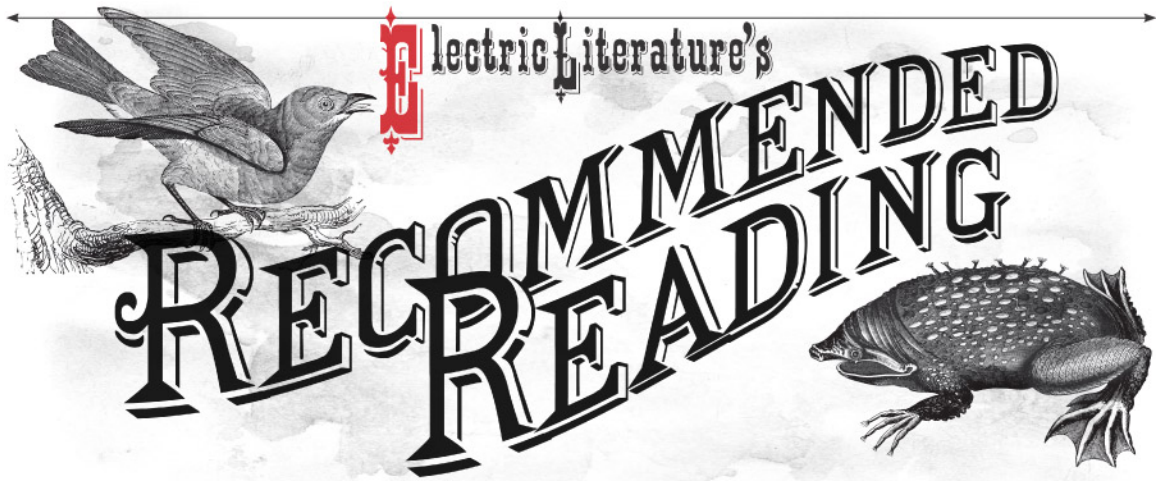


Electric Literature



Aiden Weber

Literary Magazine Report

Fall 2013

Table of Contents

Fact sheet.....	3
Comparison of Issues.....	4
Prose Reviews.....	5
Interview with Editor Benjamin Samuel.....	12

Fact Sheet

Print Magazine: Electric Literature

Online magazine: Electric Literature's Recommended Reading

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

Address: Electric Literature

147 Prince St

Brooklyn, NY 11201

E-mail Address: Benjamin@electricliterature.com or Halimah@electricliterature.com or editors@electricliterature.com

Founded: 2009

Frequency: Weekly.

Editors: Benjamin Samuel and Halimah Marcus.

What they publish: Fiction.

Submission Guidelines: Online submissions via Submittable. Previously unpublished fiction between 2,000 and 10,000 words. Submission drives are open for one month and then closed until every submission has been processed, which takes 2-3 months.

Simultaneous submissions are allowed.

Average response time: 2-3 months.

Contributor Payment: \$300

Cost: Paperback: \$10 ePub: \$5 Kindle: \$5 Enhanced PDF: \$5

Sponsored By: The New York State Council on the Arts

Distributed By: Lightning Source, Amazon, Apple

CLMP: Yes

Comparison of Issues Over Time

	Issue 4	Issue 5	Issue 6
POV: 1 st Person/ 2 nd /3 rd	1/0/4	0/0/5	5/0/0
Male/Female writers	4/1	4/1	4/1
1 st Publication/previously published	0/5	0/5	0/5

There seems to be a formula for Electric Literature of publishing four men and one woman in each issue. I don't think the trend is necessarily deliberate; one editor is a man and the other, a woman. EL only publishes fiction, but their multimedia platforms offer more ambiguous projects that could be considered poetic, like the single-sentence animation project, in which one sentence from each selected short story is pulled to inspire a short animation. The various issues seem to have a deliberate trend of first or third person, perhaps to keep the collection cohesive. The latest issue was exclusively told in the first person while the prior issue was told exclusively in third. While EL editor Ben Samuel told me one of the best parts of being an editor is discovering new voices, every author in the last three issues has been previously published. Many of those writers had pretty prolific resumes.

