

# FIDDLEBLACK

fiddleblack.org · PO Box 78, Peninsula, OH 44264 USA · 216-200-8040

## **Our Mission Statement**

Fiddleblack's mission is a basic path toward the discovery (and sometimes rediscovery) of literary and speculative works that eloquently capture what it means to know the finite bounds of *self* and *place*. A long road of inspiration led to Fiddleblack's founding, trailed through many unconnected sources, from Cormac McCarthy to Michel Houellebecq.

Our role as a curator encourages us to accept diverse work, and to publish what sings, speaks, or stares as well as it possibly should. But we see our place in the world of small presses clearly: slipped off and secluded somewhere in the metaphorical sand.

Fiddleblack is interested in works of fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction that make purposeful commitments to figuring out whom one is meant to be, and how it is that one should exist in the space enclosed around him.

We have a thin tie in each of us to physical boundaries. That is, to this room or this yard or this town or this region. These ties can be severed at anytime—at which point, we're floating. What comes next? Is one shuffled loose, left to connect again to another space? Is one somehow halved and made again?

With limitless potential, we believe it's the duty of all our writers to explore their work with a strong sense of existence within these spatial bounds. We're interested in this actual process, and less so where one eventually arrives. Attempts to answer these questions, whether focused on the human condition or a relatively speculative world, are all the better and likely to encapsulate an existential infinity.

## **Specifics**

Fiddleblack's specific mission is the search for a modern literary aesthetic: a glass through which glimpses of *self* and *place* are passed. We're interested in publishing creative writing that imagines the land with resonance, as more than an agrarian surface. This we call "antipastoralism." In that same micro-genre, we're interested in work that considers sprawl and suburbia in some transgressive fashion, realizing finite space

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and how we're emotionally bound to the land, and work that examines the ontology of a rural or varying rural region.

Further, we have an interest in speculative work that pursues the bond between horror and philosophical thought. These very real bonds may be built from vivid dissections of the reasons we're sometimes inconsolably afraid, or they may be glimpses of absences and gaps in the fixed ends we hope exist to bind us. We refer to this sub-genre as "concept horror."

And of course, work that melds these focuses is always desirable.

## **On Antipastoralism**

Literary theorist Georg Guillemín best tells what we mean by "antipastoral" in his collection of McCarthyian criticism, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*. Guillemín examines all of McCarthy's novels published prior to *The Road*. He considers each for its relevance to an antipastoral South or ecocentric West. When assessing the failures of pastoralism in contemporary response, Guillemín defines the "antipastoral" and reaches a trope. One quite useful to our mission. Of the pastoral, looking toward the antipastoral, he says:

*The pastoral protagonist has to combine the simplicity of his barely developed environment and his rustic profession with a poet's sophistication and elocution. Another [dilemma of pastoralism] is that any pastoralism is marred by the discrepancy between the silent materiality of nature and the communicative intention of art. A third dilemma is the conflict between narrative action and narrative vision: The more a given pastoral protagonist does to propel the plot progression, the less he sees and expands his discursive appreciation of nature. Finally, there is the wilderness-turn in contemporary pastoralism itself, which is problematic because an environment defined as not-human is to be represented in its own right, without becoming anthropomorphous and romanticized.*

In discussing antipastoralism, it may not hurt to also consider Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces." It's from this essay that we loosely infer our notion of finite space:

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*The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.*

We also made a diagram about the whole thing. It's a lot easier than reading Guillemin's book. Hopefully, you find it constrained and sensible.

## **On Concept Horror**

Our name for "concept horror" is borrowed lovingly from the subtitle of philosopher Robin Mackay's fourth volume of the research journal *Collapse*. It's a term we use to describe speculative writing concerned with *self*'s religiously sanitized "dark night of the soul." Where the John of the Cross common definition for that phrase wishes to discuss inevitable disruptions of faith, we mean for it to reference an arguably more harrowing status: the true disruption of one's being. On a speculative platform in the parent-genre of horror, this phrase feels natural when applied to creative work with critical and consistent *self-versus-place* conflict shown in sharp, page-white contrast. You might think of ghost stories without ghosts, stories of transgressors on vision quests or strange agents wandering the joyless stations in life.

Writing on H.P. Lovecraft and something like this subject in the essay "Against the World, Against Life," novelist Michel Houellebecq remarks:

*Of course, life has no meaning. But neither does death. And this is one of the things that chills the blood when one discovers Lovecraft's universe. The death of his heroes has no meaning. It brings no relief. It doesn't bring the story to a conclusion, not at all.*

Then, reflecting Lovecraft's true influence on Houellebecq himself in an introduction to the aforementioned *Collapse IV*, Robin Mackay tells us:

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*Houellebecq's characters too live out the "unlivable," encountering in heightened form the cosmic horrors which modern society simultaneously unleashes and suppresses; they are individuals who have taken into their very soul the full weight of what we know about our universe and our place within it. Yet unlike Lovecraft's doomed heroes, for the most part Houellebecq's remain trapped within the banal everyday: With no respite even through the negative transcendence of madness, the world becomes a relentless trial, its everyday rituals and objects beacons of desolate horror.*

This is truly our second love. A micro-genre very different from the former, and one able to focus more on *self* and less on *place*, permitted to borrow genre tropes. Keeping form, we made a diagram for this idea as well.

## **In Practice**

Our interests in creative writing can be summarized quickly by assuming that some places, may they be a recluse's cornfield or a neighborhood's forgotten baseball diamond, are microcosms with strict but succinct rules that allow for potentially uninhibited existence as self-limited virtual confinements. It's sufficient to say that a publisher confined to narratives of recluses roaming empty cornfields or children rediscovering a baseball diamond could become languorous, and we accept the risk of being put in that box.

One can imagine how that recluse might consider the cornfield the bounds of his very world. Inside his cabin, where he views the world with a careful rifle, he keeps a collection of feathers in a pantry. Jars and jars of iridescent feathers. Purplehued and blue and orange. Under his bed the recluse keeps a collection of headdresses, moccasins, calfskin vests. At night he dances in his cornfield. Just over the crest of the valley where he lives a red Wal-Mart sign glows down on him, and as he dances for this sprawl god he feels safe.