

Lincoln's Story: The Wayfarer

Vel

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As a labor of love, *Lincoln's Story: The Wayfarer* is worthy of five stars. As a work of literature, however, it rates much lower. While the passion and admiration the author feels for Abraham Lincoln—the man and the president—is supremely evident, the execution of the text is weak.

Vel, the single-named Indian author who originally wrote the book in his native Tamil, is to be commended for his diligent research and his good intentions, if not for his art. He has managed to include just about every important quote and quip from and about Lincoln into one slim volume, and has included most of the key events and milestones from that short but extraordinary life. Vel has done his homework—quite literally, as this book grew out of a high school history assignment he was given while still a student in India.

It would be easy to take cheap shots at Vel for his artistic failings, his grammatical hiccups, and his stylistic stumbles, but to do so would be erroneous. *Lincoln's Story: The Wayfarer* has merit. There is a lot of good history here, and Vel has captured the spirit of Lincoln and Lincoln-lovers everywhere. His admiration for the great man is boundless, so much so that he introduces two characters, “God” and “Goddess,” who pop up to offer comments, especially when tragedy strikes the president, as it so often did.

“God” and “Goddess” may be annoying to some, but such peripheral heavenly musings are found from Homer to *Clash of the Titans* (not to mention *It's a Wonderful Life*). Classical English and Indian literature make frequent use of this device to help explain the plot, deliver a moral lesson, or reassure the audience that as bad as things might seem, there is a greater purpose to the universe and the higher power watching over us all. Lincoln, as Vel notes, understood that. “I am not a member of any Christian church, it is true,” the author cites Lincoln as remarking, “but I have never denied in the truth of the scriptures and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general.”

Vel tells his story of Lincoln using many voices, most of them neither his own nor those of his heavenly deities. Some chapters begin “I am Stephen Douglas,” “I am Frederick Douglas,” “General Sherman I am,” and the like. Here Vel draws upon the words of men who knew Lincoln to have them tell a select part of the story. The plethora of quotes and the lengthy list of sources from which these are drawn again show that the author engaged in his share of research.

Most of the information in the book is strung together in the manner of a student laying out a series of index cards in sequence and then inserting passages to connect them into a narrative. Again, there is a lot of information here, and someone wanting a short, quick, crash course in Lincoln could do far worse than Vel's book. To reiterate, while it may not be a work of literature, it is certainly a labor of love, one that, even if inexpertly crafted, has both charm and value. Lincoln himself, who was known for his humility and charity, would have been touched and honored, and for that Vel is to be commended.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (July 23, 2012)

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