

Untamed Passions: Poems

Alain N'dalla

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Untamed Passions is a captivating poetry collection that examines the dark side of love.

Alain N'Dalla's intriguing poetry collection *Untamed Passions* evokes dark fairy tales with its clever uses of language and rhymes.

Comprised of over fifty brief poems, the book sets its stage with a quote from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." Its entries are fanciful and daring in their content and phrasing. Love and sex are the conductive organizing threads, with an emphasis on unhappiness or unrequitedness. In a much lesser quantity, other entries are interludes that center topics like parenthood or particular months. All of the poems are examples of blank verse with end rhymes, although the patterns of the end rhymes vary.

"Jar of Hearts" rails against "Love's terrors and its lore," employing an imagery of bloody hearts ripped out and kept in a glass jar. Its deft end and internal rhymes result in a strong musicality. A collection highlight, "The Widower's Song," makes structural and linguistic choices that speak of bygone times, conjuring images of bards singing to the townsfolk as the speaker entreats their beloved to "teach me to love thee less." This old-time appeal is present in several poems throughout the collection, both in word choices like a reference to a "young fair maiden" and in spelling: "'tis a fate worse than death / should you, my love, ne'er be near."

In "Love at First Sight," an otherwise charming poem about a man's relationship with his daughter, a jarring metaphor, "tears handcuff his sagging cheek," interrupts the mood. Similes are mishandled, as in "Poison": "like vision in a blinding blizzard, I fall for your lies."

Darkness underlies much of the work, resulting in dark fairy tale allure. This is enhanced by explicit imagery, as with a reference to witches and dark magic in "A Cursed Curse." Some of the poems cross the line from dark to disturbing and vicious: in "Negatives from your Photograph," the speaker engages in sexually degrading behavior towards a former love's photograph.

Another running thread is intertextuality: quotes and mentions establish a dialogue with the new poems, sometimes separated through formatting, as can be seen in "Ring of Roses," where the stanzas quoting the popular nursery rhyme are in italics, sometimes merging into the verses themselves and issuing an invitation to participate in a literary egg hunt. References to Lady Macbeth's "Out, damned spot!" and Thomas Gray's "Far from the madding crowd" are two among many.

Untamed Passions is a captivating collection that—through its heady imagery, excellent rhymes, and nods to existing literature—examines the dark side of love.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (February 28, 2020)

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