ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

All that Rhymes with Love: A Collection of Evocative Poetry
Alan Gilbert
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Two Stars (out of Five)

Leo Tolstoy wrote, “All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love.” Love is the most basic human emotion, and the most essential human connection. This collection of poems touches on many different forms of love: romantic love, lost love, parental love, and more. It also offers playfulness and humor, but more often than not the poems are childish and ineffective.

Most of the pieces rhyme, which works well when they are dealing with lighter subject matter, but more serious themes are belittled by the predictable rhymes and simplistic meter. The poet’s word choices tend toward cliché, which makes it a chore to extract the emotional meaning from the verses.

For instance, the effectiveness of “Love Speaks” is weakened by the rhymes and meter: “Love speaks and those who listen / Are helpless to resist. / It tells of what their [sic] missing / Those who never have been kissed.” Gilbert is trying to encourage his readers to listen carefully to their lives, just in case they are surprised by an unexpected whisper of love. The doggerel style of the verse reduces the impact of this wonderful sentiment.

In another poem, “Just Two Years,” the speaker receives a medical diagnosis: “‘It’s cancer I’m afraid’ she said / Sitting at the foot of the bed. / ‘It’s in your bones and so you see / In two years you will cease to be.’ / Just two years.” Such a weighty topic deserves a weighty treatment, not such lightweight greeting-card fluttery.

However, the rhymes do much to contribute to the whimsy in “Never drop a hint. They are fragile!” This clever poem comically discusses various idioms in their literal sense: “I was going to beat the carpet / But it’s very good at chess. / So I went outside and caught a bus / It was heavy I confess.”

The poet attended the West of England School and St. Loye’s College in Exter, and has a degree in psychology and art from the Open University. He would do well to take a refresher course in punctuation and spelling, especially those tricky homonyms, as he frequently misuses

“there,” “their,” and “they’re,” as well as “your” and “you’re,” and other commonly confused words.

Because the light-hearted poems are the best parts of this collection, Gilbert might succeed at writing verse for children, but mature readers will have trouble appreciating the love expressed in this book.

Karen McCarthy