



Kody Montgomery
Literary Magazine Report
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Mississippi Review Fact Sheet

Magazine: Mississippi Review

Web Address: www.mississippireview.com

Mailing Address:

The University of Southern Mississippi

Box 5144 Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Founded: 1971

Founding Editor: Gordon Weaver

Current Editor: Frederick Barthelme

Frequency:

Print: Bi-annual

Online: Quarterly

What They Publish: Fiction, Creative Non-fiction, Poetry, and Essays

Submission Guidelines: All submissions must be to guest editor, listed on Web site for upcoming issue. E-mail guest editor directly with your attached MS Word document. Notes on content explained on site; content and word length change every issue.

Simultaneous Submissions: yes

Reading Period: (print) 4/1-10/1

(Online) All year

Circulation: 2,000

CLMP: (print) yes

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Why MR?

I chose Mississippi Review for a number of reasons, but what first caught my eye was that their editor, Frederick Barthelme, is an accomplished author and has held his position at MR for over three decades. One of the most viewed literary magazines in the nation, it goes without saying that the writing in the magazine is consistently of the highest caliber. The publication is also entirely devoted to prose, most always fiction, and takes many risks with the short story form.

Issue Comparison Chart

	Vol. 15 i. 3	Vol. 15 i. 2	Vol. 13 i. 4
M:F Writers	7:7	5:5	6:9
1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd POV	11:0:1	5:0:5	10:0:4
Credits: First, Magazine, Book	1:11:3	N/A	0:7:7

The comparison of male to female writers in *Mississippi Review* is more often than not perfectly proportional. The magazine is one of the most widely read in the country, and the equal representation is likely due to the large readership.

The scales are tipped heavily in favor of the first person narrative at the magazine. In almost every publication devoted to fiction, the overwhelming majority of pieces were written in the first person, likely due to the number of submissions in first person.

The credits to the authors in *Mississippi Review* can be intimidating. In all the issues I perused, only one author was being published for the first time. Half a dozen previous publications including giants like *Glimmer Train* and *Esquire* are common. There are several authors per issue that have published books and received awards. The editor, Frederick Barthelme, has built the publication from the ground up, and bolsters the magazine with well-known accomplished names. There is little hope for emerging writers.

Prose Reviews

“Jump” by Susan Kim Campbell is a first person plainspoken story in a domestic setting. The story follows a thirty-year-old college dropout as she shows her Korean extended family, a couple and their children, around a premium outlet mall. Because of the older member’s fascination with cheap designer clothing, the narrator is stuck watching the young boy, Jun, a five-year-old brat. We learn that when the trip was originally planned, the narrator’s mother was still alive and has since died. And after a phone call from the older sister, the narrator starts to reflect on life with her mother. Slowly, the narrator and Jun warm up to each other end up frolicking in a fountain in the mall together, not caring about the repercussions.

The story does a great job of showing the frustration of language barriers and cultural differences. Because everything must be translated between the narrator and her relatives, it becomes exhausting to communicate. The narrators inner dialogue, the use of memories, and the character of the older sister, Caroline, who sits in a successful law office somewhere, gives the story a good amount of depth. It was an enjoyable story on many levels.

“Queen of the Night” by Karen Kevorkian is a first person plainspoken story in a domestic setting. An unnamed narrator starts to show up at her ex-boyfriends apartment several months after what is presumed to be a rocky breakup in which the boy moved out. Their encounters are usually late at night and tend to involve only small talk and sex before he kicks her out. Despite this, the narrator thinks the man will learn to love her again. One night, after some wine with her friends, the narrator shows up and asks to be let in. Her ex admits he has another woman over, and urges the narrator to leave. Drunk, she starts to throw uprooted plants at the windows. When the ex comes out again, a woman is standing behind him in one of her night slips. The narrator then becomes hysterical and the ex threatens to call the police and returns her night slip. The female narrator is hysterical and finds a large brick and throws it through the man’s window.

This story is painfully tragic and very engrossing because of the voice of our unnamed narrator. It allows us to see her desperation to be back in love. But what really works in the piece

is her drunken breakdown after she spots the slip. The piece becomes choppy and the sentences short, giving it a very frantic feeling. A good use of form following content. Example, “I was back on the street, heels nastily tapping. Motherfucker. Motherfucker, I softly sang. I was looking for something. At the edge of somebody's garden I found a stone that weighed heavy in my hands. Carried it around on the side of his building to the bedroom window. Motherfucker. Raised the brick, smashed it down against the metal edge of the screen. The noise seemed very big.” The story is very concise and doesn’t waste words, keeping the reader enthralled and eager to see how it ends.

“Why I Have to Marry the Pool Guy” by Susan Hubbard is a first person plainspoken story in a domestic setting. An unnamed narrator, married for the second time to a poet, is fascinated with her pool boys. Her second pool boy (though they both looked like Kurt Cobain) fascinates her with his tests on pool water and his knowledge of chemicals. One day he finds an algae bloom and surface cracks at the pool, and recommends repair. The narrator, realizing in their relationship she always says agrees with him. They have a brief conversation about surfing, and she thinks about hugging his reflection in the pool water.

This story was very cleverly funny because of how sensual and intimate the narrator made every moment seem; even though it was all arbitrary talk with a pool boy. The story does a certain cadence to it, and an occasional subtle rhyme scheme giving it a pleasant pacing when reading. “My first husband wrote nonfiction: a book about sailing, a book about banks. They brought in lots of money, none of which I spent. My second husband writes poems. His books are lyrical, but they never make enough to pay the rent.” The end comes a little too abruptly though, since not much in terms of story happens. It could have used a couple more beats.

