

DOGZPLOT

AN ERRATIC LITERARY MONTAGE

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE REPORT
BY
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MAY 2009

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Fact Sheet

Online Magazine: Dogzplot

Editor: Barry Graham

Frequency: Quarterly. Flash fiction blog updated every two weeks. Anthologies published yearly by Paper Hero Press.

Web Address: www.dogzplot.com

What They Publish: High quality fiction, creative non-fiction, artwork, photos, gibberish, random thoughts, and poetry.

Submission Guidelines: Please include your name and type of submission in the subject line. Please send submissions as a .doc or .rtf attachment, .jpeg for art.

E-mail:

Flash Fiction (200 words or fewer): bgraham@dogzplot.com

Fiction (612 words or more): lbecker@dogzplot.com

Creative Nonfiction/Essay/Humor: bbishop-james@dogzplot.com

Poetry: jjones@dogzplot.com

Art: pschwartz@dogzplot.com

Interviews: spink@dogzplot.com

Response Time: Less than two weeks

Cost: Free!

Contributor Payment: None

CLMP Member: No

Accepts Multiple/Simultaneous Submissions: Yes

Flash Fiction Submissions Received Per Month: 40-120

Message from the Web site: *“Send us precise, playful, honest, original, disgraceful, hopelessly optimistic, dirty, beautiful, ugly, thoroughly proofread, over the top writing. So don't send us the good stuff. Send us something that will blow our fucking minds.”*

Why I Chose *Dogzplot*

After having some trouble trying to find a suitable candidate for my market report, my instructor Jotham Burrello suggested that I check out *Dogzplot*. He said that he thought that the magazine would be a good fit for me with regard to the quality, subject matter and general feel of the writing they publish.

On my first inspection of the *Dogzplot* Web site, the first story I clicked on was “Before and After Science” by Tim Tomlinson. Very early on into the piece, the narrator struck me as being as calculatingly soulless and selfish as many of my own narrators and I was hooked. The story pulled me in unexpected directions, including arousal and exploitation; then it made me feel bad about it. Much of my own fiction is an exercise in trying to attain this type of emotional incongruity.

But what really did it for me was a surprising amount of small-town or rurally-set fiction I found in the Winter '08 and Fall '08 issues. If my own fiction doesn't involve drugs, sex or violence, it usually involves life on the farm. In an off-the-record moment of my phone interview with Barry Graham, we discussed the inspirationally-rich writing gold mine that is Midwestern desolation. If I didn't know before that I had made the right choice in going with *Dogzplot*, I did at that moment.

Issue Comparison of Fiction

	Spring '09	Winter '08	Fall '08
P.O.V. (1 st :2 nd :3 rd :4 th)	6:1:3:0	7:1:4:1	5:1:4:1
Writer (Male:Female)	7:3	8:5	5:6
Setting (Domestic:Exotic:None)	8:2:0	9:3:1	9:2:0
Desolation Factor (Small Town or Farm/Total)	2/10	6/13	5/11

Though the points of view of the stories in *Dogzplot* tend to be dominated by the first and third respectively (which in itself is no real surprise), it is refreshing to see a small but regular amount that are written in the more-difficult-to-pull-off second and fourth person. Though there is a slight advantage in terms of contribution by males over females, a 20:14 total ratio is not terribly lopsided.

As far as the desolation factor goes, I in no way intended to paint *Dogzplot* as a journal of rural/small town fiction, rather I just wanted to trace the path of a repeated type of setting I had noticed upon my first read.

Story Reviews

Spring '09 Issue

The Killer by Verless Doran is a plainspoken, realistic story told in the second person. The story, though it takes place in the present day, continually references the mediocre career of a washed-up yet stubborn and dogged pro wrestler who is far past his prime. Over the years, the wrestler has sacrificed his body, his relationship with his family and any other possible career for the sake of chasing his one dream: wrestling. Braving his own self-doubt, the jeers of the crowd and the pummeling he knows will be delivered by his opponent, the wrestler nonetheless enters the ring to do the only thing he knows. In the end, he cleans himself up and moves on to the next town; the next fight.

