Clarion Review

General

Glorify Each Day
John Banks
819 Publishing
978-0-9833334-0-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Tommy “Teach” Morrison knows there is a dark violence inside him, an inexplicable force he does not understand and struggles to control. This violence, always simmering beneath the surface of things, frightens but empowers him in devastating ways. Unable to get over his first love, Cait, he lives day to day in a cloud of guilt and regret, memories of Cait haunting his every move. A GED instructor at Toxononomonee Community College, Teach is passionate about his students but hopelessly detached from life and love.

Glorify Each Day mimics the mindset of Teach—the narrative jumps back and forth between flashbacks of his life as a child and college student to scenes set in present day Toxononomonee County where Teach offers his thoughts on the education system and the struggles his students face as troubled learners. The novel follows Teach as he moves foggily from one relationship to another, slowly piecing together his past with his present and unraveling the source of his discontent.

Interspersed throughout the novel are first-person primary documents: essays written by Teach's students, and second-person flashbacks to intimate moments with Cait. The lively, eclectic narrative voices exemplified in the student essays are one of the major strengths of this book. These student essays—from the confessions of a comic book lover to the passions of a NASCAR fiend—work in sharp contrast to Teach's overly ruminative and cyclical style of narration. Teach spends page after page unraveling, for example, the politics of ESL education and the historical origins of Tox County. Yes, independent reflections can be interesting and enlightening, however, in *Glorify Each Day* they slow the pace of the novel. These ruminations feel more like opinion pieces or editorials than actual insights into Teach's character and his life. There is a bemused, rather lofty tone to the narration that distances the reader and makes it very difficult to empathize with Teach's struggles.

In some sections, the novel makes use of a confessional structure to provide insight into character motivations. Both Teach and his current girlfriend speak to counselors about their fears, revealing lurid details about their intimacy problems. While at surface level, this structure does offer the opportunity to delve deeper into Teach's psyche, and helps create a better understanding of his character, the doctor-patient set up is too artificial, character revelations appear forced and inauthentic.

Glorify Each Day is the study of a middle-aged man delving into his own psyche to find the source of his troubles. There is definite complexity simmering beneath the surface of the narrative voice, a sense that by patching together life's remnants, one can create something whole and begin anew. Readers of contemporary fiction will find this premise riveting, however, the marriage between these competing elements is rocky and unbalanced. A bit too disjointed, the novel does not quite succeed in putting forth a seamless storyline.

Shoilee Khan