*Starfish*,by Sara Goodman rev. by Masa Muna Shah

The Lettered Streets Press

*Starfish*, by Sara Goodman, is an epic poem published by The Lettered Streets Press. The epic takes place during a frigid winter in Chicago with a first-person Queer speaker. The epic explores the conversations and interactions with the speaker’s past and present lovers, life during freezing winter storms in Chicago, and the vivid surreal imagery of the speaker’s dreams and reflections. The author uses many refreshing and experimental techniques that display a realistic picture of love.

The dynamic structures of each poem are quite interesting. Goodman’s use of structure is very powerful as it helps create rhythm and guides readers' attention to words which impact the tone and depth of a poem. The epic displays both poems that are shorter in lines with lots of white-space and poems that are condensed and have longer lines. The poems which are more condensed tend to be the narrative parts of the epic and the more spaced-out poems tend to be more reflective and imaginative parts of the epic. This decision made by Goodman had a very effective impact on how the poems read as the speed complimented the tone of the poems.

An example of how Goodman used white space is,

“Half sleep half pills half-life

Half a halo around the dream-time scape

I was half in bed and floating” (Goodman 9.)

With the imagery being quite abstract, the white space allows the readers to real grasp and visualize the image.

The speaker’s imagination is very enchanting throughout the epic. Goodman’s use of imagination helps create depth to the main character and provide an enchanting experience for readers. Here is an example of one of the speaker’s imaginative reflections, “As if our systems / were not made of water, / blood / our systems / not made to mimic / network of stars.” The reflection is quite abstract and interesting. The emphasis on the word such as “blood” leaves emotional residue for the readers.

Another technique that was successful in the book was repetition. Goodman’s use of repetition is an effective tool at creating a strong and clear tone. A very effective example of repetition follows, “ ‘We should never make love.’ She kissed me as if to say, ‘I am yours.’ / She kissed me and said, ‘I’m sorry.’” A seemingly simple technique of repeating the same phrase can have a tremendous emotional impact for readers. Goodman reception was able to capture my attention and create a very strong emotional impact for me.

Overall, this epic was refreshingly experimental on how it used structure, vividly interesting on how it expressed surreal reflections, and emotionally captivating for how it used repetition. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to read an epic that has a very realistic telling of love with thoughtful dream-like images.