Sibel Erbayraktar

Birds of America: Stories. Lomė Moore. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2010. p/bk 304 pp. ISBN: 978-0-307-47496-4. Price $15.00.

Lorrie Moore's riveting collection of short stories, *Birds of America,* is definitely a striking satire of degenerate modern life and society in which not only things but also individuals fall apart. The broken, ungrammatical syntax that Moore uses also contributes to the effect of disintegration. The term "loneliness" is used repeatedly in the collection and is the core reason that drags people into reactions that they normally do not display. Loneliness can change the very essence of human beings. In fact "will" is the magical word in the whole collection, because my favorite story of the book, "Willing," exemplifies how human resolution can be heavily wounded when exposed to failure and isolation. Moore is quite talented in showing that even people who are seemingly strong-willed and powerful can display extreme brittleness within the gears of wheel of modernity. In this opening story of the collection, Sidra, an intellectual, sophisticated actress has an affair with a coarse, ignorant mechanic named Walter because of loneliness. She loses all her balance and determination in this dysfunctional relationship and acts like a simple minded person out of jealousy. Moore invites us to reflect on the extent to which modern life can push people's limits and drag them into absurdities.

In some other stories in the collection, the most sensitive people are surprisingly capable of displaying great strength in case of necessity. In "Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk," a sensitive mother is pushed to write the story of her cancer-stricken baby to get money for the treatments. She also struggles to be practical while dealing with her insensitive husband and financial problems. Moore exemplifies that suffering is an integral part of our lives and matures human beings while contributing to their development.

On the other hand individuals can go astray and lose their integrity. "Beautiful Grade" is a good example of this, as it focuses on a divorced law tutor who dates a learner less than half his age. He finds excuses for this strange relationship during the whole dinner scene but none of the listeners seems to be persuaded by his baseless justifications. Although there is another divorced man at the dinner table who is much more

hypocritical about personal affairs, he does not refrain from questioning the tutor's attitude. Moore again beautifully debunks the mindset which hypocritically shuns people, even though they commit the same errors as those they seek to reject.

Moore provides us with multiple perspectives to evaluate modern life and its differing effects on the human psyche. Desolation, exclusion, extreme tragedy and hypocrisy are all unsolicited ingredients of modern society but, somewhere in the world, they are being experienced to the fullest every day. Hence, it is of crucial significance not to sweep them under the rug in order to understand ourselves as human beings. *Birds of America* can be read as picturing the troubled psyche of modern individuals, who sometimes stagger under the burdens of the 21st century mindset.

Sibel Erbayraktar
Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Ankara