Reinforced by the second person delivery, this story reads much like a pep talk. The use of slang, contractions and improper English usage allow the reader into the headspace of the main character. The final line of the story, "Ain't much else you can do," really hammers home the point that yes, you have given up everything for this; there is nothing left but this. The stubborn, main character who knows nothing else makes this a heart-rending piece indeed.

Before and After Science by Tim Tomlinson is a plainspoken, realistic story told in the first person. Cliff, a twenty-something art student, details a romantic rendezvous in New York City with a suicidal young art student named Jenn, whom he knows only from her nude scene in a friend's student film. Cliff, armed with a bottle of liquor, goes over to Jenn's apartment with the intention of using her for sex. She lets him in, then disappears into the bathroom while he snoops around her apartment. When the two finally engage in sexual activity, Cliff is drunk and Jenn is high on nitrous oxide. He ejaculates on her breasts, becoming stuck in the bars of her headboard in the process. She then proceeds to gently belittle him while inserting her finger into his anus, which causes him to bleed. The next morning Jenn is gone, having left a wrench and instructions for Cliff to free himself from the bed. Cliff leaves her apartment feeling like a victim, rather than the predator he intended to be.

This was the *Dogzplot* story that initially grabbed my attention. Throughout the piece, by way of his internal dissection of Jenn's personality and problems, as well as his obscure references to various schools of art, music, literature and philosophy, the reader sees the narrator as a pathological predator; something along the lines of Patrick Bateman or Hannibal Lecter. The reader feels bad for Jenn and is afraid of what is to come. But when the tables are turned and Cliff is emasculated via anal penetration, he is instantly humiliated and therefore more human and thus, Jenn's revenge resonates with the reader long after the end of the story.

Winter '08 Issue

The Donut by Paula Bomer is a plainspoken, realistic story told in a close, third person point of view in an on-the-road setting. Sonia, a pregnant woman with hemorrhoids, is on a road trip to get some time away from her husband and two children. To combat the discomfort of her hemorrhoids, Sonia uses a plastic car-seat "donut" that relieves the pressure from her inflamed anus and genitals. As she drives down the highway and using the donut as an aid, she begins to masturbate. Shortly before reaching orgasm, she is pulled over by a state trooper on account of her erratic driving. She masturbates furiously, climaxing just before the officer reaches her window.

The story begins by saying that Sonia's husband is driving her nuts. As the story progresses, though it is never explicitly stated, the reader gets the sense that Sonia feels trapped in her marriage and by motherhood. By recalling Sonia's past sexual and masturbatory experiences, the narrator gives a sense that Sonia yearns for her bygone days of youth, freedom and music. It is not until the very end of the story, when she wonders if the officer is handsome or if he will screw her, that we see the extent of Sonia's unhappiness. However the last line, "Can I see your license and registration ma'am?" I could do without. It seems like that line goes for the easy laugh and does not necessarily fit the more somber, Chopin-esque tone of the story. Great story nonetheless.

Fall '08 Issue

"Scotts" by Meg Pokrass is a plainspoken, realistic story told in the first person. The narrator posts an anonymous ad on Craigslist, to a "Scott F." at her work, inquiring about his feelings toward her. He responds quickly, so she posts another just to be sure. Soon, she has over twenty responses from different "Scott F.'s" ranging from overtly sexual to mysterious to overtly sexual again. The narrator ends up avoiding the real Scott F. as well as contemplating a career change.

This story is short and precise. The premise is simple—a love letter intended for one and responded to by all—and the story moves forward in a logical and linear manner. The details are sparse, consisting primarily of sexually-objectifying dialogue, but extremely effective in giving a cross-section of office life as it pertains to, inhibits and encourages human sexuality.

