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CLACKAMAS LITERARY REVIEW

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“That in the beginning nothing was known of the beginning only explains so much,” so opens a poem titled “Genesis,” by John Sibley Williams; a fitting opener for the 23rd volume of the Clackamas Literary Review.

The Clackamas Literary Review is an anthology of poetry and prose that is annually compiled from the submissions of an array of authors. The review is edited and designed by English department students and faculty at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City. This year, the opportunity to review it has landed in my hands.

Ebbing and flowing naturally through topics such as war, religion and love — the usual stuff that gets people going — the collection sews sentiments much greater than the spindle of words it relies on. In fact, this touches on its greatest strengths: brevity and diversity. Each work offers a unique morsel, a bit of something to chew on before moving on to the next. This allows each piece to stand on its own and to really give you a thought — or better yet a feeling — to contemplate before your mental palette is readily cleared and lined up for a dive into another unique, pen-sculpted world. In this lies my only complaint about the collection: it is sometimes esoteric, and it is a bit hard to get a hold on the motifs of a book with such a multiplicity of authors. But esotericism is part of the nature of poetry, and it is, of course, an anthology, so its strengths by far outweigh any weaknesses that I first perceived. The charm of writing is rightly shown in this collection and the reader has little

choice — or desire — but to read and reread to fulfill understanding — an understanding that is well worth the time this book asks in return.

The collection features a good number of local authors including an award-winning poem by Jesse Gardner, a language arts teacher at Madison High School in Portland. The piece, titled “The Rhythms of Write,” won Ooligan Press’ 2019 “Write to Publish” award in poetry and is a meditation on the author falling in love with writing as a child before time wore his passion into drudgery — and then back again. That feeling: first falling fast, then passion losing luster, then once again finding that passion and being more thankful because of it. It’s an utterly human story that is relatable rather you love writing, fishing or skydiving.

“Poetry and sex are conceptual yearnings”

-Mark Rubin

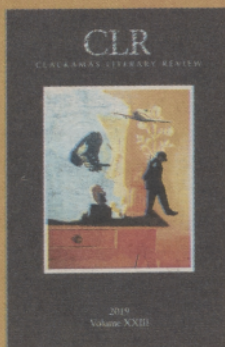
Another local writer who is also a former CCC student, Chelsea Thiel, authored a few pieces in the book. She pens two works, “Death Keeps a Garden” and “Unsavory,” both vividly descriptive poems that are wont to leave a reader wanting more.

Among some of the others that stand out to me

are Suzy Harris’ “Learning to Hear Again*” and “Even When We Are Not Ready,” a short story by Will Donnelly. Both deal with hearing. Harris’ poem is a gut-punch of emotion, its essence being an author looking forward to appreciating something that is so normal for the average person that it is all too easy to take for granted: just having the ability to hear. Donnelly’s story, on the other hand, is about a young deaf man losing his religion — and what that will cause his devout parents to think — while finding hope in a woman, before once again finding his spirituality in some context.

Rather you generally enjoy poetry and short stories or not, the thread tying this collection together is one worth tugging on. You can feel the emotion woven into each piece; each word labored over tirelessly, then reviewed and reviewed again until finally ink was put to paper. Reaching an audience with a new — or a new way of looking at — an idea is one of the main purposes of writing and the Clackamas Literary Review does exactly that.

“Poetry and sex are conceptual yearnings,” to steal a line from one of my favorite poems of the book, the aptly named “Poetry and Sex” by Mark Rubin. Indeed, it is a basic and essential need for words to be arranged just right, to make us feel something that we otherwise never would have imagined we’d feel, to shift a paradigm we might not have even considered. This is exactly why the Clackamas Literary Review is a worthwhile read — it’s made up of more than stories, it is made of the human experience succinctly and beautifully expressed.



- The CLR is a unique anthology receiving national and international acquisitions.
- The CLR won the Oregon Literary Fellowship for publishers in 2018.
- The CLR publishes first time writers alongside seasoned writers of poetry, prose and the mysterious category possibility.
- The CLR is an original publication created entirely by student editors, and fostered by English department staff at CCC.
- From acquisitions to editing and layout, an entire book is produced in the span of three months.

The Clackamas Literary Review is available at area bookstores and the CCC bookstore, or at clackamasliteraryreview.wordpress.com and other online retailers.