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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ POETRY

Ramblings of a One-Eyed Garbage Man

Jim Hart
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Even though *Ramblings of a One-Eyed Garbage Man* is written in brazenly blunt English, there is an artistry and music to Jim Hart's collection. This assemblage of free-verse poems is written from a variety of perspectives that are endearing and startling all at once.

Hart's plainspoken words are heavily imbued with a deep sense of place and local identity. Born and raised in Brooklyn, Hart is not only able to write fluidly about his own life, he is also adept at telling the stories of others. *Ramblings of a One-Eyed Garbage Man* is a rare collection of voices within one neighborhood, a constellation of vignettes that span the young and the old, the mundane and the out-of-the-ordinary. Each story represents a parishioner worshipping at the altar of inner-city life, suffering through the chaos and joyful filth.

Hart's poems do not spare the anguish of the human experience. He writes of veterans returning from war, young teenagers jumping from windows while they are high on acid, abducted children, a woman finally realizing she has breast cancer. In each of the pieces, the subjects are splayed open, laid out, and made bare. But amidst these moments of longing and personal pain, there are wonderfully sentimental poems of a charming and quirky childhood, a woman polishing her wooden table with love, and a man parceling through his relationships with his parents.

One of the unfortunate downsides of the collection is the layout of the poems, especially in the "Free" section of the book. The line breaks are forced, and the applied shape doesn't seem warranted. Readers may find it difficult to concentrate on the language while hopping back and forth across the page.

Even though some of the poems need different line breaks and closer editing, the similes and comparative language are of the highest caliber. In the piece "Processions," the narrator describes his mother's funeral and states, "The mourners / flow past my mother's coffin / like mid-night rivers / overflowing onto low lying towns." The poem "Homecoming" describes another type of funeral with equally intriguing language: "Soldiers draped in country's flag / as if prideful symbols hadn't already done enough / as if parents hearts could soften to bugle's blare / as if any beyond those gathered truly cared."

Even though this is his first book, Hart is not new to publishing. While working as the deputy director of public affairs for the New York City Sanitation Department, he has managed to publish his poems in the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Austria, and India. With its beautiful imagery, plain yet thoughtful language, and poignant themes, it is not difficult to see why his poetry has met with success.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (April 8, 2013)

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