Clarion Review

Poetry

Modern Poetry
Lloyd Constantine
Violet Honasan, illustrator
Xlibris
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The title of *Modern Poetry* suggests a nod to a major movement of the twentieth century, one that forever changed the landscape of poetry, as it was developed by legends like Eliot, Stevens, Pound, Stein, and others. Unfortunately, the book's title does not represent its contents. With its studied rhyme and use of persona poems, this collection's run-of-the-mill photographs, illustrations, and poems owe more to the nineteenth century than to the twentieth.

Lloyd Constantine, a pseudonym for Heron Lloyd Tait, grew up in Jamaica. He had careers in life insurance and engineering before working in the transit business in Canada. Today, he runs a home business about which he blogs. He is also a vocal advocate for self-publishing.

Modern Poetry follows the path of many self-published books, with sections devoted to love and family, spiritual life, political opinions, nature, travel, and everyday observations. The poems rely on conventional wisdom—nature is eternal, trees are wise, the eyes are the window to the soul—to convey emotion. Very little is done to make the language or the lyric images new for the reader. Trees remain as they ever were, and most of nature is viewed in terms of its benefit to man. In the "Observations" section, Constantine includes a poem titled "Cars." He watches the street from his office: "Blue cars, white cars, cars with paint aglow. / Sleek cars, thick cars, cars with tires for snow." The list continues, reading like a not particularly exciting children's book, and it is accompanied by a drawing of cars on a highway, stopped near a burning car. The ambition of the poetry is manifest in moments like this.

Constantine's language is erratic, moving between a patois in one poem to archaic inverted syntax in another. He often sacrifices music to rhyme, wedging in words that break up the flow of sound. Occasionally, the poems offer a bit more—a bit of whimsy and imagination,

or a lovely image, as is the case in “Counting Sheep”: “sleep came so easily / as easily as the air recedes / from between the weary / head and the worn linen.” This moment has wonderful sound work with the assonance and consonance at play, and the image is engaging. In “Twinkle, Twinkle,” a girl imagines jewelers flying up into the night sky in gas balloons to release gold and silver dust to the heavens. It is a nice image of whimsy accompanied by a charming illustration.

The tone changes in poems like “Troubled,” which looks at adult relationships—in this case, a wife unwilling to sleep nude with her husband. The poem tackles a tense moment in a marriage. This overall uncertainty about theme and direction is part of the book’s problem. The poems are gathered by subject, but they don’t tell a cohesive story. The order in which the poems are read will have little impact on the experience of the reader.

Ultimately, *Modern Poetry* does not stand as a cohesive volume of literary merit.

Camille-Yvette Welsch