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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SHORT STORIES

Finnegan's Parish & Other Stories

John Dahlgren
Ully Arndt Studios, illustrator
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In this collection of four outlandish tales author John Dahlgren has created larger-than-life portraits of the human condition. From greed to ambition obsession to insanity *Finnegan's Parish & Other Stories* examines a variety of motivations and moral misgivings with light humor and bizarre scenarios.

The title story features a car-dealing tycoon with a passion for women and liquor and an overzealous priest with a plan to convert everyone in the surrounding community to the Catholicism. A bet between the rivals sparks the creation of a new religion "Finnegan's Universal Paganism." During the course of the contest disparities in beliefs particularly in regards to love are uncovered and explored: "Don't you believe that love in all of its forms is something to be cherished?" Finnegan's new faith secures followers all over the country based on his theory that religion is simply "a triumph of salesmanship."

"Rejuvenilities" explores the tension between simple greed and malfeasance. Robert an exceptionally wealthy entrepreneur invites a reporter into his home to tell his story of rags to riches. He reveals that his success is the result of the discovery of a "fountain of youth" and the subsequent partnership he entered into with friends. When a weakness in the product threatened disaster a scheme was quickly devised to sell their ownership in the company and exit the rejuvenation business with a substantial profit.

Dahlgren a psychologist in Switzerland uses his familiarity with mental frailty in his last two stories. "Dr. Knickerbacker" takes the reader through the adventures of the first weeks of employment for a newly minted psychiatrist willing to do anything to please his mentor including expose himself for therapeutic purposes. And in the final tale "The Next Door Clandestine" the protagonist becomes obsessed to the point of emotional deterioration with a conflict between his new neighbors and the architect who designed both their homes. The stories are connected by a thread of moral questioning as well as brief mentions of events from one story to the others; however after skillfully building momentum in each tale the writer seems too anxious to tie up the endings.

Finnegan's Parish & Other Stories is a well-written collection with dynamic characters that entertains and encourages contemplation of the human phenomenon. The influence of fantasy and mythology on the author's work is apparent from the outrageous circumstances in which he places his characters. More than just a work of humor Dahlgren provides revelations about what motivates the human heart and mind.
MELISSA LEVINE (September 13, 2006)

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