



The Labyrinth

Catherynne M. Valente

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Here Monsters are hidden ...

A lyrical anti-quest through a conscious maze without center, borders, or escape--a dark pilgrim's progress through a landscape of vicious Angels, plague houses, crocodile-prophets, tragic chess-sets, and the mind of an unraveling woman, driven on by the mocking guide who seeks to destroy as much as save.

Enter the world of the Labyrinth, where Doors do not wait to be opened, but hunt you in the night. This is Zarathustra in Wonderland, a puzzle which defies solution, a twisted path through language and madness...

But where will you hide?

The Labyrinth Details

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Author : Catherynne M. Valente

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From Reader Review The Labyrinth for online ebook

Karissa says

I really enjoyed Catherynne Valente's book Palimpsest, as well as the short story she contributed to Troll's Eye View. So I was eager to read more of her works. I am so glad I did, I absolutely loved this book, it read more like a gothic epic poem than an actually book but was absolute enrapturing. The content is very dreamy and may not be for all readers; those readers who don't enjoy abstract stories and poetry should probably stick with something else.

This book tells the story of a girl stuck in a Labyrinth. She is a Wanderer and wanders through the Labyrinth fighting madness the whole way. She complete various tasks and meets strange creatures all in a quest to escape the Labyrinth. She is constantly trying to outrun Doors, that threaten to devour here.

This book reads like a crazy dream. At some times you get caught up the beautiful and poignant descriptions and loose the storyline for a bit, but Valente always tugs you back to the story at hand. I can't say enough how beautiful, artistic, and wonderfully abstract the language throughout this novel is; I absolutely loved it.

There are times where you can get a bit confused about what is happening, most of these times coincide with the dream-like periods of madness that the main character goes through. The first madness period had me befuddled, but after the second bit of madness I figured out what was going on and then was struck by how cleverly Valente is representing this character's insanity. The story snaps back to a more traditional form as the character meets up with and is forced to converse with various strange creatures in the Labyrinth. These portions of the story are written just as beautifully but less abstractly and take the reader through a more traditional fairy tale like plot.

I was struck by how this story reminded me both of The Jabberwocky (in the somewhat made-up words that were used throughout) and also of Alice in Wonderland (as the main character struggles through a world that doesn't make sense).

I love different things and beautifully dark stories and this book was both of those things in spades. That is not to say this story will be for everyone. If you don't like poetry or abstractness in your stories I wouldn't read this book. A lot of the story is woven of analogies and words that don't make clear-cut sense. If you are the type of person who likes absolutes and well-defined stories and characters this probably won't be your cup of tea. I can see how this story and the writing style would be just plain too strange for some folks.

Overall a beautiful, creative, and different read that I found to be exquisite. Valente is quickly turning into one of those authors that can do no wrong in my eyes. I feel like everything I read from her is strange, wonderful and absolute golden.

Jess says

(From my review of Valente's 'Myths of Origin' :<http://lightningtreelive.wordpress.co...>)

Reading The Labyrinth was an experience that really opened my eyes to what could be done with fantasy, with myths, and with language in general. I realise that that sounds vague and flippant, it isn't meant to.

Truly, I was in awe. The Labyrinth stunned me with its rich, sensuous, and surprising imagery, its visceral-yet-nebulous narrative which reaches beyond the events on the page and ripples outwards with numerous allusions and symbolic resonances, and the eerie and magical characters that walk its pages – all things which I have come to know as characteristic of Valente’s fabulous writing.

In *The Labyrinth*, a woman wanders through weaving pathways, meeting strange and beguiling creatures – an icy angel and a golden monkey, to name but two – but her progress, whilst often rendered in harsh and physical terms, is not merely corporeal but symbolic (ouch, that’s a painfully reductive way of putting it, but bear with me!). Valente’s novella incorporates mythic logic – of the beast and the maiden, of the three stages of womanhood, maiden-mother-crone – making the protagonist’s journey heavy with meaning. Such allusions do not, however, make the story abstracted and difficult to access as a reader. The symbolic echoes serve to enhance the emotional impact of the story, and even moved me to tears in places. I think, perhaps, that this works so very well because the mythic resonances tap into deep, tender places in the readers’ minds. We sense the weight of cultural, historical, and emotional baggage that these myths carry with them... and it moves something in us. Certainly, the way that Valente uses her allusions is not distancing, but the very opposite – it is intimate and stirring.

