



Late Starter

Robert Ferguson

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Late Starter is a whimsical poetry collection whose pieces are eclectic and unique.

Robert Ferguson's *Late Starter* is an intensely emotional and sometimes playful poetry collection that moves from dark and stormy nights on the sea to nostalgic ballads of picnics with lovers.

The collection opens with a useful introduction that clarifies its purpose and origins. Its poems are organized clearly by subject matter, starting with "Red Flares and Other Events," a section focused on actions, moments, and the emotions they elicited. The collection ends with more ambiguously styled, lyrical poems in "Soul Poems," which present matters of soul and faith, mostly from a Christian perspective.

The poems vary in length and style and are connected by their cadences and flow. Some are conversational in format—some to awkward degrees—while others are more lyrical and rhythmic. Some are ballads; others are short, quippy, single-stanza poems. Near the beginning, the poems have a near-magical quality, achieving eeriness and establishing atmospheres through illustrations of empty landscapes, woodland forests, deserts, valleys, and mountains. Naturalistic lines are a collection highlight:

*And rain, and the gale blowing fit to bust
Through the cliff itself around the bay.*

By "Characters Known and Unknown," the collection's third section, the poems become less abstract, drawing apparent influence from classical English poetry. Such later poems aim for realism and tell complete, clearly rendered, observant stories without hidden messages, as with "Valentine for a Long-Standing Relationship," which muses about how the poet might see himself:

*We strolled the length of Lovers' Lane,
We cuddled by the river.
Now when you reach your hand to me
I fear what you'll deliver.*

The collection's strongest poems, including "Red Flares" and "School Matinee," are stylistically abstruse but emotional, bringing forward much sentiment and passion with their lines. These particular poems forgo the rhythmic and rhyming characteristics of other poems in the collection, like "Weekend Neighbours." They still focus on nature and events, but their lines are more fervidly lyrical and detailed, capturing emotions and sensations, love and loss, darkness and light, whimsy and foolishness.

By "Characters Known and Unknown," the collection loses its concrete aspects, becomes less clearly rhythmic, and moves toward harsher, more jolting lines. Its poems feel less free and fit oddly together.

Late Starter is a whimsical poetry collection whose diverse topics move from love and loss to nature and history

lessons, gathering pieces that are eclectic and unique.

HANNAH WILLIAMS (August 22, 2018)

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