

Love and Lament

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A dauntless heroine coming of age at the turn of the twentieth century confronts the hazards of patriarchy and prejudice, and discovers the unexpected opportunities of World War I

Set in rural North Carolina between the Civil War and the Great War, *Love and Lament* chronicles the hardships and misfortunes of the Hartsoe family.

Mary Bet, the youngest of nine children, was born the same year that the first railroad arrived in their county. As she matures, against the backdrop of Reconstruction and rapid industrialization, she must learn to deal with the deaths of her mother and siblings, a deaf and damaged older brother, and her father's growing insanity and rejection of God.

In the rich tradition of Southern gothic literature, John Milliken Thompson transports the reader back in time through brilliant characterizations and historical details, to explore what it means to be a woman charting her own destiny in a rapidly evolving world dominated by men.

Love and Lament Details


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Author : John Milliken Thompson

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From Reader Review Love and Lament for online ebook

Heather says

Quite enjoyed this book about a girl who grows into a woman, basically thru her early 30s just after WW 1. In a very small town in western NC, in a family with tragedy upon tragedy. But she perseveres and cobbles together a life for herself. One quibble, one scene when she is a young teen and I just thought it unnecessary and irrelevant. I was worried the book would head down that path and it would have ruined the book for me, completely. So I was pretty happy that it was more of an aside. But ugh. So not a scene I needed to read. Will be interested to hear what others think (sure hoping I make book club Tuesday night!).

After book club, I have many more thoughts. There were mixed feelings among the group. And the more I think about it, the more there are so many gaps in the book. As many pointed out, it might have worked better as a series of connected short stories. Then the gaps wouldn't have mattered. It almost read like a personal history. But I still liked it. Mainly because the main character perseveres despite.

Claire says

What a poignant book. It left me a little speechless actually, a little spellbound~ It's a story that will pull at your heart and mind in a multi-layered way. It won't leave my thoughts easily~ in a good way.

This was the second book by J.M. Thompson that I have read. I actually met him at a book signing when "Love and Lament" was being released. I must say that this second book was much more enjoyable to me as a reader. He has a fine way of using prose. During the book signing he read for his audience. While I was reading this book, I could hear his voice coming through clearly and smooth as silk. I liked it very much.

LittleAlice Wonder says

A gentle reminder of faith and love, Love and Lament, is the gentle tale of a girl whose loss become her greatest strength; and whose ability to overcome seemingly endless obstacles has made for a long and beautiful tale. A good read for anyone who enjoys historical fiction, it was certainly a lucky find.

Mmars says

At times this read like Jane Austen giving the reader the small daily details, thoughts, and happenstances of a woman's life. But the similarities largely end there. Mary Bet's life was less socially restricted and this is North Carolina beginning when Mary Bet is six in 1893 and finishing in 1919 as soldiers do or do not return from the war in France.

Some parts of the story worked better than others. For example, I found the chapters taking place in France and telling of her suitor's life to be an intrusion. But I enjoy this sort of book where the main character's thoughts often take precedence over the events of the world outside their window. Since Mary Bet's young life is lived through the loss of nearly her entire immediate family, she tends to always fear the worse. These

thoughts feel like foreshadowing, but they are simply thoughts. This naturally leaves a few loose ends for the reader. And there are undoubtedly people who will ask why. Why would Thompson include this or that in the story if it led to nothing? Well, I will argue because that is just the way life's thoughts and realities are. I also felt it added an innovative twist, giving the book a smidgeon of literary importance. It also makes the book perfect for discussion, very possibly a polarized discussion.

Personally, this fits my comfort read category. One I snuggled under a blanket to read and found my mind escaping into.

Jess (Primrose) says

Initially the cover and the advertisement in the bookstore as a Southern Gothic novel attracted me to this novel. The story of a young girl growing up in North Carolina during the turn of the century and the Great War intrigued me. Mary Bet Hartsoe is the youngest of Cicero Hartsoe's 9 children. Thompson illustrates the world of post Reconstruction and religious devotion through the very young eyes of Mary Bet. Religion plays a strong theme throughout the book as Mary Bet views the world in black and white- pleasing God and avoiding the Devil. Tragedy strikes the Hartsoe family numerous times and as each death comes, Mary Bet attempts to strike/renew her bargain with God. Her father deals with each tragedy by slowly losing his faith and ultimately his mind. Mary Bet comes into adulthood and the world is changing. The Great War begins and Mary Bet sees those she loves joining in the fight. She finds her life of loss, tragedy, and girlish notions eventually fade away to acceptance, love, and promise.

