ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Devils or Angels: (the Collection)
Dan Roberson
iUniverse
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The struggle between good and evil has long fascinated humankind. With *Devils or Angels*, Dan Roberson enters the fray, confronting questions about absolute evil and absolute good. While this book breaks no new ground, it offers straightforward narratives about relationships between men and women and the ways in which those relationships can bring out the best and worst in people.

A retiree, Roberson grew up in Oklahoma immersed in the works of Poe, Bradbury, and Asimov. His book (debut) contains poems and two short stories. The cover is attractive, with a man and a woman in black against a white background, and a fiery red adds a punch of color to the word "Devils." The layout is fairly traditional, except for the fact that the poems and stories are intertwined. The language is clear, encouraging the reader to consider the classification of people as good or evil. Is a man who has an affair, then returns to his wife in order to preserve his family, an angel or a demon? Is a woman who has a one-night stand that reawakens a capacity for love in her partner an angel or a demon? The final story contains a series of scenes unsuitable for children under the age of eighteen: a woman is gang-raped, and she seeks revenge against her perpetrators. Here Roberson questions whether revenge is justifiable. Is there such thing as a justifiable homicide? Would revenge be justice or another evil act?

Each poem begins with two rhymed couplets that introduce its central theme, as in "The Preacher and the Music Director's Wife":

"When your ego begins to fill the air, / It can build and grow beyond repair. / All the haughty things you say and do / May come back and destroy you."

The rhyme and its sentiments are not particularly sophisticated, and the explanations are not necessary for understanding the poet's intentions. The language in this example, as in the rest of the book, lacks originality and metaphor. The characters lack depth, as do the situations. Overall, in *Devils or Angels*, there is little to excite readers in terms of stylistic or linguistic innovation.

Camille-Yvette Welsch