



The
Portland
Review

A Magazine Report
by Andrew Graf

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: The Portland Review

Web Address: <http://www.portlandreview.pdx.edu>

Address: Portland Review Literary Journal
Portland State University
P.O. Box 347
Portland, OR 97207

E-mail Address: jbrewer@pdx.edu

Founded: 1956

Founding Editor, Current Editor: Dick Sanders, Jeff Brewer

Frequency: Three times a year

What They Publish: Fiction, Poetry, and Art

Submission Guidelines: Submit previously unpublished work via post mail along with a SASE. Work should be double-spaced, typed, and less than 8,000 words. Simultaneous submissions are accepted. If work is accepted, first North American Serial Rights are acquired.

Reading Period: All months except June, July, or August.

Contributor Payment: One complimentary copy of published issue.

Cost: Individual Issue - \$9, One Year Subscription - \$28, Two Year Subscription - \$52

Comparison of Three Issues Over Time

	VOL 52, No. 3	VOL 53, No. 1	VOL 53, No. 2
Prose:Poetry	9:8	11:4	10:10
Prose Writers M:F	5:2:2*	10:1	7:3
Protagonists M:F	6:3	8:3	7:2:1**
POV 1 st :3 rd	5:4	5:6	5:5
Cover	Matte	Matte	Glossy

- This addition to the column represents authors who use initials for first names or who have unisex names
- This story never clearly defines a male or female protagonist.

The results of this analysis turned up very little surprise. It is a common issue in literature that females are mentioned less and are published (or write) less than males. There is a proven statistic of this through these results. Although the Portland Review does not publish a large amount of female writers, I wonder if they receive fewer submissions from female authors just the same. However, as editor Jeff Brewer sums up, The Portland Review will publish anything so long as it is quality fiction. There is no intended bias in what sex is published or in what sex stories are about.

The amount of prose and poetry remains about even, despite VOL 53, No. 1, but this is an exception to the usual about even amount of prose versus poetry. Stories are pretty evenly split down the middle based on their point of view. As we all know, fiction can go either way, and there is little rhyme or reason as to why this is. For the sake of the Portland Review, publishing stories from various points of view rather than just one is that it keeps the stories varied on a higher level than just content. And for that matter, keeping a good amount of poetry and prose in each issue allows readers to read the journal easier. Breaking up long prose pieces with a poem here or there is a great idea for any literary journal.

Story Reviews

VOL 53, No. 2 (Fall / Winter 2006)

You Saw Me Standing Alone by Kris Saknussemm is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. The narrator is a highway drunkard who stops for gas at a small gas station. In paying the blind clerk, he begins to masturbate in front of her, but is suddenly taken down a level when his truck is stolen. In the end, he is told that he will take over the shop and build race cars for the family.

The storytelling is done in a very simple manner. Content wise, the story achieves a nighttime-in-a-deserted-place level of creepy through place and descriptions of the crickets crawling around like gravel on the ground. The characters are developed very fast as their hobbies and flaws are laid out on the line without waiting. Conversation is limited, but injected at the perfect moments of time.

Invoice by Joel Weinbrot is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. The main character is a man who handles daily invoices for local doctors, until his brother comes home from the military and starts sleeping with the narrator's ex-girlfriend. In the end, the narrator's dying friend Ronald finds he has been dead in the heart for nearly two weeks and the military brother disappears without saying a word.

The story is told in a surrealistic manner, inducing the memories with drugs and apparently loony friends. The characters are introduced and developed slightly, but never fully. Neither the place nor the characters are ever seen very well, but the story does provide a wealth of history about the characters and the reader can easily gather what the relationships between most characters are. This story is quirky for sure, but the characters are interesting and it leaves the reader wondering what happened before and what happened after in a really good way.

