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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ LITERARY

The College Shrink

William Haylon
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Character studies dominate the moving novel The College Shrink*, about the turbulence of campus life and the importance of love and compassion.*

An empathetic college psychologist finds herself in trouble in William Haylon's intense novel *The College Shrink*.

Emily leads a comfortable life. She is devoted to her job as a therapist at a New Jersey university, she loves her two daughters, and her marriage is stable, if not exciting. But when Emily learns that her husband, a teacher at a private school, is having an affair with a seventeen-year-old student, she enters a free-fall state. For the first time, she needs to be taken care of herself.

After her husband leaves and their twin girls head off for separate colleges, Emily begins to live alone. Her tiny house comes with a mortgage that she can't afford. Once warm and welcoming, it becomes a symbol of how trying hard to be a good person can "suck sometimes."

Emily's own story is offset by illuminating, concise chapters devoted to each of her clients; these describe their backgrounds and the issues that they face, as well as their own understandings of their issues. Emily's impressions of her clients enrich their presentations, leading to potent descriptions of the challenges that therapists and students meet together. Reflections on the increasing need for therapy on college campuses, and of how Emily's work morphed from helping students adjust to college life into treating serious mental health issues, play in.

Beyond Emily's story is a prevailing sense that universities don't always deliver on what they advertise; disturbing topics, including around rape, racism, and social class distinctions, are treated in a palpable manner. As the narrative moves beyond these considerations, it shows how Emily became so enmeshed in her clients' lives—and they in hers. As client and therapist boundaries are breached, the tension increases. A student is attacked, an activist confronts the attackers, and another student considers suicide; in the process of dealing with these events, Emily learns more about herself, clarifies her true values, and finds unconventional ways to help. These developments are satisfying.

Throughout, the omniscient narrator condenses information from multiple perspectives well. But the book's tone varies: it is sometimes sardonic, and at other times witty. The length of its sentences changes, too, leading to choppy reading, if also to a text that complements the unease and restlessness of its wide cast. The transitions between scenes are smooth, and the book progresses with speed. It addresses to the audience lead to intimacy, as with a description of a football player who is said to be "bigger than whatever you are picturing." But there are also malapropisms and grammatical errors in the book that distract from its involving work.

Wrongs are righted in the moving novel *The College Shrink*, about the turbulence of campus life and the importance of love and compassion.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July 2, 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

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