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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ POETRY

The Works - Shallow Waters

Rivuli
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The poems in this collection date as far back as 1941, offering glimpses into the author's mind across generations. Many are titled simply with the date when they were written, and they peer closely into the poet's thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, Rivuli's thoughts and feelings don't seem to reach the transcendent realms that make poetry worthwhile.

For instance, "FROM THE HEART" reads (in all capital letters): "IF YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY / SAY NOTHING. / IF THERE COMES A TIME, / WHEN YOU HAVE THE WORDS, / AND THE WILL, / SPEAK FROM THE HEART, / BUT I CANNOT KNOW, / IF I WILL THEN BE PREPARED TO LISTEN." This admonishment ends in such a petulant sentiment as to be easily dismissed by readers with emotional maturity.

Stylistically, the choice to print most of the poems in all capital letters seems strange. The reader feels as though the poet is shouting every line of every poem, and they don't all deserve to be shouted. Some of the emotions are raw and strong, yet those emotions would have come across through the words, without the bizarre emphasis of all-capital letters.

Some of the verses suggest a Dickinsonian attention to small environmental details, like "ODE TO A FLY" (The poet seems unaware that an ode is traditionally a lyric poem with an elaborate meter, expressing an exalted emotion.) "FLY OH FLY UPON THE WALL, / HOW IS IT YOU NEVER FALL? / HAVE YOU FEET THAT STICK LIKE GLUE, / OR IS IT JUST THAT FLIES LIKE YOU / WERE BORN TO WALK ON ROOFS AND WALLS, / AND NEVER SUFFER PAINFUL FALLS?" This poem is neither lyric nor elaborate, and it expresses only mundane curiosity.

Quite a few of the poems sport a meter reminiscent of nursery rhymes, like "1 OCTOBER 1977," which begins: "CAPTAIN MATTHEW SAILED FROM PORT / ONE WINDY SUMMER'S DAY / BETWEEN THE SEA AND SKY HE FLEW / ON A JOURNEY FAR AWAY." Here again, the venerable meter and capital emphasis imply that the poem contains weight and import, but it turns out to be just meaningless doggerel.

The poet insists on anonymity, and the book doesn't contain any information about Rivuli or any previous books he may have published. Perhaps this is wise, considering the poor quality of the verses in this volume, the strange capitalization, and the many errors in spelling and punctuation. Although some of them might be suited for greeting cards, these works are shallow waters, indeed.
(March 16, 2010)

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