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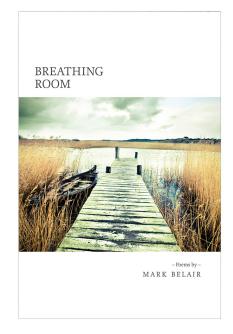
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BOOK REVIEWS

Mark Belair Ruth Lepson Scott Ruescher

BOOK REVIEW



Aldrich Press ISBN # 9780692434635 114 pages

\$17.00

Purchase this book from: Aldrich Press

Breathing Room by Mark Belair offers ample space and time for readers to move from the concrete realm of the physical world to an expansive experience of abstraction and breadth.

Small visual details like "buttery light" on an old building in the city, "empty pews tinted by stained glass," a flock of gray pigeons lofting toward "leaden skies" supply an exceptional aesthetic experience of the world our eyes can see. Consider, for example, this excerpt from "Once a Skyscraper."

Down a dusk-dark canyon of glass-skinned skyscrapers abides an old, tiered building that alone takes a buttery light slicing in from the wet, its decorative masonry front glowing with a warmth the slim, young structures, crowding it disdain—they're hard-built for cold speed—

As beautiful as the preceding image is, the poems in this collection don't just spring from the sense of sight. They have feeling and muscle, too. One poem titled "Wrestling," for example, captures what a boy in junior high school experiences when he separates from his opponent.

It was only junior high school but I wrestled on the team in fierce, taut, exhilarating matches that, once decided, my opponent and I would separate from with a sudden sense of how light freed bodies could feel, a lightness we kept until we returned to our respective benches and sat and lost the loss of the other's weight and clutch and pull and regained our own remembered weight.

The book is divided into fourteen sections which seem to be autobiographical, though they don't so much tell the story of the poet as they do the experience of all humans. Each section bears a title that begins with the words Breathing Room. For instance, sections include Breathing Room To Let Things Take Their Natural Course; Breathing Room To Let Them Grow; Breathing Room To Ponder Beliefs; Breathing Room To Imagine. Each poem offers room to reflect on the world we find ourselves in: our cityscapes, country settings and elusive realms of belief.

For the poet Mark Belair, the world within which we are immersed offers prompts for thought and word. He captures this process and shows it to us in the poem called "Steps," which is included in the section titled Breathing Room to Imagine.

Basement steps drop down from the sunny sidewalk

I tread as something dark

rises up their brick wall,

something on a determined

collision course with me,

something accelerating

as if to escape the obscure

life it's been living down there so

startling me until

I see that it's my shadow

rising like the prompt

for a poem: strange and unexpected

yet, upon arrival, matching me.

I highly recommend *Breathing Room* by Mark Belair. It will sustain you in the beautiful, muscled, ethereal experience of life on earth.

— Mary Ann Sullivan May 1, 2016

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