"Price of Dried Fish" by Hardy Jones is a plainspoken, realistic story told in the first person. A Thai woman marries an American man, Luke, who is working in Thailand on a visa. Though their relationship is strong, the conditions of Luke's visa keep him away from home for three weeks of every month. With Luke gone, the narrator visits the market to buy dried fish. However, the preferred fish-seller at the market begins to overcharge the narrator on account of her supposedly-rich white husband. Eventually, she ends up trashing the fish-seller's business and thus, no longer eats dried fish.

What makes this story effective is that it reads as if it were coming from the lips of a Thai woman with only a rudimentary grasp of the English language: "I not eat dry fish anymore." The sentences are short, simple and grammatically incorrect. This has the effect of taking the emotions of the narrator of the piece and laying them out in their most direct and honest form. I found myself cheering along in righteous indignation with the narrator of the story.

Interview with Barry Graham

Barry Graham is the founder, editor and flash fiction editor of *Dogzplot*.

R.W.: How did you get into publishing and why did you start *Dogzplot*?

B.G.: It was just by chance. I was in grad school and I was talking to one of my professors about alternatives to taking literature courses. He knew Aaron Burch, the editor at *Hobart*, and he suggested that I intern with him for some credits. I started by reading submissions for *Hobart* and it was then that I decided to start my own thing.

R.W.: So you got your start by sifting through the slush pile?

B.G.: It was kind of the opposite of that. He pulled out all of the stuff he knew wasn't going to fly before he sent it to us. The stuff that he was on the fence about or wanted to talk about he'd send to us to read. Then we would meet up every couple of weeks with a stack of stories to talk and debate about them.

R.W.: Could you describe a typical day? Is there such thing?

B.G.: Everything is dependent upon the submissions that are coming in. Everything comes in bunches. If a new issue goes up or somebody posts a new link to the journal, it seems like I get more submissions around those times. But sometimes I'll have a week or two when it's really slow. Everything is dictated by the number of submissions.

R.W.: From the time something changes on the site, how soon do you see the next deluge of submissions?

B.G.: Pretty quickly. I update the flash fiction site every two weeks and it is in the first three or four days of doing that that I see the most submissions.

R.W.: Typically, how many submissions do you receive per issue?

B.G.: It's hard to say, collectively, because I have several different editors for each aspect of the magazine. I have a fiction editor, I have a poetry editor, I have a nonfiction editor, I have someone who does artwork and someone who does interviews. For each quarterly issue, I just get something from each one of the five of them and I post it to the Web. As for me, I do the flash fiction (200 words or less) and I probably receive anywhere from ten to thirty pieces per week.

R.W.: What are some difficulties you experience, not only with submissions, but with running a magazine in general? Any pet peeves or recurring problems?

B.G.: No, I don't think so, I like doing all of it. I like reading the submissions, I like posting it, I like networking, I like going to book fairs and conferences. There are no aspects of this that I do not enjoy. Sometimes the money gets tight; that is probably the biggest thing. I always wish I had more money for promotion.

R.W.: Who funds *Dogzplot*?

B.G.: Me (laughs). We have never solicited donations. We use the money we get from the books we sell to print more.

R.W.: Let's say that a manuscript comes up that you're really into, but you have a previous commitment to publish another. Do you go for the one that is really taking your attention, or do you keep your word and stay with the one you initially decided to do?

B.G.: I'd definitely stay with the one I was working on. For example, there was a woman named Heather Bell and I got a really good full-length collection from her. I told her it was probably going to take a while because I had a few other projects ahead of it. She e-mailed me back to see if she could maybe pass it around to people who might be interested and they were. I said yes and she did. So she pulled it away, which kind of sucks because I was looking forward to putting it out in the fall, but I understand her not wanting to wait a half a year to put out a project. So yeah, it sucks, but I try to do as much as I can.

R.W.: You said earlier that you do the flash fiction aspect of *Dogzplot*, what is the level, if any at all, of feedback between yourself and the writer?

B.G.: I give quite a bit. I don't know how true this is for other editors, but I try to keep up as much communication as I can between myself and the authors. At least I try to. Obviously, you can't have a relationship with every author. I read quite a few online and print literary journals and so I'm constantly posting links to our contributors' work in other journals, news about forthcoming books, interviews, etc.

