

A BagelBards Book Review

Deer & Other Stories

By Susan Tepper

Wilderness House Press, price \$16.95

Reviewed by Paul Steven Stone

To read the artful and nuanced stories of Susan Tepper is to move through a world of shadow and echo. Shadows cast during the seventies, time of the Viet Nam war and the Beatles, a time when both mind-altering drugs and higher visions of humanity were fighting for their place in the national conversation.

And the echoes, oh yes the echoes. They rise from the silence that envelopes and punctuates the ambiguities and half-lies of the hollow late 20th century America envisioned by Tepper. A world powered it seems by unstated motivations, subtly textured relationships, the fear of death and somewhere, behind it all, a deeply seated yearning. For what, I can't say.

Each story is so wonderfully crafted, more a still-life portrait than a plotted story, yet we rarely have the benefit of a plot or a final act. But there's never a shortage of tension. Made even more visceral by the fact we're never sure of the narrator's voice, age, or even gender, shifting from one story to the next. Tepper moves effortlessly through a multitude of veils in telling her stories, and the search for the narrator's True North is invariably one of the many mysteries we happily take on when reading "Deer & Other Stories".

These highly entertaining, culturally-perceptive stories delight in catching their characters off-balanced and humanly incomplete. And we, the fortunate readers, get to witness their resulting and generally futile search for wholeness and completion. All the while aware that somewhere out in the woods, in every story, deer are hunting for their own rightful place in Tepper's world.

I heartily recommend this unique collection of stories.

