

Title of Magazine: Used Furniture Review

Issue: n/a

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Editor: David Cotrone (editor) and Susannah Lawrence (managing editor)

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Web Address: www.usedfurniturereview.com

What they publish: Fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, book reviews, art, and columns (of any format).

Submission Guidelines: Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis and both simultaneous and multiple submissions are allowed. They accept all genres and have no length requirements, but ask that you keep submissions under 6,000 words. Submissions may be sent through Submittable.

Description of Publication: Used Furniture Review is an online literary magazine that started in November 2010. Their “About” page says that they update three times a week, though the most recent piece (a set of poems) was posted in early May. Up until then, they seemed to update very regularly. The design of the site is attractive, easy to navigate, and as inviting as their subtitle, “A House For You to Build.” They look to promote contemporary writers “both established and emerging” and from the most recent pieces, it’s clear that they stick to that, with a few seasoned writers (such as Write Bloody’s Jeanann Verlee) sprinkled between a slew of unknowns.

Prose Per Issue / Amount of Published Annually: UFR isn’t divided into issues—they post submissions as they receive them—but in 2012, they totaled 40 pieces of fiction.

Prose Reviews:

The Difficulties of Raising a Modern American Baby by Cari Gornik is a plain-spoken realistic (though unlikely) story in a domestic setting. The first person narrator just had a baby that is, according to everyone she knows, “getting ugly.” Marcy suggests she shave off his unibrow while he’s young, Jacob assures her that he’ll grow into his head, Ken offers that his sister uses hydrocortisone cream to get rid of her baby’s blotchy skin, and Daisy suggests mineral makeup. The narrator obeys, but soon her baby starts to get “cankles,” so she puts him on a diet, at another friend’s suggestion. The story continues with her doing more and more ridiculous things to make her baby attractive, using tips from her friends who have cute babies or prize-winning schnauzers or who are just very opinionated. By the end of it, the baby’s wearing ill-fitting clothes to fix his proportions, has blond hair and taped back ears, and is doing an hour of Baby Einstein workouts every day.

Gornik has just the right amount of tongue in her cheek while telling this story of a mother caving into pressure to make her baby beautiful. It’s bizarre in a way that is both funny and illuminating, pointing out the ridiculous emphasis society places on beauty by using a baby—the only type of person that is almost always considered attractive—as its subject. This societal pressure is heightened by the piece’s rapid pace and by the way she names each minor character in the story. However, the story doesn’t seem to have an ending. Nothing changes from the beginning to the end; it only escalates. I was hoping for some new information at the end, even if it was only the onlookers’ consensus about the baby after all his modifications, but was left feeling underwhelmed and incomplete.

Manic Sex and Depression by Katherine Gehan is a plain-spoken realistic story in a domestic setting. It begins with the narrator on the phone with her ex-boyfriend (“you,” as the story is told in second person), who is at the Massachusetts State Hospital for what seems to be severe bipolar disorder. They talk all about how he’s feeling

and what he's doing, but she makes a point not to tell him about all the men she's been sleeping with. When she goes to visit him, we learn more about their history through a series of flashbacks: how they lived together for three years and how she moved to this city for him, how he left her for a nineteen-year-old girl named Marla, how he attacked Marla on the beach and the judge sent him to the hospital for evaluation. We also get snippets of the stories of the men she's been sleeping with since he left her: an Irish architect whose kisses are rough and a moving man who went to Yale and carries her to his bedroom. Throughout all these flashbacks, we see her ex-boyfriend in the hospital, "a once-man transformed into a beaten child, swimming in grown-up clothes." Throughout the story, she begins to feel more sympathy for Marla and by the end of it, she decides that maybe he left her for Marla to protect her, because he knew he was "going mad" and chose Marla to witness it instead of her. But still, she has one question: "why couldn't it have been me?"

This story's strength lies in the raw emotions that come through in the narrative, without necessarily being an emotional telling. In the last paragraph, the narrator is more straightforward about her feelings, saying things like, "When I think too much I fall apart. I smoke and I jitter and I twitch. I nourish myself with responsibility and fear," but until that point, she only shows us her emotions by the details that she's noticing or the tone she takes to tell the flashbacks. We can tell that she's sleeping with these men to fill the void her ex left because she fixates on how she doesn't tell him about them. When she's talking about the encounters themselves, she slips back into talking about the ex, about how when the Irish man came over she went into "the tiny kitchen—do you remember our kitchen?" and how when she met the moving man, it was at a place she had been to with the ex. Another interesting choice she makes is in the telling of what happened the night he attacked Marla. Of course, the narrator can only guess the details, but she fills them in herself, painting the ex in a very sympathetic light, almost telling it through his point of view and taking his side. She even makes Marla seem like the bad guy by comparing her to a literal monster, "You saw Medusa in her brown curls and smashed the snakes into the sand, hitting her head again and again." We can see how the narrator still loves her ex and blames the mental disorder—not him—for everything that has happened, without her ever once having to say any of this. When the ex talks about a guy in the hospital who has "been driving [him] crazy," she notes that he "speak[s] him almost affectionately, forgivingly," which is a direct parallel to how she speaks of her ex.

Rating: 8. This would be a great place for emerging writers to submit. The prose is fantastic, but not as complex or "heady" as many other lit magazines tend to be, meaning that new writers can submit with confidence. However, the fact that they haven't updated either their website or their Twitter since May 3 is cause for concern.