



A Magazine Report

by

Sarah E. Doyle

May 2009



Table of Contents

<i>Fact Sheet</i>	3
<i>Why I Chose Blood Lotus</i>	4
<i>Comparison</i>	5
<i>Prose Reviews</i>	6
<i>Interview with Stacia M. Fleegal</i>	8
<i>Interview with John Steele</i>	10



Fact Sheet

Magazine: Blood Lotus

Web Address: <http://www.bloodlotus.org>

Email Address:

General: bloodlotusjournal@gmail.com

Poetry: bloodlotuspoetry@gmail.com Fiction: bloodlotusfiction@gmail.com

Editor/Founders: Stacia M. Fleegal, Teneice Delgado

Founded: 2006

Mission Statement: “The editors of Blood Lotus want to read poetry, fiction, and anything in between! We read year-round, and our quarterly issues are packed with fresh language, memorable characters, and beautiful artwork. We refuse to believe that everything has already been written—let us promote your best writing as proof.”

What they publish: Poetry, Fiction, Creative Non-Fiction, Art, “Gray Area” pieces

Submission Guidelines: No more than five poems in a submission. Fiction must be short stories, not novel excerpts, of no more than 4,500 words. The editors ask that you give yourself an introduction, list any previous publications and include a one-sentence synopsis of your story. “Gray Area” work should be sent to bloodlotusjournal@gmail.com and should include an introduction and an explanation of how you, the artist, define your work. No attachments. The editors at Blood Lotus want you to know that you are likely to only ever be published in one issue.

Please visit <http://www.bloodlotus.org/feedback.htm> for more information.

Simultaneous Submissions: Yes, but only if it is stated in the initial email and the author must notify Blood Lotus if the piece is accepted elsewhere.

Avg. Fiction Submissions per issue: 480

Frequency: Quarterly

Reading Period: Year Round

Contributor Payment: Non-paying



Why I Chose Blood Lotus

I found *Blood Lotus* when looking for an online journal to do for this report. I really wanted to do one that nobody had heard of and that I knew nobody else would pick. The name, Blood Lotus, immediately jumped out at me and made me want to investigate further into what this journal was about. The Web site is simple enough to allow you to find everything you need without having to search, with a menu bar at the top and every link clearly marked as to where it takes you. I only make note of this because I've seen other online journals try to be dynamic with their site, but just end up being confusing. *Blood Lotus* also allows the reader to view their issues as a PDF file, making it easy to print and carry with you, as if it were a printed journal. I appreciated this so much because I love reading something I can hold in my hands; I get tired of staring at a computer screen for long periods of time.

Blood Lotus publishes mostly poetry, but the fiction they do publish is strong and page-turning. I've read all the fiction pieces in the last three issues and they were all well-written and satisfying. Since the fiction editor, John Steele, receives over thirty submissions per week, it is easy to see that he reads them carefully and critically to decide which should be in the magazine. Since there are so few fiction pieces, they have to be really bold and absorbing. Ultimately, I think it would be a privilege to be published in this magazine.



Comparison of Issues

	<u>Issue#12 April '09</u>	<u>Issue #9 June '08</u>	<u>Issue#5 May '07</u>
Poetry:Prose	8:4	13:3	10:5
(Writer) Male:Female	3:1	2:1	5:0
POV 1 st :2 nd :3 rd	4:0:0	2:0:1	4:0:1
(Writer) emerging:established	1:3	1:2	0:5

Blood Lotus has clearly, over time, made an effort to publish more works by emerging writers, whereas in the beginning issues, they started with a lot of established writers. Most of the statistics here aren't that surprising, and even though the issues I chose to look at closely on this graph say otherwise the ratio of male to female writers is distributed pretty evenly, since most of the poems are written by women.

I do think it is interesting that they have significantly more first person writing than anything else, because Fiction Editor John Steele says he has “a hard time with first person stories because they are so easy to screw up.” I agree with him because first person can narrow your vantage point, so it takes a strong writer to be able to see everything. This statistic shows that John really felt very strongly about these pieces and felt that they really nailed the first person narrative.



Prose Reviews

From Issue # 12, April 2009

Red by Eva Langston is a poetic, realistic story in an exotic setting. The narrator starts off by dyeing her hair “Manic Panic Electric Lava Red.” She has been dealing with a severe eating disorder, it seems, but she never admits that; she only tells us that she hates food and is afraid of ever getting into triple digits, weight wise. So, her mother sends her on the Greyhound bus to visit her grandmother, in hopes of fattening her up. The whole bus ride she eats nothing and makes frequent comments about her body. She meets a man, Garrett, who sits down next to her after getting on at a stop along the way down south. She notes that he is “one of the hairiest men” she had ever seen. They make small talk and he doesn't really leave her alone, despite the fact that she doesn't seem interested in talking to him at all. They get off at the same stop and have to wait for the next bus to come; Garrett suggests they do some Ecstasy in the interim. Back on the bus, Garrett and Red, his nickname for the narrator, are both high and voraciously grabbing at each other. Red proceeds to give Garrett a blow job exclaiming that she has “swallowed him whole.”

