

THIS IS SO NEW

LITTLE BOOKS | BIG IDEAS

Independent Press Report

Jessa Marsh

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Fact Sheet

Address: So New

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<http://necessaryfiction.com>

Masthead: James Stegall, Publisher

Amy Guth, Managing Editor

David Barringer, Design

Steve Himmer, Necessary Fiction Editor

Jessica Fritsche, Associate Editor

Founded: 2001

Focus: So New publishes novel length, essay collections, and short fiction pieces, with a particular focus on writers who are active supporters and contributors to online literary magazines.

Activity: 16 books since 2001, plus a lit zine updated once a week since February 2009.

Description: So New is a very small press that pays close attention to detail and actively supports and promotes the growing online literary community. So New also specializes in creative book design through the use of recycled materials and design work unique to the scope and content of the individual work. Their books are fully thought out pieces of art, from the writing to the presentation.

Submissions: So New exclusively publishes “authors [they] already know” for full length pieces. Writers are encouraged to submit pieces under 2,000 words to their online lit zine *Necessary Fiction* in order to get on So New’s radar. Submissions should be emailed to editor@necessaryfiction.com. The subject line should include the word ‘submission’ and the title of the piece. Simultaneous submissions are permitted, but multiple submissions will be ignored.

Most Recent: *American Soma* by Savannah Schroll, published May 2009

Why I chose So New

Enthusiasm is important to me in everything- I pretty much believe that if you aren't enthusiastic about the things you are doing in your life that there is no point to be doing them. This trait is even more important to me in a press. When starting a new literary venture having true enthusiasm for the written word is clearly important. If you don't feel excitement at the prospect of publishing a kick-ass new author, then it seems to me that you just won't be able to succeed, at least not for very long.

From my first encounter with So New, it was clear that what they lack in staff size or funding they made up for with sheer, unbridled enthusiasm. This is not limited to one factor of So New. From book design to promoting literary community, So New is so full of love for all aspects of the written word and its distribution into the hearts and minds of readers that it was apparent that this was the press that was bound to win me over.

They didn't fail to live up to my expectations. The editorial staff was prompt in contacting me back and contributing to this project. I'm extremely impressed by the managing editor, Amy Guth, who responded to me on the very day I e-mailed her. She was a willing and helpful participant who solidified my initial impression of So New. These writers and editors just love good writing and they want everyone who has a beautiful, strongly told story in them to get it out and to the people. So New is the kind of press that I dream about when I sit down and chip away at my manuscript. I foresee nothing but good things for them and their authors. Now if only we could get them a few million dollars so they could have a chance to publish as many books as possible.

Interview with Amy Guth and James Stegall

Jessa Marsh: What was the impetus that caused the creation of So New?

James Stegall: Our original idea back in 2001 was to bring the great writing we found online into print. Our focus has always been on the authors, artists, and designers who contribute to the work and not profit motive. We view ourselves as an indie music label. We find the really interesting authors getting published in great online journals like Word Riot, Monkey Bicycle and McSweeney's.

J.M.: I found So New through Wordriot. What are your thoughts on literary community? Do you think it's important? How do you participate in literary community?

Amy Guth: Absolutely. I founded Pilcrow Lit Fest (pilcrowlitfest.com) in 2007, which is a small press and independent media festival each Spring in Chicago and now, each autumn in Nashville, for the sole purpose of promoting community-building within the literary community, specifically the small press community.

J.M.: What benefits do authors get from choosing So New over a larger publisher?

A.G.: When I set out to sell my debut novel, So New was my first choice. I submitted the manuscript to a handful of small press publishers, but So New was my first choice. I personally wanted to publish with smaller press because I wanted to personalized experience and creative approach for which small press is known. My experience as both an author initially, and now as managing editor at So New has been nothing but positive and supportive. I think, and this is only speculation, that due to the often more personalized experience of working closely with an author and doing so without many of the constraints which exist at larger publishing firms, we build strong relationships with our authors and within the literary community, and can offer a more personalized experience than is often the case with larger firms.

J.M.: How many copies of your latest book will you be printing for your first run?

A.G.: We'll start with about 1,000-1,500. The beauty of digital printing is that we can make conservative estimates and re-up our order with the printer on short notice if we need more.

J.M.: With Necessary Fiction and your lovely website, you are embracing the Internet as a forum to get writing out there. Are there any other opportunities that you see with new technology?

