

about Josh, Harpers Ferry's Tom Sawyer sans Becky Thatcher, because he cares about so many things. Many young readers will find themselves relating to his jumbled emotions about his father. Despite Bill Connors' crotchety and cynical outlook on life, you find yourself caring what happens to him, too. (Donna Acquaviva)

Labyrinth, by Sybil Pittman Estess. Pecan Grove Press, 2008. 68 pages. \$15.

Sybil Pittman Estess's new poetry collection, *Labyrinth*, is a rare pleasure—poetry that is emotionally moving and yet stays with the reader, calling for rereadings. The mostly women characters in the poems narrate real and surreal episodes of love and pain, loss and growth. The book looks at woman's traditional role and the rewards and punishments associated with it, and examines all the facets of male-female relationships from romance to frustration. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, sometimes ironic, these poems will come back to the reader as he or she encounters similar situations in his or her own life.

Labyrinth is Estess's third book of poetry. Her first two books are *Seeing the Desert Green* (Latitudes Press) and *Blue, Cuddled in January Sun* (Word Tech Communications). Her poems have appeared in *Paris Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Texas Review*, *Concho River Review*, *New Texas*, *Windhover*, *Rattle*, and many other journals. She has taught in several colleges and universities in Texas, and now devotes much of her time to her writing and to participating in poetry activities.

The book is divided into three parts: *Morning Star*, *How Heathcliff Misses Passion*, and *Labyrinth*. *Morning Star* contains poems about women on the edge of calamity. The opening poem, "Crisis Angel," shows a humorous picture of the role of the speaker in dealing with the many disasters and family and community tragedies, in which a woman is just naturally called upon for support and nurturance. Accompanied by her Crisis Angel, the speaker buys "temporary clothes" to see her through her crises—all her new clothes are pink:

I have
learned that pink is powerful. And I am
growing my own puffy pink wings, sweet
as cotton candy . . .

What the speaker *does* concludes the poem:

I sit at the head of the bed of sick and dying,
I bind the red wounds of my relatives, friends.
I pray five times a day to nourish strength.
I praise. I sculpt and mold whatever comes.

One of the concerns in Estess's work is how we invent our lives, how we make our stories up from memory, bits of history, desires. "I Have No Story / I Have No Tale" tells of the speaker's maternal family whose own parents lived through the Depression in Mississippi, went broke, then migrated to California to pick cotton and oranges. The mother chooses to remember what she selects of this period:

They first lived in big canvas tents
she chose not ever in her life to recall.
She didn't remember the cots, either,
the ones her two living sisters did . . .

The mother doesn't recall the vivid tale of grinding poverty and bare survival narrated in the first part of the poem; rather, she claims:

"I don't remember that far back . . . but I claim none of that." So mother did not own her own story. She wouldn't put her name on her pain. Some other, perhaps—but she didn't say, didn't know which. Her history, then, was not that of her sisters,

which is my inheritance that I heard from them.
As for her, she lived in the moment,
the present being the only place she believed
people should stay. "Why look back?" she argued.
"Even if it ever happened, it might
or might not be true. Who knows what took place,

What's real? I don't. They don't, You don't.
Don't you agree?"

In the middle is a wonderful sequence of eccentric, whimsical poems about Heathcliff and Catherine. Estess puts the two in various

locales and jumps without difficulty between life and death as the two explore the nature of romantic passion—its intensity, its destructiveness, its obsessiveness, its timelessness. The two have dialogues in which they argue for their own understandings and directions of passion. Nothing is resolved, as it cannot be—no solution can be found for the differences of need between the sexes, no reconciliation between the abstract male and female will. The use of these personae to represent the wilder emotions now, as well as in Bronte’s fictional world, is intelligent and entertaining. One poem, “Abstraction,” gives some sense of the group, but they are very different. This one is about passion and poetry:

Abstraction

Catherine once loved dancing.
She can remember lush
waltzes and eros. She would follow Heath

to his car, not bother to name what she felt.
Found her lover’s hand, raised it to her breast.
Only now, no passion to build on, only her

lonely poems. Has Cath become an abstraction?
Does naming kill the soul, slowly, as it labels?
Can Catherine descend again to the flowering earth,

glowing and showing by sun, or moon?

“Heath” and “Cath” share other scenes, exploring passion and its paler counterfeit, words.

The title poem is at the end—and it is an unusual poem for Estess. One thinks of going through a labyrinth as a solitary, meditative experience, but Estess did not find it that way as a visitor: it was complicated, crowded, requiring attention to other walkers, discovering obstacles that others present. So in “Labyrinth, Fourteen Ways” it becomes a powerful symbol. It suggests the woman’s role in making her way through a world not designed by or for women, and it also suggests the way of a Christian pilgrim. Its broken lines suggest the broken paths:

When you walk it
you are by yourself, but not.

afforded him an uncommon insight into the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of American politics and American social evolution, so when he combines these talents—something he has already done admirably in *The Class of 1846* (the Fletcher Pratt Literary Award), *Reelecting Lincoln*, *Surviving the Confederacy*, and four additional books—the results are not only compelling, they are convincing. *One Man Great Enough*, the history of Lincoln's rise to national prominence, tells the story of the great rail-splitter's emergence against the immense backdrop and sweep of the national spectacle and in so doing becomes not only important but riveting.

Everywhere, Waugh's narrative moves forward with dramatic intimacy. Rather than merely tell us what went on in Lincoln's life, Waugh *reveals*, and here the depth and breadth of Waugh's painstaking research becomes manifestly apparent. In the substance of the work, readers are invited to move with Lincoln from his youth in Kentucky and Indiana through his slow, thoughtful rise toward regional and finally national importance in the midwestern swing state of Illinois. At every turn, rather than resort to lifeless description, Waugh succeeds in unfolding Lincoln's character through the observations and insights of Lincoln's friends, his political allies, and his political and philosophical opponents, and when he isn't doing that, he is busy revealing the man through the pithy insights and observations of Lincoln himself. As a result, when Waugh is done, the reader understands and appreciates Lincoln's position on a host of national questions and particularly on the issue of slavery, having moved with him from his first vote against the fact of slavery in 1837 to the book's dramatic conclusion when, after the Confederacy has fired on Fort Sumter, Lincoln and Stephen Douglas reconcile on the issue, Douglas—the debate's clear loser—acting swiftly to support Lincoln in their mutual attempt to preserve the Union.

For its comprehension of political courage and moral thought transformed into determined action, *One Man Great Enough* is timeless in the vitality of its theme. And Waugh's polished prose makes that theme ring long after the reader turns the final page and sets the book aside. (Phillip Parotti)

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