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## Book Review - The King Who Made Paper Flowers

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## Off the SHELF

**The King Who Made Paper Flowers** by Terry Kay (Mercer University Press, 2016: ISBN 978-0-88146-566-2, \$24.00)

Terry Kay's latest novel, *The King Who Made Paper Flowers*, is an interesting read. It is set in a lightly fictionalized Savannah, by which the author means that certain government figures are definitely fictional. This Savannah lives, breathes, and features a variety of colorful characters that form the main attraction for the book. The main driver of the plot is Arthur Benjamin, who arrives in town only to be first pickpocketed and then befriended by the narrator, Hamby Cahill. Hamby is a street magician and a bit of a shady character, although clearly not all bad. Feeling sorry for Arthur, Hamby takes him to an abandoned warehouse called "The Castle," where an eccentric woman called Lady lives with an assortment of other characters, each quirky in their own way, walking the streets and making things lively.

The book is beautifully written, and Kay's skillful choices with language bring it all to life. From an early point in the story, Hamby describes why he met Arthur in the first place: "Maybe I am called to bus stations like a recovering alcoholic is called to a tavern door because of

my father's genes doing their little jitterbug dance in the thick of my blood. Maybe I have always looked for him—thinking he would return as he left—on a Greyhound."

Arthur is a bit of a cipher, in that much of him and his past is hidden, but interacting with him

brings out the rest of the characters as they first try to figure him out and then support him in his struggles. The plot is based around a struggle between the powerless and the powerful (those fictional government figures), remindful in some ways of *The Pushcart War*. If there is any complaint to the book, it is that Arthur's choices seem to most often drive the story while the rest of the characters react to the outcomes. This makes them slightly less compelling, but it does raise the question of who is truly powerful in a situation. The story feels like a fairy tale or an

Arthurian legend, which ties in nicely to many of the references in the book. Overall, it's an enjoyable read.

Recommended for public libraries and adult readers.

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