**Clarion Review**

Poetry

**My Gift of Poetry**
Angelique Michelle Townsend
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Even in the darkest hour, there is something to honor. This is the mantra of Angelique Michelle Townsend's poetry collection, *My Gift of Poetry*. The earnest pieces in this book honor the lessons and gifts of God. Like personal prayers put to verse, the poems remind readers life is a gift and that in all dark periods are lessons and tests.

Townsend's main message is that God's gifts can be found everywhere. In "Crack," she explains addiction can "leave you broke and feeling sad." This piece reads like a prayer, one that applies equally to individuals struggling with drug use and communities dealing with the effects of illegal drug activities. The opening of the poem relates drug use to slavery: "Something you want and crave, / by putting chains on your body like being a slave." Such creative word choices and metaphors effectively explain the choke-like hold of addiction.

Another standout poem is Townsend's celebration of the life and music of Stevie Wonder. The form and word play of "A Wonder's Story" is unlike any other in the collection. This experimental piece is not divided into line breaks. Instead, it is a long prose poem that uses the titles and key lyrics from Wonder's most famous songs. Moving between referencing the songs and the poet's relationships and connection to Wonder's words, it reads like a musical collage.

Most of the poems are dedicated to specific people or groups of people: Townsend's first love, Jesus, and those who are hurting. Though some of the dedications do not seem needed, there are a few notable exceptions. "Boys Vs Men" is introduced with a meaningful quotation from Corinthians 13:11, which contributes to the poem's message: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, / I thought as a child: but when I became a man, / I put away childish things." This opening prepares the reader for the comparison poem while adding a subtle layer of meaning.

*My Gift of Poetry* is not shy when it comes to its subject matter. Townsend talks bluntly about what she has learned from love lost and won, emotional journeys through pain, and her relationship with Jesus. Her writing speaks to poetry lovers looking for earnest inspiration and for the religious interested in a new way to celebrate the gifts of God—life, love, and faith.

*Lisa Bower*