Above, I said that Valente’s work was ‘heavy with meaning’. By this, I did not mean to imply that Valente’s prose is turgid or overwrought. Her lush, poetic style may be a little oblique for some readers’ tastes – especially in a market in which ‘transparent’ prose is the norm – but honestly, if you are willing to expend the extra concentration that Valente’s work needs (and deserves!), you will not regret it. With many other authors, you can sense that language is merely a tool via which to tell their swashbuckling story/communicate their great characters. If the writing’s also good, that’s a plus; if not, oh well, the story was pretty fun. The same cannot be said of Valente; in her works, style and content are not divisible. Her writing is more challenging than most, but it is doing something more than most, too. It is language with affect. The reader traverses the linguistic paths as well as the characters, and not all paths are smooth and straight.

If this sounds at all interesting to you, read Valente. Plunge into her words. Revel in them. Breathe them in.

Kat Lombard-Cook says

Labyrinth is like a lace-work of words. It's definitely surreal, and there are explosions of paragraphs that describe nothing so much as madness. It's a story of a quest that isn't, a journey to a center that's not there. It's slightly insane and cyclical, but it's beautifully wrought. The plot is certainly secondary to the tale-telling, and the times that the book drops out of the narrator's head and dips into dialogue serve as resting points for your sensory-overloaded brain. At times, it can be a little bit hard to slog through the metaphors and find the meaning behind it, but it's rewarding in the end.

Jaymi says

This was a very interesting book. Really, it was. It's told in the first person and is about a woman who's trapped in a Labyrinth. She's being chased by doors and we follow along as she searches for the mythical center. But it's the writing and the way the story is structured that makes this book so interesting. The writing is painfully structured, as if every word was CAREFULLY chosen. In some places the story reads more like

a poem than modern-day prose. The structure, folds in on itself and doubles back... as if it were the labyrinth itself. I chose to read this book because it fits into my goal of reading more fiction than non-fiction.

Rachel says

Despite some well-turned phrases, half of the book was incoherent internal monologue. It had the effect of obscuring the story for pages at a time. This was disappointing after being wowed by *Palimpsest*.

Nikki says

This was, I think, Valente's first book. It's probably my least favourite of hers that I've read. It's very classically her work -- her motifs and preoccupations, her way of plotting, her half-poetical writing -- but it just didn't get hooks in me like *Deathless* or *The Grass-Cutting Sword*. There's amazing imagery and I actually liked the cyclical nature of the story, but...

If you tend, like me, to be most drawn by strong, well-delineated characters, and a plot which moves from A to B with some resolution, this probably won't be a book for you. I enjoyed the imagery, the well-crafted-ness, but there wasn't enough to make up for the fact that this is an Anti-Quest narrative.

William Leight says

(2.5 stars really)

This was Valente's first novel: previously, she was a poet, which may perhaps be the reason, or at least part of the reason, why the focus of this book seems to be more on words and images than character or plot. (Further evidence: the book is split into cantos, rather than chapters.) The titular labyrinth has no beginning and no ending, and hence no real room for story or character development: instead of inner change, the main character literally changes color to match her surroundings as she passes through. Indeed, at the end we are back precisely where we were at the beginning, the last chapter repeating the first one word-for word, with only a slight addition to the never-named narrator and main character's self-description, an addition which gives no real indication that she's any different than she was before. The adventures she goes through, we are told, are ones that she has gone through before and will go through again: hence the other characters don't really have much of an independent existence, being only props in the narrator's ever-repeating story. The one hint of a real story are the memories that surface occasionally of a life before the labyrinth, but nothing ever comes of these and we never learn how the narrator arrived or if it is indeed possible to leave. Things do happen, to be sure, but since we know that the narrator will be running the labyrinth forever they can only do so much to hold our interest. Mostly what we have is the language, words thrown wantonly about with the intention of producing an almost psychedelic effect: an overflowing richness of description. Sometimes it's enough, but mostly it's not.

Xdyj says

CMV's first book. Probably not as impressive as her later stuff but still a fun read. You can get it for free from CMV's website.

Sarah Rebecca Andrews says

The Labyrinth is a linguistic gem; I am truly in awe of the author's use of language and her descriptive powers, because her simile and metaphor combinations are an eternal well of wealth.

The story is piece of art. One of my favourites for the risks and pure command of the English language the author has, using it to its full potential and some. Sometimes the narrative is confusing, and you wonder at times if there is indeed one, but I think that is the beauty of it. You are Alice falling down the rabbit hole, Sarah in Jim Henson's Labyrinth, a child of Valente's poetic maze. The sentences swallow you whole as you traverse the various Cantos and characters, and you, like the heroine, get lost in its immensity.