VOL 53, No. 1 (Spring 2006)

Plenty of Room in Heaven by Jonothan Evison is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. The narrator is a college graduate who helps a professor, Gerard, cope with being fired from his job. Gerard goes through many struggles and eventually phases

money out of his life. The narrator fixes this problem by offering him a job under his boss, Eugene, a Russian hot dog stand owner, where Gerard finds a new love.

The writing in this story is very simple, but the author uses sarcasm and exaggeration to further influence the humor of the story. Eugene, the hot dog stand owner, is the funniest character, and this is brought on by his dialogue using z's for t-h's, the crazy things he says, and his love for a simple American treat. The small details are turned into big ones and Hot Dog Heaven is glorified as a safe haven for all employees and lovers of great dogs. Although the writing is very simple, the character development and use of place and theme create a hilarious story.

Rainbow Party by Matt Williamson is a plainspoken realistic story in a foreign setting. The narrator is a Captain in the armed forces. He works in interrogating Saudi Arabians at Camp Eagle, where they get the idea to have a Rainbow Party to convince the interrogated that they won't want to be interrogated again. The oldest man plays a girl and has to go down on ten of the men, leaving different colors of lipstick on their genitals. After the fun and games, the Captain still has to determine leads.

The writing in this piece is very specialized. The author may or may not be military personnel, but pulls the character off very well. The story jumps in a little too fast and the reader does not find out what is happening until the second or third page. The jumpstart might resemble how things happen in the setting, but they are too fast for a reader to pick up the story immediately. Overall, the story is believable due to its technical writing using military terms and language, as well as creating believable characters that act and speak like true military characters.

VOL 52, No. 3 (Fall 2005)

The Courtship of Eddie's Father by Alex Behr is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. This is the story of a man and his dying marriage. The marriage began dying after the adoption of a Vietnamese boy named Eddie. The narrator wants to have sex with Eddie's mother, Crystal, but ends up deciding to set a good example by directing his wife to converse with Crystal while he shows his son how to eat food by mouth.

This story is in first person, which allows us to see very closely into every thought of the narrator. Without this point of view, the story could have been ambiguous or completely uninteresting. These viewpoints also allow us to see the flaws in the relationship between husband and wife, which creates the conflict that resolves much like small conflicts in real life; that being unresolved for the most part and ignored on the large scale. As in real life, the story keeps on going without concrete conclusion.

Tickets by Chad Benson is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. It is the story of a man who needs structure in his life, so he buys a functional VW Rabbit to fix up with his buddy, Earl. Earl is quiet, but knows about cars. In the story, we meet Margaret who often frequents the narrator's porch. They sit on car seats next to the frame of the Rabbit and converse, knowing it will be the last time they have a night like this.

The story contains layers of story, all of which interrelate to the others. The complexities are where the story lies. Earl is a believable character as is Margaret, and they interact with the narrator separately to keep their layers of the story unmixed. Character development is well achieved in this story by using other stories that involve the character's lives growing up or current and showing their reactions to these things. The ultimate conclusion in this piece, also, is that life goes on and we cannot control it. The author controls every aspect of the story to create an overall sense of the main character through the secondary characters.

Interview with Jeff Brewer, Editor-in-Chief

Has your interest always been in literature? Can you tell me how you ended up in editing this journal?

I wouldn't necessarily say that I have always had an interest in literature. I always liked to read, but I was a pretty dumb kid. At 13, I would always ask questions, like 'what is your favorite medicine?', 'if you were a cat what would be the first part of your body you would lick every morning?' My dad says I was a bit of a slow learner. That's why they bought me Velcro shoes for the first 14 years of my life. I hear stories about writers who remember first reading Proust when they were 13, discovered Tolstoy at 14, and so on. I remember a neighbor of mine having a cat named Tolstoy, and we all began to realize the lady was losing her wits when she shaved the cats spine and sewed a piece of carpet to its bald spot. The cat walked different after that, and I remember feeding it a hamburger, I thought that would fix things. So when I read finally read Anna Karenina, a few years back, I had all sorts preconceived notions about Tolstoy, and each of them was crushed.

