



Jenny Shank

Author of “Welcome to My Nanobrewery,” in McSweeney’s Internet Tendency

“Right now my thing is super small batch one-off IPAs. I brew them from the tears of Trappist monks in these eyedroppers, or ‘nanogrowlers,’ if you will,” says the narrator of Jenny Shank’s satirical narrative. “No, you don’t drink it. You just squirt it in your eye.” Shank, 36, is a journalist, creative writing teacher, former Denver/Boulder editor of *The Onion A.V. Club*, award-winning novelist and mom to two kids. Her work has appeared, well, everywhere, including McSweeney’s Internet Tendency column, where “Welcome to My Nanobrewery” ran in April. In the narrative, Shank, a self-reported non-beer geek, gives craft brewers a gentle (and hilarious) ribbing ... so we decided to ask her what was up with that.

What inspired you to write this piece?

Because I enjoy other people’s enthusiasms, I always read about new craft breweries in newspapers and magazines. I came up with that Trappist monk line when I read about some Colorado beer fans waiting in line for a delivery of Westvleteren 12. Then I was reading an extensive craft brewery feature in *5280*, a magazine about Denver, and they interviewed a

brewer who said, “Anyone can over-hop a beer.” I thought that was pretty funny, because I wouldn’t know the first thing about over-hopping a beer. Then I thought about what other qualities one might strive for in a beer, if hops are not enough. I was influenced by the reverent voice of this magazine piece, which dropped in all kinds of beer terms that I wasn’t familiar without explanation, as if to say, if you live in Colorado, you should know this.

Then there was this fabulous article in the *Denver Post* about the Black Shirt Brewing Company. The journalist discussed a beet Saison he’d tried once with awe and rapture, and the best part was the photo of the brewer, grinning and holding a glass he’d developed just for his beer, with a side raked at 45 degrees. The journalist mentioned these special glasses, but didn’t explain them, and I just wondered—do a lot of brewers do this? How exactly does he create the glass? Is he also a glass blower?

What do you hope the reader takes away from the piece?

I just want them to laugh. I think adding a laugh to someone’s day is one of the top things you can do.

As a consumer / observer, what do you think about the direction the craft beer culture is heading?

Because I’m not much of beer drinker myself, but am surrounded by rapturous beer drinkers, I think I can perceive the humor in their lingo in a way someone on the inside of the culture might not, just like immigrants to America can often perceive striking qualities about our culture that we might not be aware of. Even though I grew up here in Colorado, I feel like I’m an immigrant in beer country.

But as for pushing the envelope, I’m all for it. I am a fan of creativity in all its forms, whether people express it by writing a novel, making a movie or creating their own unique beer. Creativity in other forms always inspires my writing, as it did with this piece.

So, how much of the piece is a serious eye-roll, and how much is affectionate teasing?

“Welcome to My Nanobrewery” is 100 percent affectionate teasing. I like beer geeks. I wish I could meet the character Roland, who wins the aggression category at company Brew Fest every year.

I have done some more eye-rolling-type satire, like one called “New Ways to Summit Everest,” inspired by all the crazy ways mountain climbers are trying to break Everest summiting records. Those guys are nuts, and sometimes endanger others in their quests. But beer brewers? I just enjoy their enthusiasm.