Overall, I found it a likeable read. Thompson's style of prose and narration is definitely one to savor while reading. It is not a fast paced story, it is choppy, and at times leaves the reader with no closure. I wouldn't call this a Southern Gothic read, in my humble opinion. The story played more of role than the period it was set in- I would have appreciated a bit more historical background and references.

karen says

this is a straightforward and episodic novel about a girl born in 1887 in north carolina, who grows to womanhood amidst many personal tragedies and historic events.

mary bet starts life with eight siblings, two parents and most of her grandparents, but through a series of illnesses and accidents and misadventures, she finds herself the last living child, left alone with her father, who is grief-maddened and becoming blasphemous as time goes on and life and loss continue to chip away at his sanity.

(this death toll is not a spoiler if you take a moment to look at the family tree at the beginning - all those tragically short lifespans.)

the novel is both a historical slice-of-life and a character study of a girl, then a woman, well-practiced in the arts of abstemiousness and self-denial bordering on martyrdom. this is a character who feels things deeply, who still carries guilt over things she did when she was five, who makes bargains with a deaf-eared god about what she will sacrifice if he stops taking her family away from her. it is about her yearning for love while at the same time pushing it away from her when it comes. it is about her clear-eyed childhood

observances of the effects of liquor and of racial inequality and the justice system, her guilt over her growing estrangement from her father, and her unexpected career path.

it is sad without being maudlin. mary bet's is a character with deep reserves of fortitude, partly determined by her religion, partly by a stubborn will to survive to defy the curse that seems to be upon her family.

but for me, a book with a crow on the cover (eeevil bird) that opens with a scene in which a young mary bet believes herself to have come face-to-face with the devil, and then multiple deaths bam bam bam, *should* have some of the supernatural/southern gothic between its covers. but it doesn't. this is strict realism, which threw me for a loop initially, looking for the the cracks that would let out the dark nasty, but that never happened.

so know that going into it - this will have great storytelling in it, particularly the episode with the banana plants, and every single late-novel scene with mary bet and her father, but it will be 100% this-world.

and it's lovely. my only quibble is that the events don't seem to cohere in a narrative whole. the situations happen, but then they rarely carry through to later scenes. my preference is always for a book that is so densely written and packed with foreshadowing and import that it leaves you breathless with "how did the author manage all of that in one little story?" but that's just a preference and has no real bearing on your enjoyment of this novel. this one doesn't have the "echo factor" that wags my tail, but it is still a well-told story with a unique and strong main character. definitely worth your time.

Tracie Hall says

I listened to the reading of this by Christine Williams. Sorry to be harsh, and it's probably just me, but the first 6 or so parts felt a bit too ambitious of an attempt to describe a tragic childhood full of loss (a mother, 8 siblings, a couple of romantic interests...), jumping from death to death and abandonments. Character and locations open up a bit after that, but a suspicion persists, despite some peeks into the character's familial and religious mores, that this will not evolve into a story of deep feeling or close relations, but is rather, primarily a vehicle to describe historical places, lifestyles and events.

Michelle says

Playing Jokers Blog: all suits of genres and bookish news

It should have been named Lament and Love, because not only was that the order in which I feel like events in the book go but it also describes how I was feeling about the book.

The Hartsoe family experiences one tragedy after another, witnessed and experienced by the youngest child, Mary Bet. It leaves a profound mark on her and the family's psyche. The story then follows Mary Bet as she grows up, learning some secrets and what kind of an adult she wants to be.

The first half of the book was not too enjoyable for me. For some reason, the first quarter felt passive in the way it was written. I felt like I was reading about scenes instead of being in the scenes. Then the second quarter was so depressing. It was almost a joke with my boyfriend, "well, another person has died!" It is

definitely a heavier read and I think you have to be in the right frame of mind to it.

The second half though sucked me in a lot more. It became more active and it focused more on Mary Bet's development. In fact the very end had me wanting to read more instead of just feeling compelled to finish it.

It's a mixed bag book for me, and I am not doing a very good job of explaining it, but it was enjoyable, I'm glad i read it, I just think the beginning could have been set up differently. It runs the risk of scaring away readers before the good parts.

Playing Jokers | *all suits of genres and bookish news*

Nancy says

Very long, well written epic novel. Takes place in a poor mountain area of North Carolina. This tale pretty much covers the life of a woman named Mary Elizabeth. She's the sole survivor of 9 children in the Hartsoe family and the youngest. Her life is hard, but she perseveres and lives an interesting life. Very well written and full of raw emotion.

Nicole says

The year 1887, was special for Haw County, it was the year that the town got their first railroad, but for the Hartsoe family, it was the year their daughter, Mary Bet was born. Mary Bet suffered the loss of most her family member by the time she was fifteen and as she grows into a young woman she is faced with even more difficulties and must find a way to survive the worst.

