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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ LITERARY

Not Blessed

Harold Abramowitz
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This novella plays with conventions of storytelling. It is experimental fiction, meaning nothing is certain, and everything is contrived: “the rules need not necessarily apply.”

The author is out to shake up the reader’s expectations from the very first page. The story may or may not be about a man looking back at a childhood incident. There is more than one version of events. The details sometimes change, and sometimes remain the same. There is a house variously described, for instance, as a farmhouse, a cottage, a cabin, and a fine house. The reliability of memory is called into question through several devices including conditionals (if, may, would), hedges (“I believe,” “I wish”), lapses (“but these reasons escape me at the moment”), reminders (“Am I forgetting to mention”), confessions (“Of course, the explanation is, thus far, insufficient”), admonishments (“And it is high time I made myself more clear”), and mocking apologies (“Forgive me for having been, thus far, obscure. In fact, I did not mean to lie”).

Abramowitz lives in Los Angeles where he co-edits a short-form literary press, Eohippus Labs, and co-curates an experimental cabaret event series, Late Night Snack. *Not Blessed* is a venture in art. As the narrator says, “There are, in fact, no constraints here, and there is nothing more than meaninglessness.” It’s up to the reader to decode the text and supply meaning: “And the point was that between irrelevancies, various truths could be discovered.”

The style is self-consciously modern: The story progresses. And then it stops. The story progresses and then it stops. Repeats itself. In fragments. Jumps back and forth in time. Changes narrator. Alternates point of view. The “you” of the first line might be you the reader, the policeman questioning the boy who is lost, or the driver mentioned at the end; likewise, the “I” is never clear—it could be the man in the car looking back at himself as a child, or it could be some other person, a parallel man, looking at a parallel story he’s never quite able to reach as narrator. The events are also told at times through third-person omniscient narrator (“one” or “he”).

The result is a “system so complicated that no one could imagine actually trying to understand it,” as the man in the story puts it. The author drags in just about every conceivable storytelling type—legend, fairytale, memoir, dream, visions, speeches, sayings, truisms. All are at the disposal of the narrator as he tries over and over again to construct (or deconstruct) what happened the day he (or the boy) went for a walk and was found by a policeman on the edge of the forest.

“There is grace in knowing,” he says at one point. But it is left to the reader to figure out the significance (if any) of this chance encounter on the road.

TRINA CARTER (June 15, 2010)

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