*Instances of Head-Switching,* by Teresa Milbrodt rev. by Emma Garcia

Shade Mountain Press

Teresa Milbrodt received her M.F.A. in fiction from Bowling Green State University which led down the path of publishing her novel *The Patron Saint of Unattractive People* (by Boxfire Press) and various short story collections. Milbrodt’s current collection, *Instances of Head-Switching,* contains stories of Greek gods visiting mortals and running media campaigns, territorial unicorns who became famous because of a bar of soap, and a woman who is afraid to be alone so she adopts the sphinx from Egypt to protect her. These short stories bring magical realism alive in a fun and quirky way as each main character navigates the reality of life.

The strongest craft element that Milbrodt utilizes is tone. “Feet” is about a shoe saleswoman trying to help frustrated customers with literal screws in their feet find shoes that make them feel better while dealing with her overweight father who tries to levitate at home. Tones like sadness, frustration, helplessness, and defeat are clearly all seen in just one scene out of dozens:

“The lady starts crying, releasing so many tears she soaks her jeans and dampens the carpet. I want to cry, too. I’m supposed to solve problems for my customers, not want to shoot them. It’s desperation and sympathy and annoyance that makes me sit next to her and bawl. I’m tired. Of her. Of my father. Of all the feet I want to save. If you don’t get that emotion out of your system you’ll explode, and that’s messier than damp carpets.”

The various tones create empathy, pulling readers in further to engage with the characters. It feels like Milbrodt is saying no matter the differences there are in life, people still have emotions. Even though these stories contain mystical and fantastical aspects the tone makes them relatable. The irritation, sarcasm, and joy throughout the stories is something people encounter every day, and Milbrodt effectively captures these emotions while telling readers several imaginative stories.

Milbrodt also has realistic tensions in each story that makes the fantasy element applicable to the present time. The story “Marbles” is about a woman who has different marbles of emotions and she swallows them in order to feel anger, compassion, or even love, and then regurgitates them later to use them for another day. The tension in this story is whether or not her feelings for a friend are real because some emotions are just too powerful to swallow.

“I wondered what it would be like to swallow all my marbles at once and never spit them out. I wondered what it would be like to go without them for one day.”

While the imaginative elements throughout are dynamic and unique, the tensions and tones are casual making the stories easy but mind engaging reads. Milbrodt doesn’t create magical feelings or problems—for the most part the issues her characters face are the same problems any person would encounter, making the stories seem more realistic than they actually are.

*Instances of head-Switching* is a fun and entertaining read for people who like fantasy. It’s also an interesting read for those who like to dwell on the meaning and emotional depth of a story. This book is meant for any young adult or older and is an escape from life. If a reader has a hard day at work with others they’ll enjoy *Switching Heads*. It might just encourage them that even magical creatures struggle with other people at work but at least they can change which head they want to wear that day.