

[Fiction Advocate](#)

written by Entropy | September 8, 2015



[Website](#)

[Submission Guidelines](#)

Interview with Brian Hurley, Editor

How did Fiction Advocate start?

Six years ago I thought I had a thing or two to say about contemporary literature, so I started a blog. Readers liked it and began contributing. We merged with another blog. We wanted to publish books, so we figured out how to do that. It just grew. I think of Fiction Advocate as a superhero cape, or the keys to a really sweet car. Anyone can don the cape, or borrow the car. It's a name, a tool, a way to get extraordinary things done.

Tell us a bit about Fiction Advocate. What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?

We're out to publish great fiction and great literary criticism. I think a lot of people don't realize how inseparable those two things are.

Online, we like to publish ambitious works of literary criticism that become events in their own right. So we've done the biggest and best (and only?) live-blog of *Infinite Jest*, a reader's guide to *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, a book-length essay on the origins of Holden Caulfield, a huge survey of the Hungarian novels of the 20th century, a book review that's 10,000 words long, and so on.

In print, we work with authors to bring out strange and exciting books that might not get published otherwise. For instance, we published a multigenerational mystery about wine and ghosts (*The Black Cat*) and a deadpan, semi-autobiographical novel about growing up in Soviet Belarus (*USSR: Diary of a Perestroika Kid*), and we're finalizing a *Wicker Man*-esque thriller set on an isolated island enclave off the coast of Georgia (*Eyes on the Island*).

Most places that publish both fiction and criticism seem to favor the fiction. They might have a print magazine that publishes fiction, and a web site that publishes more fiction, and then somewhere on the web site they'll make a little space for book reviews. These publishers seem to believe that great fiction will emerge from a crowded field of lesser fiction. That's not what works for us. We believe that great fiction emerges from a field of great criticism. The lesser stuff gets mowed down, recycled. To write something great you have to be thinking deeply and arguing passionately with

a diverse group of friends.

Can you give us a preview of what's current and/or forthcoming from your catalog, as well as what you're hoping to publish in the future?

Coming up we have an anthology of works inspired by Richard Brautigan, which will include fiction, photos, and essays by writers like Aimee Bender, Jesse Ball, and Ben Loory. Also an enormous, 4-volume novel about Greek mythology, 9/11, gay men, and office work. We're planning a series of small books that will approach literary criticism in a new way, inspired by great series like Bloomsbury's 33 1/3. And the web site carries on. We recently launched a new column by Nina Schuyler about "stunning sentences," and a series in which E.B. Bartels interviews women who are titans in the field of non-fiction.

What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?

As smarter people have explained elsewhere, the middle is being squeezed out of the publishing business. So it's a good time to be at the top or the bottom. Everyone on our staff is both a top and a bottom. (Sorry, couldn't resist.) Our masthead includes a book designer from Little, Brown, an editor from Oxford University Press, and a speechwriter from the Obama administration. We bring that top-level know-how to Fiction Advocate, where we get to start from scratch and find our own, new approaches to publishing. We have these little moments where we combine big-time publishing experience with the flexibility and potential of independent publishing, and that's really exciting. Suddenly you feel like the whole room is zooming forward.

How do you cope? There's been a lot of conversation lately about charging reading fees, printing costs, rising book costs, who should pay for what, etc. Do you have any opinions on this, and would you be willing to share any insights about the numbers at Fiction Advocate?

I don't know, money is dumb. But it's also, you know, *mathematical*. If you're cautious with it and you do your homework, there's no reason why you should get sandbagged by money issues. Billions of dollars are spent, each year, on reading. You just have to be honest with yourself about the size of your slice of the pie.

Our staff works for free. Our online contributors write for free. Our book authors earn a generous royalty percentage on a small amount of sales, but they all earn some money. We earn a trickle of money from ads on the site, which pays for upkeep. We get by.

As a publisher, you owe it to your authors to manage your money well. Your first priority is to keep the lights on. Your second priority is to put money in your writers' pockets. We may be a small operation, but we keep those priorities straight.

After doing so much work with Infinite Jest, what did you think of The End of the Tour?

Our editor Michael Moats is something of a Wallace expert, and he's been covering the movie since it was first announced. He'll tell you all about it [right here](#).

Recent Fiction Advocate releases:

