

2006

Algren, Nelson - *Nonconformity*

Essays. Liked them very much. Gave me courage in these times NOT to give in and try to fit with what's popular.

Antioch Review Spring 2005 Vol. 63, #2

Yin/Yang: Duets and Opposites. Another thematic issue with similar problems as *Colere*. However, several of these stories are quite good—primarily what I look for in a journal. Engaging, movement, character experiences subtle (perhaps profound) change.

Boyle, T.C. - *Talk Talk*

Not as good as *The Inner Circle*. A good read, interesting structure, characters, POV, but had no zip. No snap. Ending was good, subtle, not dramatic, but the journey from coast to coast was not that great for the reader. I wanted to like it because Boyle signed my copy at the Tomales Bay workshop and because his writing, his entire oeuvre, is so fine, particularly his stories. The story he read aloud at Tomales Bay was excellent.

Carlson, Ron - *A Kind of Flying*

A collection of stories from three original collections—a “best of the best.” All of them quite good—plain language but sophisticated, about “everyday” situations, yet every one of them is limned in a unique way. Particularly loved story “Keith.” Keith speaks with a great idiolect that begins almost immediately.

Censored 2006

Censored news stories. Incredible what the media leave out of the news.

Colere (journal)

This is the journal that published my story, “The Age I Am Now.” I think my story is among the top two or three in the issue. The problem with thematic issues is that one may accept stories that fall below normal standards in order to fill the pages. About half of the stories were above average. The other half, not.

Cunningham, Michael - *Specimen Days*

The man can do no wrong. Three sections—19th c., 20th c., & 22nd c.—all using same or similar characters (Catherine, Luke/Lucas, Simon) with similar personalities. One character in each section quotes Walt Whitman verbatim, as part of the dialogue. Wonderful, not even sure how. Complex, dazzling—how I want to write!

Davis, Jeff - *The Journey from the Center to the Page: Yoga Philosophies and Practices as Muse for Authentic Writing*

I met Jeff at the Taos writing conference, and Ken and I struck up a friendship with Davis and his wife, Hillary. Although I do not practice yoga, I learned much from Jeff's book. His is but another way at allowing the subconscious to flourish in one's writing. I did many of the exercises, and one (becoming an object) yielded one of the best scenes I've ever written, that story landing in one of the top literary journals in the country. This book is rife with many jewels, and I plan to re-read often. [Later, as I did Pilates and meditated, I felt even more comfortable with many of the exercises Jeff lays out in his book. It's a great read for anyone attempting to grow.]

Descant - (TCU literary mag)

Very disappointing. The stories seemed so average (except for one), so bent in certain directions, probably the most editorially bent journal I've read yet. But . . . I may send a couple of my more "conservative" stories.

Flynn, Nick - *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*

Memoir about writer's father. No sentimentality toward his subject. Difficult feat to achieve when writer was so abused by his alcoholic father.

Gettysburg Review - Summer 2005

Four stories. Liked one a great deal.

"The Healing Power of Pets" by Rumaan Alam

Great narrative pace. Metaphors: answering machine (light bulb comes on in mind of reader at the end) / pets.

Irony: "There are so many unsavory people in the world." Yeah, one just killed your brother, Eliza's husband. I like how Alam introduces information gradually. "My brother was murdered" (307-17).

Haslett, Adam - *You Are Not a Stranger Here: Stories*

Every story a jewel. Annotated each story with comments at the end. Courageous writer artistically and emotionally. He accomplishes things with ease that one is not supposed to do such as shifting POV briefly to make clear why a character is doing or thinking something in particular. The wealth of detail he uses is just enough in the right place at the right time. Epistolary stories. Story built around an interview.

Marson, Bonnie - *Sleeping With Schubert*

Signed copy that I've finally read (heard Marson read at Taos conference). Light but serious, too. Couldn't make up my mind as to which. Some depth to it, but also

many things seemed too facile. But perhaps that's what "fantasy" is all about. Liked musical references, yet this woman (by her own admission) has never played an instrument herself. Something is missing although there are certainly many great passages.

McSweeney's 15

Wide variety of narratives including translations of foreign (mostly Icelandic tales). I didn't see any of my stories being liked by someone who edited this magazine except for "Snarked," which has already been snatched up. I'm not playful or experimental or postmodern enough for *McSweeney's*. In spite of the obvious level of talent, the work largely seems average or good at best. One example is "Country Underwater," an excellent story by Kiara Brinkman.

Missouri Review - Spring 2006

Great, as usual. Issue after issue, I read from cover to cover. Never a bad or even average story in the lot.

Moss, Barbara Robinette - *Fierce*

A great memoir. Prose is deceptively simple. The complexity, in fact, is inherent in the simplicity within the fabric of the work—exactly what I'd like to accomplish in a memoir.

