Clarion Review

Short Stories

All Points North
Shelby R. Lee III
Outskirts Press
978-1-4327-5569-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

In *All Points North*, author Shelby R. Lee presents thirteen short stories in a stream-of-consciousness style employed by Faulkner and other southern writers. The author dives headlong into the psychology of the human experience in an unabashedly honest way, revealing the inner workings of his characters by fully exploring the pain, resentments, and absurdities they encounter. The book's title is the same as the first story in the collection, a whirlwind account of a sailing race. In this story, readers are forced to keep up with the action and disorientation the characters experience. In the end, the chaos of the race is worth the risk and the effort when, once again, "all points north."

While several identical themes and motifs are evident throughout the stories—including the excessive use of alcohol, the need for psychological treatment, and judging members of the upper class—each story is unique in its subject matter, helping make the collection a worthwhile read. For example, "Under Veiled Thought" describes the fallout from an unconventional psychiatric treatment. "Maxine Dolittle," by contrast, is a severe yet humorous rant against an annoying coworker's personality.

Lee presents his themes and characters with an incredibly strong voice. Entering his stories is like walking into a thick, humid smoking room. Readers may have a hard time finding the big picture or being able to get their wits about them; this is the effect of the psychological world of Lee's characters. At times, readers may feel they are on the receiving end of a joke they do not fully understand. Although not always comfortable, the stories are evocative, and readers will not forget their encounters. In fact, they may even be inspired to question their own motivations for their actions in life.

Lee's downfall is pushing his characters too hard in one direction. Many characters have such extreme personalities that they end up lacking complexity; even the most vile of humans

have some good in them, and vice versa. An occasional widening of the narrative lens in order to see Lee's characters from a different point of view would make them more human, believable, and interesting. Despite this, *All Points North* explores the inner workings of what makes us tick. Readers will be challenged, intrigued, and wanting more of the author's unique perspective.

Gabriela Worrel