

FICTION FIX

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Literary Magazine Report
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Table of Contents:

Fact Sheet.....	3
Why I Chose Fiction Fix.....	4
Comparison of Issues Over Time.....	5
Prose Reviews.....	6
Interview with April Gray Wilder.....	13

Fact Sheet

Title of Magazine: *Fiction Fix*

Founded: 2002

Editors: April Gray Wilder (Editor-in-Chief), Alex Pucher (Managing Editor), Mark Ari (Editorial Advisor), Russell Turney (Graphic Literature Editor), Blair Romain (Associate Editor)

Web Address: fictionfix.net

E-mail Address: editor@fictionfix.net

What the publish: They accept fiction, short or long (under twenty-five pages double-spaced), graphic fiction, novel excerpts and novellas (15-40K word count), graphic novellas, artwork such as photographs, paintings, drawings, and digital and media art.

Submission Guidelines: Submissions through Submishmash. They announce when they will be taking submissions, and submissions opened on April 1, 2013. They accept multiple and simultaneous submissions.

Response time: Up to three months.

Frequency: Bi-annual; however, they are in the process of moving over to a quarterly publication.

Description of Publication: Founded by Mark Ari, a faculty member of the University of North Florida, started the magazine with students in 2002. The premise of the magazine celebrates stories as an addictive experience, and they want the stories that make you feel. Published quarterly, they look for “experimental” and “soulful” work from writers around the world. Each issue publishes “reader’s choice” and “editor’s choice” pieces.

Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: 10-12/40-50

Cost: Available for free online.

Simultaneous Submissions: Yes

Multiple Submissions: Yes, limit of two pieces.

Annual Submissions: 1,000

Pay: None

Why I Chose Fiction Fix

I chose *Fiction Fix* because no matter what story I sit down to read, I always finish it feeling *something*. That's the beauty behind every piece *Fiction Fix* chooses to publish. No matter the length of the story, the point of view, the tone, the plot, it makes you feel. The authors are not afraid to take risks, to think outside the traditional bounds of storytelling. Hybrid forms of listed instances spawned by plastic surgery, or '80's rock, stories told in one-sided conversations, entire lives told in a stranger's perspective, and those told in a single sentence. These are just a few of the reasons I got hooked on *Fiction Fix*.

Founded in 2002 by Mark Ari and co-run by several of his University of North Florida (UNF) students, the magazine was fueled by student work, both literally and literarily. This has helped to set *Fiction Fix* apart from other magazines, as the selection catered more toward emerging writers. Fiction Fix prefers stories that play with structure, take risks in language and narration, and ultimately inspire emotional reaction. Every story is spawned by a desire to explore fiction, to create something with the power to influence introspection and demand a reaction. All stories do indeed elicit a reaction. Some of my favorite short stories have been discovered within the pages of *Fiction Fix*, such as "Tendencies" by Jennifer Clark, "Mixtape" by Elisha Wagman, and "Freedom Is Just Another Word" by Vic Sizemore. Each piece is exceptional in it's own way whether for the magical realism, relatable voice, or the meticulously detailed instances. I never finish an issue without having read a story that left a lasting impression. I appreciate the fact that *Fiction Fix* archives their stories online and makes them available to the public for free, as this allows for a greater audience to explore their work. Despite this leading to a lack of compensation, I believe that this allows *Fiction Fix* to be a more accessible outlet to publish work, especially among emerging writers.

Comparison of Issues Over Time

Issues	Issue 12	Issue 13	Issue 14
Published Writers: Emerging Writers	12 : 1	10 : 2	11 : 0
Prose Author- Male: Female	4 : 9	6 : 6	7 : 4
Long Pieces: Flash Pieces	5 : 5	7 : 2	8 : 2
Editor's Choice ¹ : Readers' Choice	4 : 9	8 : 2	7 : 3

This comparison, over time, proved to highlight the diversity between each issue season of *Fiction Fix*. While sometimes there are more male authors per issue, on the other hand there will be a larger number of female authors in another issue. While *Fiction Fix* tends to favor longer stories, they still publish flash pieces. However, it is fairly common for the magazine to contain more Editor's Choice stories. The two most recent issues featured mostly stories chosen by the editors, but with such a rigorous reading period who better to decide which stories appeal to an audience than the people slaving over them? The only downside for emerging writers lies in the fact that for every writer taking their first steps into publication, at least nine authors already have credits from elsewhere.

