FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

The Poet's Funeral
John M. Daniel
Poison Pen Press
978-1-59058-144-5
(April 30, 2005)

Las Vegas has it all: glitz, gambling, intrigue, and murder. A beautiful poet is found dead, her body sprawled across the late Elvis Presley's king-sized bed, at a swanky party during a book publishing convention in 1990. The official cause of death is accidental drug overdose. Guy Mallon, her former lover and the publisher who gave Heidi Yamada her big break, suspects there's more going on than the local police admit. His suspicions are confirmed when the photographer he was flirting with, who took photos of the party and Heidi's body, is roughed up and kidnapped. A roll of her film is in Guy's pocket, and when he is threatened by a burly cabby, the reluctant Guy finds himself playing sleuth.

This mystery unfolds like the first light of dawn spreading across the Nevada desert as Guy interweaves eulogies given at the poet's funeral with events following Heidi's death. Heidi had a lot of people who hated her, and most of them were at the convention. Any of them could have poisoned her, but who did? Could it even be one of the speakers at her funeral, one of the people closest to her?

The author's smart wordplay enhances this book beyond the run-of-the-mill "hard-boiled" detective mystery. For example, one hapless fellow is described as walking away with "his shoulders slumped and his hands hanging on the ends of his arms like weights." Daniel's use of dialogue among the various characters is also masterful, especially when he relates the blistering repartee between Heidi and several VIPs at the convention. The reader can feel the long-simmering tension between the characters in exchanges such as this, when Heidi quarreled with a literary agent shortly before she died: "You may not have noticed this, Beatrice, but I never embarrass myself," Heidi answered. "I only embarrass other people."

"I have noticed," Beatrice said. "You're good at that." It was no wonder Heidi had enemies. But did one of them actually kill her? Both Guy and the reader quickly become entrapped in the mystery and are impelled to solve it.

The author is a small-press literary book publisher in California, has taught fiction writing at UCLA Extension and Santa Barbara Adult Education, and is on the faculty of the

Santa Barbara Writers Conference. His previous books include *Play Melancholy, Baby*, a mystery, and *Generous Helpings*, a story collection. Extremely knowledgeable of the book publishing field, Daniel intersperses tidbits from that industry throughout the book. It's easy to imagine that the characters in the book are not really fictitious, and that the events in the book actually did occur.

Anyone who loves good mystery stories, the publishing industry, or the backdrop of Las Vegas will definitely want to attend this *Poet's Funeral*.

Alan J. Couture