



Magazine Report
By
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Fact Sheet

Magazine: NANO Fiction

Web Address: www.nanofiction.org

Address:

NANO Fiction

Campus Activities Box #517

Houston, TX 77204-3031

Email: nanofictionmag@gmail.com

Founded: 2006

Editor/Founder: Kirby Johnson

Frequency: Biannual

Description of Publication: Released in Fall and Spring. Currently reading for its third volume. Web site is very basic and easy to navigate.

What They Publish: Flash fiction, prose poems, essays, and comics, all under 300 words

Submission Guidelines: See Web site for details

Submissions per Issue: 150-200

Stories per Issue: about 30

Reading Period: Year round

Reporting Time: 3-6 mos.

Simultaneous Submissions: Yes

Contributor Payment: Non-paying

CLMP: No

Why I Chose NANO Fiction

I discovered NANO Fiction on newpages.com, looking for a magazine that possessed an offbeat, attractive quality. When I clicked on the link, I was attracted to the simple and contemporary design of the Web site. Having read through the site's archive, I was drawn in even further. Each story had this magnetic appeal to it right off the bat (as is necessary for flash fiction) but left me wondering and wanting more, and each had a very strong voice.

All being under 300 words, I was impressed by the depth of the stories. "The skill these guys have," I thought, wide-eyed.

So I ordered the issues and set up the interview.

Comparison of Issues

	Volume 1, No. 1	Volume 2, No. 1	Volume 3, No. 2
Author, m:f	4:1	2:1	2:1
Protagonist, m:f	4:1	5:3	9:4
POV, 1:2:3	1:1:2	2:0:1	9:1:5

As far as POV goes, there is no preference between first, second, and third, as the numbers change drastically between the issues (besides second, which never really fluctuates). The strength of the story at hand seems to be the deciding factor. Comparisons also show that males are published more often than females, though the chart is by no means evidence that NANO *prefers* guys.

Prose Reviews

Volume 1, No. 1

A Year Ago Today: The Horse by Gene Morgan is a plainspoken second person story. It is crafted in short, choppy sentences, often in stream-of-conscious fragments. “You” wake up to a parade outside your window. There's a man with a bullhorn and a marching band. You're pissed, cranky, and want to go back to sleep. You're unable to, so you go pee and pour yourself a giant cup of coffee. The marching band gets closer, your coffee kicks in, and you start to enjoy the music. Your toes wiggle, and eventually you start to dance across your room. The marching band passes and gets farther away, and your mood depresses. You're alone and living in a box. You bang your head against the wall. A lingering horse takes a shit right below your window. It's cold outside, so the pile of shit steams.

The stream-of-consciousness makes this story more readable and emotional than it may have been if it were told in a straight, conventional scene. It makes it feel like a journal entry—"must stop man with bullhorn. find his address and march beneath his suburban model home while he's shitting. rodeo his wife. must get more sleep. a little more shitting." What's also interesting is that almost every word is lowercase, which quickens the pace and adds to the journal-like feel. The fact that it's told in second person makes the reader focused and interested in continuing the piece, as it makes you wonder about who is actually experiencing this, as though it's not fiction.

Show, Don't Tell by Paul Eckert is a plainspoken story told in first person. The unnamed narrator's friend, Laura, will only go by the name Scarlett-Begonia, even though she hates flowers, thus making the self-appointed nickname "a complete failure." She bases her existence on, and revels in, "expressing" herself. She has pink streaks in her hair to express her sympathy for AIDS patients. She writes poetry about the Holocaust. She likes when strangers gawk at her and call her weird, assuming she's a drug addict or an anarchist. At the end of the piece, the narrator says that she once dyed her hair black, but shaved it off two months later because "she was tired of conforming to her own expectations. That was the weirdest thing she has ever done."

What works for this piece is the universality of it. Everyone knows someone who is so self-righteous about something (in this case, "expressing oneself") that it just becomes downright laughable but still so sickening that it makes you want to roundhouse kick them in the face. The quick snippets given to us, which is what the piece is composed of (there's no real scene, just character clips)—such as the reason for her pink hair or when she's not "chilling out," she's writing poetry about the Holocaust—are strong building blocks of character development, and none are irrelevant.

Volume 2, No. 1

Brake by Austin Havican is a plainspoken, first person story. A mechanic—the narrator—pulls an old man, Mr. Batch, outside to his car. He is working on his brake rotors, which were so worn down that the car was making grinding noises. The narrator tells him that there are two options—to wear them down, which would give Mr. Batch a couple months, or to replace them. Mr. Batch notices that the rotor in his hand is more worn down than the other one and asks why. The narrator explains, "This one is from the driver's side ... It's more worn down because there's

more weight on this half of the car ... Because you mostly drive alone, right?" Without looking at him, Mr. Batch tells him to just replace them and walks inside.

Having the POV through the eyes of the repairman instead of Mr. Batch adds a layer of sympathy for what otherwise may have been too sappy. The story may have lost some of its credibility if that were the case, especially when the narrator asks Mr. Batch if he drives alone. The narrative could have easily taken an overly sentimental and cliché turn. Instead, the emotion is smoothly drawn out through an objective person's POV, and the sympathy for Mr. Batch's situation—presumably, he is a widower—is that much more raw.

