

Title: Odd Pursuits  
Author: Robert Castle  
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Reviewed by: Dianne Gray

From the immensely bizarre, to the heart of the human condition, *Odd Pursuits* is an eclectic collection of stories separated by three themes--STATIONARY, MOVEMENT, and REALIZATION. Though at times strange, *Odd Pursuits* is thoughtful, injected with dark humor, and well worth the read.

STATIONARY contains six stories, of which I would categorize as the “oddest” of Castle’s pursuits. Opening the anthology was “Dennis’ Bed”, a brilliant choice, in my opinion, as the story itself was like a blurry picture slowly coming into focus. The story is short, the subject matter dark, but when you get to the grizzly end, Castle has directed you sharply to his bent, leaving you off kilter and open for the stories to come.

The tales in the first part of the collection are uncommon, some more extremely than others (eating an odor to become an odor, thereby freeing oneself, or the account of the Sphinx, the entity responsible for all one’s mundane, though not unnoticed, disappeared possessions). By far, my favorite was “The Heart Keeps on Ticking”, the story of relationships from the perspective of alarm clocks, who must be bundled along with their owners, and have relationships themselves.

With MOVEMENT, Castle’s story selections highlight the turning points of relationships and thoughts. Castle masterfully provides a definitive conclusion to each story, without giving his characters a definitive resolution to their situation of change. Unlike the previous scenarios of STATIONARY, most readers will identify with the plights of the characters in MOVEMENT. What I really began to appreciate in reading this segment of the book was how well Robert Castle illustrates character interplay. Each dialogue is effortless and authentic, and character reactions to one other, or events, are meaningful clues to the personalities bringing these stories to life.

REALIZATION, as it suggests, emphasizes stories with a telling conclusion to the quandary of their characters. It is no surprise to me I liked these stories the best. While I won’t say there are any happy endings, there *are* endings, which satisfies the natural order of things for me. My favorites were “Match Point”, the story of two men whose relationship is framed both structurally and metaphorically in tennis terms, “Ohio by Night”, a love triangle set on the highway through Ohio, and “Mate”, the skirmishes of a couple set in the framework of a chess match.

*Odd Pursuits* can be praised on many levels, but in writing, there are two things, when all is said and done, that ultimately matter--what one has to say, and how well one can say it. Robert Castle fulfills on both counts. The stories and characters are complex

enough for readers to find different qualities of merit. I highly recommend a foray into this multifaceted collection.

Rating: 5 cats