I absolutely loved this story. It is a great re-telling of a classic story. It never felt forced at any time because of how differently the author approached it. She just used the fundamentals of the story (red imagery, girl going to grandmother, outsmarting the wolf, etc) and let herself tell the rest the way she wanted to. She doesn't beat you over the head with anything that may be an element of the original story. We get a lot of strong sights throughout the story; there wasn't a point where I had trouble seeing anything she was telling. One of my favorites was when she was describing her legs in comparison to a fat women sitting next to her: “I imagined the backs of my thighs spreading out and plumping up inside my jeans, the flesh turning into dimpled white fat.”

Issue #11, Jan. 2009

Stud Fee by CD Mitchell is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. Mike and Lani are in a hotel room, and Lani is telling Mike she is pregnant. However, Mike is a man Lani's husband paid to impregnate her. She and her husband, Jim, couldn't conceive on their own, so they hired a friend from church, Mike. Mike and Lani, up until this point, had been meeting to have sex for a year, but Lani has been pregnant for almost ten weeks now and is still meeting with Mike for sex. Her husband is aware of this, but doesn't seem to care. The story then flashes back to the day Jim offered Mike the opportunity to impregnate his wife at a BBQ they had at their house. Mike has since fallen in love with Lani and the reader is led to believe that Lani feels the same. The story ends with Mike and Lani deciding not to run away together; Lani goes back to her husband and Mike takes the check Lani gave him for services rendered and heads out of town.

I enjoyed the structure of this story. We start off in the present; we know that Lani is pregnant by a who her isn't her husband. We then learn how the arrangement came to be through flashbacks. Mitchell has a really strong hold on his

characters in this story, which is why this structure really works here. The strong characters make you want to keep reading, despite the fact that you already know the outcome and the lead up. They are believable people because they aren't perfect and don't necessarily treat each well in this story; they aren't likable, but mirror what some of us look like at times: imperfect. This makes the story much more enjoyable to read.

Issue #10, November 2008

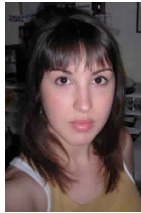
A Long Line of Liars by Mike Hampton is a plainspoken, realistic short, short story in a domestic setting. The narrator's grandfather, Jake, worked at a Gospel station in Wichita. Then, he was drafted to the Navy and worked as a radioman there, avoiding doing any real manual labor at all costs. He got transferred to another ship, becoming the ship's photographer. During leave in Hawaii, he met his wife, the narrator's Grandmother, Pearl and they started up a photography business by dressing Pearl up as a Hula girl and convincing Military men that she was the real deal. They then moved to a modest neighborhood and Pearl freaked out all the housewives by telling them raunchy stories of her escapades with Naval men. The housewives convinced their husbands to buy Jake and Pearl's house at twice what they paid. They became millionaires, had seven genius children, and died a heroic death saving children from a bus fire. Thus, leaving our narrator as the only person to "share their story."

I had to read this story twice to get the full grasp of what it is about. I realized that it's as if our narrator is a child, making up a fantastical story about the lives of his Grandma and Grandpa. We don't know what is true and what is not true about these two people, but their story is interesting nonetheless. The part that I enjoyed about the structure of it was that it doesn't really turn into somewhat of a tall tale until the end. This was a clever way, I thought, of getting the reader to buy everything he is telling them about Jake and Pearl. This way, the reader feels the need to go back and read it again, trying to figure out what the story was that they just read.



Interview with Stacia M. Fleegal

Co-Founder, Poetry Editor and Managing Editor



Sarah Doyle: What inspired you to start this journal?

Blood Lotus: Teneice Delgado and I co-founded *Blood Lotus* while we were working toward our MFA's as part of Spalding University's brief-residency program. We were both assistants with *The Louisville Review* and enjoyed reading and editing, and we had a lot of similar interests in poets and poetry. It was really as simple as that. We knew online was the way to go because it would be practically free to run, and that we could potentially appeal to a larger audience and therefore attract a diverse pool of submissions. We realized all we really needed were a URL, submission guidelines, an email address, and a name, and while that was technically true, we know now that a concept, a mission, is very important. We also wouldn't claim to be any kind of authority on evaluating the poems of others if we didn't try to read as much poetry as humanly possible, from a few hundred years ago to the most recent issues of leading journals.

