

Cease, Cows

Editor: H. L. Nelson

Web Address: www.ceasecows.com

What they publish: Flash fiction and prose poetry under 1500 words. They only publish strange literary fiction, magical realism, speculative, slipstream, utopian and dystopian, bizarro, apocalyptic, or post-apocalyptic stories.

Submission Guidelines: There is a link on the Submissions page that goes to their Submittable page. Submit one story at a time in each category. Simultaneous submissions are accepted.

Description of Publication: Cease, Cows gets its name from a line from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez when the main character tells his livestock: "Cease, Cows, life is short." The magazines tagline is, "Life is short and so is our fiction." It is easy to navigate through the magazine. Stories are highlighted with a companion picture. But there is no archive of past issues, or even an organized idea of an "issue."

Prose Per Issue/Amount of Published Annually: Publishes sporadically. There is a story at least once a month. Sometimes up to ten, but an average of about five. About sixty stories are published annually.

Prose Reviews:

Downstream by J.D. Hager is a plainspoken realistic story told in a domestic setting. Ray and Melanie have just purchased a new house right on a creek, something they hadn't thought would affect them. Through a third person narration, this couple deals with the problems that stem from this geographical marker, "the worst indignity was the rats." Hordes of overly smart rats descend on their property and this couple struggles to find solutions. Through a compilation of different instances, the rats defeat Melanie and Ray again and again. Finally, they hire a witchdoctor to deal with the problem. After the witchdoctor's visit, a biblical rainstorm begins and it washes away the swarms of rats, but even though the immediate problem is over, the couple's home and future is still tainted.

The story moves very quickly. Even though it's longer than many flash fiction pieces, the use of concise, directly told instances add up to create a fast-paced story movement. This whole story is told in exposition and, even though there isn't any dialogue, the characters come through in concrete, specific details, like "Melanie [having] a stronger aversion to poisons and toxins than she did to rats," or "Ray [knowing the calming aftermath of the rain] was a temporary illusion. Even the rats transcend being just the conflict of the story and become characters in a way. This story successfully uses humor and semi-magical occurrences to highlight and explore an "everyday" problem that people deal with quite frequently.

So Bright We Quit Our Shadows by Christopher David DiCicco is a plainspoken realistic story in a domestic setting. An unnamed, first person narrator recounts six days when the world grew brighter. "Not hotter. Only more painful to look at." This story is written in a list-like form, with each of the six days told in separate instances. In the accumulation of these instances, character is revealed, as well as the major conflict, which is that the world is getting brighter and the intense light is literally driving people underground. This conflict causes tension in the relationship between the narrator and his wife, revealing the true human nature of getting upset at other's when something is completely out of anyone's control -- "It didn't matter. Yelling at Sara did nothing to stop it, the light." After six days, the narrator recounts the "last day," when he decided to step out of the basement and into the light. Like the best kind of flash, the story ends with an ambiguous ending and a powerful sight.

This story very successfully sustains an eerie tone that keeps the reader on-edge throughout reading. The promise and anxiety of what's to come next is weighted onto every word. The repetition at the beginning of the sentences to announce what day it was creates a nice rhythm and keeps the pace of the story. Short, choppy sentences are paired with longer, more drawn-out paragraphs to create an imbalance that reflects the confusion of the story's content. Intriguing imagery and arresting, directly told moments fuel this story and allow it to move strongly towards an open-ended conclusion, that closes with a kind of gasp.

Rating: 8. Even though there isn't a clearly defined "issue" or links to past works published on the site, it is still easy to navigate and the design is very simple and pleasing. This magazine features significantly accomplished writers as well as many upcoming writers. Written work is presented respectfully and complimented nicely with visuals.