Prose Reviews:

Issue 73

“Supernova” by Dani Shapiro is a realistic, subjective, third person fiction story told in a domestic setting. The story follows Shenkman, a middle-aged man dealing with everyday stresses, including dying parents and in-laws, and a son he doesn't fully understand. The story begins with a scene of Shenkman on a RowPro rowing machine,

competing virtually against others. The scene reveals a nightly model, in which Schenkman avoids his wife and his insistent thoughts about their little problems and his nine-year-old son, Waldo sneaks out the back of the house and back in. Schenkman narrowly loses the race to Lindgren, his old rowing teammate from college and talks with his son who has returned from his excursion. His son wants to talk about a relatively nearby star, which he is afraid will supernova but Schenkman tries to hurry him to bed. Schenkman then thinks about how he has landed squarely in the middle of life while Lindgren is winning. He thinks of ways to wound Lindgren and ultimately decides to go visit him while his wife takes Waldo to Jiu Jitsu. Lindgren vaguely remembers him, and after Lindgren suggests that Schenkman get a Rowpro, he realizes Schenkman isn't even aware of his imagined rivalry. Schenkman then thinks of his son and wife carrying on without him. He realizes his son's great potential and leaves Lindgren, wishing to acquire dignity and grace on his own terms with his family.

Shapiro tells a story that is universally relatable, including a protagonist struggling with his own lack of purpose and pretend nemesis. The son, Waldo's high intelligence is revealed through his dialogue and because of the close-third narration, we readers are able to see the cognitive void between the protagonist and his son. That's not to say Schenkman isn't intelligent, he just isn't a knowledge sponge quite like his son. When Schenkman understands that it is Waldo, who makes *him* a success, who makes him a winner, he leaves his pursuit of measuring himself against an arbitrary enemy from his past. This is the moment of discovery. Shapiro smoothly transitions to an end within a couple short paragraphs, maintaining the reader's attention to the end. For this, the story is satisfying and emotionally fulfilling.

Issue 72

“Fame,” is an excerpt from the novel *Saguaro* by Carson Mell. It is a story within a story, told in the subjective first person perspective in a domestic setting. Bobby Bird explains he will be covering thirty years of his life in this story at the beginning. It covers his return to Arizona to live with his mom and her loser boyfriend, Chris, after he failed in New York and decides to compensate for his physical ugliness by taking up a career in rock and roll. He goes to Los Angeles and is discovered by a producer. He puts out a long list of marketable but shitty music. He becomes incredibly famous and leads a reckless life of partying but cannot elude the sadness of his past. Eventually, while driving down the highway, his tour bus flips, members of his band die and he is badly injured. He awakes in the hospital while being operated on.

The story is fast-paced and fun with a colorful and unique voice, “...I decided, fuck it, it’s time to show the world. I went to the kitchen, right past Chris, got myself a bottle of olive oil and poured some into my palms. Smoothed my hair back with an unbreakable comb. Slick.” Bobby Bird is full of dirty one-liners and unpredictable self-sabotage. He likens himself to Mick Jagger and we get to watch as he passes through the classic rock star obstacle course of booze, groupies, Rolling Stone interviews, and forgotten memories. I finished the story, which stood strongly alone, interested to read the remainder of the novel.

