

voice—consistent throughout each piece—and consumes the reader within the speaker's world.

Among the collection's theme of family lies Collier's greatest strength: his ability to create a character and use this, paired with raw emotionality from the speaker, in order to tell a magnificent story. "Cyclops" evokes the voice of an apologetic grandchild reflecting upon his immature thoughts of his grandfather and realizing that now that he is gone it is too late to truly appreciate him and hoping to find some sort of reconciliation among this regret. Another poem, "My Father's Knee," brilliantly captures the contrast between the ugly truth of aging and the speaker's father's bravery to push through the complications of his old age.

Collier also tackles the issue of a growing individual trying to find and also come to terms with religion. In the collection's first piece, "Piety," the speaker is proud of his devotion to God and the church, and seems to somewhat admire the organist for his lifelong devotion and church manners. In contrast, "Lashed to the Deck Rail" deals with a speaker who struggles with an inner conflict

of what he has been told is sin but feeling as though it may not be.

Collier's knack for noting the world in its uninhibited reality is uncanny, and his ability to create these characters and scenarios is brilliant; whether it is the man singing in the YMCA shower room, an anecdote of the bizarre life and death of the horseshoe crab, or the way in which a young boy remembers his dead friend for the way he parts his hair. The realistic themes found among each piece makes Collier's piece extremely compelling and fascinating to read.

—Lauren Tozer

Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions by Michael Czyzniewski. Chicago: Curbside Splendor Press, 2012. 168 pages. \$10, paper.

Mike Czyzniewski loves Chicago. Some people might say he is Chicago, not unlike Mayor Daley, the Water Tower, and Oprah; they just got more famous. After reading *Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions*, one begins to wonder if a larger-than-life personality, shot through with equal parts no-nonsense talk, skewed cynicism, and an opposing

"golly-gee-whiz" faith in life is a prerequisite to claiming the Windy City as home.

Within the pages of this surprisingly easy, fresh, and smart read, you're treated to Czyzniewski's imaginings of the skinny on everything from Dennis Rodman's last tattoo, to Mrs. O'Leary's cow as steak, the aforementioned Daley, the Water Tower, Oprah, and many more. All have a place in Chicago's history, literature, or popular culture, and all are at once surreal (one book blurb calls the work "fabulist") and truthful. You can hear Rod Blagojevich's voice discussing the importance of his first prison tat, or David Hasselhoff's waxing egocentric at the ridiculous thought that he'd be an organ donor. You also get inside the imagined heads of *Sister Carrie*, Leopold and Loeb, and John Wayne Gacy.

What makes this quirky collection work is less about the shared Chicago-ness of the subjects as the freakishly smart way Czyzniewski juxtaposes character and situation. Mr. T hawks male enhancement tablets on late night TV, and Dennis DeYoung discusses his alien abduction episode. My favorites include "David Yow's 10 Simple Rules" and "Roger

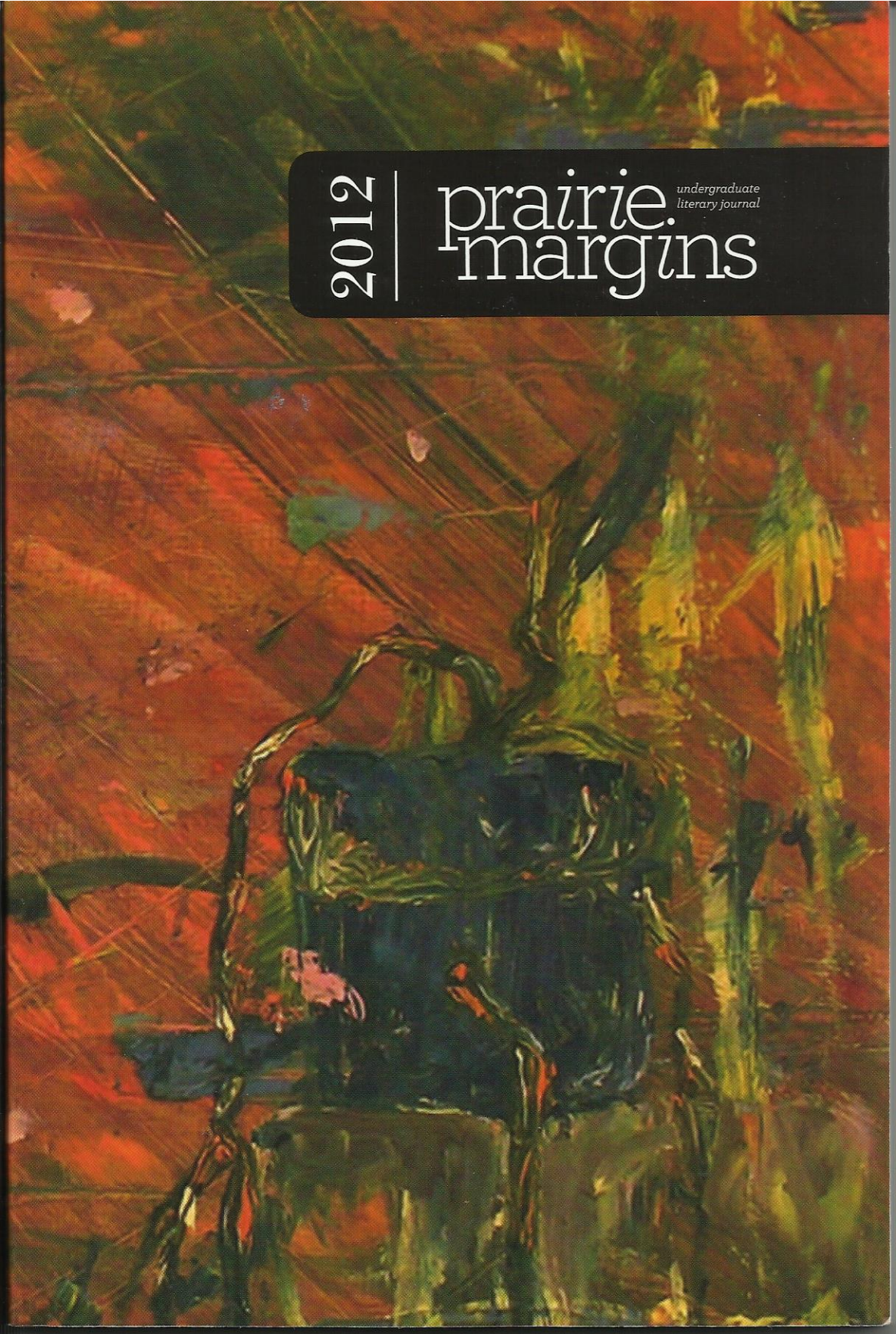
Ebert's review of his second date with Oprah Winfrey." In that vignette, Czyzniewski imagines Ebert attempting to impress the up and coming Winfrey with his work by taking her to a film preview. Unfortunately, the film is *Revenge of the Nerds* and thus begins a tale ending in Ebert's utter humiliation.

Chicago artist Rob Funderburk provided illustrations of the famous Chicagoans for the *Curbside Splendor* publication. They are a perfect complement to Czyzniewski's ironic style—bold strokes of caricature in black and white capture the essence of the subject with a wink.

The narratives are often in first person, which adds to the surreal sensibility (Soldier Field defending itself against spaceship comparisons). The prose is at once accessible and aggressive; it grabs you and drags you in with a deceptive conversational style. This is not writing for the pretentious literary reader. Like the town itself, *Chicago Stories* is big-hearted, quick-witted, and will punch you in the gut if you need it.

—Christine Chapman

Tracks: A Novel in Stories by Eric D. Goodman. Kensington, MD:



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