Defining Creative Non-fiction

In an interview Renee Hansen, Editor, South Loop Review, America's leading creative non-fiction magazine talks about her life and work

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What are the ideas behind your magazine?

South Loop Review publishes primarily creative nonfiction. Creative nonfiction is exactly thatit's writing about the nonfiction world in a creative way. Creative Nonfiction offers a document of the world from a personal perspective. It engages the audience in personal, political and artistic truths all at once. A good creative nonfiction writer will be able to engage his/her audience in the story behind the event. That is to say, a newspaper might report on a fire, but a creative nonfiction writer will tell about the experience what was it like to go through that fire, what does the writer know about life before and after the fire?



Renee Hansen

The South Loop Review, the journal which I edit, looks for writing where you can feel the voice and life of the author behind it. The writers of creative nonfiction are journalists in one way they bring an event to the attention of the world but more than that they are poets. In this sense, the creative nonfiction writer knows about language, word choice, metaphors, and theme. In a way, the "real" story is difficult to tell and grasp. The real effects and resonances of a story are deeply hidden, and The South Loop Review looks for the writer who is on that journey of discovery-- the writer who is trying to seize the real meaning of our lives. To that degree, writing is more about the journey. Some writers are able to present that journey in the most artful way-- through extraordinary cadence, and word choice. I am a fan of James Agee because of his cadence, his writing is almost like a meditation, you need to follow it for a long time, and suddenly it comes over you, everything he was trying to get to. I am also a fan of Bharati Mukherjee, her word choices are always juxtapositions, a light image against dark. She is extremely poetic, she's always leading you towards a blending of the familiar with the strange.

As editor of the South Loop Review I think that the language and art and sound of a story is more important than the fact that the story happened. The fact that it happened will be reported and catalogued. What is more important than the event, is the way the event resonated, the effect upon the individual, and the way it is being told. For this reason The South Loop Review looks for writers who have a strong voice. The voice is both the texture and the container. There can be a static nature to the voice, or it can feel powerful and pulsing; there can be ornateness or sparseness; the voice can sound colloquial or practiced. It's important that the writer knows her voice, and uses it, experiments with it, allows it to move freely, and in the end brings us to whatever point or pointlessness she wanted us to see.

While making editorial decisions, what do you look for in a write-up?

I think it's unusual that more writers don't think of their voice as product. That's what it is, it is what they produce, what emerges, what in the end, they are left with. It is an organic product. Good storytellers know how to captivate an audience and they know the tech-