Issue 82

“Pearl” by Mary Miller is a realistic story in a domestic setting, told in the first-person. It begins with the unnamed storyteller’s mother telling her the world is her oyster. She can tell by her father’s silence that he disagrees and thinks she should go and bring

her husband back. But she is still young and she moves back in with her parents and gets a job as a receptionist at her friend's dad's law firm. She dresses promiscuously and bites her nails behind her desk. A partner frequently comes over and tells her about his broken home life: his wife is an alcoholic, his daughter is depressed, his money is all tied up in real-estate, leaving him cash poor. She lets him take her out to a casino for her birthday and he asks if she'd like to stay the night. They get a room and he gives her a key and tells her to go have fun playing some games. While playing, a bartender starts telling her about his crappy life. He's in the army reserves soon to leave for Iraq, he used to be fat with a ponytail but now he's thin and bald. He loves his dog. She doesn't want to hear his story but she wants to have sex so she follows him down a hallway and has sex with him. While they have sex she thinks about how she wants to keep his dog for him while he's gone and be the recipient of the letters he'll inevitably write and she'll lose weight so when he comes home he'll think she's the most beautiful thing in the world. Then she thinks maybe he won't come home at all and suddenly she doesn't want his dog or his letters and he seems to be struggling to make her orgasm so she tells him her boyfriend is likely looking for her. She goes back to her room and calls her mom and lies, saying she's staying at her friend's. The partner comes in late, drunk and falls on his own bed facing her. He says he doesn't want to have sex with her because he'd really be having sex with his daughter. She says she's not his daughter but he says they all are.

This story is a great example of concrete significant details being used in a very simple way, working together to create a very complex composite. The voice seems to match the depressed mood; the speaker is too weak and hurt to spin long careful sentences. The details just dribble out, "I let him talk and talk, didn't let on that he could

bend me over right there, that I didn't need to hear his sob story." However, the story has its surprising moments. Her dialogue is much stranger and more abstract than her narration, showing her disconnect with the world surrounding her. "I like books about fucked-up people," I said. "The kind you have to tear the cover off because there's a girl on the toilet staring at her shadow." The story ultimately explores the coping mechanisms of lonely people, the runaround they'll take to avoid the only confrontation that can save them. The story is economic in length and poignant in tone.

Issue 78

"Pulls" by Gary Lutz is a surreal story told in a domestic setting by a first-person unnamed storyteller. The plot was very difficult to decipher but what I gathered was the following: A man begins by saying it has always been his way to go hungry for people and then make his way door to door, but there was a time in his forties when he was married and he had a best friend. His wife, whose name was Helene, and he rented a two-story brutal house. He tried steering her towards sexual relationships with women but it wasn't much use. He alternated spending time with her and his best friend who he had a physical relationship with. His wife wanted to meet his friend but he wouldn't let her, he'd only give her incredibly useless details about the friend, like mentioning his rib that slides out of place. His wife starts spending time with a preacher who is knowledgeable and intelligent. He becomes interested in the younger generation and goes out to find one. He meets a young girl at a mall and shares a strange conversation with her, gives her his address and she writes him once, saying goodbye. He finds a big Laundromat and starts doing tons of laundry, putting only one article of clothing in each washer to ensure a thorough cleanse. Eventually the young girl gets back in touch with him wanting to meet

again. They do and he ends up sitting around a table with her and his friend and he takes her hand and puts it on his friend's arm but her fingers don't even open around it. He begins his life over from that day.

I hated this story. The line by Hemingway comes to mind, "Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?" I love Faulkner and I think he uses big words in a legible way. In this case, Lutz makes a big formless pile of abstraction. The voice is in love with itself and annoying. He writes sentences like, "I remember that something consolatory had been ciphered into the icing of a store-baked cake," and "This ensured a cautious, tyrannical clean." But the annoyingness can't be captured by isolated sentences. It's the juxtaposition of the sentences and of the prose. There is really no plot, very few recurring themes; it is an incoherent ramble. It seems to wish to propel itself to a pedestal by way of ambiguity. This piece was not a story to me but a collection of demented, oddly dark visions phrased in the most pretentious and difficult ways possible.