All in all, *Fiction Fix* establishes an eclecticism through open minded submissions. Each issue seems to be dictated by the stories themselves; the ones that scream the loudest get told.

¹ Each issue of *Fiction Fix* is broken up into two sections of selections, one being Editor's Choice, the other Readers' Choice.

Prose Reviews

Issue 12

“Mixtape” by Elisha Wagman is a plainspoken realistic first-person story told in a domestic setting. Jasmine is stuck in the hospital with scleroderma, a chronic illness with a life expectancy distinct to her own conditions, leaving her with awful sores and skin that hardens until she can’t move. Her mother is the only person that comes to visit on her birthday, bringing a vanilla cupcake and the boombox Jasmine cherished in the 1980’s. Jasmine uses the tape recorder to make a mixtape for her mother, recounting all the times that she took her mother for granted or didn’t appreciate all that she really did for her. By the end of the story, her lungs must be drained several times and she’s about to undergo life-threatening surgery when she hands the nurse her mother’s mixtape.

“Mixtape” appealed to me on a personal level. The voice of the narrator, the recounting of moments passed and taken for granted, the resonance of old songs connected to memories established an empathy within Jasmine’s character. She could have almost been me, if I were just twenty years older. Wagman never reveals Jasmine’s age, but she is in her late twenties at the earliest, as mixtapes, music, and clothes of her youth have long gone out of style, and the little known fact that most patients with scleroderma are diagnosed after the age of thirty. The narrator’s relationship with her mother, and the details Wagman chose humanize the characters, creates an emotional connection for the audience. “Today, I know my mother loves me. Even if I run naked through the hospital she will not forsake me. I have never done this, but life has proven that I can’t afford to say that I never will.” Madonna’s hit “Papa Don’t Preach” triggers this instance when her mother helps her friend Lola through an abortion. The rhythm and

content of the song echoes throughout the voice of the narrator. “Lola didn’t want sermons on mortal sin. She wanted an abortion.” The narrator recounts her mother’s willingness to help the girls, when they could not count on anyone else. This sentiment echoes in the fact that her mother has sacrificed her entire life for her daughter, even now as she spends her spare time at the hospital, as they both get closer to death.

Issue 13

“Freedom Is Just Another Word” by Vic Sizemore is a realistic objective third-person narrative told in a domestic setting. Nadine is handcuffed to a chair that is bolted to the floor in a police station contemplating what will happen to her children now that she will be going to prison. Nadine has struggled financially for months, their small home gradually being blocked off until the four of them are crammed into the living room insulated by plastic sheets to keep out winter. Each month her situation grows more dire, losing her license in two states, being over \$3,000 in debt, her dilapidated old van hemorrhaging oil that she cannot afford to replace, and finally her children taken away by Social Services and her impending incarceration. While Nadine is devastated to think about what will happen to her children without her, she rejoices because she knows they will be better off.

The voice Sizemore’s piece is incredibly matter-of-fact. While the story is told in a close third person through Nadine’s eyes, there was little exaggeration or embellishment. Sizemore uses concrete significant details to characterize Nadine’s relationship with her children and her interactions with John Law to mirror society’s image of her. For example, her eldest son Bennie wants to play basketball for the JV team and spends his time looking through magazines and circling sneakers he wants. “The ones he’d made repeat circles around for her to see were black and red Nike Air Max Wavy, and they had been marked down from \$79.99 to \$59.99... It broke her heart to see those cheap shoes circled over and over like that.” Sizemore uses a scene in a creative writing class Nadine takes at community

college, before her money ran out. The Class is full of privileged kids, who constantly use words like *epiphany*, and, *aha*, when they have no concept of what life is really like. They scoff at Nadine's nonfiction piece and claim it is "too sensationalized." "But it really happened," is her reply. This anecdote perfectly sums up Nadine's struggles to be understood by her community and to understand them. Sizemore also puts emphasis on money and the bills piling up, in terms of her budget, and how much money she *needs*, what she needs it for, and what she can live without because there isn't any to go around. This heightens the urgency of Nadine's need for a solution, raises the stakes in developing her motivation, and ultimately strengthens the impact of the devastating ending when Nadine loses her kids to foster care, and getting life in prison. However, interestingly enough, Sizemore allows Nadine to become a fully developed character as she does not lament this, but chooses to view it as another type of "freedom."