Volume 2, No. 2

Portrait of a Man Descending the Stairs and About to Trip by David Galef is told in one long sentence. The man is descending the stairs, about to trip because he's not paying attention. He's staring out the window of the staircase across the street, where he sees a woman, presumably a stranger, who has just leaped out of a window, wearing nothing but a man's shirt. It ends with "...the man stares at her as if he could support her with his gaze, so stricken, so rapt."

In such a dramatic moment as watching someone jump out of a window, it's fitting that the story is told in one sentence. It builds the momentum, slowing it down, making it *feel* like one moment, one second. However, in order to set the tone, clauses and digressions are interjected, such as the man's rocky relationship with his wife and a description of the building across the street.

Interview with Kirby Johnson

Jeffrey Valerius: What made you start your own publication, and what do you think was the defining moment when you realized it was actually going to happen?

Kirby Johnson: I initially started NANO Fiction as an outlet for CW students at the University of Houston to publish their work. At the time of conception, there wasn't an undergrad journal on campus. There was a large body of students who were writing and who wanted to publish their work but had nowhere to do so. I thought NANO Fiction could be that outlet. After the first issue, the journal changed direction, branching outside the university, but we still remain loyal to unpublished authors, “hungry” to get their work out there.

During the course of fundraising, I felt obligated to our donors and subscribers to do something with their money. This obligation (and fear) pushed me to go through with publishing the journal, but I didn't believe we could actually do it until we began meeting with printers.

J.V.: How many submissions do you normally receive for an issue, and is it hard to toss aside stories that you feel should be included but can't (maybe because of page limitation, etc.)?

K.J.: We receive 150 to 200 submissions per issue. Because the pool of submissions is so limited, it can be difficult to find enough work we enjoy to fill the issue. Every now and then there is a story I prefer and the other editors do not. We are very diplomatic in these situations. Everyone has a chance to give their opinion on the piece, and then we vote. I never feel bad after a vote and I hope that the other editors don't either.

J.V.: What's your process like when you sift through and pick out which submissions to include in an issue—are style, POV, subject matter, etc. important in the decision making? Are there expectations you have from a submitter, or criteria you follow?

K.J.: Style and point of view are very important. If a story is well-written and the author has a distinct style or has chosen an interesting point of view, it doesn't matter what the subject matter is. We don't have any expectations from writers who submit to us, other than that they read our submission guidelines. You would be surprised how many cover letter/emails we get where the person tells us they love the journal and then submits 5 poems.

J.V.: Is there any kind of story that you get too much of that just turns you off when you read it? (An editor once said that he gets way too many stories about cancer and its aftermath, and so whenever he sees that word now, he cringes.)

K.J.: We see a lot of “relationship” and “father with a gun” stories written in second person. We tend to prefer the “father with a gun” stories to the “relationship” ones.

J.V.: In “Gipetto's Sin” by Josh Maday, a dark and offbeat twist is put on the classic Pinocchio story. Is that something your publication goes for—a risqué, offbeat point of view?

K.J.: I would like to think so. I want our stories to excite people. With flash fiction you only have so many words to catch the reader; you can't rely on traditional forms of story telling or, for that fact, traditional stories. You have to explode something. You have to make the most of the 300 words you are provided with. "Gippetto's Sin" does that. Josh turns the fairy tale on itself, stripping the reader of their naive relationship with a childhood story.

J.V.: Most of the stories you publish are from emerging writers that haven't been published much. Why is that?

K.J.: I think the form is appealing to a new generation of writers who are very active in their own publishing communities, online and otherwise. Most of our writers are not quite established yet, but they are being published. Quite a few, however, have books, chapbooks, and are working on their own publications.

J.V.: Do you accept a story as is submitted, or is there a revision process you go through with the author before it's published?

K.J.: It depends on the story. Many stories we accept as is and don't worry about until we begin proofing the issue. Other stories we select have strong foundations but need tweaking. We will make suggestions to the author and do our best to compromise on the changes we would like. Most are receptive to the suggestions, and a very small few actually pass on being in the publication.

J.V.: NANO Fiction is bound. Why? Are there cons to the bound world vs. online, or vice-versa?

K.J.: NANO Fiction is bound because I wanted to create something I could hold in my hands. The most obvious downside to this is cost. Printing is expensive and making up for this expense through magazine sales takes a lot of time. I definitely have to divide my time between the editorial and financial aspects of the journal. I have considered transitioning the publication to an online-only format, in the hopes that I could focus more on the editorial work, but I don't want to give up on my printed booklets just yet.

J.V.: The cover art for your issues are quirky and eye-popping; do they follow a central theme that relates to the stories of a certain issue?

K.J.: I think the cover of a publication is very important. It's the first thing people see in a bookstore or at our online store. I try my best to find art that is just as unique as the stories within the journal and in doing so we have found four really amazing artists. We usually choose an artist after we have all of our contributors and stories in place. When the stories are already there, you know instantly if the artwork will fit well with the content.

J.V.: After publishing four issues, is there anything you wish you'd known before starting NANO Fiction? Anything you could take back?

K.J.: There are tons of things I wish I had known. The first two issues are riddled with mistakes but as a whole, running NANO Fiction has been a learning process, and I wouldn't take any of them back. I've learned a ton about self-publishing and running a business in general. In the next few years we hope to expand the publication and file for our 501(c)3. There will be more mistakes to come but I am happy to learn from them.