

Ace

Richard Carr

Word Works (November 2008)

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"I am hardtop ironclad crash-tested / and only need someplace safe to sleep / or sleep it off / or sit up sleepless" Richard Carr writes. *Ace* a novel in verse interweaves four lives separated through hurt longing and rebellion in a series of fourteen line poems. From the reader's vantage point *Ace* unfurls its landscape like a desecrated dollhouse where even the remaining trappings of comfort are somehow skewed: "but no one ever saw inside my little room / the dresser leaning against the bed / or ever knocked on the door / bedside lamp with a yellow shade."

The four narrators of *Ace* are all given space and voice within this collection each persona fully formed. *Ace* "a name I picked up for being awkward as a kid / sideswiping parked cars / twisting up my bicycles in crashes / a sarcasm / a jeer" is the culmination of junkyard despair and the seeming toughness that only such an upbringing can allow. Yet we see a tender *Ace* in his longing for his former lover Carol and grandson Little *Ace*. Carr's poetics crouch in shadows over his grandson in the words "put an end to curiosity...a danger now / better that he hide from me." Carol enters posthumously detailing her death and revealing facets slowly like screen credits. In the bars Carol's "hair [coated] with sticky nicotine / thickening and peppering my complexion / lowering my voice / until one day someone called me a skank / or maybe no one but I believed it." Her green passion "lived alone among the ferns / hung everywhere for health and serenity." Carol and *Ace*'s child Miss Princess is the expected fruit of such a juxtaposed landscape arguably real and more alarming because of it. To Miss Princess "raising my own child would prove / I'm mature...because who needs a stupid boyfriend / or stupid anyone else." The most powerful of her rebellions is her decision to abort her own child as she slowly transforms into a more bitter amalgamation of her parents. Little *Ace*'s narrative awakens lastly silently watching his grandfather "until he is startled awake / how he must love life." Carr allows the aborted Little *Ace* some despair the natural consequence of such envy for "what use is a father without arms feet face / who was never viable / but cut and scraped out of memory."

No matter the narrator Carr overwhelms readers with a commanding sense of language plot and terse syntax. However dismal the circumstances these speakers are scenes from history their hardships not notable to anyone but themselves until Carr gives them voice. Solidly crafted even the most terrible vignette stares at us from *Ace* telling us "I want to live / though the dead are piled all around me / stacked like junked cars in the jagged embraces of their kind / and stillness."

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