Clarion Review

Fantasy

The Memoir of a Nazarene: Jay Levi
Edward J. Murray
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Two Stars (out of Five)

To write a fictionalized autobiography of Jesus is to risk offending some readers. Edward J. Murray is to be commended for his courage, if not his style, in writing *The Memoir of a Nazarene: Jay Levi*.

To have Jesus, or, as he is known in Murray's book, Jay Levi, "tell my own story" is one thing. To have him write in a modern vernacular not unlike that found in the author's native Philadelphia is something else. It seems contrived for Jay to say things such as "Mom has a good imagination" when discussing his conception, or to make the Son of God sound like an average, everyday Joe ("when Dad wasn't singing he would play the trumpet"). There are other contrivances, too, such as this odd statement: "Whether I was born in 3 or 7, according to the new calendar, or something in between is a matter I could clear up in seconds if I wanted to." And referring to John the Baptist as "Johnny B." or "The Baptizer" also seems forced.

The apostles, one of whom refers to Jay as "the leader of the pack," are a silly bunch and not in a good way. This is no Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, although at times it seems as if the author almost wants it to be, but then he pulls back, as if rethinking the whole premise of the work.

To his credit, Murray does try to demystify and humanize Jesus, having him do such normal things as lying on the beach with Maggie (Mary Magdalene) or spending a year "living totally drunk for a week at a time;" in such passages, the title character does seem like an average young adult of his or any other time. Then Murray spoils it with references to toilet paper, lox, fiddle players at weddings, and other things that are out of time and place.

There are a number of minor typos throughout the book, including "my mirth" instead of "my birth" and "giving" for "given." There are spelling errors, too: The members of the Jewish sect Murray refers to as the "Essen's" are actually the Essenes. These should have been attended

to before publication.

The Memoir of a Nazarene is unlikely to offend any but the most stalwart member of Jesus's fan club, but it borders on trite. It is not funny, even when it is meant to be. Murray does not go too far in trying to demystify his subject, although he does try to explain all of the miracles ascribed to Jay as matters of coincidence, misunderstanding, or everyday happenstance, such as finding jars of wine hidden in the back of a storage room at the wedding feast of Cana. Murray works hard—perhaps too hard—at trying to show that Jay, as he says of himself, "may be something else, but I am a man too!"

Mark McLaughlin