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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ POETRY

Point of Reference

R. B. Seals
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Opening R. B. Seals's poetry collection, *Point of Reference*, is like taking a peak into someone's diary. These lyrical poems offer the reader thought-provoking metaphors about the realities of the world, from a brief encounter with a robin to tough topics like abortion and assault.

The rose-tinted shades are lowered so readers can see from the perspective of a student coming of age in a rural Midwestern town, in "Ruminations," or a thirty-three-year-old single mother battling depression, in "Running on Empty." The diverse points of view and confessional voices provide new lenses with which to see the world.

These poems do not shy away from complicated subject matter. "Living on the Edge" follows a woman who has a loving husband but who struggles to move on after an assault has left her pregnant. The woman's "lonely dilemma" eats at her. As well, the collection is not concerned with political correctness. In "Crossroads," a teacher's "error in judgment" with a student haunts her. Seals gives readers a glimpse into this character's shame and the badge of indiscretion that will continue to follow her.

Seals's use of first-person plural in "Star" implicates the reader in society's fascination with fame. The poet talks about the "gilded cage" of celebrity and how the public will "use you till you fall from grace, / then we'll find another to take your place." The point of view provokes readers to understand their own influence.

Many of the pieces are built in quatrains with an aabb rhyme scheme. The end rhymes and consistent form provide a strong skeleton for the collection. The complex subject matter of the poems is reflected in the volume's cover. Here, a powerful wave hits a wall with a lighthouse looming in the background. This image hints at the powerful current beneath the water's surface—just like the poems.

Seals is able to deftly move from a poem about cows grazing on a pasture to a piece that follows a speaker who believes in "lesser races." The poems encourage the reader to take a step back from familiar situations in order to see from a new angle and react against the status quo.

LISA BOWER (June 20, 2013)

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