BOOK REVIEW: GROANS FROM OLD BONES

Book: Groans From Old Bones by William F.E. Morley (1920 - )

Book Review: Leonard Dabydeen

In the early 20th century, Edith Wharton (1862-1937) of the Age of Innocence (1920) fame wrote:

_In spite of illness, in spite even of the archenemy sorrow, one can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in a small way._


And D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) of the canon publication of Sons and Lovers (1913) and Lady Chatterley’s Lover (1928), wrote in the first stanza of his poem, Beauty of Old Age:

_Tt ought to be lovely to be old_

to be full of the peace that comes of experience
and wrinkled ripe fulfilment.

(http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/beautiful-old-age-2/)

And Edmund Waller (1606-1687), an English poet who was thought of arguably as a pioneer of the classical couplet in English verse, reflected in this poem, *Old Age*:

*The seas are quiet when the winds give o’er;*

  *So calm are we when passions are no more.*

  *For then we know how vain it was to boast*

  *Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.*

  *Clouds of affection from our younger eyes*

  *Conceal that emptiness which age describes.*

(http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/old-age/)

If within this fraternity of poetic minds we can luxuriate joyously on the richness of old age, or becoming old but fresh as sunshine in its glory across expansive horizons, it is requisite for us to peruse the 45 poems in this book, *Groans From Old Bones* by nonagenarian author, William F.E. Morley. In Bill’s own words, this book is simply “*some versification*”. But simplicity aside, the author’s thought process is full of clarity and lucidity spanning only a short period of time, between 2014-2015. At age 90+, Bill’s poetry collection is phenomenal. In Barbara E. Kelly’s Note as Editor, this book is “…*for your enjoyment*…” And in summation, she says it is “…*a collection of Bill’s poetry. Bill is a very complex person, and you will see the many sides to him in this collection of his works. His poems will touch your heart, have you laughing and centering you at times with reality.*”

Unequivocally in the Prologue, Bill delightfully sets the mind of the reader, or a poetry enthusiast, to pulsate with intent to open this book, *Groans From Old Bones*, only to read poem after poem,
Tales of old
Of Yesteryear
Herewith retold
To please your ear.
If you can cope,
As I surely hope,
My heart with joy will cheer
(10 October, 2014)

And so behold with heart-full cheers, this enigmatic and complex nonagenarian author broods in our minds with a poem titled LIFE’S MEMORIES in thirteen lines (p.2),

The years go by and fill my head
With many memories of things done and said.
Of the friends I’ve loved in my long life,
With scenes of joy, but some of strife.
There are days of sunshine, and of cloud,
Of acts of shame, and some of which I’m proud.
There are bad words well said, but some are black.
Either way, they can never be taken back.
So keep thoughts pure, in a sound mind
Do unto others in a manner always kind.
Then, perhaps, if you’re lucky you’ll find
In the end your life has been worthwhile,
And you can look back with a happy smile!
(November, 2015)

In the same breath and lucidity of thought, the author resoundingly portrays how old age matters in this poem, TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE AGED (p.2),

Trials I have and quite a few
Then there’s tribulations too.
From the moment I awake,
All my muscles start to shake.
Then a shiver, down my spine,
And my stomach starts to whine.
Try to stand, fall back on bed,
The nurse comes in, thinks I’m dead.
Gives a shriek, falls in a faint,
I fan her just to show I ain’t/

(November 2015)

Absolutely, Bill brings spontaneous laughter in gathering of the vagaries of old age. But what is significant to note is that each of the first nine lines in this poem has a syllabic count of seven. And the rhyme scheme – a a, b b, c c, d d, ... sets the tone and rhythm of poems throughout the book. There is a splurge of fun, frolic and twists of Romanticism and some feeling of sadness, composted with pleasure when reading this collection of versification. In the reader’s reckoning there will be onomatopoeias and iambic meters that will foster Hallmark treasures for choices of poems. The images are surreal and amazingly interesting.

