ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Prayers of an Accidental Nature: Stories
Debra Di Blasi
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The people in these stories are not happy in their skins: they are too old, or too rich, or too beautiful or too working class… On the other hand, no one really does anything so it is difficult to feel particularly sympathetic. And the only two characters in the entire collection that do have jobs are punished with death. Sex is the dynamo that drives most of these character's lives. As the protagonist in the story "Blind" says just before killing herself because she is no longer young and therefore can not attract men, "Perhaps if she?d had an occupation, what was I ever good at besides seduction?"

Di Blasi is a good story-teller, but sometimes her stories lack distance. She can seduce us with her language, but the passion in the stories is often empty because there is so little sense of objectivity. On the other hand, one of the stories that is truly successful, "An Obscure Geography," takes place in the classroom of a rural junior high. Although the plot is not particularly surprising, the detachment and thus, attention to detail, added with her true talent, result in a fresh, moving piece about teaching and the power of words.

The title story, "Prayers of an Accidental Nature," comes at the end of the book, and the end of a string of other stories having to do with Latinos. Up until this point, the Latinos have all been males "golden and shrouded in the sexy blur of foreign language" which might give one an uneasy feeling of reincarnation when the spell-binder protagonist became a young South American female. This story is the least successful at creating atmosphere, sympathy or plot. Instead, it seems to be a peculiar attempt to illustrate the depravity of the world as compared to the youth of South America.

Nevertheless, more than half of the stories are very good, even with the lingering déjÃ vu sense about them due to the ever reoccurring presence of the Latin lovers. "I Am Telling You Lies" and "An Obscure Geography" are both worth the price of the book.

H. Shaw Cauchy