

# Inside the Castle

written by Entropy | March 9, 2021



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## *Interview with John Trefry, Editor*

*How did Inside the Castle start?*

Inside the Castle started like many small presses (from what I understand) as a place to publish my own book, PLATS. The book had already been done for 7 years at that point and, to be quite honest, I wasn't even aware of the entire community of independent literature that had been sitting out there parallel to my work on the book, so I thought, why not just print some copies and attempt to sell them to people I knew, none of whom were writers and none of whom had even the slightest interest in the type of literature I cared about. That demoralizing feeling that I was the only person who was interested in the type of books I wanted to write was ratified by that attempt at self-publication. But through a mutual friend who was a writer and had published work in independent circles I was given some great advice: look at the fucking internet you stupid shit! And I did, and found a whole universe of people who not only liked the same work I did (Butor, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Simon...) but were writing and publishing things in that vein. I reached out to loads of people and heard back from two people: Joe Milazzo and Mike Kitchell. Joe, out of the goodness of his beautiful heart, read PLATS and actually did an interview with me that is on this very site. The very first published thing I ever had was actually a review of Kitchell's APART FROM, also on this very site! So the openness of these two guys, and the generosity of Entropy really made me aware of, and feel a belonging to the community that changed my venture to something far less introverted,

although it still took a few years to incubate to the level where it felt like I could be of any use to another writer, and ultimately, as you may know, Kitchell was the first person I published that wasn't me.

*Tell us a bit about Inside the Castle. What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?*

I think in the past when I have talked about this I have often conflated my literary interests or predilections with those of Inside the Castle, but well into my seventh year of doing this I think I am able to look at it in a different way. Although my expectations for what a book is capable of were pushed forward by people like Robbe-Grillet, Gérard Genette, and Umberto Eco, my background in practicing architecture has shaped the way I envision the publishing endeavor itself far more. And although I learn from the people I publish, I feel like it is a completely separate life from my own writing. I have heard people say that they want to write an Inside the Castle book, or something like that, but quite honestly I don't know what that would be. I think that perhaps some of our books, like SMUT-MAKER or LONELY MEN CLUB are seen as visually striking and maybe seem to be emblematic of what we do. But I look at something like German Sierra's THE ARTIFACT or JoAnna Novak's NOIRMANIA as being familiar to the conventional manifestations of a novel and a poem, however it is the use of language itself that distinguishes the piece, I guess you could call it stylistic, but a rhetorical maturity that you don't see much in contemporary literature where that garb fashions the text into something that could only be written, never spoken. I guess what I'm driving at is that I'm interested in how books can work like buildings, where buildings are mute, dumb, raw assemblages of geometry and materiality under the auspices of cultural iconography, they don't communicate, they don't embody a causal understanding of truth, they aren't—even when they attempt to be—representational, they simply "are." That makes it sound like they have nothing at stake, which couldn't be further from the truth. It's more that the stakes are different for the creator and the user. To the creator, the congruent indulgence in every aspect of the physical manifestation of a building is the most important thing in the world. I love the John Ruskin quote, "Objects become noble or ignoble in proportion to the amount of energy the mind has visibly employed on them." To the user, that depth of information lies insistently behind the patina of the quotidian world. It is accessible, but only in a raw state, and as the function of rhetoric aspires to, it is meant to wash over us in waves, planting seeds through the distinction of its underlying labor. Lately I have been thinking more about the fact that the book is a lot like an art gallery. It puts its contents into a context in which they are meant to be scrutinized, different from the fog of text floating around us every second of the day. And I don't know how I feel about that. I mean, my goal is to publish books that exploit the fact that they are books. But the fact that every book is exploiting that makes me realize I am still lacking the language to describe what my project is, although I know I have one.

*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?*

Well... this year (2021) we have five books in the schedule: ONTOLOGIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL COLLAPSE by Nuala Loges, THE CREMATION PROJECT by Andrea Mason, FREAKOPHONE WORLD by Madison McCartha, a reissue of HUNCHBACK '88 by Christopher Norris, and the as yet untitled Castle Freak digital residency project by Josie Cordova. We have announced or will have announced by the time this comes out, our books for (2022) which are: THIRD WORLD MAGICKS by Mike Kleine, SMALLNESS STUDIES by Ava Hofmann, -MANCER by Mike Corrao, <http://www.insidethecastle.org/title/> by Grant Maierhofer, AETUI by Jessica Hagy, THE NEW QUARANTINE by Johannes Göransson & Sara Tuss Efrik, 2 more reissues (which I doubt will have been announced actually), and hopefully a 4th Castle Freak book!

*We used to ask, "What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?" We're still interested in the answer to that, but we're even more interested to know what you think needs to change.*

What needs to change? Jeezzz... I'm not sure. I think over the past year or so I have tried to stop paying attention to what is going on in the rest of the small press world for various reasons, so I can't really think of anything useful to offer. Something I have talked with a few people about though, and this is especially relevant in light of Small Press Distribution's labor scandal (I could never afford to work with them anyway), is some way of creating a union of small presses with a database that would allow bookstores to contact us directly for distribution. The idea of having a centralized physical place doesn't make a ton of sense I don't think, but if there was a centralized virtual space that bookstores could come to (and maybe retail buyers??? I dunno) it would create a much more effective playing field to get decent work out into the world. As it is, small press representation in bookstores is typically relegated to those presses who have the means to work that market. I don't have the means, or quite honestly, the dedication to that aspect of this biz.

*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 Inside the Castle?*

Well we don't do anything for the money. We don't charge fees for anything, we give our writers 60% of profits from books. I am frankly grossed out beyond words by small presses that charge writers money to submit their work. I mean, charging someone \$20 books to enter a chapbook contest? You may as well be pointing a gun at them in the street. I have read all the arguments for that and quite frankly the defensiveness with which those rationalizations are hoisted up tells me that they know it is bullshit. Either someone is just trying to make money off of something that they cannot figure out how to make actually profitable, or they are trying to punch above

their weight, in which case, just be small and do what you can with what you've got. I have found ways to make this all work for several years without putting very much of my own money into the equation. That being said, what I have put in is thousands of hours of my time. When I was working as an architect my office was always working long hours for the basic fee that was in our contract. Sometimes I would have a conversation with another architect, on a job or maybe a former classmate or something, and they would be talking about like logging hours and keeping track of fee. I never understood that. I mean, I understand it, but it was not the side of architecture I was interested in. I tend to think that a piece of work takes as long as it takes. So I guess I was reared on that kind of mentality. But beyond that, what it instilled in me was that I don't know what else I would be doing with my time. So I have always kinda been repulsed by the equivalence of money and time. And I find it even more repellent in literature. Furthermore to all that, as I was starting to say above about the logistical side of not spending money, I use print-on-demand exclusively. I know it is shat upon, but I have never heard anyone say "Inside the Castle books look like shit." I know they aren't archival quality, but it is the only model I can really sustain and keep my interest up in selecting books that aren't "unit shifters." I just want money out of the equation. That is how I can stay interested. And being that I do all the work myself (with a couple of exceptions over the years) keeps things interesting. I have learned a lot of new skills and gotten better at some of my own skills as far as design and such.

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*Recent releases from Inside the Castle:*

