






# WATER~STONE REVIEW



A Magazine Report by Jessie Tierney

December 2007

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# WATER~STONE REVIEW



## FACT SHEET

**Magazine:** Water~Stone Review

**Web Address:** <http://waterstonereview.com/>

**Address:** Water~Stone Review, Graduate School of Liberal Studies  
Hamline University, MS-A1730  
1536 Hewitt Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55104-1284

**Email Address:** [water-stone@hamline.edu](mailto:water-stone@hamline.edu)

**Submission Guidelines:** Fiction under 5,000 words (exclude your name) to Fiction Editor Shelia O'Connor at address above. Include SASE.

**Reading Period:** Submissions accepted September 15 - December 15. Read by Grad Students at Hamline University in their Literary Magazine Publishing course.

**Frequency:** Published annually by the Graduate School of Liberal Studies at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Circulation:** 1,500 print run; 700 paid circulation.

**Unsolicited manuscripts:** 60% of manuscripts are unsolicited per issue.

**Recent Awards:** Pushcart Prize, Best American Poetry, bronze prize for design excellence from MN Magazine Publishers Association.

**Contests:** Brenda Ueland Prose Prize alternating years, Meridel Le Sueur Essay, which focuses on social, political, and communal concerns.

**Cost:** \$14 individual

**Staff:** Three paid; ten unpaid

**Mission:** “Water~Stone connotes the dynamic, transformative power of literature, as well as the search for beauty and perfection at work in the hearts of aspiring writers. The logo type for Water~Stone is based on a hybrid of two ancient alchemic symbols: one for the amalgam of all elements, and the second for the element of water as a pure and dynamic force. The amalgam is a reference to the multi-genre, interdisciplinary nature of the graduate writing program at Hamline University.”

# WATER~STONE

## ISSUES OVER TIME

	EIGHT (2005)	NINE (2006)	TEN (2007)
Prose/Poetry	14/40	15/51	10/45
CNF/Fiction	8/6	10/5	5/5
First/Third/Second (fiction POV)	4/2/0	4/1/0	3/2/0
Setting: Domestic/Exotic	11/3	9/5	6/5
Emerging/Established	1/13	1/14	3/7

This is a well-regarded literary magazine, with consistently high-caliber prose. In my chart, I used “Emerging” writers loosely—I counted anyone “emerging” if they hadn’t already published a novel. I did not see any undergrads on the contributor’s pages. There were quite a few very well-established authors with multiple books out.

In every annual issue, there is always space for at least five fiction stories, and interestingly, fiction is more often written in first person. I did not bother to note the POV of nonfiction, because it was all told in first.

Essentially, I have found that Water~Stone stands up to their goal of publishing great literary prose.

### CONTENT

Water~Stone publishes fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, book reviews, interviews, and photography. Contributors to Water~Stone have included Gina Frangello, Naomi Shihab Nye, Robert Olen Butler, and Robert Bly. Water~Stone has published interviews with Junot Diaz, Eavan Boland, Frederick Busch, Julia Alvarez, Brenda Hillman, Mary Ruefle, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Pete Hautman.

### CONTESTS

Water~Stone Review offers two contests that prose writers may be interested in.

The biannual “Brenda Ueland Prose Prize” offers \$1,000 and publication. Submission time is usually between November and January. Water~Stone also publishes an annual “Meridel Le Sueur Essay” that honors Le Sueur's focus on social, political, and communal concerns. See [www.waterstonereview.com](http://www.waterstonereview.com) for details.





# STORY REVIEWS

VOLUME TEN

“In Transit”

2007

*Slut Lullabies*, by Gina Frangello is a plainspoken fictional story in a domestic setting, told in first person by Emily, who looks back on a definitive experience of her eighteen-year-old self. At a bar one evening, her best friend essentially steals her boyfriend after finding out that Emily had been sleeping with him without her knowing. Emily wants to leave, but has no money as usual, so her boyfriend's 22-year old brother says he'll take her home. Instead, he drives her to his apartment, gives her a glass of water, and goes to his bedroom. She wakes on the living room couch four hours later to Gus entering her, and she struggles as the rape continues. In the morning, he acts as though nothing happened, gives her a glass of orange juice, and drives her home. Emily reflects on losing her best friend, her boyfriend, and her mother, who is dying. She realizes in the end how much she loves her mother, and decides to spend the entire Saturday with her.

The first line draws the reader in immediately: “I found out my mother was a slut from my best friend, at a bar with my secret Greek boyfriend who was possibly a homosexual and his uptight brother who pretended to know nothing of our affair.” Frangello has a psychologically-driven style, where the storyteller is very much aware of her own thoughts and emotions as well as the motives and drives of the other characters. The ending, however, falls short. Once the rape happens, the contemplative style shifts, and it seems as though the teller doesn't know how to process it, which, given the distance she has from the event, the reader would expect. In the end, we learn that this was a story of Emily coming to terms with her dying mother. This realization makes the reader wonder why so much time was spent in the bar rather than surrounding the rape or Emily's contemplating it. Still a thought-provoking, unique story.



*Mrs. Kennedy is Organizing Herself*, by Adam Braver is a third person story in an exotic setting, told very close to Jackie Kennedy. She is on Air Force One on a runway in Dallas, about to take off from Love Field. Her husband's hearse has just been loaded into the jet, and Johnson will soon be sworn in as president. She grieves her husband's death, contemplates the future, and re-lives his death. There is still a blood stain on her dress. She's doped up so much that she can't cry. Ken O'Donnell comes in to tell her Johnson is going to be sworn-in in ten minutes, and that she should be there. She refuses. He leaves. Once he comes back a second time, she agrees, but "Only for my children ... I will only do it for my children. And I am not changing my dress. No pageants." She does not want her husband and her own legacies to be washed away so quickly. She decides in the end "the world does not need poets—it does a fine job creating its own sense of irony."

Braver's storytelling gets right into Jackie Kennedy's internal thoughts. Through her, he explores grief, loss, duty, loyalty ... many of the qualities that surround a death. "Grief has become a part of her. Like a growth inside her," his language is captivating, appropriate for how one might believe that Jackie Kennedy thought. The story is convincing. Not once is the reader drawn out of the telling. On the contrary, the emotions are so human, so universal yet specific to the story, that the reader is right alongside Mrs. Kennedy, feeling them as she does.

**VOLUME NINE**

**"What Prevails"**

**2006**

*Galveston Island Breakdown: Some Directions*, by Sue William Silverman (Winner of the 2006 *Brenda Ueland Prose Prize*) is a plainspoken story in a domestic setting told in the second person. "You" fall in love with a man who drives a yellow convertible and have an affair that destroys your marriage. You move into a top floor of an apartment you share with a quadriplegic. You get a temp job (which turns into thirty four different temp jobs) and shoplift clothes because you are poor. You wake one night to see the bar where you fell in love with yellow convertible man burn to the

ground. In the end you have gotten a permanent job at the Houston Zoo, and are speeding down the highway, with suitcases packed, toward your new life.

The second person POV works in this story to evoke intimacy between reader and teller, and manages to do this without throwing the reader off. The flat, sad tone emerges from how the teller speaks of banal activities she must engage in, or things that could be seen as exciting (“The Neon Penises of Galveston, Texas,” and “Shoplifting: A Cautionary Tale”). After this journey out of love and out of a marriage, the reader is left with a minor sense of hope because “you” are finally leaving Galveston to begin a new life in Houston.

*Balsa* by Brenda Miller is a short first person creative nonfiction essay, told in a domestic setting. Miller talks about flying machines—when she was young, putting together balsa wood planes; when, before she left Seattle, she went up in a hang glider for no real reason but to see something new; and her friend Karl, who just yesterday, “went up in a flying machine at sunset ... perched in what looked like a hybrid of a bicycle and a plane.” She uses the flying machines and their construction to speak of life—how long good things, “like cicadas—who are granted only one frantic day to do their life’s work,” last, and how to say goodbye.

Miller’s tone is uplifting, recalling memories in carefully selected, delicate language, and drawing very subtle conclusions about what she has noticed in her life. She uses specific details and metaphors throughout to hint at a realization: “our own bodies, flimsy, really, as balsa—and our lives, which always pass in an instant.”

**VOLUME EIGHT**

**“Light Keepers”**

**2005**

*Heirlooms*, by Rachel Hall is a plainspoken third person fictional story in a domestic setting. Hall uses a list form, beginning many paragraphs with “They left ...” then goes on to paint a vivid picture of the life or things of a Jewish family, moving to America after the war, must leave behind.

Friends, beds, “a sureness with language,” money, books, sounds of cathedral bells. Some things, we find out, the family cannot leave, like Lisa’s desire to have a child, which she cannot. In the end, the day before the family is scheduled to leave, Jean passes an alley and sees papers fluttering in a down draft. He moves closer, finds that they are dollar bills, and collects them, stuffing his pockets. There are more than he can fit. He runs home, yells for the women to come, and empties his pockets on the kitchen table, only to find that the bills were printed during the French Revolution, and can’t be used now. They are ugly, and “a silly thing to take when so much has been discarded or given away or sold. Still,” the story ends, “he cannot forget the way the bills sailed in the wind, how he felt running toward them, hope lodged in his throat.”

