



Peony in Adoration: Reflections at the Feet of Jesus

Shannon Kurtz

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Unlike long form prose, poetry demands that the eyes slow and the mind calms, engaging beyond content and plot and instead at the level of diction, sound, and rhythm. Kurtz, whose poetry has appeared in the *St. Linus Review*, asks of her readers not only patience but genuine spiritual reflection, having published this collection of personal verse seemingly to mark her return to the Catholic faith after twenty years as an Evangelical Protestant.

Divided into sections that are pointedly related to the creation, character, mother, gospel, passion, presence, servants, healing, and gifts of Jesus Christ, the book's design culminates in blank pages meant for readers to pen their private responses to encountered themes and imagery. Each chapter is headed by a Bible verse, and some are sprinkled throughout, which, instead of detracting from Kurtz's writing, reinforce the purpose of this verse as not merely personal pleasure and release but as "poem-prayers" meant to assist the author and readers in private conversations on topics of faith.

Kurtz displays some variety in style through the incorporation of haiku, free verse, journaling, and prose poems, but relies heavily—indeed too heavily—on structured rhyme. While rhymed verse has the potential to create momentum and energy, the integrity of the poems is ultimately compromised by the limitations of the form. One example lies in the forced rhyme in parts of "The Big Lie": "For every evil, / There is the big why: / God doesn't care, / The devil's big lie. / ... Yet when your prayers are so deep / They come forth as sighs / Your tears touch Me deeply, / I do more than stand by."

The poems are most successful when composed in free verse, though even then they do not escape prevalent and repetitive diction, such as the prose poem "Living Water" or the short "Airport Christmas." With sparse description and flowing yet purposefully disturbed rhythm, Kurtz evokes the eyes' movement from one side of an airport lounge to another, revealing her observatory skill: "Great undulating desert / Asphalt mirage, no heat. / Great migrating birds / Just touching down / No resting, no nest. / Disembarked throngs / March past counterfeit trees."

Despite some barriers and flaws, Kurtz's sincere, lucid writing and unwavering focus on specific spiritual ruminations will undoubtedly resonate with others of her faith. After all her aim here is not only to adore Jesus, but to inspire readers' deepened relationship with divinity.

CHRISTINE THOMAS (November 5, 2007)

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