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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆

The Panoptikon

Steven P. Pody
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“All poetry is personal experience and thought processed through a unique filter of being” poet Steven Paul Pody writes; yet one of his stated goals for this volume of collected works spanning thirty-nine years of his life is to venture beyond the strictly personal to “observe and expose the innermost soul of human commonality.”

Steven P. Pody is a world traveler; he has served in the US Air Force in Alaska the Peace Corps in Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Mauritania toured of much of Asia and lived on an Israeli kibbutz—in all he has visited fifty-one countries and forty-eight states. He considers himself “an observer and liver of life and a scribbler of poetry.” But his poems are more than mere “scribbles”; Pody has crafted a collection that is wide-ranging playful and wise and has done so with considerable skill.

Pody uses iambic pentameter to create verse that skips dances and in many cases demands to be read out loud. He writes for a wide and varied audience; some of the poems would be appreciated by factory workers on their lunch break others are excellent children’s tales and fables and some require background knowledge of history and myth.

The poem “Huh? Just Me” introduces the poet to his readers with statements like “I’m just a simple kind of man / who for sanity’s sake / disbelieves all he can” and “Priorities vary with peoples and time / but I’ll pass on contented if remembered / as kind.” These are down-to-earth man-on-the-street concepts that are easily accessible to the masses but the end of the same poem reaches for deeper levels: “I withdrew from the mainstream so that I won’t drown / I’ve lost many a mask but it’s myself / that I’ve found.” Here the poet asserts that the masks one may wear to function in “the system” must come off for the true self to be revealed.

“The Toad on the Road” is a fable that playfully leads children to look beyond superficial features to the hearts of others; coupling this work with that of a fine illustrator would result in a delightful children’s book.

Poems that require some background include “Panopticon” (this spelling is deliberately different from the book title’s spelling); fortunately the author has included brief explanations at the end of his book to enhance the reader’s understanding: “The panopticon is like a double mirror of one’s own soul” the poet explains; prisoners and guards are on opposite sides observing each other yet are not all in the prison?

Especially engaging are Pody’s poems celebrating the natural world; “Summer Birds” (“Distant ebony specks winging a warm breeze: / Seekers of the fair solstice / here to spawn tomorrow / and gain by season’s abundance”) and “Eyes of the Falcon” (“those eyes those eyes those darkling orbs”/) are fine examples.

Steven Pody has created poetry that examines universal concepts on multiple levels capable of engaging and delighting a wide range of readers.
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