



A Tribute to My Son

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A Tribute to My Son is a prose-poetic exercise in grieving that attempts to explain the unexplainable.

Samina Muhammad's *A Tribute to My Son* is a mother's plaintive lament, carried across poems and short essays that serve as a scrapbook of grief bound together by strong faith.

The collection is emotionally weighty, thanks to the rawness of the narrator's grief. Sometimes the tone is angry, at other times it is depressed, and often it is religious. This blend of emotions makes for difficult reading.

The narrator's Islamic faith comes through in the poems, where it functions to provide solace in the wake of her tragedy, and through a series of brief essays at the end of the book that explain and explore parts of the author's spirituality.

Strong poetic techniques, including evocative metaphors, sometimes break through this emotional density, providing a break of light into the darkness and allowing for outsider connection to the very personal subject matter. In "His Ring," Muhammad writes, "I want to avoid the chase and stay the same / I want to avoid the race and stay that tame." There's a wonderful humanness to such expressions, which capture the twin urges of grief to seek some new normal and to cling to the past.

Similarly, "I Miss You Baby" reflects familiar aspects of loss: "Beauty of my world and the life's brook is gone / It's like the word from my favorite book is gone." The missing word is a strong image, mirroring the way that, during grief, people are let go of bit by bit rather than all at once.

Poems evolve as the work progresses, which very effectively mirrors how grief unfolds. Early poems struggle to put phrases together, while later poems are clearer, as with "Please Father":

*Please father your child is waiting for you
peace be upon you
Please father
your child is breaking without you
peace be upon you.*

Still later poems explore deeper spiritual truths and provide wonderfully challenging images and ideas. Short essays, most not more than a few paragraphs long, explore topics like djinns and life after death. In form, they are more approachable and easier to understand than the work's poetry.

Poems are written in a stream-of-consciousness style and have consistent grammatical problems, primarily with verb and subject agreement. Some images and metaphors are hard to understand.

A Tribute to My Son is an exercise in grieving that attempts to explain the unexplainable, merging personal loss with a

spiritual focus.

JEREMIAH ROOD (September 26, 2017)

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