Issue 81

"It doesn't Have to be a Big Deal" by Rebecca Schiff is a realistic story in an exotic setting told by a first person narrator. A young, unnamed woman has flown to northern California to spend time with a broke pot grower she met at a singsong. They go to a restaurant designed for potheads which serves munchies exclusively: zucchini pop-tarts, mango wrapped hamburgers, etc. After eating they find that his car has been vandalized, as usual, by his malicious ex-girlfriend. They return to his house and have sex. She doesn't understand why he's broke. He has weed in the freezer and hidden in ceramic frogs all over his desk. She remembers how their fling started, meeting at the sing-along and then exchanging emoticon-laced messages and sending pictures of each

other back and forth. His picture showed him with pig-tail buns but she tried to follow her mantra of “it doesn’t have to be a big deal,” overlooking minor flaws in order to have a good time. Then they’re driving to a hot spring retreat and he complains about his friend who spoiled his bluegrass band by leaving for Hawaii after one of the other band-mates died in a car accident while blasting “Sweet Child O’ Mine.” She knows he’s really mad at the friend who died for dying and transfers the anger to the other friend who left. They get to the hot springs where clothing is optional and everyone is nude and she pays for their day passes. The man at the front desk explains that the waters are holy and sexual congress is not tolerated. They go in the hot springs and mime to each other rather than speaking. They want to have sex but he only has flavored condoms and she doesn’t want a flavored vagina so she gives him a blowjob. After almost getting kicked out, they return to the hot springs. There, while in thought, she realizes his ex-girlfriend had an abortion and the friend he is mad at owes him \$3,000. She has three days left in her trip but she wants him to drop her back at the airport and just give him money to mail her what she left at his place. He asks her to be patient and she contemplates her mantra.

Different threads of time are woven throughout the piece with great clarity. Schiff dips back into the past and pulls back into the present without noticeable transitions. The voice, which is that of an outsider, is hilarious, commenting on pothead pretensions and ironies. We smoked under a Navajo quote, “Thoughts are like arrows: once released, they strike their mark.’ ‘More like Garden of Cultural Appropriation,’ I said.” The plot is not particularly, but the attitudes and satirical characters strewn throughout are amusing enough to make the read worthwhile for anyone whose ever known a dreadlocked pot smoker, or just anyone who has been to northern California or Oregon.

Issue 75

“The Healing Center” by Catherine Lacey is a realistic story told in a domestic setting by a first person storyteller. Sylvia looks at herself in the mirror and so does the anonymous storyteller, mimicking Sylvia’s poses. Sylvia has a voluptuous, desirable body while the narrator’s is plain. Sylvia asks why they have women’s bodies. The storyteller says Sylvia has been saying never mind a lot lately and getting stir-crazy. She knows it is because Sylvia intends to leave. She remembers how they met at the acupuncturist. Sylvia was the receptionist. Sylvia never looked at her but one day she did and she looked at Sylvia and they both looked at themselves and they liked what they saw. Then they started sleeping together and going places arm in arm. One day Sylvia stirred her spoon around an empty teacup and the storyteller knew things were over between them. Sylvia asked the storyteller if she ever felt like a lab rat and after asking Sylvia to clarify her question, the storyteller tells off Sylvia and Sylvia continues to defy her.

There is a lot of symbolism at play in this story, beginning with the mirror reflection. It’s all about looking at things from different angles. Looking at love, heart, self-perception etc., “Sylvia was doing a lot of never minding back then, so much never minding that it became unclear if she minded anything anymore, or if she minded her own mind or even my mind, or anything that was mine.” Dialogue is italicized rather than quoted and the story moves at a watery, timeless pace. It’s all very heady. I wouldn’t recommend this story to friends other than as a style study. I didn’t find it particularly entertaining or intellectually provocative.

Interview with Electric Literature and EL's Recommended Reading Editor

Benjamin Samuel.

(Conducted via phone)

Andy Hunter and Scott Lindenbaum founded Electric Literature as a quarterly journal in 2009 in Brooklyn, NY. EL has since put out six printed issues, produced the first fiction magazine for the iPad, published two novels and launched a community building weekly magazine called "Recommended Reading," which publishes in a four-week cycle, beginning with a story chosen by EL, followed by an indie press excerpt, then an author recommended story, and finally a selection from a literary magazine's archive. An original note by the editor accompanies each story.

