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Book Review: Dandylion Riot by Jeanette Powers

John Brantingham · Wednesday, March 18th, 2020

For me the lines that summarize what is most beautifully humane and real in Jeanette Powers's *Dandylion Riot* is found in the following lines:

> *For the abandoned*
> *it feels like everyone*
> *has been beating on them*
> *for their whole lives*
> *and they are the only ones*
> *paying the price (30).*

Powers does a lot in this collection, but I feel the greatest connection to their work when they draw me into the world of the outsider. Those people who are excluded from the world, who are made to feel small and ignored are given voice and dignity in their collection. In this and in so many other ways, this collection is extraordinary. It is a complex look into a world of the excluded.

In one of my favorite poems, Powers describes the narrator's relationship with a boy who has won a goldfish at a carnival and wants them to take it so he can enjoy the moment and not kill the fish. The boy asks them if they want the fish.

> *Every part of my being says absolutely not*
> *except for my mouth, which blurts out sure*
> *because this boy and me and that fish*
> *have one thing in common*
> *we all know what it's like to not have a shot (38).*

The compassion expressed for the boy and the fish is a compassion that extends to the entire collection. The narrator is someone whose heart is large enough to have empathy for all. And while they tell us that it's because they are someone who has been hurt and humiliated themselves, I have the feeling that it goes beyond this. Yes, they have been hurt, but kindness seems to be a part of the inner core of their being and that comes through the poems in so many ways. In this way, their work ennobles both the characters of their poetry and us as well. We are given a view into the way we can understand those around us.

If there are criticisms for Powers, let other people make those comments. I have nothing but praise and admiration for what they are doing here as I have only admiration for their poetic skill as well. A narrative ease winds its way through their stories and the language only compliments what they

are doing. Poetry at its best can make the reader a better person. Powers's has the strength to do exactly that.

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