Clarion Review

Body, Mind & Spirit

Profound Vers-a-Tales
Kamil Ali
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4251-8902-0
Two Stars (out of Five)

This poetry collection by Kamil Ali examines the human experience: the moral complications and decisions we make every single day. Nearly every piece deals with questions and ideas about humanity and morality. The poems' familiar settings images and characters expose the underbelly of the iceberg the points folks know exist but are happy to ignore.

Ali's writing skills are best shown through his use of the line. Often he mimics movement or an image through the length or the very look of the stanzas and lines of the poems. This builds another layer of metaphor for the piece—visual metaphor—and deepens the overall effect of the poems. For example in the opening poem "The Beggar" Ali takes the time to describe the title character's appearance. The dirt grime and poverty of this woman are made all the more real because the lines mimic the shape and action of the beggar's arm. Ali writes:

She stands there all day with her long stringy hair
Dirty and matted from days without care
Her long slender arms shakily extend
Long unkempt fingernails on fingers that won't bend

Because Ali's opening stanza is so rich and layered readers can almost close their eyes and see this woman with her unbending bones and chipped and dirt-caked fingernails.

The biggest problem with the poems is the same issue that plagues the book's title: the writer says too much. The book's title *Profound Vers-A-Tales* would be creative and effective without the decree that the book will be "profound." Another example comes early on in the poem "Charity." Here the writer opens the piece with what seems like a thesis statement: "Charity begins within the heart; it speaks out loud and clear." The power of the poems is dulled when they become more self-help than narrative tale or lyric.

Still who can blame this poet's eagerness and passion? It's clear that he has taken great care with these poems. When the writer lets the morals and ideas at the heart of the poems breathe the results are beautiful. The poems in this collection are full of rich ideas that are as unruly and complex as they are interesting and universal. The poems don't just take the reader on a stroll in the park: they demand that readers peer under rocks and consider the stump of where a tree once stood. These poems are about seeing as much below the surface as what's directly in front of us. Like a metal detector for meaning these poems help readers revisit what they've seen so that they can ask the right questions when they see a homeless face catch a piece of breaking news or stumble across a fast-moving river.

Lisa Bower