



Denver Syntax

Magazine Report

By:

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Fiction Writers & Publishing

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: Denver Syntax

Web site: www.denversyntax.com

Email Address: Jonathan@denversyntax.com

Founded: June 2003

Founder and Managing Editor: Jonathan Bitz

Frequency: Quarterly, Accepts year round

What to Send: Provocative works dealing with madness, sex, death, general mishaps, strange infirmities, involvement in unique situations, sociological criticism/assessment, philosophy, physics, and stories with interesting use of language (within reason). Witty and clever pieces that play on words while keeping focus on the storyline are greatly appreciated at Denver Syntax.

What they Publish: Short Fiction, Poetry, Visual Art, Essays, and Editorials

Submission Guidelines: Include cover letter with brief bio, manuscripts must be attached as an MS document, and include the word "submission" in the subject heading.

Reading Period: Year Round

Simultaneous Submissions Accepted: Yes

Contributor Payment: Currently not paying.

Submissions per Quarter: 200 to 300

Why I chose Denver Syntax:

Initially, I was surfing Newpages.com clicking here, reading there, when I came across the title Denver Syntax. The title struck me as irregular. It didn't have the words Review, Quarterly, or Anthology, leading me to believe that maybe I hadn't run across just another of the many university based journals. Which at the time was what I wanted but, I couldn't have told you this then.

I clicked the link, the Web site loaded, and right away I was impressed. The art on the front page was progressive, modern, and dark. There was a painting of an old man in an undershirt standing against a corner wall spot with a rope tied around both shoulders and over his chest. He looked very sad. I loved it. The color scheme of the Web site is Black, Red, and White. I scrolled down. The Web site had a center focus sort of like a letter box screen only this one runs vertical as opposed to horizontal. The black outline ran alongside a white strip in the middle which while scrolling gave me the impression it was to represent a film roll.

Then, I began to read. The writer's voice is so apparent in the stories. There's the cynical, sarcastic, humorous, dark, and overly aggressive narration. I enjoy all the prose. I think this journal represents a young generation's voice, one that is concerned with taking risks when it comes to being provocative.

Comparison of Issues over Time:

Approximately: 2007 - 2010

3 rd POV	1 st POV
4	6

Male Author	Female Author
7	3

Dialogue in Quotations	Dialogue Italicized	Dialogue Unmarked
6	3	1

Right away I noticed the number of male authors published seemed to outnumber the number of female authors on the Web site. As the ongoing discussion and debate goes though, many believe there are more male writers in general than female. Such may or may not be true. I found it to be true at a glance.

Another thing I noticed was the strong narration and voice, which after looking more closely I noticed many of the pieces were first person narratives. This wasn't completely surprising because the closeness of the voice to the narrative suited well to the overall arc to the story.

Lastly, the first two stories I read had dialogue italicized. I had hope that this was a theme, being someone who prefers not to use quotes I appreciate when a story uses none or employs a different tactic to structuring dialogue such as using italics. As it turned out, quotes were used more often than not.

Story Reviews:

Issue 19

1.

Breakfast by Amy Glassenapp is a plain spoken and realistic story written in a domestic setting. The objective third person narrator tells the story of an older sister visiting her younger sister. The older sister wakes up hung over, naked, and bearing her enlarged clitoris. There's a crack in the ceiling that the little sister sees with a tiny leak dripping. The older sister brought home a man her first night visiting. He is asleep and fully clothed on the couch. The younger sister tells her the guy needs to be gone by the time she gets back from getting groceries. The older sister smashes a cup. The man wakes frightened, the older sister cries, and the man slips out the back door after a drip falls on his head. Walking down the street he runs into a girl he recognizes, he thinks from the club the night before but changes his mind when he judges her by her loose clothes, the kind of clothes a person who spends too much time indoors wears, but still he finds her attractive. He says to her that he's seen her before. She shakes her head. He asks if she needs help with the groceries. She says you're kidding right? He watches her walk down the block, and then up to the house he'd just exited. She balances her groceries on her hip, like a mother would do.

The prose is sharp and filled with hints. The diction is aggressive and the syntax is exciting but there is an unstated connection beneath the sex, mention of mothering, the cracked foundation in the roof, the leaking, and the hint that the visit is after the little sister's abortion. The gesture of how the groceries are held, the broken tea cup on the kitchen floor, the cracked ceiling, and the oversized clitoris are all strong images. There is no specific change but the situational and verbal irony makes for a story that resonates with the reader long after the piece is finished. This is because of the constant hinting toward the idea that what is familiar to these characters, what is unspoken is a long ongoing dysfunction that they have shared in their own denial, and are still misunderstood about what each other's responsibility is to each other. The tone is a contrast between disturbing and endearing.

2.

