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# Clay

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Davie is growing up in the north-east town of Felling during the 1960s and, amongst other pressures, the bully, Mouldy, has to be resisted and there's the new boy, Stephen, who persuades Davie and his friend that he can help. Like previous key characters in Almond's novels, Stephen makes clay models; Winston in *Heaven Eyes* or Mina in *Skellig* (?Sometimes I dream I make them so real they walk away or fly out of my hands?). Stephen is also one of the outsiders we have met before: Askew, for instance, in *Kit's Wilderness* ? ?Such a strange boy, such a strange mixture of darkness and light.? Here are the conflicts on which Almond's fiction has thrived and triumphed. But not here. Mouldy's violence is harsh and brutal and there is no way of standing up to him. Where before Almond has found ways of bringing outsiders into the world of hope and safety, Stephen, for all his magical talent, is too damaged, the darkness too strong. His models are more diabolical, possible golems. Yes, Mouldy can be defeated but he has to be killed. The strongly catholic background provides the mix of good and evil but is more cynically earthbound, saints with feet of clay, where only the mad see heaven. As Davie and Maria ponder the wonders of spring, the human bullying is echoed in a snake casually gobbling up a frog. Almond writes so well that he will always persuade his readers but he seems to have exhausted his supplies of hope. Here we are confronted by the clinging earthiness of clay out of which Almond as potter can only create demons for a world, seemingly more autobiographical, where darkness is just too well embedded. AJ

Running Order:

75

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