SD: Why did you choose to not only include fiction, but non-fiction as well in your journal? Was there any point where you just wanted to make a poetry only journal?

BL: That decision was based, again, on appealing to a wide variety of writers. Also, Spalding's MFA program places a heavy emphasis on cross-genre and interdisciplinary study, so even though Teneice and I are both poets who don't write fiction, we enjoy reading it (and nonfiction), and we know plenty of people who write in more than one genre. About a year into publishing *Blood Lotus*, we began to get a lot more submissions and knew we wanted to have an authority on prose read the fiction, so we asked our friend John Steele if he'd come on board. We had a nonfiction section and editor for a while, but weren't getting as many submissions in that genre as in fiction and poetry, so we decided to focus on those two, but to open up a section called the Gray Area, where we'd accept one or two pieces per issue which cross genres a bit and can't be so easily categorized.

SD: How involved are you in the promotion of Blood Lotus? What are some things you have done since the startup to get your name out there?

BL: To promote *Blood Lotus*, the best thing we've ever done is to take out an ad on newpages.com. Newpages is a great resource for writers, one which all of us have used to research markets for our own work. We get a lot of traffic on our site from people clicking on the Newpages link. We also take out the occasional ad in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, and we have

both a Facebook and a Myspace page. For the last three years, we've distributed promotional material at the annual AWP conference as well, and this has been effective too: word of mouth, either face to face or on the internet, is and will always be the best marketing tool.

SD: What is the best part of editing Blood Lotus? The worst part? (if there is one)

BL: The best part of editing *Blood Lotus* is, of course, reading and getting to promote great writing. Speaking just for myself, I would say the worst part has less to do with the journal or the work and more to do with feeling like there's never enough time. Four issues a year might not seem like a lot, but working on BL is never-ending. We're now getting between 800 and 1,000 submissions per issue, or every three months. We do it because we want to and love to and believe enough in the importance of writing and the arts to want to provide a venue to promote them.

SD: One of the reasons I wanted to do this report on Blood Lotus was the fact that you offer PDFs of all your issues, making it easy to print them and take them with you, if you so desire. Was this your hope in doing this? Is this sort of a way of bridging a gap between print and online?

BL: The PDFs are actually fairly new, although we are working to get our back issues into PDF format as well. The purpose of the PDFs was to make a more cohesive issue, to be able to order it and control the flow and emotion of the pieces and how they play off each other. I definitely think that's a way of, as you say, "bridging a gap between print and online," whether readers print out the PDFs or not. (I hope readers who print the PDFs will share with others and/or recycle!)

SD: Have you ever considered doing a bound version of Blood Lotus?

BL: It's definitely something we've talked about. We're torn because we all share a love of books, their printed and bound tangibility, but we don't want to fuel the misguided notion that print is somehow more credible than digital. We believe in the internet as an important tool for promoting and disseminating art.

SD: What about Blood Lotus do you hope stands out to people?

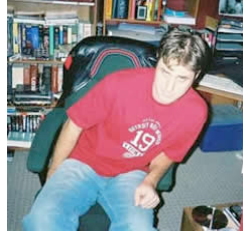
BL: The most common feedback that we get about BL is 1) people love our name, and 2) people respond to the eclectic range of writing and voices we promote. Our submissions are often accompanied by cover letters praising work from previous issues and thanking us for choosing "intense" and "meaningful" work. That's all we could ever ask!

SD: Do you have any advice for someone wanting to start their own literary journal?

BL: A person can't be an editor without being a reader, partly because that's the main work of editing, but primarily because it is unethical to "judge" the work of others if you are not knowledgeable in the field. No one can know everything about poetry or fiction, but the three of us—Teneice, John, and myself—read as much as we can. We also make time in our very busy lives to do this because, as I said earlier, we want to and we find meaning in this work. If a person is willing to read, make time, create procedures and standards and stick to them, self-promote, and stay abreast of the writing and publishing fields, then that person can start a literary journal.



Interview with John Steele
Fiction Editor



Sarah Doyle: All of the editors at Blood Lotus graduated from Spalding University, which is where I'm guessing you all met? How did you get brought on as the fiction editor?

BL: I did meet Stacia and Teniece at Spalding. I was in the fiction concentration and they were both in the poetry concentration, but we just clicked and started hanging out. I became a PBA, or Poet By Association. After I graduated, I expressed interest in helping with the fiction submissions and they asked me if I wanted to be the full time fiction editor. It didn't take me long to make up my mind that I definitely wanted to be involved with BL, so I became the fiction editor.

SD: How do you like to read stories that are submitted? At home? In a big leather chair? And how many stories will you typically read in one sitting?