New Renaissance (journal)

Three stories. Okay. None of them grabbed me in any way. Trouble with so many journals: there are serviceable, well-written stories, but they never grab the reader.

Nunez, Sigrid - *The Last of Her Kind*

"Unusual" in that the novel is non-linear. It shifts POV often (and not always smoothly). And it has large chunks of narrative without dialogue. I liked it for these reasons. Nunez demonstrates that there are many ways to write a novel.

O. Henry Prize Stories 2006

So great to read excellent stories, compared to ordinary journals. These are the cream of the crop.

Roanoke Review - Vol. XXIX

Not that impressive. Nine stories: two excellent, the rest average, good, or very good. A little disappointing.

Robinson, Marilynne - *Housekeeping*

A great book. The woman says so much in such a slim tome. Prose is lovely, original, lyrical.

Russo, Richard - *Nobody's Fool*

One cares about Sully and most of the characters before the novel has ended. Fine but subtle ending for a character who's been alienated from everyone and unforgiving of his late father. When he tells Miss Beryle that he forgives her, he's also forgiving his father whether he knows it or not. Says it in half jest, but he means it.

Salt Hill 18

All four stories were way above average. Good one to submit to.

Short, Gary - *10 Moons and 13 Horses*

Love his poems because they contain strong narratives. He also manages, as in prose, to be quite expansive. Favorites: "Frame Blue" and "Teaching Poetry to Third Graders."

Smiley, Jane - *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*

After 9/11/01 Smiley finds she cannot write fiction immediately—she must have time to absorb what has happened to her, the country. (What is more she isn't sure she can conclude a novel she has been working on.) Instead, she selects 100 novels to read and then comments or writes a mini-essay for each one. In addition, she discusses the novel as an art form: that there exist as many as twelve categories: the epic, the polemic, the confessional, the romance (capital R), the tale, historical, et. al. She then discusses at length the writing of a novel.

The best book about the novel I've ever read. Not a how-to book at all, more of a I'll-Show-You-The-Way-But-You-Have-To-Drive. Very opinionated, but often opinionated artists are that way because they know they are correct (as correct as any human being can be). If you disagree with her, you must have a very good idea as to why, and you must be able to explain your objections (to yourself).

During 2007 I try to read the same hundred novels Smiley has. I find I do not have her stamina and quit after ten or so. However, I do keep her list handy and continue, from time to time, to select yet another one to read.

Thiel, Diane - *Crossroads: Creative Writing Exercises in Four Genres*

Many creative writing texts offer a smattering of "examples" from published, cherished texts. Well over half of Thiel's book is comprised of perfectly apt examples to demonstrate all that she wishes to teach. Far from providing her book with padding (I see the wheels moving in the minds of some of you), her examples are a necessary part of the weft of her text. At a time when genres are losing their carefully

tended boundaries, this book is a great one to help us understand that unraveling and make the most of it.

Thiel, Diane - *The White Horse: A Colombian Journey*

I studied with Diane at the Taos writing festival this summer. This book is a joy. Thiel is a courageous person and writer to pen this book. It is one that crosses many genres, a concept that pleases Thiel and one that she exploits with great skill.

“I imagined safes all over the world filled with this precious metal of still somewhat mysterious origins. Scientists now believe that gold must have been created long before the creation of the earth. Any element heavier than iron must have been created by a supernova, which sprinkled it throughout this part of the universe. Gold is hence the product of supernovas, as we ourselves are made up of the same basic elements as stars.

“The sun had not yet fallen, but one of the first stars had already come out and beckoned there on the horizon. An invisible thread connected my eye to the star and the star to the rock in my hand, and I felt the little river of gold run into my own veins, reminding me that I too was part of this delicate balance” (164-5).

Such fanciful writing, yet it has a certain verisimilitude with regard to the lives we lead each day when, if we pay attention, we are privy to some of the same kinds of magic.

Wright, William - *Harvard's Secret Court*

Scary scary tale of young men and faculty members at Harvard who were purged by a “court” of administrators including Laurence Lowell (heir to family of Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts). Don’t know why this fascinated me except that it seems our country is so ripe to go *there* once again. The author believes, though does little by way of logical argument, to propose that homophobia is due to genetic make-up—as is homosexuality itself (which is supported by scientific study).

Xconnect (journal)

Four of five stories were good or better. One stinker. [The journal includes excerpt from Russell Banks’s *Darling*.]

York, Lynn - *The Piano Teacher*

Uses multiple POVs without making a big deal of it. Only weakness is the reader doesn’t know whose story it is. Wilma’s? Daughters? [York is the judge that awarded me second place in the Tennessee Writers Alliance Award 2005.]