

Customer Review

5.0 out of 5 starsCenter and Circumference is a beautiful collection of poetry

ByJohanna Shapiroon July 27, 2018

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Center and Circumference is a beautiful collection of poetry, divided into thematic segments, that create the perfect image of life, which has a core, and also all those things which surround and enclose that core. There are love poems to all sorts of beloveds that encompass great yearning, searching, a sense of near but missed connection; and then at times a glorious rejoicing in the other. One of the more optimistic poems Filament manages to find a new image for the age-old adage that the world is held together by love. In the moment of reading that poem, you believe it!

I most loved the Time and Memory section. And of those poems, perhaps because I have identical sets of keys, I loved that poem the best, which is about all the lost keys and the lost doors they open, if only our failing memories could retrieve into which keyholes they belong: "The keys themselves/are now forever locked." So true, and yet we cherish them for the doors we know they could open, if only we could remember where they are. I also enjoyed the odd glints of humor. And although Stein is not a "Jewish poet," his Jewish soul and spirituality peek through so many of these poems in ways I particularly relish and cherish. This section also highlights Stein's delicate intimacy with the natural world ("I am part of this.../and this is part of me"), and the solace its mysterious majesty brings, while at the same time putting mere humanity in perspective.

Another rich section is Work and Society. It is in these poems that Stein's irrefutable sense of social justice shines forth most strongly. Refugees, immigrants, the forgotten, and overlooked, the Othered – the words of these poems welcome them home even when our government does not ("foxes will be foxes" one poem comments – how prescient!). The work rails against gun violence, corporate greed (including one memorable image of the chief executive as a devouring mouth!) and downsizing, and the depredation of the environment. I was deeply moved by these writings, especially In the Cross Hairs, which captures what now seems an almost unimaginable vision of dipping from the same pot, lowering our shields, and reconciling with one another. May it one day be so!

The association to music throughout the collection is lovely, both occasionally in the language of the poems, and in the visual suggestions that remind us poetry is a kind of music. The illustrations generally are gorgeous, what a wonderful addition to the text.