"Tendencies" by Jennifer Clark is a magical realist story told in first person in a domestic setting. The narrator has never been the kind of woman to receive a lot of attention, but as the days go by she starts noticing metal objects sticking to her body. Eventually, after she starts carrying home paper clips, staplers, and rings, she notices a change within herself. She, as well as everyone that she comes in contact with, is obsessed with touching her and gravitates toward her. This process begins gradually but eventually, she cannot leave her house for fear of being pestered. By the end of the story, the narrator's magnetic pull literally destroys whatever touches her, including her neighbor's husband, who is stuck to her in the form of leftover skin flaps.

The gradual reveal of the narrator's condition makes the story intriguing, as it starts with paper clips attaching themselves to her blouse and eventually leads to her doctor informing her that she has the gravitational pull of the earth's core. Clark creates a suspension of belief, as even the doctor regards the condition rare and puzzling, but he feeds

into her magnetism, all the same. The story is told through an interaction between the narrator and her neighbor's wife after his death. Though Clark never uses dialogue and instead cuts out any indication of the neighbor's responses and questions, the transition of the moments is smooth and the tension continues to rise with each word, due to the calm, and almost comical structure of the story. "The boss finally had enough. She came over to my cube and sat down on my lap. With her legs entwined around my waist, hands sunk in my hair, she fired me. I could tell it was quite painful for her to let me go, but I understood." While at first, these instances are broken up by funny tidbits, like the image of spoons dangling from the narrators ears and nose when leaving restaurants, change flying everywhere, and cash registers breaking open as she walked by them, they become steadily more unsettling as a change in the narrator's motivations is revealed. "With dawn, I could make out pieces of skin--your husband's skin--stuck to mine. Look, even now I flutter in the breeze. See? See how they sway when I move my arms this way and that?" The narrator has become so enamored by her own magnetism that she cannot resist approaching her neighbor, even knowing what it will do to her. The ending has very sinister aftertones while seeming innocent, proving authentic to Clark's tone. "As the compass drifts slowly south, I just want to be closer to you. One step. I'll just take one step."

Issue 14

"How to Ruin the Book Fair of All the Other Kids" by Sarah Scoles is a plainspoken realistic second person story told in a domestic setting. The narrator is being bullied by Steven Pickering, and offers to help her mom when she volunteers at the book fair so she can get out of class. There, the narrator tries to stand up to Steven as he's bullying Carla, the only girl who understands her. Her attempt to kick Steven in the balls leads him to knock over all the books on her and Carla, and she hugs her. Her mom comes over and tells her it was inappropriate and she starts wondering what about it was inappropriate. Her and Carla share a

moment when the narrator gives her *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and the girl understands the metaphor embedded in the gesture.

The voice is undeniably strong. Throughout, the narrator includes these little flash forwards to the narrator in the future, tainted by the image of the “good kid”, so that one day she’ll be leaning against the building, not going to class, wanting Karen (though *who* Karen is, remains unknown) to think she’s “Bad with a capital B for leaning against this building instead” and how she’s always going to be the person she was in fifth grade. These future moments allow Scoles to characterize the narrator through moments of action and inaction, how in front of Carla she stands up to Steven, and does nothing when she’s alone. Scoles does a fantastic job of keeping the voice like that of a ten year old, of explaining these situations in a colorful way that reflect the critical thinking skills of a young kid in a direct address to the audience. “Because you, too, are old enough to understand metaphor, smile beneath Clifford’s stoic snout.” This line allows the story to come full circle and illustrates with unwavering certainty, that the narrator and Carla have just had a moment of understanding through an adult lens.

“A Life in the Day” by Louise Henrich, is a realistic first person narrative told in an outdoor setting from the perspective of an insect. The narrator is described as breaking free of a cocoon and growing wings, enjoying the beautiful day that’s full of promise. On a bridge over the lake, the narrator spots a young girl and her mother. They are talking about catching frogs because they must be abundant on a day like today. Out of the lake, and only the eyes visible, the narrator spots a frog, but it’s too late. The narrator becomes the frog’s dinner.

