide. Dark shit we can't use. I chalk it up to desperation on the part of some of our submitters who are just blanketing the industry with their submissions and not putting the time or effort into where they want to be published. They just want to be published.

MW: Who reads all the submissions?

BP: Here's how it works: I check our inbox every few days and do a quick read through anything that comes in. If it's blatantly not humour I respond to the writer or artist immediately, thanking them for their submission but letting them know that we only publish humour so that they don't send us more of the same. I'm always polite. Anything that is humorous I then streamline. If it's a poem it goes to a folder set aside for Corina. If it's a story, list or something that fits in our fiction section it goes into a folder for me. If it's artwork it goes to a folder for Lee. If it's a submission to the Review it goes to a communal folder for the Review.

MW: Do you have a process for figuring out what gets accepted for the Web site?

BP: Some pieces of fiction I make my mind up on very quickly and accept or reject accordingly. Anything I'm not sure about I mark up and then send to Corina who will weigh in on it. If we both feel we like it then we publish it. If one of us disagrees with the piece then we most likely reject it. She does the same with the poetry. It's a great process when you only have two editors. We picked it up from H.L. Mencken, editor of the old Smart Set magazine (pre-cursor to the New Yorker). Two checkmarks = publication. One checkmark = a debate. No checkmarks = a polite rejection and encouragement to submit more to us again in the future.

MW: How about for the Review?

BP: We print out every submission and have a weekend reading fest where Corina and I go through everything first. We make a shortlist of pieces to go in. We then edit them down, get them reworked etc. We basically accept everything that we want then try our best to get it all into the Review. The Review is only ever between 64 and 80 pages long though so we can't fit everything in. We then run all our selections by Lee, who weighs in on his favourites and also weighs in on the design side. He lets us know if a story is ideal for illustration or not. Then we send them to Benson who cleans them up and weighs in as well. In the end it's sort of a 4 person decision on what we are going to publish in the Review. If there's debate, I make the final call as editor. We don't tend to have too many debates over pieces though as we're all more-or-less on the same page.

MW: The Egregious is another online publication that you release on a monthly basis, but the tagline says it's "Not another newsletter." What prompted you to create it?

BP: It's an ideal solution for the stuff that we select for the Review but doesn't get in because of space problems. It allows us to serialize longer pieces that don't work so well in the short fiction category of the Web site but which don't fit into the Review. It also allows us to again hark back to those old magazines that used to serialize fiction by Charles Dickens and such. It also lets us keep in touch with our subscribers and everyone else in the months that pass between publications of the Review.

MW: What are some of your biases when it comes to humor?

BP: That's a tough one. We strive for something that consists of both high- and low-brow humour. I'm never really successful in explaining what that means exactly. Our tastes run the spectrum of humour. Potty jokes are a tough sell for us if they don't have anything deeper than a fart joke involved.

A lot of the things we reject are pieces that are blatantly tailored for McSweeney's. You can sort of tell when you're reading a piece that's been submitted and rejected by McSweeney's. We try to steer away from those because otherwise we'd all read the same way.

There are weeks where we are desperate and our standards drop because we don't have anything coming in that fits our criteria. It's on weeks like that when we'll either lower our grade of humour or sit down and hammer something out ourselves. It's not the perfect solution, but it happens. Some weeks we also might have a poem that's very deep and qualifies in our mind as "high-brow". In which case we might choose a story that is very "low-brow" or a cartoon that's very easily accessible to everyone's sense of humour. We try to give a little something something for everyone in that way.

MW: In issue 3 of The Review, "The Customer is Always Right" by Benson Lee could have easily been just another gross-out story, but it's saved by the unique characters and the hilarious and bizarre dialogue. What do you think separates a piece from being a gross-out for the sake of being gross-out and actually being funny with gross elements?

BP: I don't know. I know Benson pretty well because he's our copy-editor and a professional journalist. So his grade of humour and sophistication is up there with the professionals. He's sort of one of these guys who understands that a story doesn't work so well if it's just a straight up low-brow gross out story. Complexity makes the story work on different levels. I sometimes look at stories like episodes of the Family Guy. Sure there's gross-out humour in there, but there's also deeper thought provoking humour involved as well. We strive for the same.

MW: How many submissions do you receive yearly?

BP: Eek. That's tough. Hundreds. We publish about 50 stories, 50 poems and 50 cartoons a year online. Plus about 10 poems, 10 stories, 10 pieces of flash fiction, and like 30 illustrations in each Review. Then of course we try to put out more stuff in the Egregious. For everything we publish we probably reject 2-3 things. Probably somewhere around 500.

MW: How much time do you spend working with the writers on their submissions?

BP: It all depends. Some stories we spend two seconds with them. Other stories we go back and forth. We get some submissions that are really great ideas but aren't executed to the best of the writer's ability. With those pieces we often work with the writers to get the stories or poems up to specs and then publish them.

MW: How do you go about getting the awesome drawings that accompany each story and poem in the Review?

BP: We have a list of about 40 illustrators who we work with time and again. We try to throw them pieces they would like to work on and pay them what we can. We don't pay very much because we don't run ads, but we do our best to at least give people an outlet to get published and produce some great art.

MW: How is the current state of Canada's economy affecting Feathertale?

BP: It hasn't impacted us yet. Our Bully-Boy comics are still selling. The Review is still selling. Our Web site is getting more traffic now than ever. Since we don't run ads we're not taking a hit from the death of advertising. That said, I'm sure we're not recession proof. Ask me again in a few months when our distributor cuts us a check for the latest Review sales in bookstores and I might tell you something different.

MW: What are some of the benefits to having the online magazine and the Egregious as opposed to the print edition of The Review? Some of the drawbacks?

BP: Drawbacks: The Egregious takes a lot of time to design and put out.

Benefits: The Egregious is a great way for us to remind our print subscribers and our online fans that we still exist. It draws them back to Feathertale.com because every month or so they get this Egregious in their inbox and then they say, "Oh, I haven't been to Feathertale.com in a while."

MW: Since you do have so many outlets of Feathertale already (The Review, the Web site, The Egregious), what are the odds that you'll branch out into other mediums in the future?

BP: We're trying branch out. We have an online gallery, we're publishing posters and we have some book projects we're working on. The trick is finding the money to do all this and also finding the time. As you now know, we're a four person operation. We each have full time jobs. It's a labor of love. But if it becomes too laborious we risk falling out of love with the project.