In Answer to your Question by Phillip Gardner is a plain spoken story in a domestic setting. The story is a third person subjective account of a man (Hank) seeking revenge on

another man (Darryl). Hank has Darryl's arm in a vice grip, Darryl is beaten badly, and Hank is holding pruning shears while he is asking Darryl for the truth. Hank tells Darryl if he tells the truth than he can keep four fingers. He's taking the pinky. If he elects not to talk he's talking the pointer and the pinky. If he lies, he's taking the thumb too. Either way, he says he'll leave two in the middle even if Darryl lies. Either way, one finger is gone. Darryl is given the option to pick. Hank says he'll leave those because he won't take everything from him like Darryl did to him and so that Darryl can still wave Bye Bye.

I enjoyed this story from the start because the opening had me in suspense. "I've got some good news for you," Hank said. "And I've got some bad news for you." Then the suspense continued the whole time as Hank gave his long winded speech to Darryl locked in the vice grips, as Hank strolled around the garage holding pruning sheers that he named "Hawk." I didn't have to see a finger cut off because the suspense of my wondering what will happen next was more important. The majority of the story is dialogue but it works because Hank is so calm and collective about mutilating a person that the little action given was enough to keep me reading. This piece gave me a close up look at a character suffering from betrayal and madness through the length of time it takes for him to make a move and the prolonging of the moment to strike fear into Darryl who he's seeking vengeance upon.

Issue 11

Jesus Freak by Malarie Yolen-Cohen is a plain spoken story in a domestic setting. The story is a first person subjective account told from a wife's perspective about her husband's old friend Ben coming in town to visit. The drama begins right at the start with the protagonist hearing from a fortune teller that trouble is coming into town in the form of company. The husband forgot to tell his wife about Ben, a Harley riding backwoods Anti-Semite from his childhood coming to visit them in Houston. The married couple is Jewish. Ben the Anti-Semite rips through their flower patch with his motorcycle, flirts with the wife, and tries to push the gospel onto the Jewish Couple. When denied, he rips off back to Tennessee where he sends them Jews for Jesus literature until he falls off the Christian wagon and begins soliciting women and hitting the sauce like he used to.

The story is funny, and like many of the pieces on Denver Syntax, there is a strong influence on irony. The opening line set me up for the incoming visitor Ben and from the line I knew I was in for a laugh. "I never gave much truck to fortunetellers, but this one's message

was vague enough to spark a niggling of worry; ‘Company’s coming. Could be trouble.’” The diction and syntax is untraditional but embodies the southern voice so it works. Ben comes into town with his bible in his duffle bag and at dinner pulls it out to tell the Jewish couple something happened to him he didn’t expect. “Jesus. I was saved by Jesus,” Ben announced. The couple explains the fundamental difference between his religion believing the Messiah has already come and theirs believes he’s yet to come but Ben doesn’t go for that. He persists, fails, and leaves the next day. The final laugh doesn’t come until a couple months pass by and the couple hears through the grapevine that he renounced his born again ways. The story resonates because it pokes fun at the phases a person goes through in a short amount of time when “trying to find oneself” or “soul searching.”

Issue 13

Bob Malone Cleaned up Dead Bodies for Money by Josh Byer is a plain spoken story in a domestic setting. The first person narrator recounts a job he had cleaning up dead bodies. Byer describes the melted bodies by giving a recipe of bananas, shit, malt vinegar, and wet garbage mashed to snot then left out to sit for a week. The corpse room was referred to as the cream. The narrator tells the story of a twenty five year old painter looking for human anatomy experience who cries until his tear ducts dry out. Then there was a pot head named Stone who found a baby corpse and he smashed up the house, causing sixty thousand dollars worth of damage. People would ask the narrator to tell the tales of death at parties, bars, clubs, etc. Then, after he would everyone would call him sick. They would quit calling him. So he quits his job and works at a restaurant because at least there he can still get laid.

The story has a confusing opening line. From the horse’s mouth: At this point, I was a bit worried because I was afraid there was going to be talking animals which after all the childhood movies I’ve seen I can do without. Then, the story got dark. “Not murder victims, or police shootouts. Old people. The homeless. We’d go into an apartment, someone would ascertain that the victim had died of natural causes, and we’d clean the mess up. I used to go home and shower with bleach to get the smell out. Working in an office is worse though.” Bob Malone refers to the room with the body as the cream and using a recipe to describe bodies gives sensory detail that is completely disgusting but entirely engaging. Through writing in this first person narration about a job it seemed like all faded away about what the story teller looked like and as a reader I found myself more interested in the characters around him rather than Malone.

The characters were given little description but we learned who they were but what they did or were described as doing. The story is tragic comic.

Interview with Jonathan Bitz

Bryce Berkowitz: Was the inception of Denver Syntax you fell into? Was this a long time aspiration you had in mind?

