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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ POETRY

Unmasked: Poetry of Self Expression

Paul Kachoris
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Poetry might be the best literary window to the soul, enabling a reader to observe and find meaning in the unmasked fragments, feelings, and contradictions inherent in every person. Paul J. Kachoris has made use of his own poems to analyze and convey important events and experiences from his life in the poetry collection *Unmasked: Poetry of Self Expression*.

Kachoris is a board-certified psychiatrist, so the idea of “confessional” or self-analytical poetry seems like something of a natural progression. He has been in professional practice for forty years, and his poetry spans time, too, with some of the poems included in the collection dating as far back as the 1960s. Kachoris’s stated goal with *Unmasked* is to authentically express his reactions to his life and allow readers to relive significant moments of their own lives along the way.

The book is arranged into nine main sections, or “Facets,” plus a prologue and an epilogue. The Facets are broken up into segments entitled: “Fear, Terror”; “Sadness, Sorrow”; “Anger, Rage”; “Shadow”; “Odyssey”; “Joy, Happiness”; “Ecstasy”; “Transcendence, Spiritual”; and “Agape, Love.”

The text includes images of paintings and masks that enhance the work overall; it is clear that Kachoris has put as much thought into organizing and presenting his poems as he did toward writing them. Several of the pieces themselves have won awards: “Aspen Cathedral” won first prize in the religious category and “My Gary Kitchen” won second prize in the lyric poem category of the Poets & Patrons Chicagoland Poetry Contest in 2006. “Papa’s Old, Black, Leather Suitcase” won third honorable mention in the experimental poem category in Chicagoland’s 2007 contest.

The concepts and imagery of the poems are well conceived. “Mama at the Window” portrays a once-vibrant woman now settled into a tightly closed world, and “Twin Beds” looks lovingly at the bond between two brothers. However, the poetic language in these and most of the other pieces in the book is somewhat lacking, tending more toward the prosaic: “Lying face to face / in the dark / with lots of chatter, laughter; / scaring each other in the dark, / making weird noises; / long droning conversations / putting each other to sleep, / or keeping each other awake for hours.” These lines form a tender, thorough description, but in providing so many raw specifics, there is little room left for the reader’s mind to fill in the blanks. There also isn’t much in the way of poetic technique to be found, aside from the repetition of key words.

Kachoris’s poems can be vivid, but their subjects aren’t always as clearly determined as a familial relationship. Many convey emotion, but they don’t truly deliver emotion. Therefore, readers are continually left with the feeling that the pieces were written for the author’s benefit and not necessarily for an audience.

The poems work well enough in small doses, but over 285 pages, the emotional roller-coaster ride gets a bit exhausting. Still, for readers who enjoy the experience of peeking into someone else’s life, Kachoris bravely lays bare his soul in *Unmasked*.

PETER DABBENE (March 4, 2013)

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