Even though the book starts out with a family tree that warns readers of just how many lives are lost in the Hartsoe family, the emotional journey will be exhausting at times. The first half of the book is full of pain, grief and heartache, while the second half is focused on survival and perseverance. Thompson does a remarkable job of writing a poetic prose that will immediately whisk readers back in time. The rich metaphors bring the setting of Haw County alive, while Mary Bet's strength will leave readers in awe. The narration was a bit strange at times, almost as though it is an outsider looking in and there is more to the story that is being glossed over. But overall, this is a must read for Southern Gothic Literature fans.

Notes:

This review was written for the My Sister's Books bookstore.

This review was originally posted on the Ariesgrl Book Reviews website.

thewanderingjew says

This is a well written, but heartbreaking story about two families, the Hartsoes and the Murchesons. Cicero Murcheson marries Susan Elizabeth Hartsoe and she bears 9 children. The tragedies that follow their lifeline are tenderly expressed by this author. The tale is told from the perspective of Mary Bet Hartsoe, the youngest and last surviving child of the family. She has witnessed the deaths of her grandparents, siblings and mother. She has had to deal with her brother's deafness and had to watch her father's descent into madness following

his own father's path. At the end of his life, her grandfather Hartsoe, was obsessed with creating a perpetual motion machine. This story is about superstition and, possibly, the perpetual motion of life, the forward marching of this family and others like it, that in spite of their inexorable, difficult journey toward heartache and loss, continue on, never quite giving up. The decisions Mary Bet was forced to make were heartfelt but difficult, yet make them she did. She was a strong and independent woman in a time period when women were docile and compliant. A forerunner to more vocal champions of women's rights, she achieved a place of honor in a man's world and, ultimately, discovered her own rightful place in the world.

The novel begins as the 19th century nears its end and continues until the end of World War I when Mary Bet's life finally takes a different turn. Mary Bet was born in 1887 and she spent the next three decades seeking solutions to her questions and uncertainties and trying to discover her true purpose in life. Her quiet strength and determination, her kindness, her manners, her fears and her sorrows are all presented in detail, making her into a character we grow to know and identify with; we feel her burdens and share in her pain as she faces the sorrows rained down upon her family. We are privy to her doubts about herself and her faith in an ever present G-d, her fear of death and the devil, and on the other end of the spectrum, her ultimate optimism in the face of trauma. She rarely shows anger and most often exhibits common sense in her dealings with people. Throughout her life, Mary Bet is pretty even-tempered, kind and generous, but she has committed her own sins in the past which have continued to loom larger in her mind. She must come to terms with them. She wonders if her family could be cursed. The family's genetic field is threaded with madness. Even Mary Bet sometimes feels that she is not quite tethered to the ground. She once had an imaginary friend. She believed the devil was coming for her. She witnessed her father's bouts of madness when he talked to himself, admonished himself, tried to shoot himself.

She lives in a time when change is everywhere. There are horseless carriages, advances in civil rights, improvements for the rights of women. There is racial bias and religious prejudice which is just beginning to be addressed. So this story is about a time when not only Mary Bet searches for answers, but so does America. Should women and blacks have improved rights and benefits, the right to vote, own property; should the country go to war, conscript men, allow women to hold office, should companies discriminate, should Christians mix with Jews? It is a time when there are no miracle drugs and very few adequate treatments for disease and other afflictions.

The image of life in the heady days at the turn of the century is vivid. The reader is taken back into the past with Mary Bet. It is a world in which different classes, religions and race are stressed. Mixing is forbidden. Sometimes it feels like there is too much detail, but it is the minute explanations of everyday life that allow the reader to get to know the main character and live in that time with her, although some characters seem to come and go before they are fully developed.

The reader may wonder if Mary Bet's insecurities and burdens were brought on by her own behavior, her own tentativeness and instability. However, she comes into her own, becoming the first woman to serve as interim sheriff in North Carolina. She manages the job well, solving crimes, reforming juveniles, and settling many petty disputes and economic issues that have remained unresolved for years.

Also, as I read, I sometimes wondered where this book was going. It seemed to march on without a goal, and yet, in the end, it was simply a very good story, a story told without the vitriol, crude language and concentration on sex that is so prevalent in many of the cruder novels of today. Mary Bet is a warm and endearing character, a bit afraid of G-d and the Devil. Religion and its dogma scare her. She has suffered so much loss that she may be afraid to love, afraid to lose again, afraid she could be cursed. This book is about her coming of age, her growing into herself and learning to deal with the contrasting aspects of life.

The title comes from a poem by George Herbert, Bittersweet.