Henrich pulls you into the story through the mystery established by the first paragraph of repetition, “My life. My life my life my life. Here it is: I may fly.” From the very start, I want to know what’s going on and who this narrator is and what he or she is doing. Henrich then uses beautiful imagery and metaphor to show the changing insect,

becoming the final product of its evolution. “And maybe simply because the desire is strong enough this time, I shed once more, and, in doing so, reveal wings—unmistakable wings. I am the hungry caterpillar of the lakes. I am the nymph Shakespeare spoke of—look at that sun!” These descriptions lead to the narrator watching the girl and her mother, understanding that it’s a beautiful day to catch frogs, a perfect day even. This undeniable understanding made me feel even more sorry for the winged narrator when I read the last line. “I glance back at my waters and the frog emerges just eyes, and a mouth I do not even see opens and drags me back to the bottom, the dark, the ink, the lake of her childhood.”

Interview with Editor-in-Chief April Gray Wilder

Amy Kisner: From an editor's perspective, what does the submission process look like for *Fiction Fix*? About how many submissions do you receive per reading period and roughly how much time is spent reading?

April Gray Wilder: We're currently receiving a thousand story submissions per year for our three short fiction issues. Our policy is that every story is read by at least four readers/editorial assistants (some of whom are brand new and others who have been with the journal for many years). If even one of those readers votes "yes" on a story—or if a couple vote maybe—it gets read by one of our editors. If the editor recommends that we "accept" or if he or she has even a modicum of doubt about rejecting, it gets read by the other editors as well. So, a lot of time is dedicated to every submission we receive. We feel that this is a very important policy as we seek to publish not only really strong "traditional" works, but also experimental works which may not be received as easily by all readers.

AK: When selecting a story for publication, how much time do you spend editing the story? Or, when selecting a submission, is it always beyond revision?

AGW: Due to time constraints, the vast majority of stories we accept are already "publication ready." We will occasionally accept a story that needs major editing if it is unusual and emotionally striking. In these cases, we offer suggestions to the author and he or she decides which ones to keep, tweak, or "stet."

AK: What are the benefits of having an archived online journal available for free?

AGW: The benefit for authors is the accessibility of their work for readers. For the journal, the availability of at least some back issues allows writers to see—with no uncertainty or need to make a purchase—if they feel that *Fiction Fix* is a potential fit for their work. In summary: more readers and more writers. Our current model is predicated on the belief that as a small, but growing literary journal, our primary service is to provide great stories for readers, and to bring our authors the widest audience that we can.

AK: And the drawbacks?

AGW: The sole drawback is a lack of a functional budget, which leads to less time for editing, less opportunities for promoting the journal, etc.

AK: *Fiction Fix* started as a student operated press, how has that affected the growth of the magazine?

AGW: *Fiction Fix* would not have been able to grow to the size it is today without the dedication of students from the University of North Florida, which has allowed it to gain its cohesive and unique identity. The best example of this is that *Fiction Fix*'s first editor-in-chief, Sarah Cotchaleovitch, is still a part of the journal, reading a third of those thousand submissions we receive, and copyediting all of our accepted works.

AK: Do you think being a student-run press gave the journal a slight advantage within the community?

AGW: Undoubtedly yes. In its early years, *Fiction Fix* was embraced by the local community at UNF: it was read in classes and sold in the University's bookstore, and readings were hosted at the UNF art gallery. The journal's current success would not be possible without that local support.

AK: When there's a disagreement among editors about which pieces to publish, how is it solved?

AGW: This is not uncommon. Our editors have eclectic tastes, which we see as a strength. Perhaps half to three-fourths of the stories in each issue are agreed upon with no hesitation. But for the remaining, a story may not resonate with all editors equally. In these cases, it's important to be able to see beyond the confines of one's personal tastes. Keeping in mind the journal's mission to publish "accessibly experimental" and "soulful" literature, we discuss how the story will fit within the current issue, as well as the story's strengths and weaknesses, typically in regards to originality," the beauty of the language, the success of the plot, and whether or not the story makes us feel.

AK: In *Fiction Fix 13*, there is a story entitled "Tendencies" by Jennifer Clark. It is an incredibly unique story, rich with magical realism. Can you tell me a little bit about working on that story? Did it come to you finished or were you able to see it through a few drafts? What elements of the writings stood out immediately?

