Clarion Review

General

Gert's Book of Knowledge
P.J. Thomas
CreateSpace
978-1-4537-6428-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Gert's Book of Knowledge opens with a wonderful attention grabber: "After Gert, I went back to men. Well, there was a brief stint with a beautiful hand cream model, but it was Gert who imbued me with interest." In fact, P. J. Thomas's second novel is peppered with dozens of intriguing passages, but they fail to redeem the weaknesses of the book. The author's gift for piquing interest from one chapter to the next is exemplary, but her aptitude for believable characterization is poor.

Johnny, the book's gentle and ironic narrator, was a young university student when he met Gert, a charismatic and brilliant university lecturer, and many years of unrequited love between the two commenced. Three years after becoming Johnny's muse, Gert suffers a breakdown and falls into a months-long coma in a mental hospital. Following a course of electro-convulsive therapy, she makes a very strange recovery. Compelled by a visiting angel to write a book of knowledge, with Johnny as the scribe, Gert leaves the hospital, and begins her project. The author's sometimes awkward effort to make Gert both hilarious and wise dominates the next eighty-eight pages.

Gert's book—an odd soup of aphorisms, observations, and other products of Gert's debatable sanity—is published to mixed reviews. Though panned by academia, it is lauded by fringe groups and others, including four eccentric brothers whose Vancouver ranch is managed by a magical cat named Pidgy Tutu. The brothers invite Gert to lead their church.

Under the tutelage of Gert and Pidgy Tutu, the Starlight Church "served up a humble pie of feel-good ideologies, Maslow's Humanism and the ancient New Age knowledge." Gert and the cat become so popular that a warehouse in Toronto was procured for expansion of their teachings. A crack cocaine addict, Eughan, is hired as the building's caretaker, and soon he and Gert are a couple. Millions of dollars are made and another cat joins the team, but plans to

extend Gert's "peace, love and alfalfa sprouts" teachings to Europe is a catalyst for crisis. Gert leaves the church with Eughan, gives her money away, works in soup kitchens, and finds herself homeless. Meanwhile, Johnny goes into the media production business, becomes rich, and pines for Gert.

And the saga doesn't end there. Eughan dies, Gert becomes a street eccentric, develops a paranoid fear of Johnny, goes berserk on a plane, and winds up in the hospital again. Gert is released, takes over the church again, writes another book, marries, and on and on the story goes.

Gert's Book of Knowledge is packed with entertaining stuff. For those who like a manic, funky read, this will satisfy.

Patty Sutherland