A.G.: Personally, I very much enjoy technology and work with it a great deal. Certainly there will be more mixed media and mixed technology projects planned at So New as we move forward.

J.M.: Your website emphasizes the creative design that goes into the books. They are very beautifully done. How are these design choices made? Do you have a staff member who specializes in graphic design? How much input is the author given in this process?

J.S.: So New has been very lucky to have amazing designers like David Barringer on our side. We always give designers and artists the credit they deserve, and the artistic freedom to make the book something interesting and new. I think that holds a lot of appeal, especially since we pay in hugs and sunshine. I love book design, and have devoted hours to physically building the books based on what designers create. I think our dedication means a lot.

A.G.: We want our authors to be proud of the book they bring into the world, so our authors have a great

deal of input and they work closely with our designers.

J.M.: With the introduction of Necessary Fiction, you've created something similar to an audition—writers are encouraged to submit short fiction to the magazine before trying to submit a full-length manuscript. What was the reasoning behind combining an online lit zine and a press? Is there anything you are looking for in Necessary Fiction that you wouldn't necessarily seek out for So New or vice versa?

A.G.: Because of the personalized attention we give each author, we want to make sure that not only is their style of writing a good fit with the style of So New, but also that the author is someone who is enthusiastic, creative, and a good fit as a partner with us. The addition of Necessary Fiction has increased our submission volume significantly, and we recently appointed Steve Himmer to serve as editor of the Necessary Fiction site to handle the increase. Prior to the introduction of Necessary Fiction, we generally only received pitched ideas, offered long manuscripts. Necessary Fiction has opened us up to writers of shorter fiction, too, and encouraged the submissions of short story collections, such as *American Soma*, coming out in late May from Savannah Schroll Guz.

J.M.: On the So New site, it says that there is no better writing, there is just different writing. What qualifies as 'different' in your eyes?

A.G.: We want tightened, carefully-told stories. We want excellent writing. We want original thinking; Clichés in storytelling and language don't really do much of anything for us. By "different" we really only mean that we aren't devoted to a particular genre or format, but are interested in writing that is positively strong, beautiful, intelligent and solid.

J.M.: How do you approach marketing your releases?

A.G.: We rely a great deal on social media and creativity. Frankly, the business model for promoting is changing, and we're keeping up with it. So are our authors, as we've encouraged each of them to maintain updated social network profiles and to use their online presence strategically and honestly. A great deal of responsibility is upon the author in that regard.

J.M.: Since starting you have expanded your scope from photocopied zine-styled releases to bound books. How does So New continue to grow, despite the waning economy?

A.G.: Are we in it to get rich? No. We're in it because we love books, we love making books and we love good writing. That said, naturally, we have grown and continue to grow. We (the editorial board) communicate a great deal and try to make choices that makes sense, and do what feels right and aim for smart business choices. Recently, in addition to bringing in Steve Himmer as our new Necessary Fiction editor, we also brought in Jessica Fritsche to serve as an associate editor. Both smart choices; I have utmost respect for the work and integrity of them both.

J.M.: What do you think the role of the small press is in the future of publishing?

A.G.: Again, I think the business model has changed and is more relationship-driven than ever. Both small press and technology have delivered greater accessibility to authors and creative ventures than ever, and offered us the ability to try new things and work with fewer and fewer constraints for a given project.

Necessary Fiction

Editor: Steve Himmer

Web Address: <http://necessaryfiction.com/>

What They Publish: Fiction

Submission Guidelines: Short stories of 2,000 words or fewer can be submitted via e-mail. Simultaneous submissions are allowed, but multiple submissions are discouraged.

Description of Publication: From So New Publishing, Necessary Fiction is an online zine with a bare bones blog-style site, updated with a new story every Wednesday.

Prose Per Issue: 100% prose / 1 story / 52 per year

Prose Reviews:

Marionettes by David Erlewine is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. The unnamed narrator describes his life after his long time girlfriend, disappears one night while jogging. He is forced to interact with his girlfriend's mother, who has become obsessed with sending her daughter emails that ultimately, the narrator logs in and reads himself, leaving him feeling voyeuristic. In the end, he begins to believe he can recognize potential abductors in crowds and feels the urge to shout things like "let her go, man" to strangers.