I got the chance to chat with EL's editor Ben Samuel, about the birth of the brand, the turns it has taken and some of the observations and standards he makes as an editor.

AIDEN WEBER: How did Electric Literature get started and how was Recommended Reading born out of it?

BENJAMIN SAMUEL: So Electric Literature started as a multi-platform Quarterly. We published in print, we published in PDF, E-pub, we had an iPhone app, which was the first of its kind. We did that for about six issues, and then we took stock and looked at what the publishing landscape was like currently and how it had changed since we founded the magazine. We noticed that a multi-platform publishing model had actually become pretty standard; it had caught on and we sort of proved that that model worked.

So we wanted to continue to innovate and serve the independent publishing community to a greater capacity.

AW: Is that where Recommended Reading came in?

BS: Yes. The reason Recommended Reading exists is because there are so many great small magazines, so many great small presses and writers doing great work, and we wanted to make sure they got the exposure they deserve. RR is weekly, it's free, and it's digital only.

AW: Why did you go all digital?

BS: The reason for that is we can save the upfront cost of printing so we can pay writers fairly. And we can also make [the material] more accessible. So if you have a story on RR you can share it easily, all your friends can check it out. When we partner with a small literary magazine and republish a work that was printed, we often hear that the exposure from RR was far greater than from its initial printed publication because the RR platform is free and online.

AW: I saw on your site that writers are paid \$300 for EL publication. Are writers being republished from literary magazines paid similarly?

BS: For re-prints we pay writers \$100.

AW: And is it just free publicity for literary magazines or are they paid for their contribution as well?

BS: We like to think of it as something a little more substantial than just free press. We're all part of this community and RR is a tool we use at EL to highlight some of the great literary magazines that are out there.

AW: How do you go about selecting the literary magazines you partner with?

BS: The first pool of literary magazines we pulled from was just a body of magazines Halimah Marcus, my co-editor, and myself were already familiar with and the small presses we already loved. So they were the first ones we approached just with the idea of RR and kind of pitched it to them and saw if they were interested, and as it turned out, they were. We also went around to AWP in Chicago, as a matter of fact, and went up to all these different publishers and received a great deal of support for the idea even before we launched.

AW: Is the selection process different now?

BS: Yeah, we hear about new magazines, new publishers all the time. The beauty of this community is everyone is very supportive and connected. So we'll reach out to friends, to

magazines we hear about directly, and a lot of times people will reach out to us and ask how they can get involved.

AW: What are you looking for in writing, as an editor?

BS: Obviously having a good story to tell is very important, but we're also interested in stories that engage the reader in a new way. It's not just as straight-forward as a story can be, they're doing something interesting stylistically, they're using voice in a way that we may not have seen before, something that distinguishes the story in a way and makes it remarkable.

AW: Do you prefer writers to have a history of published works?

BS: I think any editor of a literary magazine or publishing house would probably agree that one of the greatest thrills of this job is discovering new writers and finding those voices that haven't been heard yet. So really, having publishing credits is not essential. That's not going to get you published. Having something to say and saying it well is really what's important. It's always informative if someone sends us their publishing credits or if they come with a recommendation from someone we trust, but that's really not what gets them published, at least not at Electric Literature. Every story we receive is read twice, and even if only one person likes it, it gets bumped up to the next level and we refine it from there.

AW: EL is supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, and upon visiting the site, readers are suggested to donate. Are these EL's primary sources of funding?

BS: We are in the process of going non-profit, which is part of why the reading on EL is free. Originally we were founded with more of a business model. Right now the majority of our funding comes from ad sales, and we have donations, we have grants [as well]. I'm not certain of what the future will be regarding magazines' funding. I think it's quite possible it will stay the same, where you have an institution behind it, or simply magazine sales and donors really prop up the bottom line. I hope we don't end up in the sort of situation where we send edits to a writer and say, "Could you put something in here about Pepsi?" [Laughs] But that certainly isn't something that we would do.