

## Different Coins in the Fountain: Volume I of II

**Carlos V. Cornejo**

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*Evocative realism abounds in this imaginative collection of short stories.*

Like snapshots of incidents and escapades in a scrapbook, this collection of more than fifty imaginative vignettes brings to life a diverse cast of characters. *Different Coins in the Fountain*, the first of two volumes of short fiction by Carlos V. Cornejo, explores the unanticipated angle of ordinary experience and delves into the unfamiliar realm of eccentric behavior.

Alternating between first- and third-person narrative, while gallivanting into a variety of situations, the book does not adhere to a theme. Perhaps, as the title suggests, this compilation is not intended to have an underlying bond, but it takes off in many directions without a guiding motive. A rapid-fire work that appears to be in the developmental stage of production due to a need for more proofreading, this book offers much in innovative potential—for some of these slices of life are enlightening.

The font is not consistent, with a few stories set in boldface type for no apparent reason. Time-intensive scrutiny and careful content editing would enhance this promising work, which tends to “tell” rather than “show” the progression of events, leaving some stories without a needed sense of immediacy.

Even in pieces that conclude with definable purpose, the endings are somewhat oblique, leaving one to wonder whether the intent was to amuse, provoke, or close the story with simplicity. Dangling dialogue or ambiguous remarks frequently wrap up these tales: “She didn’t comment, but asked herself, ‘How can that be?’” Or, “All possessions were taken away, and now the land returned to be a colorless landscape.”

Sparks of creative humor, especially in wacky descriptive passages, may be the book’s strongest quality: “Grandpa told the story of a booby hatch inmate who acted as if he were a St. Bernard dog. He carried a water bottle around his neck in case he had to rescue skiers...The water bottle was thought to contain brandy...Being a dog, he ate in his dish that was placed on the floor. He didn’t use hands. He barked when he liked what he ate, and used his long tongue to clean his face.”

Rather than discussing the contents of this collection, the blurb on the back cover discloses why the stories were written and how they are to be read, along with a rather lengthy biographical sketch on the author. The cover depicts a blue bubbling fountain that seems to accurately reflect the lively nature of the work.

Cornejo holds two master of arts degrees from San Francisco State University. His extensive travels to Europe and Asia, as well as excursions in North America, have likely contributed to the evocative realism found throughout this fiction debut. Written for aficionados of the experimental journey, opposed to the predetermined destination, the stories take unexpected turns, often puzzling, yet always eliciting a question that may need greater contemplation.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (February 18, 2014)

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