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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ POETRY

Memories, Thoughts, and Dreams

Guy Bala
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Guy Bala's *Memories, Thoughts, and Dreams* features twenty-eight poems celebrating common aspects of nature and grieving the end of a romantic relationship. Using symbolic elements such as seasons, flowers, beauty, and the ephemeral—from a falling snowflake to the wind's passage—the author recalls love and loss in plainspoken terms. Arranged in an order that charts a transition from tranquility, in "Mountain Sojourns," the opening poem, to love and then estrangement, in "Alone," each poem discloses its topic first through its title and then offers such direct revelation that often leaves the reader wishing that Bala had applied Emily Dickinson's oblique "tell it slant" philosophy.

Readers are amply prepared for Bala's forthright approach. Enthusiasm for poetry as self-expression emerges in the author's introductory note, the inclusion of which, while atypical for traditional, single-author volumes, contextualizes an aesthetic that favors transparency over gradations and employs emotive abstraction. Here, souls embrace and are immortal. Existence is questioned in the absence of the loved one. The relationship depicted, while sincere, relies on familiar, comforting ideas and tense contradictions: "Together with you /… I am complete"; "I love you with all my heart / Yet / I am afraid to love. The author also relishes techniques found in song lyrics, such as repetition, most evident in poems that include "Loving You" and a later companion, "I Loved You."

Bala delights in the pastoral—from snow "swirling / Twirling" to "bright and luminous" stars, "fluttering leaves" to "dew-covered grass"—as a means for rendering experience. Such faithful adherence to actualities, however, leaves less room for readers to imagine these and other moments with a fresh eye. The tendency toward simplicity may appeal to general readers who are new to poetry, or poetry readers who value immediacy, brevity, swiftness, and fluid transitions.

True to its title, this is a highly personal endeavor, composed with curious typographical choices, from the cursive interior that evokes the intimacy of handwritten correspondence to the drop shadow letters against a gold-toned seascape on the cover. And though the book dwells in universality rather than pinpointed specificity, it is a testament to selfhood confronting nearly engulfing pain, yet with few regrets for having braved the encounter.
KAREN RIGBY (November 1, 2012)

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