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Foreword Review LITERARY

The Oracles Fell Silent

Lee Oser
Wiseblood Books (Feb 21, 2014)
Softcover $11.00 (262pp)
978-0-615-87613-9

An academic and a rock star clash in a witty caricature of contemporary culture.

Lee Oser's sophomore novel offers a wry and appealing brew of malcontented characters navigating the absurd deifications which accompany modern celebrity.

Oser's narrator is Richard Bellman, an Ivy League graduate who's assembling the memoirs of the enigmatic, knighted British rock star Ted Pop. Bellman struggles to maintain his center even as Pop's celebrity becomes a maelstrom around him.

Ginger Drake, a fluff journalist whose obsession with Pop's bandmate Johnny Donovan has crystallized into dark and sophisticated forms of stalking, serves as one stormy center; Sir Ted's provocative and gifted daughter, Lexie, makes another. Pop's spiritual but depthless wife makes politically correct, if disruptive, alliances that threaten the safety of the Pop home, while a controversial priest offers potential inroads to contentment.

With the exception of Bellman, most of Oser's characters are guided by blithe egoism. They are given to making pronouncements like "I dreamt the world unfriended me on Facebook," or to crusading with aimless hope: "What was God trying to tell the world through [me]?" They feed on fantasies of perpetual grandeur, even as Bellman finds an unsteady path into the quietude of church life.

Across one tumultuous Hamptons summer, Bellman nobly attempts to tease out Ted's story. The musician proves only occasionally helpful, though his curmudgeonly rejections of some of the trappings of celebrity are refreshing interruptions in otherwise self-satisfied dialogues. Sir Ted may not always be forthcoming with the truth, but he proves one of the few characters who expresses real interest in it.

The Oracles Fell Silent is a seething indictment of contemporary preoccupations with fame, one written with humor and style. Redemption takes unlauded forms: Sir Ted finds his, with finality, in the midst of a destructive storm, and Bellman must locate his away from the grandiose personalities who muddy his life in the Hamptons. Those who maintain their glittering lifestyles by the novel's end aren't cast as the lucky ones. Oser draws such conclusions with persuasive conviction.

Certain to enrapture readers interested in rock and roll's less seductive underbelly, Oser's book offers a captivating and witty picture of the features and failings of contemporary culture.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Spring 2014)

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