ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY

The Man Who Wouldn't Stand Up
Jacob Appel
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When Arnold Brinkman refuses to stand during the singing of God Bless America at a baseball game, he calls it a minor "inconsequential" incident. The media call it unpatriotic, and come down on him like a ton of bricks as a traitor to his country. The central question becomes, Was he out of line?

Arnold is a quiet man. He is a botanist, columnist, and plant nursery owner. He lives in Greenwich Village with his wife, Judith. He has a small garden which he tends with loving care. He likes people individually, but plants collectively. Although he doesn't like children or baseball at all, as a man of principle, he takes his nephew to a Yankees game one spring day.

But that's as far as he goes. When everyone rises to their feet to join in the singing of what he calls post-9/11 jingoistic claptrap, Arnold stays seated. To him, it all feels too propagandistic, "like a Nuremburg rally," and he wants no part of it. Unfortunately, he is caught on camera for everyone to see and jeer.

Juxtaposing situations that aren't analogous (such as comparing Yankee Stadium to Nazi Germany) pushes the limits of satiric fiction, much as the main character is out to test the boundaries of freedom. With hyperbolic ease, the author makes Arnold the most wanted man in America despite the fact that "the entire business was so implausible, so surreal."

Jacob Appel is a bioethicist, with a JD from Harvard and an MD from Columbia. He also has an MFA from New York University. His short stories have appeared in several literary journals including *Shenandoah* and *Bellevue Literary Review*. *The Man Who Wouldn't Stand Up* was chosen as the winner of the 2012 Dundee International Book Prize, the UK's largest prize for unpublished authors.

The book smacks of the absurdist Russian literature of Nicolai Gogol (*The Nose*). But rather than send up society or the system, Appel has given his character an agenda—to fight against hypocrisy and knee-jerk patriotism. Whether that works well as a driver of fiction is debatable. Some may find it "darkly comic," like one of the book prize judges, Stephen Fry. Others may find it ludicrous, even off-putting. Arnold himself says, "See my point? There really

is no story.”

Trina Carter