



Country Soul & Caravan Magic: Un Séjour à Strasbourg

R. R. Pravin

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There is a poetic expression here for anyone who has ever fallen in love—who has pined for someone, who has loved without being loved back, who has been cheated on, or who has felt confused in love.

R. R. Pravin's poetry collection *Country Soul and Caravan Magic* is syrup sweet in its musings on love and heartbreak.

Love found, love lost, and love's overwhelming power are the basis of the collection, which uses heavy symbology to convey its messages. Heartbreak is like a broken chandelier or a shattered mirror, in an appeal to standard tropes.

Free-form poems eschew rhyming. Steady cadences and pleasant rhythms run throughout, as does dramatic language, as in "Teenage Heartbreak":

*I listened to the sounds
Of a storm that never ends
I guess love is a stormy sea
And I was a shipwreck
In the making.*

Love is consistently presented as both beautiful and dangerous, fulfilling and powerful enough to sustain or destroy. Line breaks are the most successful means of emphasis here, as in "Breaking Point," where each pause captures the poem's general uncertainty:

*I can't even drive
Without stopping
To draw the frosted windows down
To get a clearer vision of where
All of this is heading.*

Still, these choices do not come across as particularly distinctive. The book's metaphors and similes are frequent and unsurprising: country life is quaint and uncomplicated, violins symbolize sadness and sorrow, and trams and trains are paralleled to the acts of leaving, escape, and abandonment. Because they do not move beyond what is familiar, the images become stagnant.

Poems are rife with personification; "walls whisper" and "love plays." Romantic love is the main focus, though parental love also comes into play in poems like "Piano," which takes abandonment into the family realm.

There is a poetic expression here for anyone who has ever fallen in love—has pined for someone, has loved without being loved back, has been cheated on, or has felt confused in love. As universal as they are, though, the poems do not achieve much depth, and they quickly come to feel predictable. A few poems, like “The Merchant of Paris,” are more subtle in their turns; these stand out most.

Many lines have a country music lyrical feel; they yearn for a simpler time and are not distracted by modernity. Personal portraits are peppered throughout the book with quotes about love and life; these needlessly pull attention away from the poetry.

The love poems of *Country Soul and Caravan Magic* are earnestly collected for all those who, like its speakers, are simply in love with love.

KATIE ASHER (March 30, 2018)

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