Confessions of a Self-Help Writer: The Journal of Michael Enzo

Benjamin W. DeHaven
Lagniappe Publishing (July 2014)
Hardcover $22.95 (176pp)
978-0-9899126-8-6

This pontificating, self-centered character offers unexpected insight in an entertaining and edgy way.

Michael Enzo is the type of protagonist you will either love or hate, and Benjamin DeHaven gives readers plenty of reasons to feel passionately one way or the other in Confessions of a Self-Help Writer.

The titular confessions are—according to narrator Benjamin DeHaven—Enzo’s own journal entries. They have less to do directly with his ghostwriting of self-help books than his random autobiographical experiences of varying depravity and the roads he has happened upon along the way. DeHaven’s interspersed chapters of commentary provide the motivation for publishing the journal as an act of revenge for his own less-than-ideal situation, for which he holds Enzo responsible.

Quirky and inarguably unique in both style and content, Confessions of a Self-Help Writer is sure to evoke strong reactions. Taken at face value, Enzo is a crass and self-involved character, reprehensible in both word and deed for the most part, and with seemingly little sense of responsibility or depth of feeling. However, as with most interesting protagonists, there are layers to his personality and moments that hint at a deeper emotional core to his character. The occasional interruption by DeHaven provides a grounding point at which readers will be reminded that this journal is presented by someone with a biased point of view and an ax to grind.

Enzo is a drunk (and an occasional drug user) who pontificates while urinating into crowds and refers to every woman he knows, including his mother, as “Susan.” His poor attitudes and behaviors started early on, when as a Boy Scout he was the proverbial bad seed, the one who “led three other scouts to destroy the bowline knot that was tied to a self-made latrine post, forcing unsuspecting friends to fall into a pit of their own feces.” That he later found a brief leadership role within the troop seems rather undeserved, but it’s indicative of his ability to manipulate others.

The book is sprinkled with Enzo’s words of wisdom, helpfully emphasized in boldface, which appear to signify personal epiphanies.

DeHaven runs a risk that readers will be lost in Enzo’s offensiveness, yet those who press on may see him as a metaphor for various societal ills and dichotomies of daily life. Confessions of a Self-Help Writer is an entertaining if slightly disturbing tale of a man who is consistently devoted to being own worst enemy.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (Fall 2014)

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