

REVIEWS

Face Up

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Face Up: A Collection of Outlaw Poems is highly recommended reading for fans of poetry and, perhaps especially, those who believe themselves adverse to this format. The latter audience would seem an unusual choice for recommending a poetry volume, but Face Up's promise of passion and fire refutes the typical perception of poetry as either staid or too literary to be readily understood by the general populace.

It tackles the angst and abuses of modern society, from illness and addiction to rebellion and confrontation, taking on these causes with a scorching charge that belays any notion that poetry is too complicated for the average reader to grasp: "You hear the river; life ebbs and flows; you knew all along/your DNA was a crapshoot."

The poems don't speak to the heart. They roar with fiery reflections that admonish readers to rebel, take charge, and defy the mundane: "You can't keep deformities hidden behind stockings,/closed closets,/and lonely laundry lists forever. Plant your feet firmly on/the ground,/and do not hesitate to sink into the dark, cool mud,/spreading/your toes across relationships and looking for love on/solid ground."

Replete with nature observations, social inspection, and descriptions of individual lives touched by anguish and violence, these poems soar, defying any notion of staid free verse inspections: "She lights another cigarette while the phone rings in the/background./The cloud of smoke she exhales forms the shape of a/grenade. A grenade/powerful enough to leave behind shadows of memory/that soon evaporates./She gets up, turns off the television and vows to see her/son's body as whole..."

Face Up: A Collection of Outlaw Poems is a powerful testimony of survival.

It's a force to reckon with, deserves to be in any library strong in contemporary poetry and women's writings, and ideally will assume its place of power in book club discussion circles. There, poetry can take on a new role as a major influence in and focus on living a passionate, rebellious life that eschews the mundane:

"I see snapshots of defeat as I rewind the decades,/a true bricoleur with a lifeguard certification who stood/stoic/at the water's edge as a man fled into the frigid waters/one early/March afternoon, the sun starting its descent, his bobbing/head/hallowed, his words reassuring me that this is his/moment of/glory as he goes under the third and final time."