

An impressive debut collection, Mike Madill's *The Better Part of Some Time* (Wet Ink Books 2022) reminds me of opening a stranger's photo album and reflecting upon the intimate details of this poet's childhood, the grief tunnel he entered upon his father's death, and his mid-life contemplations. The memories and images are so rich and vivid in sound and sight that they immediately come alive.

Like a poetic memoir filled with genuine heartfelt tethered and untethered emotions (both joyful and sad, at times humorous), his 50 plus lyrical poems are divided into three sections ("Little Voice", "The Ricochet of Sky" and "Solar Flare"). For a non-poetry reader, the words are accessible, easy to read, and easy to understand. For poetry connoisseurs, the work is well-crafted and layered with poetic devices and deeper meanings.

I especially loved the way Madill uses the motif of aged snapshots to enhance his first-person narrative, especially in the first section. For example, in the poem "Flash of Blue", he writes "If I close my eyes, will the picture/take shape without me?" (p. 5) and in "Shutterbug" he states "The ice-blue flash of my new/Kodak Instamatic slices the gloom,/glint of winter sun through taffeta/curtains, bleary as week-old butter." (p. 6).

He often uses colour and/or lack of colour (such as his reference to Kertesz's black and white photographs) to describe objects and to emphasize various moods in his work. One of his first poems is titled "Red". His last poem is titled "Yellow". Could these two colours be associated with the Seven Chakra System, which is a meditation aid? Madill mentions Chakra in two of his poems. I'd like to explore this concept further but will save that for another day. Additional readings and research may unravel other common threads or themes.

When writing about his father, he often plays with words associated with his dad's blue collared characteristics. In "2. Oil Can" he writes, "You yearned to/rid your world of rust and squeaks." (p. 33) and in "Six Feet Up", he pens "I approach the real you, as though/laying down paving stones, page by page." (p. 45)

There is also an openness and vulnerability in the writing that pulls the reader closer into the poet's state of mind. Madill is not afraid to address perceived failures and to share painful details. In one of my favourite Madill poems, "What I Need Is Another Hole in the Head", his frustration shows, "I might as well toss my words/into a cement mixer." (p. 59)

In another poem he writes, "Staying vertical might very well be/my only accomplishment today." (p. 39)

What Madill may not realize is that he has already accomplished so much. His manuscript for *The Better Part of Some Time* received an Honourable Mention in the inaugural 2021 Don Gutteridge Poetry Award Contest where he competed with established writers such as David Blaike, Wendy Jean McLean, and Antony DiNardo. Many of his poems have already been previously published in well-known and established literary journals across Canada; not an easy feat in this highly competitive literary world.

Two more of my favourite poems from the collection are: “In Pencil” where he experiments with a different style, using elements of a crossword puzzle to create a poem; and “2. Lost” where he writes “Someday, I’ll finally earn your chainsaw poise.” (p. 44).

The third section of the collection is less narrative, more experimental, but still well-crafted, as he explores different poetic styles. I laughed at the list poem “He Was Unhappy”, especially with the line “Because he’ll never read all the books/he owns” (p. 70) I can relate to that!

I gave this collection a four-star because I’m expecting Madill’s work to grow even stronger in the future.

Without a doubt, a talented poet to watch!