The form is effective in this story because of the instances where Hall breaks from it. After initially establishing the “They left ...” pattern, later paragraphs start, for instance, with “It turns out there are things that cannot be left,” or “Sometimes,” Lise will say, “I find myself wondering where something is...” The descriptions that follow the listed items give the history of this family, the significance of their life in Poland, and explain the transformation that must take place as they go to America. Hall proves that this is a subtle, economical way to get a vivid picture of a life in a short amount of time. Her language is carefully chosen; each word feels intentional. This adds to the delicate tone of the story as well as the family.

*And We Sell Apples '77*, by Ginnah Howard is a plainspoken first person story in a domestic, mountain-town setting. A sort of day-in-the-life, Rena narrates as her husband, Steve, is “about to duck daddy-duty.” She and the kids pile into the car, whose muffler is failing, threatening to get them pulled over, which would be very bad since Steve’s got his marijuana stash in the glove box. They drop the kids off at Aunt Peggy’s, and Steve is planning to take Rena to the blues bar, one of the few romantic things this couple does. But as they’re smoking up in the car, they spot Nooley, an

old friend who'd disappeared since last winter, walking in the church parking lot (across from the bar). They learn he's doing AA, and they decide to sit in on the open meeting, stoned. It's torture for Rena, and they leave to pick up the kids as soon as it's over. When they get home, Steve implies that he might go sober, maybe even tomorrow. The story ends with, "You believe that, you believe anything."

Rena's dry, sometimes humorous storytelling voice is striking. Not only does the reader get her slightly sarcastic thoughts, but we also get the voices of her children and her husband, "Steve, about to duck daddy-duty: Just gonna take a run to the Quickway." There is rarely a physical description of any character, yet the diction in this story paints a clear picture of the speaker. Place is handled well, "We pass the log cabin, one of our few neighbors. Place has no electric, no inside plumbing," and the reader gets a strong sense of the kind of town the family lives in. An engaging read.



# INTERVIEW WITH SHELIA O'CONNOR

FICTION EDITOR, Water~Stone Review



**What does it mean to be the Prose Editor at Water~Stone? Are there others who read fiction submissions? Do you submit the manuscripts you've chosen to Mary Francois Rockcastle (Editor)? How much interaction do you have with the other editors?**

First Water~Stone Review is a literary annual published by the Hamline University Graduate School of Liberal Studies. So one of the primary responsibilities of the prose editor is to facilitate and teach the Water~Stone Prose course each spring. That course is made up of the current editorial board of Hamline's GLS students, and their job, among other things, is to review and select the pieces to be considered for that year's issue. In that capacity, the prose editor works as both teacher and guide, facilitating discussions, illuminating the merits and challenges of particular stories. I am also responsible for screening the 100's of submissions, communicating with writers, negotiating final choices with the executive editor and the editorial board.

When finalists have been selected by the editorial board, our editor, Mary Rockcastle enters the process with her own perspective on the finalists. It's a three point system with checks and balances that assure the journal isn't representative of a single aesthetic.

**I noticed that nearly all the stories in Issue 9 had been written by published writers. I'm curious--what role does a history of previous publications have in the reading process? Do emerging writers go directly into the slush pile? Do you read solicited manuscripts first?**

In prose, we read the slush pile first, without regard for previous publication. It is purely by chance if our writers have been previously published. From there, the strongest manuscripts move into the next round of consideration—they are put before the student editorial board enrolled in the Water~Stone class. As a rule, prose manuscripts are solicited later in the process and are often solicited in response to the range of work we'd still like to see in this issue of the journal.

**What are some recurring mistakes you find emerging writers make in their stories? Do you have advice and suggestions for these writers?**

Many writers send out stories before they are seriously ready for publication. I would say that's a large part of our early round of rejections. Common problems are issues in point of view, a lack or urgency, absence of plot and dramatic movement, flat characters, a failure to establish a compelling voice. If you look at it in the reverse--a story that has all these things—urgency, plot, action, rich characters, compelling voice, that's a story that grabs our attention.