BL: I like reading at my desk with a coke and bag of chips. I generally do this at home, but sometimes I'll take them to the library because I like hanging out there. I can get through about twenty stories at a time because, like I said, I know what I'm looking for in a good story and when I don't see those elements in the first couple of pages, I stop reading. If I like what I'm reading, then I put it in a "maybe" pile, where I will return to it once I have significantly narrowed the submissions down and read all the "maybes" in their entirety and then I pick the best four or five from those.

SD: We've read a lot of interviews with editors that state they can tell they are going to publish the story from simply reading the first line. Do you agree with this? Have you had any specific instances where you said a "yes" or "no" from reading the first line? If you have, were there any instances where you went on to read, realizing you have changed your answer?

BL: I have often said no after reading the first line. The first line is the author's best chance to get my attention and make me want to read the second sentence. It's amazing how many authors don't consider their first sentence the most important. If the first sentence isn't great in some way, or at a minimum, error free, then what assurance do I have that the rest of the story is any good? Rarely do I change my mind if I read further. The first line is a great indicator of what's coming next. As a general rule of thumb, if the very first sentence doesn't engage me or hook me, I can pretty well guess how the rest of the story will read. As a time saver, I generally mark the stories that have that great first line and they are instantly put in a different pile. Stories that have an expected, boring, error-riddled or simply clunky first sentence already have a strike against them and I'm less likely to read the whole story. Look, if you have something to say, why be coy and start off with something unimportant? A lot of writers start out with a "warm up" sentence or paragraph, but that's not where the story

really starts. The idea should be to make every word count, get into the story as late as possible and get out as early as possible. Don't waste time with meaningless words.

SD: When you go to write your own stories, do you feel that the editor in you speaks loudly or are you able to divorce the editor from the writer?

BL: There is the first draft, which is all writer. Then the second draft, which is a weird combination of writer/editor/rewriter. That's the hard part--being a good rewriter. Many authors simply don't bother to rewrite, and, in my opinion, they simply aren't writers. If you haven't revised and rewritten and challenged yourself as the author, then you shouldn't be submitting your story.

SD: Do you have a process for deciding what the first story will be in the fiction section?

BL: There is some talk about thematic issues across genres and if one presents itself, we try to arrange the work to have some thread that connects all the work.

SD: Can you think of your favorite story you've published in your journal? Why is it your favorite?

BL: Right now I'm pretty happy with the story in our current issue, *Bird Brain* because it made me laugh and it was very visual. It was a very tight story.

SD: In issue #11, there is a piece by Kristin Lewis called "Hollow Girl" that when I read the first time felt like prose poetry to me. The language just felt so beautifully poetic. I know that your fellow editor, Stacia, doesn't like that term, but what do you think about it? Did you think at any point that piece should be in the poetry section?

BL: I'm okay with a little crossover between poetry and fiction. I think poems can tell stories and stories can be poetic. We now have a "Grey Area" section where we publish pieces that don't clearly fall into either genre but combine elements of both. I think this is a growing trend in the writing "out there." Really, when it comes down to it, it's how the author uses language to achieve an intended effect. All that I require is to be moved and engaged, whether it's a plain prose style or very poetic.

SD: Do you find yourself drawn to certain types of stories, stories with certain types of characters or themes (i.e. female P.O.V., 3rd person P.O.V., stories about relationships gone wrong, etc.)

BL: I have a hard time with first person stories because they are so easy to screw up. Many people don't know how to tell a story using first person. They can't separate their voice from the narrator's. I like stories with a strong, engaging character who actively overcomes (or doesn't but at least tries) some tremendous obstacle to reach a desirable goal. I have to understand why the goal is important to them. There should be some sense of something at stake. So many stories are merely a slice of life and I am left feeling "why should I care?" You, as an author, have to make me care.

SD: On the flip side, what are some things in manuscripts you see all the time that you are just sick of reading about? (i.e. death of a family member, how I dealt with cancer, etc.)

BL: Depression and suicide. I don't want to read a story that makes me want to shoot myself because everything is terrible and there is no sense of awe or wonder at the world, even dark or disturbing parts of the world. The author is our filter or

lens to the world. We are looking for fresh perspectives or interesting ways to view the world. I prefer to read something that has a sense of curiosity about things rather than one that is resigned to being bummed out.

SD: Do you have a final say in what gets published? How much input do Stacia and Teneice have in what goes into the fiction section?

BL: However ill advised it may be, they trust me to pick only the best stories we receive, just like Stacia gets final say on poetry. We respect each other's judgment and we haven't been wrong yet.

SD: Do you have any final thoughts or advice for emerging writers looking to submit not only to Blood Lotus, but to literary journals in general?

BL: Read. Write. Revise. Rewrite. Polish. Be professional. Get that first line perfect. Follow the submission guidelines exactly. Don't give an editor any reason to trash your stuff. Don't give up.