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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ POETRY

Sky and Earth, Cielo Y Tierra: Poems Poemas

Christina Watkins
Xlibris (Apr 12, 2011)
Softcover $15.99 (59pp)
978-1-4535-0915-9

In this small collection of short, lyrical poems in free verse, written in both English and Spanish, Christina Watkins gently opens readers' eyes to a world that glimmers with the radiance of spirit. Without ever using the words "spiritual" or "religious," she lifts the veil of reality just enough to allow the otherworldly concepts to slip in unannounced. The two languages stand shoulder to shoulder on adjacent pages, and it is intriguing to observe how, while each presents its subject in a slightly different light, with a different texture and flavor, they touch the heart equally. Written over many years, the poems in *Sky and Earth, Cielo Y Tierra* form a journey in which the "wisest travelers" are "starlight led."

Watkins, who has traveled extensively, has had poems published in journals in Canada and the United States. She has also taught and worked as a spiritual director in Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Australia, and she brings spiritual depth and wisdom to her poetry without sacrificing lightheartedness and joy.

The poem "Did You Know?" asks, "Did you know / Mother God is a salsa dancer?"; it has a voluptuous female God swinging her hips because "Her spine loves music." One can't help but smile at this glorious, sensual imagery that opens the mind and heart to the notions that the body is good, joy is good, and even God loves a good dance.

"Small Brown-Eyed Boy" is both tender and chilling in its message that everyone is someone's child or mother, father, or friend, and that the loss of any beloved one, especially to violence, is tragic. On a different part of the emotional spectrum, "Why Bother with the Tango?" is discreetly naughty, with its suggestive description of the dance intended to kindle desire: "the drama of being close yet not speaking / the glide forward and back / the rise and the fall of it / lightening and mending all that has come apart."

Watkins' poetry is not mere description of an object, event, or emotion. It doesn't simply show the flower; it digs deep into the soil where roots grow to nourish the life of the plant. This is poetry that one will want to come back to many times, finding that, with subsequent readings, one's vision has become more clear and the heart more ample and forgiving.

The poem "This One" is among the strongest but is slightly marred by an awkward opening: "A prompt from our light—large-selves / taps our shoulders saying: / This one, this one." The cover photograph is a bit underexposed; correcting it would have revealed the hidden detail in the image.

Christina Watkins has created a powerful and luminous collection of poems that, like a series of small arrows deftly shot, knows how to find the heart.

KRISTINE MORRIS (February 12, 2013)

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