“Theft” by Nathan Oates is a first person plainspoken story in a domestic setting. An unnamed narrator holds his child early one morning, doing his share of the work to appease his angry wife, as he notices a rusted out car parked on the curb outside his suburban home. There is a black dog in the backseat, and the narrator sees a young man petting him from the front seat. Relieved the animal is lost or forgotten, he turns away. Later, the police arrive and arrest the man for breaking and entering, and the whole neighborhood watches with pity for the man’s sister-in-

law. The man realizes though that the rest of the neighborhood, his wife as well, is something he doesn't recognize.

This was story was told in a very effective POV, but I wish it had one more beat towards the end. The voice of the narrator was compassionate, and was a great juxtaposition to the suburbanite world around him. The story provided a good read, though it took a couple of reads to understand the internal and external contrasts being presented.

Interview With *Mississippi Review* editor Frederick Barthelme

Frederick agreed to answer a few questions via e-mail during one of his overnight work sessions. This correspondence takes place between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m.

Kody Montgomery: You've been the editor of the *Mississippi Review* for over thirty years now. How did you come into that job? Did you always see yourself becoming an editor, or is it a job you happened upon in your literary career?

Frederick Barthelme: I happened to get a job at the University of Southern Mississippi where the creative writing program had fallen on hard times. There was a magazine here, a sort of regional not very good magazine, which I thus inherited. It's a job I happened upon, and, for a good while now, have enjoyed.

KM: The South has a proud history of producing very strong, very distinct writing. Tell me about the history of the *Mississippi Review*.

FB: MR was started by Gordon Weaver in 1971. I took over in 1977. My effort was to turn this little known regional magazine into a national magazine, and to burnish its reputation in doing so. I started by inviting writers whose work I admired to submit, and gradually transitioned into accepting new material and submissions from younger and lesser-known writers. I also worked with Kim Herzinger here to develop a list of people we wanted to be aware of the magazine and to this day we send out an awful lot of complimentary subscriptions to people we want to see the book.

KM: I've noticed you have a managing editor and a guest editor for every issue. Can you talk about how the labor is divided amongst the editors and other staff members at *Mississippi Review*?

FB: It's a bit less simple. We have a print magazine, which, as I say, has been around since 1971. Our online magazine was started early in 1995. While the magazine have similar names, their content is almost always different, that is, there is not too much shared content between the print and online versions of Mississippi Review.

The idea behind this was that the online version should not simply be an advertisement for the paid printed version, which was what literary magazines did in the latter half of the 1990's.

For years I edited all the issues of the print and the online magazine, and gradually began to invite others to do the selection process as I thought that diversifying the editorial POV would make the magazine more interesting.

For the print magazine we do all the design and layout in house. For the online magazine we usually have a guest editor every issue. The editor selects the work and I put it online.

KM: How do you know when something doesn't belong in your magazine? And how do you and your staff handle rejections? Personal letters, nonspecific replies?

FB: It's very much a personal intuitive process. You read the work and want it or don't want it. Sometimes you're not clear and so you set it aside and read again. Eventually it becomes clear to you that the work wants to be in the magazine or does not want to be in the magazine. Since we do an annual contest, rejections are usually emailed. I guess that's largely true of the print version, too. We haven't been accepting unsolicited material except for contests in the print realm, so I don't even think we have printed "rejection slips" any longer, though we had them once. Online the rejections are handled by the issue editors and are done via email.

KM: Can you tell me about the aesthetic of your publication? Is there an overall theme to MR? And how are these things determined?

FB: We're decidedly cross-pollinated, but we have a couple of things always in mind. We don't tend to like work that is labored and overwritten, sentimental, rhetorically silly, self-absorbed, etc. Online there are literal themes to the issues, but the print magazine, which is published only twice a year, is either a contest issue, or a "topic" issue with a special editor. These things are determined when I think I have a bright idea and ask someone to head up an issue of the print or online magazine. Also, one of the print issues is a contest issue each year.

KM: I've noticed you have more than a dozen books published. Sixteen, I believe. How do you find the time to write, teach, and be the editor of MR? How has being the editor affected your writing process/approach?

FB: I like to work, so it's never been a problem to write, edit, teach, conference with students, oversee the creative writing program, sit on committees, etc. There's plenty of time. I do a lot of work on the magazine at home and a lot of schoolwork at home. I tend to focus on whatever I'm working on and haven't really had too much trouble doing that, regardless of which bit of work is on tap.

KM: Times are tight for all print publications right now, and the literary magazines are hurting, especially. How have you managed to stay afloat in these economically uncertain times?

FB: We get a tiny stipend from the university (4 figures, unchanged since 1977) and we run a national writing contest each year. I once objected to this because if you run a writing contest it is obvious that most of the contestants will not win. Then a friend and ex-student, Jane Armstrong, persuaded me that it was appropriate for writers who were seeking publication to pay for the magazine, since the magazine is there to serve the writers, or whichever writers it actually serves. This is an idea also once espoused, in somewhat different form, by Charles Newman, then editor of *Tri Quarterly*, when he wrote about young writers not subscribing to or buying or reading the literary magazines they hoped to publish in.

It also true that publishing a literary magazine is not very expensive, or, at least, does not have to be very expensive. If you have lots of pretenses you can make it very expensive, of course.

KM: Thanks for answering all my questions, Frederick. I very much appreciate it. One last thing though, could you give some advice for emerging writers and editors entering the world of publishing?

FB: Write more, write more carefully, edit more and more carefully, cut out all the inessentials, keep the work in circulation to magazines you have read and are taken with, don't be afraid to cut your own work leaving only the most beautiful parts, and never force the work that you're writing to conform to some idea you have about what it ought to be. Let it breathe.