FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Poetry

Trouble behind Glass Doors: Poems
Walter Bargen
BkMk Press, University of Missouri-Kansas City
978-1-886157-87-3
(September 15, 2013)

A balance of dark humor and a devastatingly sorrowful tone illumines the human condition in these elegiac poems.

Appointed the first poet laureate of Missouri in 2008, Walter Bargen writes about humanity with a candidly chilling and captivating voice in his latest collection, *Trouble behind Glass Doors*. In the title poem, he states, "We never leave the places we've lived. / We construct and reconstruct our absences. // The address of / our disbeliefs written on the back of napkins, / lost at the bottom of pockets and purses." In many ways, this volume is a collection of those lost napkins, an intimate set of portraits behind the glass doors we each construct in order to carry on.

One particularly haunting poem, "Derailed," describes the story of a child who was thrown off of a moving train by his mother shortly after his birth. The poetic climax occurs near the end when the grown man who survived the brutal abandonment decides to repeat history and disappear, leaving behind "his office, his home, his family, not to be heard / from again, assuming a different name, / to be derailed in another life?" The desperation in this poem weaves its way through the rest of the narrative, leaving the reader simultaneously devastated and intrigued.

Dabbled throughout the collection, which contains forty poems, are a series of more lighthearted vignettes. In these poems, Bargen refers to himself as "the poet." In "Scantily Clad Poet," an editor of an online magazine informs "the poet" that he is "the second most popular keyword used to search the Web site after the football team" and before "the scantily clad" cheerleaders, according to her Google Analytics. The poem ends with the lines, "Then she suggests the rankings might have been different / If the poet had been shot jumping up and down in a cute red dress. / Now the poet is hurt, red is not his favorite color. / Then the poet wonders what she meant by shot." The humor in this series, albeit dark, acts as a reprieve against some of

the more heart-wrenching poems.

The power of the collection lies in Bargen's willingness to be straightforward and honest on the page. In "Two to Four Weeks," he takes the reader through the painful experience of his last conversation with a friend before the friend passed away: "A flush / of red / and then the long clear outline of winter—I wasn't the one and then I was / as you put down the phone." The way Bargen catalogues emotions as they happen is reminiscent of Frank O'Hara's casual, observational poetics.

Bargen's poetry will appeal to anyone who is looking for an elegant, direct poetic examination of the human condition.

Jacquelyn Lazo