

Thirty West Publishing House

written by Entropy | January 29, 2019



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Interview with Josh Dale, Editor-in-Chief

How did Thirty West Publishing House start?

It was in my 3rd year of undergrad at Temple University. I recently switched my major from construction management (my employer's dream) to English (my personal dream) and was becoming accustomed to the subjectivity and critical thinking that I wasn't typically exposed to. The anxiety was so poignant, I thought I was going to be fired, but then again, it was an unattached, unaffiliated change. I took a course on publishing with Temple professor, poet, and publisher, Brian Teare, and I was immediately captivated with the craft and possibility of publishing myself one day. Like any student, I was sloppy and subject to many trials and errors (just ask my father about my final project!). Once the logo was commissioned, a draft-like sketch of thinly precise lines spelling out all 25 characters, I knew there was something there. And the rest is history at this point. Overall, I attribute today's successes and work ethic to those embryonic days and the perseverance of one day creating something greater than ourselves.

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

For me, personally, I enjoyed reading the history of Hogarth Press, founded by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, in undergrad. They not only learned by experience, but they kept the spirit of the letterpress alive, which is

something I'd like to purchase and perform the same in the future. I also am influenced by the more contemporary Fact-Simile (formerly based out of Philadelphia, now Lancaster I believe) and the meticulous care they put into their limited-edition print-runs. TW has been stalwart in our head-down, working attitude when it comes time to print, assemble, and ship our wares; Marxist principles have been adopted along the way. As far as themes, destigmatizing mental illness has always been central for TW. Our early titles vouch for that. But as of late, we've been broadening our perspective to accommodate different pieces to place into our mosaic. It's a niche market for sure, yet the *experience* of reading, especially for the first time, is what TW prides itself on most.

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?

TW has had a big year in 2018, staying true to our roots and publishing three first-time authors. We've also begun our premier literary journal, *Tilde*, which in two issues has published a wide range of international and domestic authors and nominated 5 authors for the Pushcart Prize. We are striving to keep the momentum going in 2019 with a new pamphlet series and (so far) 3 chapbooks by acclaimed and rising poets Joseph Sigurdson, Olatunde Osinaike, and Rebecca Kokitus. These poets have fulfilled needs that we didn't think we had, and that alone is unusual, yet settling. Our 3rd annual chapbook contest has recently acquired an NYC-based guest judge that we are very excited about and will be revealing in the coming months. Tie all this in with a newly-commissioned, Temple/Philly-based cover designer, and the skies appear to be comfortable and free of turbulence.

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.

The Greater Philadelphia region has really carved itself a foothold in the East, at least from what I've seen since I began all this. Small presses & zines, independent bookstores, and collectives of like-minded people are raring up this vehicle of artistic progress. There's truly something for everyone within the outstretched arms of this community. People not only talk on social media but plan events and meet in person. It's not about who gets the most "likes," but who's filling those empty seats.

And it's in those last few sentences that lies my answer to "what you think needs to change?" I understand the value of social capital and playing the algorithmic game to your advantage, but must art be subjected to the will of Silicon Valley? Why do my favorite writers have only a few hundred followers yet are being published by the best small presses in the land? The proof is in the real, whether you're hopping over to an open mic after work/class or scheduling time off from friends or family to attend a book festival. Despite some hiccups and unfortunate circumstances that come up with life, they

haven't stopped me from being an enabler. It's become a part of who I am and my life, so I see it as a necessity. Regardless of what *you* take out of it, at least do it for your contemporaries, as much as you can.

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 Thirty West?

A lot of sacrifices were made early on in establishing the means of production, but I've been in a fortunate position as far as materials and tools go. I feel the hand-made aspect has drawn in readers organically and we manage costs of books based on length and materials used. I feel it is fair and those who really enjoy an author will do what it takes to support them. With submissions I do my best to be fair and allow free and unsolicited periods for our manuscripts and *Tilde*, with an option of a "tip jar" for those so inclined. The chapbook contest is the only thing that has a price tag, but again, the entrance fee is small and comparative to other presses of our caliber. The only real challenge I've had is with book fairs. Being chapbook-focused, the general festival goer isn't as keen as your local writing community. The books appear flimsy, fragile, free to give away, and too artsy, which I understand. Maybe the reading mass isn't quite meeting us in the middle just yet, but I have faith that major festivals like AWP will be more fruitful. There is a time and place for everything in this literary world and I'm ready for any changes that come our way.

Since I turned this press outward to the world, I've been unwavering in keeping our authors satisfied in their book publishing experience and reaping the royalties of their dreams. From contract to distribution, I and my team do it all for their continued success. Marketing ourselves as a traditional publisher also brings gravitas, a responsibility. I dubbed the last two weeks of a book's manufacturing process as "hell week" for a reason. I couldn't have done it without the help of my father, loved ones, and friends. Instead of seeing it as an arduous task, I'd rather call it a party; turn on music, grab some food and alcoholic beverages, and work until the pages stop lining up. It all pays off when I drop the boxes and envelopes in the mailbox. It's funny how you spend all the time with them in your hands, just to mail them out to their final destination, no longer your "children." It is challenging, yet it gives me hope in what we can do for the author and community they reside in.

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