

## Only Yesterday: Memory---Poems of Love, Loss, and Life

**Lee Robinson**

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Writing from the Welsh poetic tradition with its emphasis on musicality and landscape, Lee Robinson adds another voice to that culture's literature. The poet moves from his personal history to the very distant past of the Celtic kingdoms and the Anglo-Saxon invasion, and also from India to Wales. Robinson's interest in history is vast as is his subject matter, which makes for an intriguing and, at points, disjointed volume.

Robinson has a strong sense of music. His more recent poems in particular evoke the same sort of love of landscape that Dylan Thomas made so famous in his own poems about Wales. Rife with assonance and consonance, the lines sing of the land of coal miners and their lives. In "My Birthplace," Robinson writes, "As my valley moved its uplands ending / So closed in the hills and steepened the sides / Whilst at its base a sluggish river gurgled / Impenetrable black, thickened with coal dust." The repetition of the sibilant "s" creates a soothing sound until the hard "k" introduces the conflict of the coal mines. The sound work continues that tension throughout the rest of the piece as it moves into the future and the mines are abandoned.

The poet also has a strong eye for detail, evident through his colorful, active descriptions. In "The Heartland," he writes, "White on black and black on white / Barred sky, gaunt poplars stand / Rank upon rank, silent band / Awaits the clarion call of spring / To life and leaf and bud."

Unfortunately, the book also has its issues. The cover of the volume contains typos in the subtitle, and the text includes boldfacing of seemingly random words. The format is also inconsistent, with some pages featuring only one poem and others two, with the second poem spilling over onto an additional page. Some poems or sequences of poems contain a short introductory note; others do not. Likewise, some titles are underlined and follow standard rules of capitalization while others are neither underlined nor properly capitalized.

All of these editing concerns combine to create a disjointed look that is mirrored in the collection's content. Robinson moves from poems about Wales to a poem about India without the benefit of transition. A tighter focus and stronger transitions within the pieces themselves would have helped to create a more cohesive book.

Ultimately, *Only Yesterday: Memory—Poems of Love, Loss, and Life* includes descriptions that are vivid and accessible, and the history and stories are engaging. Further editing of the text along with a clearer focus would result in a stronger volume.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (December 6, 2012)

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