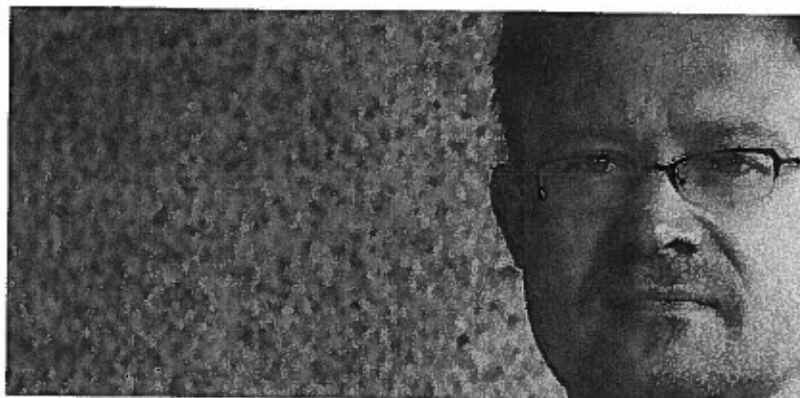


WHO IS MICHAEL BRYSON?

Online reading and writing is more popular than ever. So why did Michael Bryson pull the plug on one of Canada's first online literary magazines?

By JORDAN WHITEHOUSE



In East York, a door crossed with metal bars is flanked by a bar called Bars and Burgers and a dance studio named Dance Dance Dance. Across the top of its frame "1562 Danforth" is displayed in gold lettering. Behind the door's smudged glass, a narrow staircase ascends steeply to the second floor.

When I first peered through this door, I was looking for the headquarters of *The Danforth Review* (TDR), an online literary magazine created by author Michael Bryson. "It ain't here no more," said a gruff and slightly slurred voice from the patio of Bars and Burgers. "Bryson took it away."

Bryson didn't just move the headquarters of TDR, he removed it completely. This seemingly abrupt end to TDR was puzzling to me. Why launch an online literary magazine in 1999 when online writing lacked legitimacy, only to suspend publication in June 2009 when online digital material was more popular than ever before? After speaking with Bryson, I found my answer.

You would be forgiven if, upon first sight of Bryson, you mistook him for a middle-aged banker dressed for a Sunday afternoon on the couch. He has two attentive blue eyes that peer out from behind the oval-shaped, wired glasses that cross the tops of his eyelids. His straight brown hair recedes, but the length still allows for a neat part to fall over the left side of his brow. He tells me that before he could even ride a bike he was creating his own magazines from a typewriter.

A childhood interest in the written word did not transform into a desire to actually become a writer until he attended the University of Waterloo as an undergrad. There he began publishing poetry in *Phoenix*, a student-produced literary magazine. He continued to publish poetry in magazines like *The New Quarterly* and *The Antigonish Review* while completing a master's degree at the University of Toronto.

It was not until 1999 that he became interested in producing an online literary magazine. When I ask him why he chose to create an online magazine rather than a print publication, his answer is simple: "I wanted to learn how to do web pages, and I needed some subject, so I got to work on the other subject that interested me."

Most of Bryson's answers are similarly short and to the point, and perhaps reflective of his personality: a man with little time to waste on padded prose.

He credits *The Danforth Review* as a crucial part in his continuing education. In addition to learning how to create web content, he discovered the critical role small literary magazines play in our culture. "Without small magazines, so many writers would never get started and would never maintain the courage to continue," he says.

If he believes this to be true then why suspend the publication of his small magazine, especially when you consider how many writers are more willing to publish online today than they were in 1999? His answer is, of course, concise: "When the

inner voice tells you it's time to go, it's time to go."

Although short, this answer reveals everything I need to know about why he decided to end TDR: Bryson answers only to himself. He ultimately does not care about the recent respect that online writing has garnered. He cares about what he can learn next. "Every experience is part of the learning curve, and there's always more to learn," he says.

Bryson's next project appears to be his own writing. He recently released a book of short stories entitled *The Lizard*. The book "represents the completion of a trilogy of books that share a common set of concerns: the process of growing up, the tension between order and chaos, interpersonal relationships and the backdrop of contemporary Toronto," he says.

When I ask his editor, Rob McLennan, why the public should pay attention to Bryson's writing, he says, "Because it's smart, sharp and just damn good." His answer is cut with Bryson-like precision—almost as though Bryson's prose has percolated into McLennan's own psyche.

About two weeks later, I'm walking past Dance Dance Dance and hesitate at the door to 1562 Danforth Ave. "Did you find it?" a familiar voice grumbles sarcastically from Bars and Burgers. I keep walking without saying a word. I do, however, wonder what I have found. About a block further on I get my answer: I have found a writer, terse yet reflective, committed to his own education. ✍

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