R.W.: With regard to topic or style, is there anything that you receive too much of or consider a turn-off?

B.G.: It doesn't annoy me, but one thing I see a lot of in *Dogzplot* is people submitting with the attitude that this is 'the wildest and craziest shit I have.' I get a lot of stuff that is over the top.

R.W.: You mean over the top in terms of subject matter?

B.G.: Yeah, just crazy, stupid shit. You know, like people killing their mom and drowning their kids. Shock value stuff that I'm just not that into.

R.W.: And that brings up another question: Is there anything that is off-limits in *Dogzplot*? Any censorship issues?

B.G.: I don't censor anything. I've actually received a few e-mails from contributors saying, not that they were pissed off, but that they were a little miffed that their work was going up next to stuff that they considered distasteful. Last Christmas, I ran a Christmas-themed issue of flash fiction. For the artwork, I had a picture of this woman in a bikini, bent over and wearing an elf hat while spreading her ass cheeks. A couple of the contributors sent me e-mails complaining about it, but that's going to happen.

R.W.: After reading over such a large amount of fiction, you must have a sense of what isn't working. In terms of your own writing, does this help you avoid those pitfalls?

B.G.: In a way. I see too much flash that just has too many unnecessary words in it. I think that helps to keep my own writing tight, even with some of my longer short stories. It keeps me conscious of every single word.

R.W.: Do you have any specific long- or short-term goals for *Dogzplot*? Plans for world domination?

B.G.: I want to go as big as I can. If I can build an empire, I'll build an empire. I just want to keep it going and outlast everyone else.

R.W.: Have you seen your readership or hits per month increase as you have been doing the journal?

B.G.: I've actually never seen it. I run everything off of the main page, but I post all of the stories on blogs because it is easier to update that way as opposed to constantly making new html pages. I don't have a blog-tracker so I don't have any idea of how many people view the stories.

R.W.: I read it!

B.G.: Thank you! I do a lot of book fairs and whatnot and everywhere I go—I just got back from Philly, I was in Buffalo last month, Chicago and Ann Arbor next month—people are coming up to me and saying, 'hey I really like *Dogzplot*, I read it, I enjoy it' and that is a really cool feeling. And that is exactly what I want.

R.W.: Writers currently making their entrance into the publishing world are entering a market in a state of flux. Technologies such as Kindle, coupled with the slump in sales and distribution issues of printed books, threaten to eliminate the profitability of "traditional publishing." How do you think technology will help/hurt literacy as a whole? Do you see yourself as one of the old guard, one of the last defenders of literacy?

B.G.: I think a lot of the big stores might be in trouble. As far as small presses go, I think this is the perfect time for them. Technology is making book production cheaper and cheaper. And with so many online literary journals, people are at the point that they are tired of not holding something in their hands. Be it chapbooks, D.I.Y. books, print-on-demand books; I think that over the next few years we will see more printed versions of these online literary journals. This may not bode well for the big guys, but I think it will be a time of expansion for the little ones. There is a tight-knit community of small press literary magazines and I think they will do whatever they can to help one another out.

R.W.: I definitely agree with the need for a tactile experience when reading. I don't think technology will ever top a piece of paper.

B.G.: Yeah, it's just not the same. My printer is not expensive at all. They make it really cheap to print off a hundred books, which is the model I generally use. When they're out, I'll print more. If they don't sell, the most I'm out is the cost of a hundred books. And that model works for me. I've never hit the wall where no one is buying *Dogzplot*-related books.

R.W.: Do you have any advice for myself or anyone else who may be considering or planning their first foray into the publishing world?

B.G.: The best advice I have for anyone is to trust their instincts. If it feels good to you, if it feels right to you, if you believe in what you're doing, then go for it. Don't compare yourself to other people. If you go online and you feel

discouraged because other people are doing things so much bigger and better than you, disregard it. Trust in your instincts, trust in yourself and just keep going. Stay positive, believe in what you're doing and other people will as well. Your belief in what you're doing is all that matters.