



Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions

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This year's winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets competition is Maurice Manning's *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*. These compelling poems take us on a wild ride through the life of a man child in the rural South. Presenting a cast of allegorical and symbolic, yet very real, characters, the poems have "authority, daring, [and] a language of color and sure movement," says series judge W.S. Merwin.

From *Seven Chimeras*

The way Booth makes a love story: same as a regular story, except under one rock is a trapdoor that leads to a room full of belly buttons; each must be pushed, one is a landmine. The way Booth makes hope: thirty-seven acres, Black Damon, Red Dog. Construct a pillar of fire in the Great Field and let it become unquenchable. The way Booth ends the Jack-in-the-Box charade: shoot the weasel in the neck and toss it to the buzzards. The way Booth thinks of salvation: God holding a broken abacus, colored beads falling away.

Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions Details

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Author : Maurice Manning

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From Reader Review Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions for online ebook

Laura says

This is one of the most astounding books of poetry I have ever read. From its compelling first words ("Sheepish as a far off echo, Lawrence Booth wades/into the Great Field and the wide-yawning night") to its stunning final image ("Here come the crows!"), this book is sublime. There's not a single wrong note here. The characters, their voices, are so true, so exactly themselves. Though form and style vary from voice to voice and poem to poem, Manning maintains a powerful economy of language throughout - tight, crisp, just enough and never too much. Here as with *Bucolics*, he wrangles familiar imagery - and even ordinary words - into something extraordinary; for example:

"He cloaks himself
in the pheromone of harvest-time.
The last hay stuffed in the barn;
everything looks like a pumpkin,
even the clouds are coming in swollen."
(from Act V, Scene IV)

Read together, the poems create a riveting momentum, a sense of something about to happen. There is story here, but not in any obvious or contrived way. It really does feel like a book of visions, glimpses into a character and his world.

I have seen this book described as Gothic; postmodern; biblical; radical pastoral; Freudian pastoral. All I know is that I read each poem twice, right away - sometimes a third time. I read a number of them aloud to my husband, because sometimes you just can't keep it to yourself.

Clara Fang says

A difficult but rewarding read. The voice of the speaker is Appalachian, childlike, and surreal. A very unusual book: narrative, lyrical, experimental; what good poetry should be.

Erica says

I ordered this book after reading a poem from it in the *New Yorker*.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that Maurice Manning is a dear friend, but, as a trained journalist, can say objectively that he's a marvelous poet.

I thought this book was astounding, and it completely blew me away. Thoughtful, humorous and insightful with a clear delight for language, reading Manning makes me realize I'll never be as smart as he is. Which is perfectly ok by me.

Kim Lohse says

A fantastic book that experiments with form--and by form, I mean beyond the classical we associate with poetry. Yes, there are sonnets, but in drawl, and there is also a poem in the form of a mathematical proof as well as a poem in the form of a legal document. It is a poetry book, which reads like a novel, except that it reads like no such thing.

Kellie says

Overall an interesting read. The book of poems is loosely cohesive, telling the story of Lawrence Booth, "the bull's-eye boy" featuring an interesting set of characters with names like "Mad Daddy", "Black Damon" and "Red Dog". At times the strangeness of the book was bordering on being too obtuse but choice lines really stand out and shine such as:

"For now, the whispery world is full of honeybees and clover; it is a very sleepy time and he has so many sleepy days ahead, plus some terrible ones."

Greta says

oh those dreams of water, rivers, swimming, sinking

Erin says

Simply the most startling and original poems I've read in a long time. Utterly fine and wild.

Leanna says

Like John Berryman's "The Dream Songs" if William Faulkner wrote them. Very southern in its vocabulary, images, and metaphors. I liked how all the poems operated within this one strictly defined world. Weird, colorful, somewhat surreal, somewhat narrative book. Most appealing to me was how Manning invented this "language" of the South and stuck to his own rules. Pretty awesome.

Katie Schmid says

I liked it! To my mind, though, Atsuro Riley's "Romey's Order" is perhaps a more stylistically interesting book in the same genre.

Eric says

This is poetry, not that stuffy Brit. lit., snooty poetry but salt of the earth poetry. I finally fished this pretty short book but only because I had to keep myself from reading it all in one sitting. It has voice and word choice and all of those things. The vocabulary is a little peculiar as it is written in a kind of Southern black sharecropper voice but it feels just right. I know I am not doing the book justice in this short review, but even if you are not a big poetry fan like myself, go read this.

Aimee says

What an incredible book. I read each poem a few times, and read the book in one sitting, then thought about the book for a few days, then went back and read the whole thing again. Although each poem or vision was good and could stand on its own, I think that reading the whole book a second time through gave me a better picture of the poems as a story because of the way it moves through time and its use of different voices.

The story of a boy and his dog and/or his best friend has been told again and again, but never in such a unique and heart-heartbreakingly beautiful format. The first time I read the book, I was hit hard by Booth's loneliness. A young, misunderstood boy who has a drunken father who gambles away what little money they have and takes off with other women. His only friends are Black Damon and his dog. His classmates tease him. His teachers don't understand him, and when he grows up he is desperate for someone to love and is thankful to make a connection with the missionary woman.

The second time I read this book, Booth's loneliness moved me to tears. I pictured this kid, whose mother did not even realize his correct age (putting nine candles on his birthday cake when he turned ten) and whose drunken, crazy father was such a waste of space that Booth hit him over the head with a frying pan; this lonely child whose best friend and ardent defender was killed by some careless rich kids, and it just broke my heart. The parts that made me laugh (like when he brings his dog to church) made the sad moments (especially the moments that drove Booth to think of suicide) that much more heartfelt.

There were two things that took this book to yet another level and gave it amazing depth. The first was the use of different voices. We have insight into Booth's thoughts, but we also get to see Booth through the eyes of his best friend, Black Damon, who has his own unique voice. The other element was the theme of religion. Booth sees Black Damon as Jesus Christ and his savior. Mad Daddy, to me, represented the Father, and Booth himself seems to contain the Holy Spirit even though he struggles with his belief.

I am not sure that I quite figured out all the people and events depicted in the time-line in the middle, for instance the "legendary cake," but I thought that this book was just beautiful and I am sure that I will read it through a few more times.

Kent says

It's like Spoon River meets Berryman's Dream Songs. And in that light I like getting to know Booth, and seeing how multiple poems can color him with an inscrutable complexity. My favorite poems, though, are where the images get pushed so that Booth's life is more than just the expected difficulty. I'm thinking especially of "Allegory," where he becomes a tree, and eventually gets made into paper for "garish political tracts."

Sarah says

Very good book of contemporary poetry. I really enjoyed the narrative that unified the collection. Beautifully and uniquely written.

B. Mason says

Manning's first collection is a smorgasbord of form but all revolving around a familiar pit of existential ruminations and an explication of the southern landscape. At their most particular and intimate moments the poems feel both bizarre and familiar. And the depth of empathy for the characters in this constellation is humbling.

Karissa says

Imaginative, whimsical, heartbreaking, this collection of poems was, on every level, a joy to read. The language was precise and gorgeous; the narratives were compelling; the forms were varied and experimental. I really enjoyed this.
