

Passages North (Issue 35 - Print Annually)Editor: Jennifer A. HowardWeb Address: www.passagesnorth.com/What They Publish: “Short-Shorts” less than 1,000 words; Writers on Writing Blog; Short Fiction; Nonfiction; Poetry; ArtworkSubmission Guidelines: NO SUBMISSION FEES for regular submissions. \$15 for contests.Description of Publication: *Passages North* is the annual literary magazine out of Northern Michigan University who look to publish “stories that start strong, and then get even better. Settings where we've never been, situations we couldn't have imagined, characters doing work we didn't realize we wanted to know everything about.” That being said, they look for experimental work that plays on the page and does a little bending of the rules. They've been going since 1979.Prose Per Issue / Amount of Published Annually: Approx. 15 stories per issue/per year.Prose Reviews: “Earshot–Grope–Cessation” by Joe Sacksteder is an experimental, third-person (and at one point first-person) piece about a mother’s life after the death of her second-born son, Josh. The piece begins with Josh losing control of the family car and then quickly segues to Beth playing Brahms “Intermezzo, Opus 116 No. 5” at a piano recital. She uses the piano as a way to cope with her loss because Josh was very invested in playing the piano. The story ends with Beth playing the intermezzo on loop, thinking about Josh, unable to finish.

This story starts with short sentences that show a brief moment in time: a crash, a piano, a recital. Then Sacksteder jumps back to the beginning and gives us more exposition surrounding these moments. With each ensuing loop, the reader gets more about why the crash happened, why Beth dives into learning the piano and how she plans to live her life after Josh’s death. The story is fractured and nonlinear with half thoughts and moments of reflections given by other members of the family: Larry, the father, and the other sons, Danny and Caleb. The continuous loop structure mirrors the loop in which Beth sees her life now. It is a successful practice in form/function narrative.

“Rules of Combat” by Katie Cortese is a first-person, realistic flash story about a baby-sitter having an affair with the husband of a family she sits for. The story is a mere moment in time where the narrator, Lily, in a sexual afterglow, waits for her lover, Dan, to cook her dinner. While he pours wine and rolls sushi, Lily goes over the night quickly in her head: she was called to sit by the wife, away on business, Dan comes home early, Lily puts the kids to bed, she makes love to Dan, and her last thought is that, tomorrow, at school, she’ll trace the spots on her body where Dan touched her, thinking she’s everything that the wife is not.

This story takes the stereotypically seductive babysitter motif and twists it out from the babysitter’s point of view. Instead of being a one-sided story, however, Cortese has a knack for pairing opposites in this story: the “cold” and “bitter” wife to the warm, loving narrator, the predatory, hawk-like Dan “swooping” down on Lily but then quickly dashing away like a “pink-eyed rabbit” when his wife calls. This allows, in a very short piece, the reader to evaluate the grey area between what we perceive as right and wrong. Furthermore, the affair is written alongside a game of checkers that Lily and Dan play; it is a mirror for which the readers can parallel the opposites Cortese creates. This is an good example of taking an old story and telling it in a new way.

Rating: 5. This is definitely a higher journal that looks to publish finely crafted work. Contributors are award-winning and highly-published authors and teachers. With only 15 openings for fiction per year, writers are going to have to bring their A-game.