

“ONE BLOODY THING AFTER ANOTHER” (Book Review)

Written by Clay McLeod Chapman
Saturday, 03 July 2010 11:17



The title is no lie—one bleeding thing sure does lead to another in Joey Comeau’s (pictured) achingly beautiful novel ONE BLOODY THING AFTER ANOTHER (ECW Press). Beginning with a red-drenched furball getting coughed up at a job interview, this tender terror initiates an avalanche of beheaded specters, familial cannibalism, the intensely graphic mastication of animals, phantasmal vomiting mommies, malevolent maple trees and...high-school lesbianism.



Lest this paint an inappropriate portrait of this novel as some kind of pulp-ridden piece of gore-porn, it should be said that there is heart to this horror. Still beating, for sure—but don’t be fooled, Jack Ketchum die-hards: Comeau has set out a rather commendable challenge for himself by devising a horror novel for non-horror enthusiasts—and not necessarily the other way around. It is highly unlikely that any genre-fiction purists will claim Comeau as the heir apparent to the King, or the Koontz for that matter. However, fans of Kelly Link’s fanciful short stories (MAGIC FOR BEGINNERS, PRETTY MONSTERS) will feel right at home with Comeau’s mixture of quirk and creepy-crawly awkwardness. It is his innate ability to imbue the horrific with a sense of fragile humanity that makes this book a must-read. Comeau’s writing reads like a near-perfect symbiosis of McSweeney’s and George A. Romero, taking the much-ballyhooed post-modern irony of contemporary authors like Dave Eggers and applying it to a genre more often regarded for its twisting of necks rather than its turns of phrase.

ONE BLOODY THING is a whimsical triptych of individual tales that slowly become tethered together in the most unlikely of ways. Separately at first, we encounter Anne, Jackie and Charlie going about their day-to-day activities: dog-walking, petty vandalism and taking care of Mom’s new habit of devouring things that aren’t necessarily dead. Yet. It isn’t long before Jackie’s love for Anne can no longer go unrequited, Anne can no longer contain the maternal monster that is now chained to her basement wall and Charlie can no longer avoid the decapitated ghost that insists on following him and his pitiful pup Mitchie through their apartment...and so on.

“ONE BLOODY THING AFTER ANOTHER” (Book Review)

Written by Clay McLeod Chapman
Saturday, 03 July 2010 11:17

To untie the complicated knot of this intricately woven narrative is to do the book itself a disservice. In this leanly structured book, each chapter is eggshell delicate, fragile enough to shatter during a fast read. The real challenge of this thin tome is to savor each page, rather than tear right through. Such patience comes with its own rewards: A pleasant surprise awaits those attentive readers who pay heed to the words. Not to give anything away, but it would seem that even books can be haunted in their own way, giving voice to the dead when the living do not listen.

An odd diversion into one character’s post-car-accident fantasies serves as an unnecessary distraction in what amounts to a tightly wrought near-romance between two girls. But much like the sadistic whimsy of Joss Whedon, Comeau has the proficiency to make his reader develop an intense sense of compassion for his characters—then has the audacity to do terrible, terrible things to them before our very eyes. The ultimate feather in Comeau’s cap is his ability to make the grisly fate of his subjects feel natural, if not altogether necessary to the story. Not a single drop of blood feels extraneous in ONE BLOODY THING—which definitely has its fair share. Truth be told, the torrent of grue borders on floodlike proportions at times. It is safe to say that this book’s grisly finale contains just about the most affectionate and kindhearted evisceration this reviewer has ever read. It doesn’t get much lovelier—and bloodier—than this.



{comments on}