



## Southern Son

**William Edmund Evans**

William Edmund Evans (Jun 13, 2017)

Softcover \$22.05 (167pp)

978-1-5323-1154-3

*The gift of Southern Son is Evans's willingness to write within the space where life meets death.*

*Southern Son* by William Edmund Evans features two books of poetry, both written in the aftermath of the suicide of the poet's son, Ryan. Evans writes through his suffering, illuminating past and present, the dead and the living.

"What Part?" and "Lifting Off," two pieces that begin Book 1, carve the experience of sorrow so exquisitely that to read them is to ache. Lines like "It cuts too deep, I cannot / bear his mother's scream / lancing rage at god and sky / running down the phone wire / jumping current to a corpse," describe the shock of sudden, acute grief, and in doing so, open a door into what it is to experience a loss by suicide.

The urgency of the collection's poems—their need to create a portrait, lest the subject be forgotten—comes through most strikingly in recurring images: the fringe of treetops, a field of red poppies, Ryan's sushi knife, his silver chain. A driving, staccato rhythm propels most of the pieces, creating a connecting theme that feels almost as important as the narrative arc of the poet's grief.

It is at times a challenge to know how to approach pieces that, in great length, describe a vacation, a cherished memory, a piece of family history. These longer poems tend toward heaviness, and are often weighed down not by subject matter but by their level of detail. Some, like "County Clare" and "Stories for a Child," while interesting, feel written for Evans or for close family members, not necessarily a wider audience.

That said, it is important to acknowledge that the two books collected here seem to serve two purposes—remembering a life, and making connections between places and generations. In addition to crafting a portrait of Ryan's existence, the memory of Evans's father also makes appearances throughout the text, as do figures and places significant to white Southern history.

While these dual functions are not necessarily at odds in the text, it is evident that Evans himself is actively seeking these connections through writing—that he comes to the page in search of them, not to make them definitive. And perhaps that is part of the point: that grief and sorrow are circular rather than linear paths; that to figure out how the lives of grandfather, father, and son fit among place, history, and legacy is the work of a lifetime, not a book or two of poetry.

Toward the collection's close, Evans writes, "Horizons leave / one squinting at infinity / and nothing." The gift of *Southern Son* is Evans's willingness to write within the space where life meets death—a horizon we see and not see all the time; a horizon only those with deep courage can explore and offer to others with marked grace and lyricism.

MARGARET FEDDER (September 7, 2017)

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