*Everyone Wants to be Ambassador to France*, by Bryan Hurt rev. by Sierra-Nicole Debinion

Red Hen Press

*Everyone Wants to be Ambassador to France*, a collection of stories by Bryan Hurt, originally won the Starcherone Prize for Innovative Fiction and is now being reissued (with newly included work) by Red Hen Press. Hurt is also the editor of *Watchlist: 32 Stories by Persons of Interest*, and his fiction has been printed in numerous journals, and he teaches creative writing at Capital University.

*Everyone Wants to be Ambassador to France* gathers moving and cleverly entertaining works of short and impactful fiction. Within the stories, he plays with craft elements instead of writing traditional realistic fiction. The structurally interesting “The Sadness of Tycho Brahe’s Moose” utilizes twenty enumerated sections and clever titles (eg, True Story, Later, The Wonders Of The Universe, Dearth, The End, The Heavens Provide,) creating a logical ordering and time passage for the reader.

Tonally, while the stories are whimsical and fun, there’s also a consistent sense of sadness. This is perfectly exhibited in “Moonless,” in which an unnamed narrator is in competition with a colleague, Dr. Hu. The narrator asks a girl on a date and gets rejected, and immediately after this humiliation, Dr. Hu wins the grant the narrator desired: “Then I’d lost out on a big government grant to my chief rival, the smug molecular astrophysics, Du. Hu. I patted him on the back and ate his celebratory cake, forced a smile with icing on my lips.” The bitterness of the narrator added to the story’s stranger tensions as he constructs a universe inside his basement and soon begins fighting with the inhabitants.

Tonally, what's most striking with Hurts last story, “Good with Words,” is it is not only a meta storyline with the narrator’s agent asking for this story, but also asking how should stories should make a reader feel. It’s easy to feel the narrator’s love and pride as he brings up his son several times, even as he suffers pressures from work and his agent. It’s clear that the author has a deep passion for writing and literature, one combined with a desire to be pleasing to readers.

Fans of literary fiction, comedy, magical realism, and speculative fiction would absolutely enjoy Hurt’s debut collection of whimsical yet heartbreaking stories.