

★ Small Moving Parts

D. B. Jackson

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Small Moving Parts is an emotive, atmospheric, and memorable tour de force. Not to be missed.

In 1958, on a summer's night in Bufort, Texas, two strangers' destinies collide. Harley Cain, an ill WWI veteran and rancher, and Dodger Cooper, a neglected and physically abused teenager who walks with a limp, are distressed by their lives' circumstances and intend to kill themselves. Their chance encounter hinders their plans and sends them on a journey through the "unyielding" West Texas landscape, into a world of horse thieves and Texas law men. A profound and tender bond develops between Harley and Dodger, giving them something to live for as well as someone to love and be loved by.

Appropriately titled, *Small Moving Parts* moves in many directions. Part redemption tale, part coming-of-age novel, and part action-and-adventure story, it explores broad themes, including isolation, death and dying, life and living, abandonment, righteousness, and hope. The novel's rendering of time and place is as formidable as its portrayal of despair and benevolence.

Such dynamism, if attempted by a writer of lesser talent, could easily devolve into a clumsy muddle, but Jackson is a masterful storyteller. His narrative focus, deft prose, and keen character development depict with precision the "obscure quirk of circumstances" that propels the story. Taut dialogue echoes a Southern drawl: "I ain't getting whapped no more," Dodger says.

Harley and Dodger are captivating, and the novel's supporting characters are equally well drawn. Harley and Dodger's interdependence builds slowly and beautifully as they saunter on horseback, attempt to outwit rifle-toting killers, and engage in conversations replete with Harley's prudent aphorisms and Dodger's wide-eyed inquisitiveness.

From the novel's gripping opening, in which Harley holds a pistol to his head, to its bittersweet afterword, when the full arc of the characters' lives is revealed, Jackson's novel is an emotive, atmospheric, and memorable tour de force. It is not to be missed.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (May/June 2018)

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