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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ POETRY

Rising with the Underclass and Poems

Walter Rice
Xlibris (Oct 5, 2010)
Softcover $15.99 (76pp)
978-1-4535-5308-4

Politics and art can make for an interesting mix, as Walter Rice shows in his book of historical political commentary and decidedly nonpolitical poems, *Rising with the Underclass and Poems*.

Rice is a longtime social activist who has held union positions and served as a member of the Sacramento Democratic County Central Committee. His take on political history is unapologetically influenced by socialism.

The book is a somewhat incongruous combination, with approximately sixty pages of history as seen through Rice's view of the oppressed and underrepresented underclass followed by fifteen pages of mostly nature-inspired poetry.

The history section of the book contains divisions of brief subsections and covers a lot of ground, from the American Revolution to the present day. Rice mentions many interesting historical facts, such as a onetime "maximum wage" law, early battles for women's rights, and the concept of proportional representation. Unfortunately, his references and research are those of an interested amateur, not a historian; there are many references to Wikipedia pages rather than original texts. Other promising subjects, such as the legal treatment of corporations as individuals, which according to Rice was first decided "by an alteration by a clerk of the Court," do not have detailed descriptions.

In addition, Rice's prose is marred by an excessive number of errors, with everything from misplaced commas and misused or missing words, to statements that simply confuse: "The Southern states succeeded [*sic*] because of the election of Abraham Lincoln, Republican, as President."

The book's poetry section begins with "The Ocean and the Sandy Beach," a poem with several nice lines: "On the beach are rocks of red, blue and green/Shaped in singular forms/By a lathe between the worlds/From the waves the sand and the breeze."

Rice's poetry, particularly in the pieces "To Diane" and "To Rose," has a quiet, contemplative quality suited to reflections on nature and individuals. The author makes use of rhyme without overdoing it, and the poems are similar enough in subject, feeling, and delivery to give the feel of a single, unified chapbook. There's not a lot of experimentation or unusual technique to be found; just simple, pleasant poems that are easily digested.

Readers may find themselves drawn to the Howard Zinn-style accounting of injustice in the United States or to the gentle tones of Rice's poetry. Readers who like variety—or the sense of knowing an author that comes from reading different forms of his writing—might enjoy this book in its entirety. In *Rising with the Underclass and Poems*, Rice has fused the disparate worlds of political history and poetry into one slim volume.

PETER DABBENE (May 10, 2013)

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