

Metatron

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Interview with Ashley Opheim, Managing Editor, and Guillaume Morissette, Co-Editor

How did Metatron start?

Metatron is an independent publisher located in Montreal & specialized in contemporary literature & titles by new or rising authors. It was founded by Ashley Opheim in the fall of 2013 with a small grant from a program called Jeunes Volontaires, which allowed us to publish our first catalog (six booklets by Montreal-based authors, almost all debuts). Metatron's roots probably also lie in an alternative reading series started by Guillaume Morissette (now Metatron's co-editor) and Ashley Opheim in 2012. The experience Ashley and Guillaume gained working together on various projects over the years is invaluable, and extremely helpful to Metatron as a whole.

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

Our main aesthetic is good vibes x contemporary literature. We try to focus on debut or rising authors, though that's more a philosophical guideline than a strict definition. When we started Metatron, it seemed like very few, if any, Anglophone presses in Montreal were interested in taking chances on young Anglophone writers, and so a lot of writers around us weren't getting published, or had to look outside of Montreal to get their work out in print.

Since then, Metatron has grown and we've started working with writers who live elsewhere in Canada, or aren't even Canadian, though we still want to continue investing in Montreal talent. It's all about finding the right balance.

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?

Sure. Let's talk about our new fall 2015 catalog, which is composed of a short story collection by Fawn Parker titled *Looking Good And Having A Good Time*, a poetry collection by Oscar d'Artois titled *Teen Surf Goth* and a novellette by Sofia Banzhaf titled *Pony Castle*. All three titles are debuts.

Fawn lives in Montreal, where she studies Creative Writing at Concordia University. Her stories are fun, unpredictable, at times ambiguous, and we feel she's a great fit for Metatron. Oscar lives in New York and Berlin, and

we just loved and admired the sheer energy that emanates from his poetry collection. *Teen Surf Goth* is modern, playful, slightly demented and a breath of fresh air. Sofia is a writer, actress and filmmaker who lives in Toronto. Her debut, *Pony Castle*, won our inaugural 2015 Metatron Prize for Rising Authors, which is how we discovered her work.

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

We love working with authors who are at the beginning of their journeys, and though we can't afford to put their faces on the side of a bus or something, our hope is that working with us allows them to gain positive experience and eventually move on to bigger and better things. It seems thrilling to us to imagine where writers we've published will be 5 or 10 years from now, maybe teaching workshops or winning fancy awards or influencing culture in some way.

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 Metatron?

It's a constant struggle. We received a small grant to start Metatron, but we've been entirely self-funded ever since. All three of us (including Jay Winston Ritchie, our assistant-editor) take no salary at the moment, and any profit Metatron makes goes back to print future titles or re-print older ones. Right now, Metatron pays us in ways that aren't financial, such as in the form of the fantastic community we're slowly building one release at the time, and it's our hope that we can continue expanding so that our budget becomes a little more stable.

For the Metatron Prize, we debated internally whether or not to charge a reading fee. On one hand, we disliked the implications of a reading fee, but on the other, we really wanted to present the winner of the Metatron Prize with a cash award, and so this was one way we could make it work. In the end, we charged a \$10 reading fee per manuscript, though decided to go the extra mile by guaranteeing constructive feedback. Most presses or magazines simply send writers a vague, generic, unhelpful rejection letter, so we thought we would go in a different direction by putting together individual feedback sheets to give each writer at least some constructive comments and an idea of what our thought process was, and why we didn't think their manuscripts was the right fit for us at this point in time. We saw the reading fee as a kind of necessary evil for now, though we'd love to find a way to get rid of it in the future.

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