

Wilderness House Literary Review 2/4

Reviewed by Mike Amado

There is a Light that Never Goes Out

Confessions: Selected and Edited

by Llyn Clague

Ibbetson Street Press \$10.00

<http://www.ibbetsonpress.com/>

Ibbetson Street Press, 25 School Street, Somerville, MA 02143

Copyright © 2007 by Llyn Clague

Most enthusiasts believe that Confessional poetry did not die with Sexton and Plath. Others wish it did. But just one simple reading of "Confessions: Selected and Edited" by Llyn Clague, it's at least kicking and screaming its way to the non-fiction workshop to meet Jack Kevorkian. If "Confessions:" is what "Accessible" and "Universal" poetry should be, Then the poetry world is lost in space.

"Confessions" surpasses being wordy. It's unclear if these "pieces" are poems or undefined journal entries rearranged in what Mr. Clague must consider "Form" - a "Form" that makes even free verse scratch its head. I take a direct quote from the Submission Guidelines from Pemmican Magazine, as of spring 2007: "Journaling prose arbitrarily arranged into line breaks does not a poem make".

After the second reading of "Confessions", I found it hard to determine if I'm reading prose or poetry, seeing that Mr. Clague falls short of both genres. Knowing that "Confessions" was published by Ibbetson Street Press, I automatically expected more. With its highly confusing line breaks, commonplace imagery, "Confessions" plays like a journal tucked in the backpack of a pre-teen Goth kid. This is NOT to derogate pre-teen Goth kids, whom, I'm sure can rival and exceed most of what's offered by Mr. Clague. Such as:

"My ego is a membrane filled
-don't laugh - with air." . . .

"My very body heat
excites the air - and whoosh!
My ego expands, and expands, and -
I'm a hot-air balloon

Wilderness House Literary Review 2/4

drifting on the wind
above an earth of autumn orange."

In the literary world, there is the unspoken rule of "don't give the reader everything". In other words, give the reader enough so they can piece everything together. But something's missing in the words of Mr. Clague's "Confessions". Maybe all the power was "selected and edited" out. I'm also scared to think of how many re-rights (if any) the manuscript endured. More stunning language thought evoking sincerity and spirit-wrenching emotion could easily be culled from a conversation on a train with a stranger.

Underneath it all is an actual story of a man trying to piece together himself. There are many facets to the story that I don't relate to, however, (such as cocktail parties and Yorkshire Pudding). Nonetheless, this review is NOT to judge the experience of the author, but only to remark on the artistic caliber. The only part I found to be a tad redeeming is within chapter 5, "Career", when, the unfriendly act of being "eliminated" from a job befalls the speaker:

"My career - for the rest / of its tiny eternity -
downhill from here? / No more the big bucks,
windows, titles, perks? / Months, maybe years,
sucking up to the headhunters, / grinning at young squirts
with hire power / and walking away empty?
Me scared? / Scream my lungs out, / throw a fit,
beg for mercy? / Not a chance. I'm strong.
I can take it / like a man. I'm a big boy. Look -
my hands are as steady / as the hands of a cadaver."

Seeing the potential in this section, with its it raw intensity, it could've been written with more sensitized fervor. Reading about someone loosing their job and financial livelihood should make a reader want to get pissed off and tip over a desk, not fall asleep. I will end this review with a verse from the last chapter, Ch. 6 "Recovery" where the speaker, recovering from alcoholism reaches a sort of conclusion:

"Struggling to find God
above, I found only sky,

Wilderness House Literary Review 2/4

blue, gray, blue-black with thunder.
Struggling to find him
in myself, I found only a self,
fragile, fearful, doubting."

Reader, you decide.

Mike Amado is a reviewer for the Ibbetson Street Blog, a Bagelbard, and a performance poet from Plymouth, Massachusetts. Noted for performing lyrical tomes attuned to the social and the spiritual. Amado has featured at over ten various venues in the Massachusetts and Rhode Island areas. His first book is entitled "Poems: Unearthed from Ashes"