**I personally enjoyed Ginnah Howard's "Message '93" (in Issue 9) because of the closeness of the third-person storyteller to Mark. Mark's voice comes through strongly, and the story is full of sensory details and imagery, which makes it real for the reader. What is one of your favorite stories, and what (craft-wise) do you feel went into that story to make it successful?**

I too admire Message 93, and that's the second work we've published by Gina Howard. That wasn't an intentional choice, it just happened to have full editorial support. In fact, the board that year was not aware that we had published her previously. I don't think in terms of favorites, but rather how each story contributes to the whole. Water~Stone is genuinely committed to being a body of literature—I look for diverse voices that document the complex experience of being alive.

**What is your relationship with story submissions and their writers? Do you give specific feedback with a rejection notice? How much interaction between you and the writer is involved in the editing process?**

We don't give specific feedback, it's too labor intensive. That said, there are stories that make it into the final rounds, stories we admire but are unable to publish, and we do send personal notes to each of those writers, encouraging them to submit again, and wishing them luck with the story. In the end, we do have more good work than we can take, and there are stories that nearly made it to the finish line, and we want the writers to know that.

Once a story has been accepted, our editor, Mary Rockcastle, works closely with writers on the editing process.

**Water~Stone has gotten great reviews from writers like Naomi Shihab Nye and Robert Vivian. I'm wondering about the readership of Water~Stone. Who else reads the review? Does it reach people outside the writing community? Do you have contact with readers? What has been the feedback?**

Water~Stone is a national journal; we publish writers from many regions and it's read by readers across America. It's difficult to know exactly who your readership is, but we do hope to reach people both within and outside of the writing community. We are interested in publishing work of exceptional literary merit that is of interest to a wide readership.

**How do you feel about the viability of the literary market in our non-reading culture? What does this mean for Water~Stone? What is your sense of the future of the literary review?**

This is a constant and difficult question. Personally, I believe literature, the story in its many forms, will always be central to humanity. How that experience is delivered, the forms the story takes, that will continue to evolve and it will evolve beyond my wildest imaginings. We know readers are changing, but that doesn't mean an end to reading. It may however, mean a serious shift in the

relationship between print and reader. And within that evolution, certainly the literary review will continue to change.

**What transformations have you seen take hold during your time at Water~Stone? What moments come back vividly for you?**

We've recently added a CNF editor, Barrie Borich, who will be a wonderful addition to the journal. Our CNF submissions continue to grow and we want serious leadership for it within the journal. Also, we work in conjunction with the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, they do the amazing production of the journal (thus the beauty of it) and they have added a visual component in the form of curated photography. These works, which function independently, add another layer to the text.

The most vivid moments for me remain as a reader—the winter moments (we screen in January) where I'm sitting in a sleepy coffee shop and a story suddenly jumps off the page, changes me forever. That's the moment that makes the hard work worth it. Pure surprise. Pure awe. The sense that I am lucky for having read this story.

**You are a mother, wife, writer, teacher, editor ... how do you do it all? What gets sacrificed? How do you stay sane?**

Well fortunately, my children are nearing adulthood. When they were young, I couldn't do it all, and I would say I sacrificed my writing and teaching in order to spend the hours with them. I'm glad I did it. At this point, I try to make a sacred time for my own creative work because I am so involved with nurturing and reading the work of others. It's difficult, but essential for me to have time that is given solely to my fiction.

**How has being an editor informed your writing?**

Editing Water~Stone has had tremendous impact on my own work, especially my short stories. It is humbling to sit with hundreds of manuscripts, and to understand on a totally visceral level (you yawn, you fidget, you can't recall what you just read), that most stories don't grab you by the throat. Other's do, but they make it to the mid-point and then falter. I profoundly understand that "good enough" isn't "good enough" when you're in the company of hundreds of other good writers. Work has to be original, has to startle, has to demand our attention.

**What is the best piece of fiction you have received but could never publish--why?**

I don't think I can answer that. There has been work I have admired deeply that we couldn't publish for any number of reasons. Sometimes those reasons have to do with a small, but fatal flaw within the work. Or a larger fatal flaw, but I still respect the writer's brilliance. If I was that writer's mentor, I would step in, tell them how to quickly fix it.

Other times we reject excellent stories based on our line up. For example, we might have five strong stories all told by first person girl-child narrators. If we can only publish five stories that issue, they're not all going to make it. So three or four will have to go. And they will go on to be published elsewhere...or they should be.

Every year I lose stories I love and I wish them the best in the world.

**Is there anything else you would like to say about the review, writing, being an editor, storytelling ... ?**

I think it's important for writers to be aware of the difficulty of publishing—on a small or large scale—and the need to be persistent. It's a long process, difficult, full of self-doubt and rejection slips, but if you work hard, create the best art possible, it will eventually find a home. Keep at it.

