

SONNETS FOR SAHARA NIGHTS

In title, theme and subject matter *Sonnets for Sahara Nights* is captivating, a real “pick-me-up-and-read-me” collection. In it G. W. Down addresses over sixty sonnets illustrating many aspects of love including true, lost, departed and enduring in a very original and insightful manner. Down uses this poetic form which dates back to the Renaissance. Though not a currently popular style, it comes to life and is very accessible in G. W.’s hands. His mixing of Italian and Shakespearean rhyming schemes gives the poems fresh appeal. Initially one thinks the poems will be set in the exotic location of the Sahara. The sonnet *Unlike the Desert* and back-cover notes inform us otherwise.

“Unlike the African expanse that shares
Her name, Sahara does not instantly
Divulge the spectrum of her traits...”

The reader learns that Sahara is the object of the speaker’s longings. She enjoys a rich history which unfolds through exquisitely crafted individual sonnets.

This brings us to the collection’s greatest strength – an unexpected, extended narrative. Sahara goes through periods of indifference, resistance, rejection, acceptance in relation to the sonnets’ speaker. These are paralleled by his intensity as he recalls his innocent, from afar worship of her, which eventually leads to the heat of passion (underscored by the many metaphors for physical desire). This is followed by loss but ends in a form of renewal.

It is well to note here that the story unfolds through informal groupings of sonnets in themes as mentioned above. An excellent example from the “rejection grouping” relates to Sahara, the speaker and her “other man”.

“And I had seen my world come crashing down
So that was how she came to be with him,
And made my dreams seem mere benighted whim”
Hard Drive to Unhappiness (25)

Down has a gift for clever word phrasings and devices that add modern markers to the poems’ classical form. In *Those Wanting Companions (23)* he alludes to web dating sites.

“We see them advertise their attributes
In sentences composed while truth was twirled”

Another poem, *Hard Drive (25)*, relates to computer use, with words like “virus”, “spammer”. In *Another Failed Attempt (32)* cinematic terms appear such as “clips”, “motion-stops”. His use of metaphor in *Her Clarinet” (11)* is haunting:

“It would be sweet pain to be dismantled
By her gentle hands ...”

Its use here calls up a raw image: in *Predator (31)*: “Her innocence may mask a bird of prey”.

The range of references Down uses is amazingly inclusive. We find Pythagoras, Lazarus and Ulysses making appearances.

Also notably there are so many amazing couplets within the work that it is a challenge to select favourites. Two, however, are included here.

“Is trust an altar? Or a state of mind?
She seems so ideal, or am I blind?”
Trust (9)

“She may descend, her talons tear the glove
And strip away defences against love.”
Predator (3)

Some poetry collections may be looked upon as “appetizers”. Novels by comparison, because of their substance, are considered more like a main meal. *Sonnets for Sahara Nights* by G. W. Down forcibly contradicts this notion. With its narrative, character and plot development, exceptional use of language and form, this poetry collection exemplifies the very essence of substance. It has something for every taste. It is the perfect reading meal.

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