Voices From the Street by Philip K. Dick

A Superb Portrait Of Mental Illness...

Stuart Hadley is a young radio electronics salesman in early 1950s Oakland, California. He has what many would consider the ideal life; a nice house, a pretty wife, a decent job with prospects for advancement, but he still feels unfulfilled; something is missing from his life. Hadley is an angry young man—an artist, a dreamer, a screw-up. He tries to fill his void first with drinking, and sex, and then with religious fanaticism, but nothing seems to be working, and it is driving him crazy. He reacts to the love of his wife and the kindness of his employer with anxiety and fear. One of the earliest books that Dick ever wrote, and the only novel that has never been published, Voices from the Street is the story of Hadley’s descent into depression and madness, and out the other side. Most known in his lifetime as a science fiction writer, Philip K. Dick is growing in reputation as an American writer whose powerful vision is an ironic reflection of the present. This novel completes the publication of his canon.

My Personal Review:
Based on some of the other reviews, I think a lot of people will miss the whole point of this novel. I think the underlying cause of Stuart Hadley’s discontent with his world is that he is mentally ill, more than likely clinically depressed. I have the same condition and I identified with Hadley’s character a lot.

Everyone in Hadley’s life is trying to stuff him into a box from his wife at home, his sister and brother-in-law, to his boss at a television store. Hadley doesn’t know what he wants out of life and everyone around him tries to make that decision for him - which, if you know anyone with severe depression, is the worst thing one could do for a depressed person. It only pisses them off more.

His mental illness amplifies everything he does and how he thinks. He goes to extremes in thoughts and deeds, trying to find something that satisfies him. Some reviewers say that the character whined too much.
Hadley does whine a lot but in my opinion, that is another indication of his emotional ailments.

Hadley is a lot like the alcoholic who tries to switch from liquor to beer to wine to try and find a way to face life and the ups and downs that go with it. He throws himself into a religious cult, an affair, and eventually, a plan to completely reinvent himself. His descent into madness is violent and destructive. Call me crazy (hah, I would), but I think a lot of people have acted like Hadley at least once in their lives but would be too self-conscious to admit it and that is why they find Hadley so distasteful.

The one thing in the novel that I would criticize most is that Philip K Dick cannot write realistic women characters. But that is true for a lot of his novels. All of Dick's female characters seem to be these neurotic, half-witted twits.

This book is NOT science fiction although it can be found with all of Dick's other sci fi novels in your big box bookstores. There is nothing science fiction about it. If you're expecting Dick's characteristic science fiction, you won't find it here. Reviewers have said that a bad thing about this novel is that it's depressing. Yeah, it is but then again it's about a very sick man. Whoever would expect this novel to be light-hearted and fun should skip reading it and go back to watching TMZ.

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