ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Celebrations
David J. Murray
iUniverse
978-1-4401-7707-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Often, to celebrate life, one must first feel it slip from one's fingers. After all, to know what light is, one must know darkness. This is the arc of David J. Murray's collection of poems, *Celebrations*. Here, the speaker's relationship with his wife is threatened by lust for another woman. The ebb and flow of marriage is chronicled through verse.

The sonnet form is a solid choice for these poems. Historically, this form was used to discuss found and lost love. Thus, for a speaker waxing poetic about struggling with love and lust, the sonnet is strangely perfect.

One of the key strengths of this collection is the journey the poet takes us on. The first section of the collection is devoted to the infidelities that occur in the speaker's imagination. The honesty of these poems is infectious. Then just as quickly as the adulterous thoughts come, they leave so the poet can focus, in the book's second section, on celebrating his wife before her untimely passing.

Using a stylistic approach dubbed "cosmopolitan formalism," these poems are meant to appeal to all people, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or background. The poems depict images that could be seen nearly anywhere in the world—flowers that bloom and stars that align. However, the poet could have zeroed in more squarely on some of the poems' narratives or images. Often, the images are so universal that they lack specificity, and this dulls the edge of the subject matter. This universal quality often dulls the edge of this speaker's anguish. The poet does speak of his "feeling straight and clean," but the actual details of the relationships are not unfurled. Little is known about the potential mistress or the loyal wife.

Each of the poems is tight, but many of them sound and read the same, and the “quiet longing” the poem’s speaker discusses stretches on for too long. Instead of twelve poems discussing the inner struggle the protagonist has, the poet may have only needed half. Still, the repetitive nature of the poems does serve a purpose. The reader becomes as trapped in this ping-pong game of love as the speaker.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. Here, love lasts beyond temptation and even beyond death. The true celebration of this book is what remains, despite the events of the world.