Jonathan Bitz: I founded the Denver syntax as a result of my decade-long obsession with submitting my work to journals, publishers, editors and agents. I made the decision, along with my childhood writing friend, to start writing and publishing for ourselves. Syntax was always a way for us to keep producing new work and to build a community with others.

With my background in local music, art, graphic design, editing and writing – beginning our own online publication was a natural extension of my skill sets and experience. For a long while we thought it was a good idea (we once started a print publication but couldn't find enough funding for it) – but once I conceptualized the look and approach, I simply asked one of the nation's most famous low brow artists, Jeff Soto. Surprisingly, Soto obliged my request for an interview and suddenly, syntax was born.

BB: About how many submissions do you receive between reading periods and publication to the Web site?

JB: Issues are quarterly: we receive approximately 200-300 fiction and poetry submissions.

To establish this rate, we once spent a great many hours soliciting writers from around the country and trying to link-in with as many publications and boards and blogs as possible. As a result of that initial work, we no longer find ourselves having to solicit much work at all.

BB: What is the editorial process at Denver Syntax? How are decisions made to publish a piece?

JB: Decisions about which pieces we accept are based upon our subjective idea as to what a good story and poem and essay and piece of music ultimately, is. That being said, our process is cultivated and developed upon our fundamental ideas that we wanted to stray from academia and the stodgy university-sponsored journals. We wanted to begin at the one thing that everybody understands: the voice of a human being. Literally and figuratively, this is what interests us: stories that are driven by acute idiosyncrasies. We like the idea of giving our readers the author's shoes and telling them to take them for a walk, or a run. And because this is our publication, we can make-up whatever ideology and intent that we want to – the kind that we felt was missing from a lot of the journals and places available to many writers.

BB: How do you feel about first lines of a story? What engages you?

JB: In the same way that I believe that the first minute of a song can either hold a listener or lose a listener, the first lines of a piece need to, in accordance to the ideals we set-up with Syntax, hold a reader's attention. The first readers are obviously the editors here – and so, yes: the first

lines are critical to holding us because we know that our general readership won't give a piece too much time (we actually have a timer on our pages and can see that this, indeed, holds true – people don't tend to give any individual piece much time if it doesn't work for them).

We believe in clear and clever wordplay – as a corollary, we also believe that individual pieces should be short. We don't believe that the general public has much interest in reading something that is too academic, or isn't playful-enough. Brevity is best.

BB: How do you feel about publishing emerging writers in your magazine and is there any advice you'd like to give them before submitting to you (besides read the magazine, which they should always do)?

JB: We have thrived on the idea that (as is the case with our art and music) we have looked into the shadows of the world around us and found some provocative talent. We are very proud about the emerging writers that we have published. This is one of the reasons that we continue pushing forth: for the thrill of finding that new, unknown author.

We believe that if you approach publishers and editors with an element of professionalism (professional, standard cover letter) and follow their guidelines – you will find a way to the front of the submission pile. This is secondary to what I really think every writer should know: Charles Bukowski's poem, "so you want to be a writer?"

BB: What do you see too much of, what would you like to see more of?

JB: In all, I hate to really criticize the literary world that we have been a part of, for so long. It's a tough industry; everything is personal – from the writing to the printing and the marketing. However, I would love to see more authentic voices that are unafraid of how they will be perceived. I would like to see more bravery in voice and subject matter. As well, more professionalism in submissions and correspondence (in salutations, body and signature).

BB: Let's talk a bit about voice in writing. One thing I noticed Denver Syntax is partial to is a strong voice in addition to deliberate word choice, and aggressive syntax (perhaps hence the name?) These seem like stand by things to good writing but would you say there's more to it to fitting into your magazine?

JB: I enjoy reading, seeing and hearing what you would simply call "human interest stories". I think that, in any subject of investigation (i.e., football, politics, great thinkers and musicians, etc.) the more important information, and story, is to be found in the story of the person and of the people in the middle of the story.

In addition to this, what I enjoy most in my social life is a good story. As such, what I typically like to read is first person narratives where I can really feel the writer's voice. As though we are sitting over cocktails and I've suddenly become privy to some incredibly intimate details of their

life. Vulnerability is something that I admire, both in social interaction, but also in visual art, music and literature.

BB: Online vs. Print Journals...What do you think and why? Any opinions on the Kindle and iPad wave?

JB: We began online and have since only produced one, finely-crafted print edition. Online journals are typically free to produce for the most part and therefore are attractive for independent publishers. But for the publisher looking to make some money (probably, in most likelihood, not much – benefactors are wonderful), print is the best way to go.

As a reader, I prefer to read shorter pieces online (inherent in our philosophy). But for longer pieces, I do prefer to snuggle-up with my paperback book and cross my legs... I really don't believe that the new technologies will kill the printing industry. Or at least I hope not – ink and paper is something that moves me mightily.