



Introduction to Best Indie Lit New England, Vol. 1

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Introduction

IT'S AN EXCITING TIME FOR INDEPENDENT LITERATURE IN NEW ENGLAND. Enterprising editors all over the region have been starting up magazines featuring poetry, fiction, and essays that might have otherwise met with a cool response from the gatekeepers of literary publishing. Without the support of universities or commercial houses, the editors of these magazines, along with their volunteer staffs, do the hard, daily work of scouting for new talent, reading submissions, helping writers with revisions, and copyediting – to say nothing of building and maintaining web sites, marketing their publications, and hosting events.

Most of these magazines don't make a profit. They aren't meant to; they exist primarily to serve a community of readers and artists, not to generate income for their publishers. Many editors keep their journals afloat with donations from readers and friends and (of course) with their own money.

Readers form passionate attachments to these publications – to the diverse and socially-engaged poetry published by *Radius*, the queer feminist erotica of *SALACIOUS*, *The Inman Review*'s hyper-local lit. Readers of one magazine, however, don't necessarily read (or even know about) the others.

Before the proliferation of journals in the last few years, readers of indie lit in New England were like isolated swimmers treading water in a broad ocean. But now the sea floor has rushed up to meet them, forming solid, if scattered, islands. But readers are too often castaways in this literary archipelago, unaware of the companion islands that lie just beyond the horizon.

Back in February 2012, a group of indie journal editors met in the basement of Boston's Lorem Ipsum Books. We struck upon the idea to publish an anthology series that would showcase the best work being published in our respective journals. A series like that would provide opportunities for readers to discover new writers and publications, and for writers to gain greater recognition and find new audiences for their

work. One year later, this first volume of *Best Indie Lit New England* realizes that idea.

In its pages, you'll find a range of disparate voices and surprising connections. "Riddles," Scott Dominic Carpenter's narrative of a middle-aged woman lost in a museum, calls on us to consider the inevitability of the body's decline, the regret of desires deferred by the necessities of work and family, and the alienation of growing old in a world obsessed with comeliness and youth. Carpenter's story provides an intimate look into the life of a single character, inviting us to extend the bounds of our empathy and identification. Jessica Willis's "The Steel Mirror of Her Smile" imagines another woman in the middle stage of life, this time the novelist Edith Wharton. Drawing from Wharton's biography as well as from diary entries and letters, Willis explores the author's love affair with the journalist Morton Fullerton, setting Wharton's sexual awakening against the background of her unhappy marriage and the prosaic horrors of war.

Edward Porter's "A Proposal" is a modern romance told from a decidedly masculine perspective. In a resort in the Virginia hills, Gerald, a contractor, and Grace, a former client, play out fantasies of dominance and submission. From the window of their hotel room, Gerald witnesses a young man refuse a girl's proposal of marriage. The scene leads him to consider the balance of power and desire in his own relationship – dynamics shaped by Grace's affluence and Gerald's working-class background.

Poems in the collection offer the reader an expansive field of erotic appetites. Siobhan Smith's "Blackening My Boots" describes the thrill of watching a stranger kneel at the speaker's feet to polish her boots. Sean Patrick Mulroy's "Poem for the Lost Nudes of Rock Hudson" considers the price paid for silence in a world violently hostile to the desires of gay men.

In Kendra DeColo's "The Dream in Which You Are," the poet's shadow-self, at once subject and object, human and non-human, male and female, seems to recount a demonic seduction. And Carol Dorf's "Butterhead and Little Gems," inspired by the shapely forms of lettuce, asks: "Food and sex, / so which is it?"

"Man Dies after Sex with Horse" by Jade Sylvan recontextualizes an act of bestiality, recovering it from the trivializing frame of internet meme and elevating it to the status of primordial myth. Works by Mckendy Fils-Aime and Dee Worman disclose how traditional beliefs continue to

exert force in the modern world. Fils-Aime recounts his childhood fear of a *loa* spirit said to inhabit a tree in his grandparents' yard in Port-Au-Prince, and Worman tells the story of an American woman in Sierra Leone who is shocked to discover that her host, a cosmopolitan playwright, still believes in magic and witches. In "Ommedey Crommedey Is Your Da," the Irish writer Graham Tugwell invents a bizarre holiday ritual centered around Ommedey Crommedey, a cross-dressing Santa Claus-like figure who gives gifts to children willing to urinate on his elaborately scarred limbs.

Poems by José Antonio Rodríguez and Truth Thomas critique contemporary myths of meritocracy and canonization. In Rodríguez's "Ant Farm," a child senses a connection between his immigrant family's experience of life in the United States and the insects laboring in a classmate's ant farm: "how they worked frantically, / how I wanted to know if they knew they were trapped." Thomas's "We Too, the Foundation" confronts the myth-making of a Western literary canon that suppresses the contributions of people of color.

The editors hope that these and other works in *Best Indie Lit New England* will inspire readers to discover (or return to) the magazines that originally published them. We hope readers will seek out more work by these writers in chapbooks, story collections, and novels and will continue to participate in and support the artistic communities in New England that have made this collection possible. ❧