



**DO SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING**  
by Joseph Rippi  
([http://ampersandreview.com/Do\\_Something!.html](http://ampersandreview.com/Do_Something!.html)) Ampersand Books

*Reviewed by Manson Solomon*

Do Something, Do Something, Do Something, as one might guess from the title, tells three stories. In the space of its 176 pages, we learn of the travails of three separate young people, each in desperate straits and each needing to “do something” to work through their troubles in order to emerge on the other side. The cover illustration depicts a man in work clothes building a chimney brick by brick from the inside, which suggests to us that what these folks urgently need to do is repair their inner turmoil by painstaking reconstruction of their psyches. And the urgency is communicated visually by the fact that the

emerging chimney is constructed in the shape of an exclamation point.

The author subtitles his book “a novel”, which it is insofar as style is concerned, being a work of creative fiction. Yet, since the three characters interact only incidentally and not in any way central to the development of the narrative, it is really three parallel stories, gathered together for their common thread of psychological distress brought on by traumatic violence. They each desperately need to “do something” to work through their troubles and they all do so by means of some form of writing.

We are introduced to S (or “the girl with the starfish tattoo”), who has had her life turned upside down by a traumatizing rape, and who has had a starfish tattooed on her breast to remind her that, like a starfish which has lost a tentacle, it is possible to regenerate and become whole again. We meet her stepbrother, Eddie, who has been put into a psychiatric ward for attacking a stripper with a broken glass in a fit of blind rage after the death of his mother. Eddie spends the whole novel trapped in his disturbed head in the ward, with a pile of books by his bedside, trying to deal with his condition by wrestling with the existential perspectives of Sartre, Sontag, Carver, Nietzsche, and others. He records his observations in notebooks all titled “Something About . . .” and with “Do something, do something, do something” written on the back cover of each journal. (Though Bellow is never mentioned, shades of Herzog?). And thirdly, there is Martin, the playwright, who, when we meet him is totally drunk and throwing up (an all-too-common central condition of these unfortunate protagonists) and whose particular trauma is the loss of his prematurely-born daughter and of the divorce which it precipitated, and who is about to go back to Seattle to do something, do something, do something as a writer-director.

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So what the three protagonists have in common is being psychologically messed up, being in desperate need to “do something” to fix their lives, and choosing some form of writing as a vehicle for healing -- and a lot of escapist binge drinking and puking.

The book takes us into the characters’ minds in exquisite detail, beginning immediately with the prologue in which the sensitive Eddie is slapped down by his overbearing, brash mother while tenderly engaged with a delicate dead bird. Intimations of what is to come -- which is a deftly painted series of word-pictures displaying the protagonists’ mental anguish, each unique and each in its own context, set out in alternating short chapters illustrated with the three protagonists’ three icons: starfish, pile of books, bridge.

Joseph Riipi has an artistic sensibility, is able to get into his characters’ heads, describe their thoughts and the settings and events in which they are each caught up with sensitivity and in meaningful detail. And he conveys it in a way which draws the reader in. There is some really good material here, and one senses that there is potential for something really exceptional, were it to be marinated, developed, corrected, perfected.

Unfortunately, it seems to have been swept into print before it was quite ready. For some inexplicable reason, the words have found their way onto the page amidst a thicket of malaprops, grammatical errors, incorrect prepositions, and so on, basic stuff which distracts one from the substance of the writing like a spray of impudent little slaps in the face. These should surely have been purged by a competent copy editor before going to print. Some of the best authors have had trouble with grammar, spelling, and so on, but that is why publishers have editors. It is all the more surprising to see this here since Riipi specifically thanks a long list of supporters, including his MFA supervisor (who provides a glowing back cover blurb), all of whom presumably reviewed the material, and especially since parts of the book have already appeared in more than a dozen publications. Writing longhand with pen and paper has gone the way of the dinosaur, but can it be that texting and twittering have already rendered us all thumbs when it comes to basic grammatical facility, even in English departments and even amongst writers professionally plying the craft? Have all the middle school English teachers abandoned their students for hi tech? Sending this otherwise talented author’s first book out like this is like sending a beautiful young girl out to her first prom with acne all over her face. Someone needed to take her back inside and fix it before she got into the limo.

This is a good first effort, with many excellent lyrical passages, which suggests that Riipi will have more to offer in the future, provided he takes care to baste it well before taking it out of the oven and putting it on the table.