ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Slopjar
Ingrid Jennings
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The title *Slopjar* suggests an image of all the remnants of human consumption in a murky, metaphoric jar. It is a brilliant conceit that suggests a fresh look at old subjects. Unfortunately, the title is the strongest and most memorable moment of Ingrid Jenning's debut collection of poems, a volume that never quite lives up to the potential of its name.

Jennings uses the letter "L" to guide her chapters: "Lunatic," "Loneliness," "Laughter," "Lust," "Love," "Lucifer," and "Lord." The titles group poems based around abstract ideas that never really unify into a narrative or a cohesive figurative series. The first section, "Lunatic," references a nightmare, a terror never fully explained. The speaker finds solace in nature, but it is abruptly taken away. She then regains her power by killing her specter, but again, the nightmare, the deep-seated fear, never quite articulates itself though all action and reaction is derived from it.

The poems move forward through pain, both the speaker's and other women's. As the speaker becomes increasingly determined to live her own life, to be emboldened, she turns to writing for salvation and strength. By the end of the book, though Lucifer makes an appearance, it is faith and the Lord that save the speaker. The nightmare that began the book is relieved by faith and the catharsis and empowerment of writing.

Much of the book touches upon traditional subjects—relationships, faith, the act of writing itself—but the language tends towards the trite and abstract. In the first poem, "Nightmares," Jennings writes: "Too many nightmares live in my mind, / too many nightmares leave me in a bind, / too many nightmares surround my soul, / they leave me in fear, / when no one is near."

This poem exemplifies some of the book's issues. Nightmares, about which the reader learns little, drive the speaker. The representation of them is vague, the language lacking in detail and specificity. In "Demon on my Soul," Jennings begins, "Overwhelmed with despair that dangles over my head / like those things in cradles, / who knows what they are called, /

wait, / they are called mobiles, / see i'm overwhelmed / like there's a monkey on my back." Here, sharp editing would have cleaned up the language and tightened it down to a quick metaphor rather than a ramble. Clichés might also have been replaced with something fresh, like the image of the slopjar that titles the book.

Though Jennings' poems contain a message of empowerment through faith, self-discovery, and education, the collection would be stronger with more interesting and nuanced language and imagery.

Camille-Yvette Welsch