ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SHORT STORIES

Rise
L. Annette Binder
Sarabande Books
978-1-936747-31-3
Five Stars (out of Five)

The beauty of short stories is in what they leave out; there is greater imperative for every word to count, to cut to the heart of the matter. L. Annette Binder's *Rise* is a wondrous debut collection of her stories, any one of which could be an example of the form at its best.

Binder has met with recognition for her work and rightly so. *Rise* won the 2011 Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction, and the stories here have been previously published in such prestigious journals as *One Story*, *The Southern Review*, and many others. "Nephilim," the first story in *Rise*, was also reprinted in the anthology *The Pushcart Prize XXXVI: Best of the Small Presses*, and performed as part of NPR's Selected Shorts series.

Binder has a distinctive style to her writing, one that is consistent throughout these stories (compiled for her first published collection) and helps fourteen stand-alone tales blend into a cohesive and memorable collection, greater than the sum of its parts. The prose is crisp and propulsive, quickly evoking images and moods in strong but simple language: "They came up to old Foster's metal mailbox. It was the nicest mailbox on the street. It had two wooden blue jays perched on top and lilac branches painted down the sides. It was like everything else at the Foster house. Immaculate and a little fussy."

Though there is dialogue in these tales, Binder is primarily concerned with the inner workings of her subjects, and that introspective focus combines well with the clipped, declarative sentences to reveal events as seen through her characters' eyes, gathering force as each story rolls inevitably to its end. The longest of these stories is fourteen pages, a wonder of economy given the depths of the human condition that Binder explores.

Sarabande Books has done justice to Binder's excellent writing by presenting the stories in a beautiful package, including a haunting cover image. Binder has stated that she is currently at work expanding one of the stories in *Rise*, "Dead Languages," into a novel. While that novel, when completed, will likely prove to be powerful, it may not have quite the same transformative effect on the reader as the short story, filling in gaps and answering questions that linger in the

short story reader's imagination long after the book has been put down. These stories, as presented in *Rise*, are like ripe grapes: small in size, but oh so succulent and sweet.

Peter Dabbene