AGW: "Tendencies" takes risks—the language is direct, powerful, and evocative, and the reader feels emotionally very close to the narrator. We made only one edit suggestion to Clark, but it was to cut a good portion of the beginning, which didn't have the same remarkable momentum as was found only a few pages later. I was very grateful that Clark accepted this edit, as "Tendencies" is one of my favorite *Fiction Fix* stories to date. In the final version, the reader is dropped right into the emotional intensity of the story.

AK: Out of all the stories *Fiction Fix* published, in your opinion what were the best stories? Or the ones that you connected with on a more personal level?

AGW: For each editor there would be a different answer to this question, so I must call in Managing Editor Alex Pucher and Associate Editor Blair Romain to help with this question. There are so many stories that could just as easily fill this space for me, but possibly none which resonate with such deep emotion as Susan Fedynak's "Even When We Want to Most, We Cannot Hear the Falling Snow." Even rereading it now, knowing the whole scope of this beautiful and subtle story, it brings me to tears. The story is framed in a remarkable way, beginning in second person: "you," in a hospital, watching a couple who also sit in the waiting room.

Then, almost without notice, the "you" falls away. We forget who we are as we are entirely subsumed by the story of the couple.

Alex Pucher:

During my eight issue tenure at *Fiction Fix*, the story that connected with me, on a personal level, is remembered with ease. Michael Clough's "Alexander Williams (Descending)" from Issue 10 struck a nerve, and that nerve has remained somewhat raw ever since. To be fair, its milieu is typical, but the story that branches off of that cliché is as human as human can get. It's about desperation, longing, fantasy, reality, and the preposterous journeys we are sometimes compelled to take in order to reconcile the discord of who we are

and what we must be. All the while, there is descending, but the question the reader is left with is what the protagonist (and by extension, the reader) is descending toward. Is it reality, or fantasy? Or is it something else? Is it the fact that the only reconciliation is descending into the moment and the now? Perhaps. Whatever the reader's interpretation, though, the answer to the question “Alexander Williams (Descending)” poses is yes, and that answer is what makes the story magic.

Blair Romain:

Fiction Fix, Issue 10 was the first issue that I was a part of from start to finish. I was a staff reader at the time, and to this day I can clearly remember first reading “Water Street” by Ronald Ennis and Scott Laudati. It gave me this giddy feeling that you only get when you know you have stumbled upon greatness. To be honest, it wasn’t the type of story that I would usually gravitate toward, but there was something in its grittiness and rich history that I really clung to. It is a story of struggle and perseverance. Mike McInnes grew up during a tough time in a less than desirable neighborhood, but utilized what he was given (his dog Billy McGlory) to make a name for himself in the rat pits on Water Street. The authors did a wonderful job bringing this city of old to life. To this day, it is a story that I find myself thinking about and relating to, and it's always the first story I recommend to new readers of *Fiction Fix*.

AK: Would you say there are particular themes running throughout the issues, or perhaps a certain tone? Do you compile the stories with a particular feeling in mind?

AGW: Our goal for each issue is to present a variety of narrative styles, themes, and tones. We believe this diversity is more engaging for the reader, and offers an intellectually and emotionally satisfying spectrum of what is possible through stories.

AK: The artwork is always exceptional and thought provoking, brightly colored and vivid in one aspect or another, can you talk a little bit about selecting the artwork to match the tone of the pieces? Or is that not a factor in selecting work?

AGW: We consider our artwork submissions in isolation from the stories we've selected. Yet, by some kind of magic, the artwork always seems to offer beautiful synchronicities or associations with a good number of the stories.

AK: What is the best advice you could give to an emerging writer looking for a market?

AGW: I don't think there is one answer here, so I will say: understand that there are endless possibilities, including self publishing. Depending on the writer, here are some suggestions: find your local literary community, go to literary events, and meet editors and publishers. Join a literary journal so that you can begin to understand the contemporary landscape of your genre or genres. Commit to a not-overwhelming, but regular submission schedule (for example: send one story to three journals each month), because story submission is a learning process in itself. Or maybe don't worry about finding a market yet, do the work and find a small group of trusted writer-friends with whom you can grow. Subscribe to a few journals (if you have the money), or dedicate yourself to reading some free/online journals regularly. Don't give up.