As for how I slipped into the editor position, the timing just worked out perfectly. A couple of years ago, I got fired from another job, and so I began to volunteer as a reader for the Review. The cycle around here is that every year or two a new editor takes over, you have to be enrolled at Portland State to be eligible, which is a big reason why I got the job, I came back to get a master's in English Literature. At the time, I approached the Editor, to sit down with her and see when she was leaving, see if I could work myself into a situation where I could take over when she departed. And when I approached her, it just so happened that her Assistant Editor had moved on to other endeavors. So I threw my name into the running, and after a series of meetings I got the position of Assistant Editor. And when it came time for the Editor to leave, I threw my name into the running, and after a series of meetings, I got hired.

How closely are you willing to work with an author in editing his or her piece? Do you feel that editing the piece helps or hurts the original intentions of the author?

It really depends. There are many stories/poems that conceptually make me drool or weep, but something will be a miss within the language of the pieces. If a story reads more like a draft, then I ordinarily will reject the piece, but respond to the writer in writing, and encourage her to continue with her pursuits. And there are pieces that are well written, but deal with extraordinarily conventional storylines, and leave me feeling like I want to injure my eyes so I don't have to see those overtly sentimental romances played out yet again. In those cases I will write them a letter explaining just that. Although a little less harsh, a little more encouraging.

And so most of the edits I suggest within a story that is publishable involve tightening the structure of the story, or making the voice in the story consistent, or simply sharpen things a bit. I'll ask the writer if some extraneous scenes or descriptions are necessary.

Within a lot of pieces, I find that the writer/poet is so close to her work that those simple inconsistencies can be cleared up by pointing them out. Although I do simply make suggestions. I have heard stories of editors becoming very difficult if a writer disagrees with certain rewrites or editorial suggestions. I allow for the writer to have a final say in how her story is presented, after all it is her story and journals such as the Review serve as a medium for writers to display their creativity. The worst situation for me, is ruining a writer's voice, or having shades of myself in every piece, although that would be a fun game to play. In each story, I could change a sentence, and within each poem, change a word, so in every piece, those sentences/words that I would add could be extracted and form another extraordinary narrative, as I'm sure it would be. Extra-ordinary.

What is the staff structure like at your journal?

On paper, there's me, as the Editor, and there's Susanna Lea, who is the Assistant Editor, although Susanna really serves as the Poetry Editor and I focus more as the Fiction Editor. Susanna is a successful, published poet, and she has the advantage because she allows herself to feel. I'm much more cold hearted. I believe a ventricle of mine doesn't work right. It's the one that controls emotion. It's clogged with bacon grease. And then there are a series of volunteer readers. Without our volunteer readers, one of us would crack, and we'd probably strangle each other. They keep us focused.

What is the process a piece goes through in order to make it into the final product of an issue in The Portland Review?

We only accept submissions through snail mail, so when a piece comes in, either I or Susanna sort it into its respective pile, then readers dance to the office, grab armfuls of each, then sprint home, salivate over every word, write comments all over the manuscript envelope, then give them back to me. Then Susanna and I read over the comments, then we read through each manuscript, then deliberate, hem and haw, and through this process, pieces start to stand apart from others and we get an idea of where we want to take the issue.

When and how do you, as an editor, know if a piece is right or not right for your publication?

I rely on the pieces ability to arise a visceral movement in my body. If it clicks, or emotionally wows me, then I go back over it with a furrowed brow, skeptically analyzing every comma, every paragraph break, and determine how much it needs to be edited, if at all. It's a real treat when I can read a piece, and just say 'yes' this piece needs no edits. It always interests me how an issue comes together. In our spring issue, which will be out in mid April, 07, there are images of fetuses that float through the issue, there's a story about a woman who finds a baby in a dumpster, there's another story about an aborted fetus floating in a toilet, and I think that my gravitation toward these stories is due to my

apprehension toward publishing conventional love stories or relationship stories that delve into the psychological turmoil of a couple battling over who has more power in the relationship, and so I was drawn to these images of abandoned babies that were created by other individuals, and they're lovely pieces, each told in a unique way.

