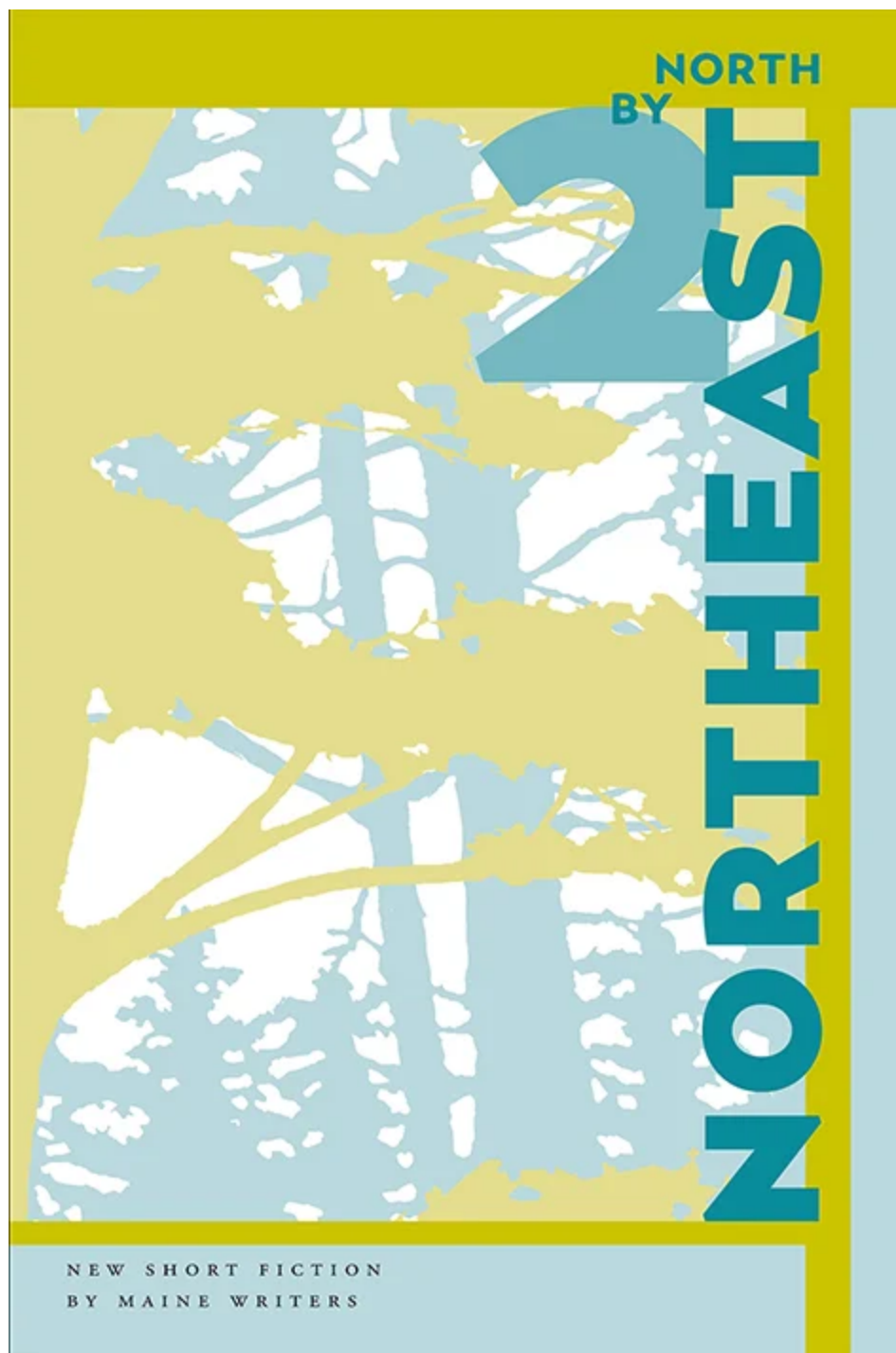


Book review: An absorbing new anthology brings together Maine writers familiar and not

pressherald.com/2022/03/20/an-absorbing-new-anthology-brings-together-maine-writers-familiar-and-not/

By Joan Silverman

March 20, 2022



The first thing one notices about “North by Northeast 2,” an anthology of new short fiction by Maine writers, is that its rendering of the Pine Tree State is decidedly not the Chamber of Commerce version. This is neither scenic nor tourist Maine, all fog and mist, sails billowing in

the wind. The view from these pages is darker, more variegated, thus richer and more true to life.

Even the prisoners who turn up on these pages aren't standard issue. In the case of Nicole d'Entremont's "Fives," the prisoner at hand is newly released, on his first night out. In Robert Diamante's "Never Buy a Used Cat," the prisoner, an escapee, hides in a basement, dispensing dating advice to a homeowner.

Local review



“North by Northeast 2: New Short Fiction by Maine Writers”

Edited by Agnes Bushell

209 pages, paperback. Littoral Books. \$22

“North by Northeast 2” is a sequel to the 2019 volume of the same name, from Portland-based indie publisher Littoral Press. This second go-round resembles the first in some key ways: Like a buffet, this anthology of 16 stories features an array of offerings – some savory, some sweet, with a range of spiciness. If a particular story doesn't appeal to your taste, just turn the page – others will.

More than half of the authors from the earlier volume make return appearances here; some of their entries, though freestanding, take the same characters to the next level. Among the returning authors are Jodi Paloni, with “An End to It,” a fierce tale of homegrown loss, and Joshua Bodwell, whose story, “We Are the Tide,” follows Gooch, a Cape Porpoise barkeep, whose character and empathy come to be tested.

Other returning authors include Eleanor Morse, with “Come Hell or High Water,” whose narrator reflects on the horrors next door when she was a child, and Emily Jane Young, whose “Peridot/Antidote” serves up a charming tale of kids' wild imaginings. It's no mistake

that these two disparate and excellent stories with child protagonists sit back to back, one a reprieve from the other.

Among the things one wants from a book of this ilk is an entrée to new names, to authors who may be unfamiliar to many readers. The book delivers admirably on that front. One of the newcomers to the series is Anne Elliott whose wistful travelogue, “The Anatolian Girl,” features an American couple as they visit shops in Istanbul and observe the local mores. As well, Reza Jalali offers “The Shah of America,” a tale of an immigrant’s misguided passion and a family’s dedication.

It’s always a delight to happen upon a great opening line, which Brett Willis supplies in his story, “Briar Lake”: “Briar Lake looked less like an amusement park than a field where various rides had been sent to convalesce.” Nor does the ensuing story disappoint.

Of course the pandemic gets more than a passing mention in this book, from the introduction by publisher and editor Agnes Bushell to references in the stories themselves. Perhaps prescient, the piece, “Love in the Time of Covid-19,” by Annie Seikonia, foreshadows a theme that’s likely to occupy more than a few upcoming works of fiction.

“North by Northeast 2” takes its mission to heart, gathering some of Maine’s established and emerging talents, and giving them room to play. At a time when magazines that showcase short fiction are in sharp decline, such anthologies fill a crucial gap.

Joan Silverman writes op-eds, essays and book reviews. Her work has appeared in many publications including The Christian Science Monitor, Chicago Tribune and Dallas Morning News. She is the author of “Someday This Will Fit,” a collection of linked essays.

© 2022