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Clarion Review

Fields of Memory: And Other Poems
Robert W. Wood
Omonomany
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One Star (out of Five)

This poet lives in a dark world full of violence regret loss and shadows. He is self-reflective using poetry to make sense of dismal chaos. Whenever he begins to imagine a brighter world his awareness of the bleakness of reality clouds over and he returns to the mire of muscle and dread.

Wood has previously published two novels: *Goodbye Vietnam* the fictional memoir of a Marine and *The Weeds of God* in which a psychotherapist endeavors to understand madness. The poems in this collection are equally somber: he writes about rage fear aggression and a man's attempts to remain honorable.

"Civilization's Conundrums II" offers a blood-soaked image of the brutality of the poet's life. He complains that although dogfighting and cockfighting are outlawed fans can still watch a human "Pounding someone into submission / For just the price of admission / To this intellectual display / Of beastly talents held at bay." He posits that it is an exercise of self-restraint for a boxer to beat his opponent without killing him. This is what passes for civility in the world of Robert Wood.

In "Evolution's Door" he tries to access his humanity despite the anger constantly lurking below his surface: "Beneath the kindness and care / I wish to display / It stalks like a tiger / Waiting for its prey."

Unfortunately despite this poet's noble feelings his work is immature and inconsistent. He uses meter and rhyme but randomly with no inherent structure or stability. For instance "Nothing More" hints at Wood's potential to write in standard form: "Is there ever a fragrance that in some gently haunting way / Seems to ask do you remember me from some other day?" However the poem devolves into weak construction and nonspecific imagery: "Yet knowing all such things I struggle still / Against what is apparently my own will."

The strongest pieces here are the most simple like "Roses in the Rain." In this poem of lost love the rhythm is consistent and the repetition of the lines "So I knelt beneath your window / and left you roses in the rain" is emotionally effective. Likewise "The Battle of Optomterry"

about a fight between Englishmen and Irishmen reads almost like a nursery rhyme: “Then they broke and ran / Like sheep before the hound / And me lord fell a laughing / On that sweet Irish ground.”

Many of these poems sound like rap lyrics and would be most successful when recited aloud to a drum accompaniment. Wood’s book could have used a proofreader (the misspellings are distracting) and his wild powerful masculine emotions would have provided a more meaningful poetic experience if expressed through either fully free verse or the taming discipline of established poetic form.

Karen McCarthy