Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Boyle-Breath Breathes
Murray L. Peters
AuthorHouse
978-1-4685-7800-3
Three Stars (out of Five)

Bernard Boyle, that helpful alien with the power to create soothing fragrances while masquerading as an Earthling teacher, appears again in *Boyle-Breath Breathes*, the charming and thought-provoking sequel to Murry L. Peters's *Boyle-Breath*. Boyle is a native of the planet Zeronia, whose inhabitants act as "social workers to the Galaxy." Boyle wants to bring to justice those bullies who were instrumental in the suicide of his student, Bernadette. When Bernadette's ghost appears to him, Boyle is compelled to find out why she has returned.

In this much longer sequel, Peters deftly fleshes out the world of Zeronia, prompting readers to revel in the author's creation of a realm where both smell and benevolence are mixed. It is comforting to think of a world whose inhabitants exist mainly to heal stressed-out denizens of other planets.

The contrast between Boyle knowing the words to common pop songs yet not comprehending why people keep engaging in hurtful behaviors like bullying makes for comical moments in the narrative. Boyle belts out Bob Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone" and understands how the lyrics apply to him, yet, even at the end of the book, he still grapples with the whys and wherefores of people's actions. While such incidents provide humor, they also give readers pause to think critically about human behavior.

All characters are well-rounded, from Boyle and Bernadette to Bernadette's bullies and former schoolmates. Each character has a distinct style of dialog and a well-developed interior life. Deep into the book, however, the audience is still being introduced to different characters and their viewpoints. This means that readers have to hang in for quite a while before learning the connections among all the players. Most will not mind waiting, though, because the characters introduced later on are just as multifaceted as those with whom readers begin the story.

One commends Peters for his nuanced take on issues such as teenage bullying and young-adult suicide. By giving voice to both victims and perpetrators, the author offers a multilayered perspective on this frightening trend. The religious gloss of Catholicism also adds fascinating dimensions to the author's social commentary because he adeptly critiques the Catholic notion that suicide is a sin. This adds a sense of urgency to figuring out whether Bernadette killed herself or if she was murdered. While it would have been enough to tackle these issues alone, Peters introduces so many social ills that his plot threatens to become too much for one book to handle.

Errors in the text prevent this innovative novel from receiving a higher rating. Run-on sentences are so long and so frequent that even the most attentive readers will find themselves lost between the beginning and end of phrases. Additionally, nouns are unnecessarily capitalized, many words are bizarrely italicized for emphasis, and all dialog is centered in the middle of the page.

While poor grammar and stylistic errors do detract from the ingenious plot, this will not be enough to deter die-hard science-fiction fans from *Boyle-Breath Breathes*, especially those who appreciate social commentary with their novels.

Jill Allen