There was one section where the dramatist in me could see it being used for an audition monologue. I could envision the scene and voice inflections so clearly in my mind, I almost got up to act it out. That is what is so refreshing and mind boggling about this book; it is narrative, poetry, verse, and script all rolled into one.

I can see this being a marmite type of book, as the poetic narrative is so lush that it can almost be suffocating at times. However that is exactly why I enjoyed this book: it requires your full attention as you pick your way through the language to decipher the story, mirroring our heroine as she travels through the labyrinth.

Shara says

While the language is rich and poetic, I wouldn't recommend this particular title to just any fantasy reader. Instead, I'd recommend it to any reader who has a love of poetic language, a love of metaphor. It's hardly a fantasy so much as it is a myth, a fairy-tale (which is a fantasy in some regards, but not traditional). The chapters are short and grouped together in Cantos (see? Big!Long!Prose!Poem!). This is something I'd recommend to lovers of myth and fairytale, philosophy and metaphor, and most important, lovers of language. You can't help but feel a little smarter, more enlightened, after reading this.[return] [return]I definitely plan on reading more of Valente's work, particularly her latest release. It'll be interesting to compare her other books to this, especially the style and use of language. And I'd really love to hear her read The Labyrinth out loud. As with anything poetic, one feels as though they're missing something while reading it silently. This book demands to be heard. [return][return]And an aside: this book also begs to be a painted narrative by someone as surreal and talented as Dave McKean. Everything from the Labyrinth itself to the chameleon colors of the narrator...I'd love to see what an artist like him could do with this book.[return][return]For a full review, which may or may not include spoilers, please click here: <http://calico-reaction.livejournal.co...>

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

'... my book is so much cheaper than LSD, and nearly twice as legal' - says the author.

Like an early Delany - *The Einstein Intersection* or *The Jewels Of Apor*, or even like Crowley's debut novel, *The Deep*, this book is an enigma. There's something going on, but like Mr. Jones I don't know what it is.

No, actually, I do. It's magic. Magic with words, magic with meanings. A Zen/Buddhist parable about a woman on a quest through a maze, the meaning of the parable is that there aren't always easily reducible meanings, quests don't always have objects and doors always have keys, even when they don't.

Is that clear enough? Probably not. Anyway, this was just the right book for me to read right now and I'm glad I finally found it.

Michelle says

This is not a book for people looking for a quick easy read, or for those that are looking for a sharply defined, concrete plot. It is a book for people who can appreciate complex, beautiful language surrounding a mythological tale. The book tells us about the Seeker in the Labyrinth, who no longer seeks the Center. She has swallowed the Compass Rose which helps her direction. She has been here a long time and has learned to avoid the snapping jaws of doors and other dangers. Along her journey she meets a dark angel who nearly destroys her, a curious lobster who provides her a key, and a monkey guide with his own agenda. We follow her through her changing person and persona as she travels. I enjoyed this book and appreciated the author's gift for poetic language. For those who might want a book with equally wonderful language, but with a plot more easy to follow, I would highly recommend her book, *Palimpsest*.

Mikko Karvonen says

I absolutely adored Catherynne M. Valente's *In the Night Garden*, so picking up *The Labyrinth* was a no-brainer. However, it proved out to be a very different creature.

The flowery, metafora heavy writing style is there, but the story itself is more of an exercise of a literacy student. Symbolic, poetic, sometimes utterly bizarre, it went from absolutely charming to not-quite-following-you-here along the way. In both situations, however, the language itself was enough to keep the experience pleasant.

Unfortunately I had to deduct one star for the ending. For all the effort put into the story, I just found the ending too predictable, easy, and unimaginative, almost literally groaning in disappointment when I was reading it.

Maria D'Isidoro says

The books of Cat Valente's that I've loved, I've REALLY loved. *The Labyrinth* does not fall into my "I will

adore it forever" pile.

The Labyrinth struck me as a collection of run-on sentences and purple prose - quality purple prose, but purple nonetheless. This is the writing of a self-indulgent wordsmith, still honing their craft and dazzling both themselves and their readers with the sheer quantity. The words could be beautiful, but lose their meaning and impact without any relief from the overwhelming ornateness. Like a medieval mosaic, all gold and precious gems, I find that much of the impressiveness of Valente's writing here is how overwhelming it is at times, like drowning in words.

Fans can say that I "don't get it." I'm fine with not getting it. If "getting it" involves slogging through what I consider immature writing to get to the point, I'll pass.

I like much of what Valente has written since this book. In Orphan's Tales and The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland, she balances her prose with more traditional narrative writing, creating novels that are beautiful, moving, and coherent. That combination, in my opinion, is real great writing.

Ian says

[perfectly circular (hid
