

Young Man with Camera

ALAN Picks - August 2015

Emil Sher's thirteen-year-old main character in *Young Man with Camera* hides his burn scars from a childhood accident with a hoodie and a camera that he keeps close to his face. T – (he hides his name as well) manages to highlight both the beautiful and the ugly through the photographs he takes of others and through his own startling narrative. T – uses his camera to break the boundaries of assumptions and the superficial on the streets of his urban neighborhood as he defies what it means to be a victim of bullying. As T – endures heartbreaking harassment from the boys who appear to do no wrong, he silently fights for those who cannot fight for themselves. The story takes a suspenseful and thrilling turn as T- tries to defend his friends and learns about the complicated nature of power and silence.

Sher's book is powerfully written and complemented with original black-and-white photographs and references to Diane Arbus's photography. These elements work together to highlight the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the beautiful. T- and those he represents are often depicted as the voiceless victims, and, indeed, in this novel Sher artfully omits quotation marks in the dialogue of his characters, suggesting that these voices are not often heard. Their stories are outside of mainstream dialogue, and yet T – finds ways to show the stories of the marginalized. This book is terrifying and beautiful, despairing and courageous. *Young Man with Camera* is not simply a story of bullies and victims, but rather a close look at power and fear, and the ever-shifting nature of both. Readers will immediately connect with T- as they see the world through his unique perspective, a tightly gripping their books to the very last page.

Reviewed by Melissa Page
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