



Revolving Love

A'Ja Simms

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These poems speak to the cost of love and the pain of heartache but also to the ability to start healing.

Love is a conundrum; it can make someone feel strong and weak at the same time. North Carolina poet A'Ja Simms comes to terms with this internal conflict in her new poetry collection, *Revolving Love*. She considers conflicting aspects of the emotion in consistently raw and heartfelt verse.

Several of the poems could be considered prose poetry—blocks of text conveying the stream-of-consciousness immediacy of diary entries. Some poems resemble unmetered and unrhymed free verse, while others borrow more traditional forms and rhyme schemes. All the poems in the collection assess love and its effects on the poet, who contemplates romantic love, with its complications and heartaches, and divine love, with its potential for solace found in a higher power.

The emotive power of Simms's poetry varies. Some entries are too generic or clichéd to stir. In "Wedding Bands," the poet endows her wedding ring with vague concepts like "peace" and "hope," culminating with "A ring of Faith. / A reign of Unity."

Likewise, the collection mixes the eternal and temporal in ways that don't quite work. In "Skin," a beautiful lyric on a lover's flesh—"Touch my skin with your finger like it's the only thing that will keep you alive"—the poem ends with a dampening abstraction: "Our skin is eternally One." After such exquisite sensuality, the turn toward eternity seems abrupt, contradictory, and misplaced.

In contrast, "Y R U Hiding?" evokes a deep and genuine yearning for the eternal: "I called on God by crying out loud." In "Love in Silence," Simms's lyrical language achieves a terse cadence: "a mute offender / what jealous pangs / what shy despairs I knew."

Simms also uses her own style of slang to render a sense of loss and frustration. Other poets might not be able to get away with this, but Simms does because of the plaintive sincerity of her voice. In "Imma Be Okay," the line "U used me but that's alright Imma be okay" becomes a tragic refrain.

At her best, Simms is a poet of urgency, transforming raw emotion into words. *Revolving Love* will attract readers who have been through similar experiences and who can identify with the poet. These poems speak to the cost of love and the pain of heartache but also to the ability to start healing.

SCOTT NEUFFER (January 29, 2016)

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