

KIRKUS REVIEWS

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Michael D. Schultz
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BOOK REVIEW

Schultz's poetry collection offers a meditation on coming of age while tackling themes of race, identity, and self-discovery.

The core theme of this poetry collection is identity; in a poem titled after the first-person singular, "I," the speaker concludes "I am/ Just...I." The poems leading to this revelation trace the speaker's quest to find out who he is, who he is meant to be, and who he is meant to be with. The speaker is biracial, with "the white side/the black side," and his experience of identity is one in which he tries to reconcile his two lineages and reckon with what it means to be a biracial man in America. As the speaker grows up and tries to understand his identity, he must also contend with raw emotions and with his desire; the speaker's quest to engage with his identity also forces him to figure out his place in the world and his relationships with the people around him. Schultz's poetry references Tupac Shakur, and this collection owes a lot—from the formal poetic qualities to the black-and-white illustrations by McGee, Anastasiia, Drummond, and Hu that dot the book—to Shakur's poetry collection *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*. Much of the collection reads like a mixtape for rejection and heartbreak, combined with the speaker's hope to build a family. The poem "Crying" is a shining example of Schultz at his best, as some expected terms (like "friendship" and "separation") are juxtaposed with surprising ones (like "cats" and "steroids"). Most of the poems, however, trade in typical images of passion, as sentiments like "My love may burn" ("Sugar") have been overdone since Petrarch, or are too tethered to awkward rhymes like "Is it necessary for love to be so frightful and scary/ Should I be wary" ("Letter to HER") for them to reach their full potential.

Strained rhymes and some unoriginal subject matter keep this collection from being a resounding success.

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