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Wolf Woman & Other Poems

Jo-Ann Vega

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Reviewed by Dawn Colclasure for Reader Views (12/2022)

5* Poetry capturing a wolf's spirit

A good poet is able to take the ordinary from everyday life and turn it into something we get to see in a brand new way. That is exactly what Jo-Ann Vega does in her book, *Wolf Woman & Other Poems*. It's a small collection of poems that span fifty years of the poet's life, so rich, beautiful and provocative that it is as though you know the poet well by the time you get to the end of the book. She shares memorable points of her life in this book – death, love, separation, etc. – and the reader is treated to verse that captures the beauty, ugliness, disparity and ultimate glimpses of hope through beautiful verse.

One of the things that drew me to this book was the title itself: "Wolf Woman." I love wolves and the wolf is my totem animal, so of course I was drawn to reading this book and I was pleased by the poem "Wolf Woman." Those who know about wolves and understand these animals will see how the qualities of the wolf are brought to life in the poem. The thing about the wolf is that they are loyal, strong, independent, and cunning. While those qualities exist in the title poem, they are also sprinkled throughout the poems in the rest of the book. You can feel the author's sense of independence, her need to be unattached and free to roam, and the profound love she has for the loved ones in her "pack" who she has lost.

A majority of these poems are personal. The thing about personal poetry is that, on a lot of occasions, readers really can't relate to them because the poem was about something that they have not experienced or cannot relate to. That's what happened when I read personal poems written by Yeats, as well as by Lorde. But that didn't happen when I read the personal poems written by Vega. The way she made it work is that most of her personal poems were based on universal themes. Her poems about love, death, and disconnection from those we love were indeed poems I could relate to. It didn't matter that these poems were written for and about people I did not know; the very feelings, thoughts and emotional turmoil came to life through her verse.

The other thing I liked about these poems is that they are written in formal stanzas. I have seen tons of poetry broken up into ridiculous patterns as well as images and lines all broken up. I really don't like to read those kinds of poems. I don't want my eyes to have to go all over the page just to read one poem. Thankfully, the poetic form was easy and pleasant on the eyes and I did not have to work or turn the book around in my hands to read a poem. I realize those kinds of poems are a trend and that they are popular on the Internet, but with a printed poem in a book,

it's not very pleasant to read. Also, I grew up reading poetry in formal stanzas, so it is just what I am used to reading.

The author writes beautiful poetry and reading this book, I can tell it is her best work. She must have chosen these poems very carefully for this particular collection. She definitely has a "poet's eye" and a sense of people she interacts with, as shown through descriptions that speak volumes about her subjects that we really don't need any other kinds of description about them, and we don't need to know them personally like she does. Through those very stanzas, she gives us enough information about them to let us know exactly what kind of role they play in her life and how she knows them. The rest is left up to her in sharing with us the rest of the story in her interaction with them. And while she writes briefly of some other interactions with people, it is just enough. She does not overdo it and she ends these brief poems with us having a sense of what possibly happened next or where she went from there.

It is a short collection of verse, as it was intended to be by the author – 50 poems representing 50 years—and I loved reading her poetry so much that I really wished there were more. I hope the author would consider releasing a longer collection of her work. I know I would definitely be interested in them. It's not so much how she writes her poems that I enjoyed about her book but mostly how she writes about the people in her life, the people who have passed on and the events that take place. She captures moments in ways that we feel as though we are really there and her choice of words to describe these events bring us into them as participants rather than observers.

This collection of poetry was a joy to read. I feel it would be a book that readers of poetry would appreciate, especially for readers of women's poetry. The poetry does specifically address women and the values women share; a lot of her poems touch on universal themes which can take us to a new level of understanding and perception of such passages in life which we all share.