The term "voice" has a huge affect on a reader's view of a writer, but no one has a truly solid definition of the term itself. What's your take on the meaning and the necessity of voice in a piece?

Quite simply, voice allows for the piece to stylistically stand apart from others, at least that's how I perceive it. I look at how the author utilizes her language tools to draw the reader in.

Do you feel that variation in content and style of a collection of pieces- for instance, from the Fall 2006 Issue, "Invoice" compared to "Four Hundred and One" compared to "EATING"- creates a sense of uniformity through diversity or do you feel it creates a broad array of pieces that may be good literature, but unconnected to one another?

I'm definitely in the diversity camp. I see it as a duty to provide both a uniform and a wide array of pieces that encompass unique voices, as well as being connected, quite simply, at the most fundamental level, by being placed inside the pages of the Review.

Can you touch on some of the difficulties a literary journal has in distributing their publication? How does your journal manage these issues?

Without a distributor, getting the issue outside of the journal's locality is a tiresome task. It's the same for other artistic endeavors as well, if you don't have the marketing and distribution channels, then it's a laborious effort to get the word out. Luckily, when I took over at the Review, we had a distribution channel set up through Bernard Deboer. But even with a distributor, I still don't know where the Review is placed. I actually called our distributor, to see what stores they deliver our journal to, but once the issue reaches their warehouse, it becomes labeled with a barcode, and loses its individual status. Their response was something like, 'you have to trust us your bar-coded product is being placed at desired outlets all over the place.'

The only way I know it is getting distributed is that writers, when they submit their work to the Review, often tell us where they read our journal at. Someone came across a copy on the street in Greece, another in a coffee shop in Japan, and another in New Zealand. Otherwise I would have no idea.

But it was one of my main goals, when I took over as Editor, to focus on widening the distribution channels, so I have taken a grassroots approach, researching local bookstores in other cities, in other states, then cold calling them and asking if they would be willing to consign some issues. It's a laborious process, and at times the business side really takes the romance out running a literary Journal.

Do you have a favorite unsolicited submission discovery or story?

Every unsolicited piece that is included in the Review is a bit of discovery in her own way. After sifting through the thousands of submissions every year, each piece that we deem as publishable, has moved us enough that we have wanted to work with the authors, and I do have to say that working with the authors/poets is the most rewarding part of the job. To aid in the process of publishing someone's story, a piece that started with an idea, a thought, and to be a part of that dialogue, well it's almost as fun as talking with yourself.

Before You Go

My buddy Mike brought me back a copy of The Portland Review after he went home to Oregon for a week. I don't think he had ever read it, but he was excited to bring me living proof (in the event that I didn't believe) that Portland exists as well as Eugene and Portland State University for that matter. He knows I like to read, and it seemed to be perfect timing.

The Portland Review is classy on the outside and witty on the inside. The editors have no quotas to fill on how much poetry or fiction should go in each issue. They publish what they want. For a decent sized journal, it's a perfect mix of psychotic literature, off the wall stories, and lovable characters, all wrapped up under a nice cover that hints at brilliance on the inside. The folks at The Portland Review are considerably nice and willing to work with pretty much anyone, especially for how busy they are (the editor-in-chief is a full time student going for his MA in Literature). It was a pleasure dealing with Jeff Brewer, the editor-in-chief.

As far as submitting work to this journal, all I have to say is, do it. The guidelines are simple and you're generally guaranteed a good read by the editor-in-chief himself. On their website, the reading staff pleads that writers "be understanding if there is a considerable delay between the mailing of a submission and [their] response; [they] are a small staff and receive over one hundred submissions each week." If you have smart fiction or something creative in the literary sense, they want it.