This book, GROANS FROM OLD BONES, according to Leslie H. Morley, of Morley Law Office in Kingston, Ontario, and son of the author, is just “a notch short of Byron” In an earlier e-mail on February 14, 2016, Leslie indicated to me that his Dad is “an old codger” who has been writing a lot of poetry recently, but “not Lord-Byron-level stuff.” He sent me a copy of his father’s book, which I received on July 8, 2016. During our conversation by e-mail, I enthused to Leslie that, as an author of books of poetry myself, I feel vehemently that poetry is the nectar that nourishes the soul. It vitalizes our own spirit of inner expression. Age has no limitations for poetry.
Any individual who loves to read poetry, will condescend unequivocally that this book, GROANS FROM OLD BONES may not be on the same top shelf with the great early 19th century English poet, George Byron. But aside of the traumatic and debauchery tidal waves that furrowed Byron into an emotional spurt of writing poetry, with an aggressive and enchanting rhyme scheme, Bill’s small book of poetry as a nonagenarian, certainly can be slated, in tone and context, as a “notch of Byron” indeed – referencing Leslie’s own words. The poems are short, underlining Shakespeare’s thought of “brevity is the soul of wit”. The rhyme and rhythm in each poem, line by line, stanza by stanza, couplets and sonnets rich in imagery, let the reader sways in musical entertainment. Reading one poem in the book urges you to read the next. Let us look at the first stanza from this poem, A TALE OF MODERN CRUSOES (p.7):

In a remote Pacific isle,
Off shipping routes by many a mile,
In a small and sheltered bluff,
Watered by the rains enough
A fruitful valley flourished there,
With fruit trees, both peach and pear,
Along the rocks were climbing grapes,
And juicy berries of many shapes.
(12 November, 2015)

And then follows the iambic rhythm in THE COUNTRY GIRL in five stanzas [first three stanzas here] (p.18),

She was pure, from the country,
When she came to town,
But that is where her morals
Were sadly to fall down.
She met a city slicker,
Took her to a bar and grill.
He knew liquor would be quicker
To gain his wicked will.

She became a Fallen Woman
Could not go back home.
So it was in city streets,
That she was left to roam.

And quickly the reader begins to get a little touch of Byron in Romanticism, reflecting on SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY in its poetic architecture. Thus the poems in Bill’s GROAN FROM OLD BONES are simple, short and somewhat experimental in the vignettes of his vast experiences in life. He sustains an almost analogous rigid rhyme scheme, rich in musical and sometimes jocular constructs with a Byron brush. The poems draw on social issues, family ties, friends and poignant moments that are personal in overtone. He speaks to life with sweet ambiance, as in this poem, PARADISE! (p. 24),

Wherever there is sunshine
That’s where I’d like to be,
Especially if the sun shines
On sand and tall palm tree.
(31 August, 2015)

Then Bill turns around with a sober tone in A PROMISE SOUGHT (P. 25),

Though the way be long
And the roads so steep,
I can never forget
The promise I must keep.
And promise to keep I will,
No matter how long, and steep the hill.

(26 July, 2015)

Bill’s groans in this book echo sincerely with sinews and travesty of war. An Englishman with a
die-hard Canadian spirit, he lived through the Second World War (1939-1945). He made no
bones about his faith in the military in this poem, AN EPIC OF WAR (p. 6),

I was sent to Canada,
An allied friendly shore,
There in peace to learn to fight
In Britain’s gallant war.
[First stanza]
The last was in old Kingston,
River Thames ran past my door;
Sister Kingston in the New World,
Dwells on Ontario’s shore.
[Last stanza]
(20 November, 2015)

This book, GROANS FROM OLD BONES is dedicated “IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY DEAR WIFE
BETH”. Bill writes in this versification, FOR BETH, A Sonnet of Sorrows (p.45), in the second
stanza,
The memory lingers, I’ll never forget!
Beth died of dementia later that year.
The feeling endures for my precious dear:
With a heart full of love, there can be no regret.
(25 January, 2014)

On a more witty side, Bill offers us the title poem, GROANS FROM OLD BONES (p. 38),

I search my mind
For what can be,
The benefits of longevity.
I’m fairly sound
In wind and limb,
But my agility
Is rather grim.
But I recite
My ABC,
And know 2 plus 2
Do not make 3.
But what is worse
As you’ll agree,
Is that every hearse
I ever see
I always think
Has come for me.
So in the end you plainly see
I’ve nonagenarian senility!
(4 July, 2014 – Barry’s Bay, Ontario)
Leslie Morley wrote of his Dad, William Felix Edmund Morley (Bill), born 1920 - that he was a librarian at Queen’s University. Bill was responsible for “looking after the old books there until he retired at age 65”. For a few decades, Bill did extensive research and reading with an insatiable focus on Canadian history, a splash of poetry, critiques of writers - producing over forty publications of mainly bibliographical works.

Reference to his publications:


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COMMENT:

Wow! That’s amazing Leonard. Thanks for writing that. He will be thrilled!

Les - 01 September, 2016

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