The narrator directly addresses his missing girlfriend, starting the story with the sentence "You never could get used to waking up early, flipping to HBO, and grinding out a few miles on the treadmill." This gives a sense of familiarity and intimacy to the voice, which increases the emotional resonance of the story. The voice also gives richness to the awkward relationship between him and her mother. Brief details like "I let her talk about where you might be and what you might be doing. She once mentioned Munich," elegantly shows the disconnected, uncomfortable relationship the two have as a result of being close to the same missing person.

Arizona's Lonely by Rachel Yoder is a plainspoken story in an domestic setting. Jacks, the narrator, tells three stories about the period of her life in which she graduates from an MFA program and moves from one city in Arizona to another. In the first story she sits with a friend drinking beer and discussing the sexual prowess of different types of authors. In the second she has a male acquaintance help her move. When he leaves, he forgets a t-shirt that she ends up regarding as a keepsake. In the last story she speaks to another friend who tells her the story of a punk boy she once loved.

The structure of *Arizona's Lonely* is absolutely lovely. Jacks is plagued with loneliness and this is conveyed to the reader without the use of a traditional plot line. The effect is cumulative and the prose never feels heavy handed. Jacks' need for connection is apparent in the first instance where she says "I thought about how I didn't want to fall asleep that night, and how I hadn't been in love for what seemed like my whole life." It continues building through the next two instances, and ends on a gorgeous note. Jacks urges her friend, who has missed out on a change at love with an odd-ball punk boy, to express her feelings by writing it down. The last line "For God's sake, write that down, too," brings beauty symmetry and emotional closure.

Rating: 7. Necessary Fiction is a new endeavor that is off to a very strong start. The fiction selected so far is well written. Some authors have been highly published, but not all of them. So New and Necessary Fiction's focus on the online lit zine scene makes them a great venue for an emerging writer to build a name for themselves.

American Soma* by Savannah Schroll Guz*So New Publishing****102 Pages**

Savannah Schroll Guz likes science. A lot. And she knows more about it than the average Joe. In *American Soma*, her new collection of short stories, she's out to prove this to her readers. The stories are greatly varied in scope and subject matter. In "Not Very Far From the Tree" a satirical look is taken at a beautiful gold digger, a thinly veiled reference to Anna Nicole Smith. Other characters include a bible verse-shouting priest who chases a panhandler into the streets and under the wheels of a city bus, an aging salesman who hops a plane to LA with two twenty-something girls, leaving his wife and his degrading job behind him, and an anti-social genius who comments on his elderly neighbor's television-watching habits. They aren't nice people and they won't do anything to redeem themselves, besides making the reader laugh as they continually find comically awful things to do and say to one another. Humor is a tool that Schroll Guz is fond of, and very good at wielding. She uses it again and again to poke fun at the strange and often pathetic characters that populate *American Soma*.

In the first and title story, anti-depressants are implanted into all food products in a secret government plot. The result is a population that is so inexplicably content that they feel no need to protest, complain, or even vote out the incumbent president. The writing is informed and detailed-- no opportunity for a logical explanation is missed. A sentence like, "It was collectively decided that broad-based clinical trials would be conducted first in metropolitan areas, where the effects would be closely monitored," is representative of the entire piece's matter-of-fact tone. The inventiveness of the situation is lost in technical jargon at points, and the sheer amount of summary leaves the reader wanting less information and more sights of the characters. These problems also reverberate through the rest of the science-infused stories, however *American Soma* does leave the realm of dystopia frequently enough to make it worth muddling through.

With all this science and satire, what is interesting is that where Schroll Guz really excels is in her handling of intricate human emotions and the tenuous but grave effects her characters have on one another's lives. "Justly Desired and Inspiring Awe" is a gem. Narrator Frank McMaster envies the life of a convicted murderer who killed his wife. After recalling that years prior he had stood behind the murderer and his wife in a grocery store check out line, Frank begins to think of killing his own wife to escape the boredom of his life. Here Schroll Guz's attention to detail shines, creating a lovely and haunting portrait of the sad, suffocating boredom of suburban life. Unfortunately she spends the least amount of time on this aspect of *American Soma*.

The tone of the book varies between the dull summary and description present in her science-heavy pieces, the over-the-top humor and satire and the beautifully, emotionally resonant moments, giving the book an almost bipolar feel. Like any scientist, Schroll Guz experiments in *American Soma*. Detail plus scientific dystopia? Not so successful. But there are stories here where everything comes together to a

spectacular conclusion. On the whole, it's clear that the writing is neat and tight. If you aren't discouraged by the first story, you'll enjoy the read.