Jo Ann says

There is indeed much love, and much lament, in this novel about a young girl coming of age in rural North Carolina. The story takes us from 1893 to 1919, years in which the main character, Mary Bet, comes of age, loses most of her family, struggles with life, love, sin and finding her place in a new and changing world...one filled both with danger, hardship, war, and joy, friendship, opportunity and forgiveness. I love Mary Bet Hartsoe and her love of her family, her spirit...this girl/woman's going to remain with me a long time! Thank you, John Milliken Thompson, for your beautiful prose...it's a joy to read your books!

Sandie says

Life is difficult in rural North Carolina in the years between the Civil War and the first World War. People worked hard and didn't have the material things that are taken for granted in modern life. Families were large and people didn't travel that much so family reigned supreme. But change was coming. These were the years that electricity started to be used, that cars started to jostle horses for dominance on the roads. Indoor plumbing was another major step forward, and the economy was moving from that of agriculture to commerce and industry.

John Milliken Thompson's *Love And Lament* details the life of the Hartsoe family in the Piedmont region of North Carolina in these years. The Hartsoes were one of the major families in the region; it's men Civil War heroes. Cicero Hartsoe came back to Haw County and ran a store. He and his wife had nine children. Life was hard but family was a recompense from God for the difficulties encountered.

But the Hartsoe family seemed marked out for tragedy. Mary Bet, the youngest, watches hopelessly as one by one, all her brothers and sisters are taken. Some die from diseases that would be easily cured today, some in accidents. By the time she is twenty, Mary Bet finds herself alone in the world, her only surviving parent in a hospital for life while she is left to make her way in the world.

Mary Bet is an interesting character. Although haunted by her family history, she manages to carve out a life for herself. She moves and finds a job, living in boarding houses and then with roommates. As the years go on, she is unsure if she will ever have another family, one of her own. But regardless, she moves on and finds value in the life she is given to live.

This book is recommended for readers of historical fiction. It is difficult for most people to imagine how different life in our country was just a hundred years ago, how isolated people were due to the difficulty of transportation and how reliant on family and friends each individual was. For women to carve out a separate life for themselves in this environment was a definite show of character. The reader will remember Mary Bet Hartsoe long after the last page is turned.

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

One dead child after another and then their mother. How could Cicero stand any more? He only had three of his nine children left and was constantly worried they would be gone too. His worry wasn't over with the three that were still living.

LOVE AND LAMENT was the saga of Mary Bet Hartsoe and was set in the late 1800's when typhoid was rampant, when deaths were on a daily basis, and when inventions of machinery were beginning to surface to make factories and lives easier. The late 1800's was a time of change for everyone both personally and historically. The book dealt with many social issues and is very deep, thoughtful and intellectual.

LOVE AND LAMENT was beautifully written. The author had amazing prose and detailed, remarkable descriptions. At times the descriptions were so vivid, you could feel the grass under your feet, smell the aromas in the air, and share the pain of the characters. Despite the marvelous writing, it was a bit tedious and difficult to get into at first, but once I became attached to the main character, Mary Bet, it held my interest.

Mary Bet was the youngest of the nine children, the one who stayed with her father, and the one who was quite headstrong for a woman of that era. It was amusing to see the social protocol of that time especially the "rules" for courting and the woman's role in following these "rules."

It was a book about family, suffering, and living life no matter what circumstances are thrown your way. If you enjoy historical fiction, description at its finest, but details a bit too drawn out at times, you will enjoy LOVE AND LAMENT. 4/5

This book was given to me free of charge and without compensation by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Brianne says

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. I checked it out from the library when I was just looking through the shelves (actually this last trip, I went to the end of the alphabet and picked my books from there). The time period and Mary Bet's situation sounded interesting.

I'm going to try and be vague so I don't ruin anything while also describing the book (let's see how this goes, shall we?). Very early she experiences loss after loss, but it wasn't as sad as you'd think. The deaths happened so quickly I didn't get a chance to become attached...until a little bit later and then it was sad and it hurt.

After her family's pretty much gone, things start to settle and you get to watch Mary Bet become an interesting and independent woman(yay!). I was afraid something bad was going to happen later on, but finally Thompson seemed to leave Mary Bet alone.

I enjoyed the writing and the setting (the details were so nicely done you were really in the story). I actually post-it noted a quote that seemed to sum up the majority of the book (especially the beginning). In my edition it's page 141: "We go on living because we have no choice, she told herself, because there is nothing else for us to do."

I didn't really care for the additional narrative voice later in the book (it didn't happen much, but it just felt too abrupt and ultimately unnecessary) and the very end felt...off. I don't know how else to describe it. I liked the ending up to the last couple of pages and then it kind of left a weird after taste. Also there was a little mystery about one of the siblings that I never felt was explained. It could be that I just missed it, but I would have liked a little more.

I would recommend this, especially if you like historical fiction!

