

Shards of Ephemera

Edmund Robert Kowkabany

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Edmund Robert Kowkabany describes *Shards of Ephemera* as a “lurid tale of greed and lust.” The author begins his novel with a nostalgic, exaggeratedly whimsical tone, but the writing soon becomes satirical as Kowkabany launches into the story of Tammy A.

Although based on a real person, Kowkabany tells a fictional tale of Tammy A., a gold-digging, conniving woman who repeatedly tries to seduce her way into money. As the story progresses, Tammy starts to feel a twinge of sympathy for her victims. Knowing that such a feeling is ultimately a weakness in her way of life, she leaves her temptress ways—but not forever. Tammy is after power and money, and she manipulates those around her to get it. Her relationships are only a means to an end, and her lifestyle, though exaggerated, will be familiar—though perhaps at times grating—to readers.

From the start, the voice of the narrator is quite prominent and, as a result, it's unclear whom readers are supposed to identify with: the intentionally flawed characters or the narrator. Much of the narration feels editorialized through word choice and comments that make the author's stances on morality abundantly clear, to the point that readers may feel Kowkabany is passing judgment on his main character. The narrator's overpowering voice does eventually fade, but, unfortunately, it is not replaced with strong character voices.

The heavy reliance on narration rather than action or dialogue makes it a challenge to get through the more than five hundred pages of *Shards of Ephemera*. The dialogue that is present is often overdramatic or stilted, “Just allow me to express once again how gratified I am you've got a sensible head upon your shoulders, that you're not spurning all the splendor life has to offer...like...like all those immoral, idiotic, agitators and whiners who forever bemoan and roam the streets and pathways of the world in search of something that's always been right under their very noses. What they really, truly want even they don't know...”

Kowkabany uses Wallace Stevens's poem “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle” as an epigraph. The poem explores how time changes “amorists” and “fops of fancy,” and it foreshadows this theme in the novel. As readers watch, the Tammy who manipulated events eventually softens to the will of the same people she used to fight to control, they'll glimpse the irony and futility of control.

The novel will appeal to those who enjoy having their morality validated through satire, but many readers will likely prefer to receive that affirmation in other ways.

MELISSA WUSKE (November 28, 2012)

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