



Theater of the Blind: Cataracts of Misperception

Jaeson Brunette

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Theater of the Blind: Cataracts of Misperception, by Jaeson Brunette, collects thirteen interrelated stories featuring characters from all walks of life, in mostly urban settings.

As the title might indicate, the book presents itself as something of an experiment. The preface warns that minimal physical character description is used throughout in an effort to force the reader to more fully engage. It is to the book's credit that this effort goes largely unnoticed. The characters and plots are interesting enough to carry the stories along.

Although *Theater of the Blind* is a collection of short stories, Brunette shows that he is fully capable of handling an extended work as his characters return in later stories and the overall arc of the book develops. In one of the most affecting chapters, a Haitian refugee arrives in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: "He could not help but continue looking to his left and right, hoping and waiting to see someone alive emerge from the utter destruction that was now his home."

Overall, the lack of physical description is not so much conceptual as it is a style choice—and one that works well for Brunette by allowing him to quickly develop his complex world of characters. Ironically, the book's biggest weakness is that Brunette's prose is not always as direct as it should be. This book could have benefited from the hand of a good editor. For example, in describing a character's dreamlike encounter with a bodiless voice, Brunette writes, "He did not hesitate to respond due to the fact that there was something in the voice that he had trusted." Another sentence includes this mouthful: "... he more than likely would not have wanted to see the future on account of the fact that he would not have wanted." Sections of the book suffer from this kind of overwriting, when a well-placed punctuation mark and the deletion of extraneous or redundant words would have delivered the message more clearly.

Despite these flaws, Brunette has an interesting story to tell—or in this case, several interesting stories. The ambitious ending ties together many characters' fates with a bit of fantasy. It provides a satisfying conclusion while fulfilling the author's stated motive, which is to "make society look into a mirror."

Brunette's stories will prove interesting to readers who value time spent thinking deeply about society as a whole. With its expansive canvas and provocative plots, *Theater of the Blind: Cataracts of Misperception* is tailor-made for a book club willing to forgive imperfect prose.

PETER DABBENE (February 17, 2012)

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