Clarion Review

General

The Wayward Son and Other Tales
Benjamin Ordover
CreateSpace
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Imagine yourself a Jew in Auschwitz. Such is the horror facing Shmuel Myritz, who turns away from family and culture to become Karol Marik in pre-war Warsaw. “The war ended but not the memories,” writes Benjamin Ordover in “The Wayward Son,” which concludes this collection, and evokes memories of Stryon’s *Sophie’s Choice*. Ordover’s commendable book encompasses eight stories adhering to a theme of “Suddenly your life turns upside down. What would you do?”

The book opens with “The Small Boy and the Bully,” in which an undersized teen copes with an assault and then learns an important lesson by reaching out to a student with a disability. “The End of the Line” finds a successful author dealing with her mother’s terminal illness complicated by the mother’s wish to find a long-lost son. “Your Cheating Heart” provides an O. Henry-like twist to the prospect of marital infidelity. In a short mystery story, Ordover turns out “Who Shot Eli James?” Overall, his writing is straightforward rather than literary, allowing the reader to create the atmosphere in their minds, as here in the title story: “The Jews in Krakow were in great fear … Most of the men came to a conclusion that in retrospect would appear to be delusional … This otherwise group of intelligent people had their rationality in limbo from fear.”

The next-to-last story in Ordover's collection is "The Ruthless Mr. Bellamy," in which a cynical and sinister billionaire turns his girlfriend into a pawn and a prominent US senator into a dupe. "During the following months a lot of business flowed to Henry's electronic subsidiary and to his armaments design firm," Ordover writes. Readers might judge this the weakest piece in the collection, the protagonist being over-the-top and the last segment of the story tacked on to no effect. In fact, more than one story in the collection ends somewhat flatly. The author also stumbles over point of view, and occasionally tosses in an incomplete sentence such as, "Thinking that he'd take a job as a stopgap measure and leave at the first opportunity."

Ordover can pen both the surreal and the realistic. The former includes "The Devil You Say," a reinterpretation of the Faustian bargain. In that tale, Charles Diablo, as he-who-might-be-the-devil, flashes temptation before the ambitious Seymour David, an investigative reporter. In the entirely believable "The Wheel of Fortune," Barney Rosen reinvents himself as a successful entrepreneur after a despairing experience at a large US bank.

Ordover, with two other books to his credit, shows a solid familiarity with the milieu in which he writes. More than one reader will happily dip into *The Wayward Son* during idle moments.

Gary Presley