

## NORTH CAROLINA *Disability Literature*

### More Disability Experiences and Voices

by Casey Kayser, Guest Feature Editor

I am delighted to present the special feature section of the *North Carolina Literary Review's* 2024 spring online issue on North Carolina Disability Literature. We are thrilled that we have received so much content related to our special feature sections that we could spread it out to *NCLR's* now four annual issues. It is wonderful to see that this theme has engaged so many writers and artists from North Carolina as well as those writing about their work.

The section begins with a poem by Morrow Dowdle, "The Trick to Losing Your Vision," which was a finalist for our 2023 James Applewhite Poetry Prize. The speaker of this poem uses the concept of a magic trick as a metaphor for their visual impairment, interweaving vivid images like scarves pulled from a fist, white rabbits, and flying doves with the speaker's experiences with their vision. The poem's themes are enriched by Donna Stubbs's mixed media piece *Eigengrau*, which is German for intrinsic grey, dark light, or brain grey, the color that many people report seeing in the absence of light, the color Stubbs perceives in the lower half of her right eye due to an optic nerve stroke she suffered several years ago, and this piece represents the absence of light and the perception of light and color in the mind's eye. Stubbs's art also appears on this issue's cover.

Next, in "Fairy Dust and Knives," a finalist for our 2023 Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize, heather liz shares the process of watching her mother decline due to Alzheimer's, transforming from a woman who had always smelled like sweet, rose-scented perfume to one who smelled like the "flesh, bland food, and cleaning chemicals" odor at the care facility. The author explores how objects

like pocket knives and perfume bottles and the scents associated with them and their owners connect us to loved ones even after their deaths. The piece is punctuated with art by Susan C. Fecho; her two pieces, *Shadow in the Corner* and *Escape*, have both appeared in exhibits focusing on mental health awareness.

Glenis Redmond's poem "Against My Religion," a semifinalist for the 2023 James Applewhite Poetry Prize, is dedicated to African American entertainer Clayton "Peg Leg" Bates (1907–1998), and it is his voice that narrates the poem. Bates loved to dance but lost his leg in a cotton mill accident at the age of twelve; the wooden prosthetic leg his uncle made for him allowed him to keep dancing. He made a remarkable career out of his passion – dancing on Broadway, appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* twenty times, and even performing for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England. The poem celebrates dancing as a religious experience and offering to God that he pursued despite his Baptist mother's admonitions about dancing. Appearing alongside the poem is artist ransome's *Come Sunday, You Can't Hide* in acrylic and collage, echoing the spiritual themes in Redmond's poem.

The books reviewed in this issue include, first, Jimmy Dean Smith's review of Ron Rash's 2023 novel *The Caretaker*, which he calls Rash's "finest novel." Several of the characters in the book live with injuries and trauma suffered in war and the disfiguring effects of childhood polio, a reminder of the thin line between life and death. Fragility also extends to place in the book, Smith notes, since *Blowing Rock*, the rural North Carolina setting of the novel, is in the midst of change in the middle of the twentieth century, and it is a complex place for

many of the characters: it is home but also a site of pain and ostracization.

Next, Julia Nunnally Duncan reviews Mary Ricketson's collection of poetry, *Stutters: A Book of Hope* (2023). Duncan outlines each of the five sections of the book, which span the poet's life from age eight to seventy-five, highlighting notable poems. As Duncan details, many of the poems focus on the author's experiences living with and communicating with a stutter, both personally and professionally. While the dark shadows of past trauma and struggles lurk within many of the poems, the ultimate message is one of hope and affirmation, Duncan says.

To close out the section, Hannah Dela Cruz Abrams reviews Ina Cariño's collection of poetry *Feast* (2023). Abrams highlights how Cariño draws on English and the languages of the Philippines to create meaningful, vivid connections between food and the senses. Cariño uses the language of food and the concepts of hunger and nourishment, Abrams explains, to explore themes related to pain and healing, home and family, and self-discovery.

I would like to thank *NCLR* Editor Margaret Bauer for her guidance throughout this two-year journey of collecting and preparing work for the 2024 special feature sections, and express my appreciation to the *NCLR* editorial staff for their efforts as well. It has been an honor to serve as Guest Editor for the 2024 special feature sections and to work with all of the staff and contributors who have helped shape them. We are so glad to have this opportunity to honor the voices and experiences of people with disabilities.

Next up: the print issue, due out this summer. [Subscribe today](#) to receive it. ■

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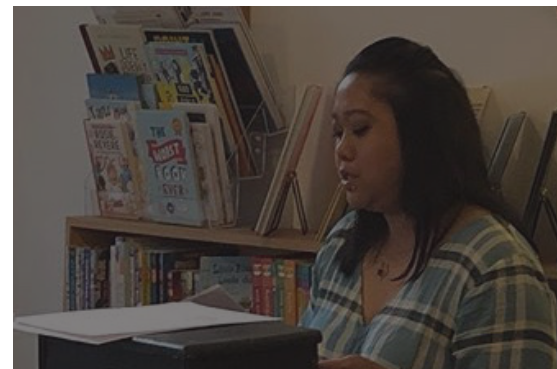
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