

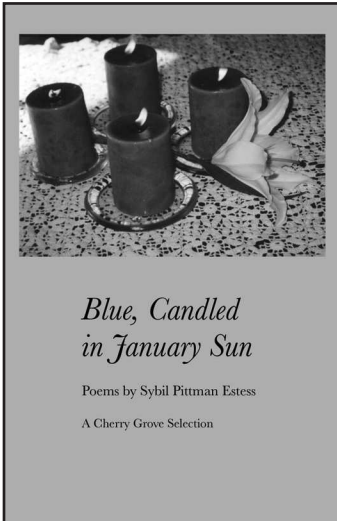
which he has always dealt disappears. The realization that the old world and the new world are virtually the same leaves us just as horrified and uncertain as we have always been in McCarthy's company.

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***Blue, Canded in January Sun* by Sybil Pittman Estess. Cincinnati: Cherry Grove Collections, 2005. 92 pp. \$17 paperback.**



Sybil Estess' lovely book of poems, *Blue, Canded in January Sun*, provides an oasis in a world redolent of language cheapening. Divided into four sections, the poetry speaks of our metaphysical associations, the poet's personal connections with place, family, and finally, how our existence may be borne and even celebrated. Thirty-four of these forty-seven poems have seen previous publication in a variety of well-established literary journals, including *The New Republic* and *The Paris Review*.

Though born and reared in Mississippi, the poet has lived in and contributed to the Texas literary scene for most of her adult life. Dr. Estess has taught literature in Texas universities, written two scholarly books, presented many readings and papers, and

served on state literature panels. Her first book of poetry, *Seeing the Desert Green*, was published by Latitudes Press.

Early on, "The Anointment" is a quiet talk in triplets with one's self, asking what a calling is, a spiritual career. "Now, here, whatever/it is you happen to be or do,/I call you out./I bless you."

Particularly enjoyable to a Texas reader are Estess' poems located in and around Houston, her home for many years. In "Rothko Chapel in Black and White," she recreates the eerie experience: "You've been here for an hour/looking at the black on white, hearing all the silence." Digging deeper, the poet finds that "What you need /is someone to tell you what it really means:/this black, white, nothing./How it's as easy as that." Maybe this loaded atmosphere means only its sensory self.

The question is central to Estess' concerns: What are we to perceive beyond our perceptions? In "The Cemetery on the Hill Behind the College in Brenham," she writes: "Would numinous /taste hot or brief or condensed enough for us,/an incensed though frozen generation?"

The third section, "Hands, Stay With Us," contains vignettes of Estess' childhood. This section, and the fourth, might illustrate well the variety of comfort levels that a poet's personal material seeks. Often when she seems to be writing about herself, she distances with the third person "she." In "Trips with Their Dad," the details are too personal to be any other speaker: "So he also thought quite foolish/ the Polynesian food they picked Christmas/ night by the loud airport near their motel." It is when she writes about her mother that Estess drops the formal pose. In "Prayer for Her Hands," she observes: "Even at sixty, / now, I do not suffer age spots, like my mother's, / whose hands lie stroke-stiff, immobile."

Estess is comfortable ending her poems with philosophical observations: "Mostly we consume toast, tea, life from chipped, / everyday, too common cups." ("Most China Cups"). And, from "On Christmas," "Though love and joy is not all we know, / see and taste. Let it glow." She does this consistently in the final group of poems. In "Clear Cut and Burn," she concludes: "Or will we just pass, rushing? On our way / to one more race, as usual, moving on. What / golden trash will we ignite next with deadly match?" In "Every Sorrow Can Be Borne," she wisely observes: "Absence is that steeped, deep sadness stories / keep. Ties, like scars, don't heal. Yet are not lost."

The color blue in the title of the attractive volume is reflected in a number of poems, among them "Bluebonnet Time," "Blue Field," and in the last poem, "As They Lower My Last Uncle" with the final lines, "Here on this table / before me in light streaming through, near noon, / by three large-paned windows, four fires blaze. / Blue, candled in January sun." These lines bring full circle the satisfying visit with the poet in this volume, as the four fires are featured as blue candles in the cover photo, taken by the poet.

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