



Josh Watkins

Independent Press Report

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## DZANC BOOKS

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## FACT SHEET

**Web Site:** dzancbooks.org

**Contact Information:**

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2531 Jackson Ave  
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**Origins:** Founded as a non-profit in 2006 by Steven Gillis. Dzanc is based out of Ann Arbor, where Gillis also established 826 Michigan, a non-profit center for young writers.

**Masthead:** Steven Gillis (Founder/Publisher); Dan Wickett (Executive Director/Publisher); Guy Intoci (Editor & PR); Steven Seighman and Amanda Jones (Art & Cover design).

**Focus:** Dzanc publishes innovative, energetic literary fiction — “adventurous, but not to the point of the work being strictly experimental without still having the soul of a great story.” Gillis and Wickett, big readers with sharp eyes for talent, only publish books they love. In addition to fiction, Dzanc have a wealth of imprints, projects, contests, and programs that promote the community aspect of literature.

**Distribution:** Consortium Books. Any print book purchased from Dzanc includes, for free, its e-book counterpart. All e-books are downloaded directly from the Dzanc website.

**Average Print Run:** Somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 (depending, of course).

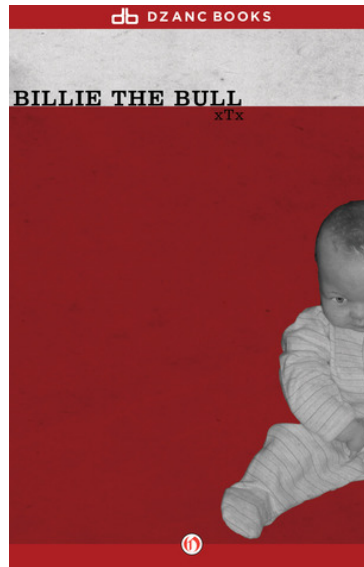
**Submissions:** Novels should be sent through Dzanc’s Submishmash. Dzanc also accepts portions of manuscripts-in-progress, with a summary of the completed project and its author. “Please no Young Adult fiction.” Allow five to six months for a response.

**Money:** Dzanc is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs, and Art Works. They also accept individual donations on their website via PayPal.

## Why I Chose Dzanc Books

Dzanc's biography is dramatic, pulsing with the same blood-sweat-and-tears that overzealous punk labels soapbox about to no end. The difference here being that Dzanc is, unexaggeratedly, putting in obtuse amounts of work to support a roster of quality literary fiction. Exploring Dzanc's website, I gushed at familiar names — Alissa Nutting, xTx, Joshua Cohen, Peter Markus — and took note of the many I didn't recognize, eager to explore. The book designs were stunning, and it was, admittedly, nice to see a respected house not stationed in New York.

Dzanc is part of a publishing canon I revere: NYRB, Dalkey Archives, New Directions, Grove/Atlantic, Fiction Collective, FSG, McSweeney's, et al: presses for whom commerce is second to art, no matter the cost; presses who, in a climate so unwilling to take risks, embrace voices strange, ambitious, and gripping. To top it off, Dzanc has put a lot into literature's education and community elements. Dzanc seeks to boost books and publishing from the grassroots up: they send writers to teach for free in public schools, they gather artists in Portugal to better themselves, they reach out to libraries and student interns, they put in the extra work to publicize and expose the work they curate. Though it may seem thankless from a distance, Dzanc's dedication has earned them more press, publications, and opportunities each year. I chose Dzanc because they are a gifted, deserving press with a success story.



*Billie the Bull* by xTc

Dzanc Books, 2013.

67 pages, \$10 paperback / \$7.99 eBook.

ISBN: 1480435651

Reviewed by Josh Watkins

*Billie the Bull* is a novella populated by bizarre characters and impossible set-pieces—a woman the size of “a smallish telephone pole,” a man and his magic scroll determined to collect everything in existence, a weaver threading with the hairs of unborn children, a penis breathalyzer. Like any skilled scribbler of the surreal, xTx uses her imagination to cloak the relentless setbacks of being alive in the unfamiliar, the dreamlike. The reader is never caught lost in *Billie the Bull*’s oddities without sensing the profound human sadness among xTx’s linguistic funhouse mirrors.

Billie Marcus, even as an orphaned five-year-old, is supernaturally tall, disproportionate. Only Billie’s foster mother, a seamstress, has the patience to love her. She sews lovely, extra-large dresses for Billie and soothes her when she is overcome by violent, fitful growth-spurts. Billie accidentally kills her mother during one spurt and is overcome with punishment (from her father and brother) and personal guilt: a guilt that winks from behind the novella’s cold, unusual surface. xTx investigates the cyclical nature of parent-child relationships by focusing on Billie as a mother of twin boys: one boy normal-sized, the other a slowly-growing giant like his mother. In the opening scene, Billie rocks the large child to sleep, noticing the smaller one: “Her smaller one, so baby-bird-pitiful lies lonesome on the floor. Some blankets. Safer. From the beginning she felt she would break him, but this was what she was given...Worthless.” Billie is unkind to the small child, and as the story progresses and we reach back into her orphaned past, we understand Billie’s place in the cycle.

*Billie the Bull* has a non-linear structure of brief, titled sections, displaying a range of forms: Billie’s dreams, lists of objects, a prose-poem of communal complaints, a monologue, a fifth grader’s history report, and

long dialogues. The structural commodities are the brief model descriptions of how a bullfight is performed, told in quick sentences stitched between the main story's scenes. Billie, like a bull killed for sport, has no choice, no control; we see her vs. the world, longing for safety and normalcy but ultimately pushed to the brink. The subplot chronicles The Collector, a man seeking to own it all, and his Finderman, who fetches things for him. The Collector has always desired a giant woman to "play" around with, and when the Finderman takes Billie's beloved son as collateral, she has no choice but to join him in another form of captivity. Though The Collector has built her a giant room to make her feel normal, with "paintings on the wall, big enough that she can name all the eye colors of the people depicted," she is robbed of choice, propelling her to take control in a gruesome conclusion.

xTx has made her name on Brevity, a literary magazine, known for her flash fictions and her personal blog. Her trademark prose style flourishes in this longer form, simple and economic yet cripplingly abstract. When Billie's son goes missing, she rampages through a public park as families flee her wrath: "Her roar, a mother's roar among the roar of mothers." We get a similar winding rhythm in the tradition of Gertrude Stein in a moment when the small son tries to get Billie's attention: "Unfolding himself from himself, he shuffles towards his mother with the unsteadiness of calves' calves." Abstract, sure, but in a way that boosts the faraway artifice of this universe, where a miserable giant lives in exile in an abandoned church.

It is xTx's voice, playfulness, and bold bleakness that connects the reader to Billie and her melancholy. In *Billie the Bull*, we get old themes delivered in a surprising, vigorous fever-dream, a further step in xTx's maturity as a writer. Sit down and read this cover-to-cover: it'll stick with you.