

Postmodern Deconstruction Madhouse

Peter Quinones

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The book shatters the mirror of traditional literary models, and holds the cold, sharp shards, shining, up to the light.

Literary fireworks abound in Peter Quinones's *Postmodern Deconstruction Madhouse*, a cosmopolitan collection of quirky stories and erudite, tongue-in-cheek essays.

Present-day Manhattan provides the backdrop for stories "The Fizz Notorio," "Rumor People," "Burn Series" and "The Exousia," in which characters encounter the oddities, both subtle and extreme, of big-city life. The tales examine themes from uncertainty to death in gleefully articulate language, rich with snappy dialogue and snarky asides and observations.

Character names are among the first signs, after the book's title, of the work's skewed perspectives. "The Fizz Notorio" features Harshwine and his mysterious friend, Prockahoon. "Rumor People" features a love triangle between "sapiosexual" Virginia, her much younger lover Rolando Carspidrain, and her rejected suitor Kentuckus Plowfinger.

The characters are sharply drawn, in part through the way other characters see them. In "Burn Series," Dixie Demando sizes up inadvertent houseguest Buck Wiscusaprig as "a scruffy looking little fuckball with dark, darting eyes and a deep scar," a perspective that sheds light on Dixie as well as Buck.

While the plots and actions of the stories are prosaic—much of "Burn Series" involves Dixie conversing with Buck while she prepares for work—the language provides high entertainment:

His face was like a metal spike. There was something edgily contumacious about the way it combined with his "don't grovel" personality that turned her on a bit.

The book's overriding theme—the dissonant strangeness of the human experience—is apparent in every sentence of its stories and essays. But nowhere is it so crystallized as in "Postmodern Deconstruction Madhouse (I)," subtitled "Explorations of the one sentence short story." Its ninety-eight examples of the art of pithy fiction present a rapid-fire kaleidoscope of language, observation, and stark imagery. Some are ribald or vulgar, some are amusing, others are profound: "If you want a true education in human nature just watch an unattractive person stare at an attractive one passing by."

"Notes on MACBETH Posthumously Left Behind by an Undistinguished Scholar" continues the verbal buffet. The essay rakes in an impressive amount of commentary on literary, stage, video, and film productions of *The Scottish Play*, to an extent so detailed as to verge on critical parody. It's nevertheless fascinating reading, likely even more so for readers with background in the Bard.

The book's final piece, "Postmodern Deconstruction Madhouse (II)," easily crosses the line into literary parody. A "metafictional" essay, "Madhouse (II)" is a wide-ranging collection of insights, anecdotes, and observations on life and popular culture, unrestrained in theme and direction, yet intelligent and compelling in composition.

While there is little warmth, reassurance, or comfort to be found in *Postmodern Deconstruction Madhouse*, the work is wildly entertaining and thought-provoking. The book shatters the mirror of traditional literary models, and holds the cold, sharp shards, shining, up to the light.

GARY HENRY (April 23, 2018)

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