ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Places in the Heart
Florence V. Gilmore-Kersee
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Poems reflect unique experience of author, who has seen much in her life.

Writing poetry is, in some ways, an intimate expression of inner thoughts and feelings. In her poetry collection *Places in the Heart*, Florence V. Gilmore-Kersee shares the fruits of her own experience of a long life.

Writing about friends, enemies, longing for love, and the trials of life, Gilmore-Kersee's poetic voice is that of a conversationalist, and her words are often those of the vernacular. This approach can provide folksy, homespun wisdom or, less enjoyably, the simple, not-always-relevant stories and opinions of an elder relative at the holiday dinner table.

Sometimes her voice has an affecting honesty, as in the simply titled poem "Life": "Life has a way of interfering / In things you got just right / When your habits are comfortable / Makes looking at the future a delight." But elsewhere, a lack of attention to meter (and grammar) spoils the sense of poetry and comes across more like a list of complaints, advice, or a rambling philosophy—perhaps well thought out, but imperfectly expressed, as in "To Let Go": "To let go is not to arrange outcomes / But to allow others to affect their own destiny's."

Gilmore-Kersee makes use of repeated beginnings and endings, as well as end rhymes, but she doesn't offer much in the way of formal poetic forms or techniques. There is some breadth of content in *Places in the Heart*, as when the author ponders the purpose of life in "The Meaning of Life" and the vagaries and fairness of recorded history in "About History." But in "The Meaning of Life," a predictable end-rhyme pattern prevents the poem from being taken as deeper and more thoughtful than those in the rest of the book. There is a sameness about the poems' construction that does not always do justice to their content.

"About History" hints at a more probing and confrontational theme ("Why is Black history given only one month to revive?"), but the similar rhyme scheme and a strangely sudden ending stops the momentum just as it is beginning to build. Gilmore-Kersee mentions other

oppressed or underrepresented minorities, such as Native Americans and (mistakenly) “the Spanish” and their Cinco de Mayo, but nothing more comes of it, leaving the poem more like a half-realized conversation starter than a fully conceived statement of injustice.

Gilmore-Kersee’s book breaks new ground only in the unique experiences of its author, who has definitely seen enough in her life to inspire a plethora of writing material. Readers open to seeing life through another’s eyes may find a place in their hearts for *Places in the Heart*.

Peter Dabbene