

Plain Air: Sketches from Winesburg, Indiana

Michael Martone

Baobab Press (Sep 6, 2022)

Softcover \$16.95 (195pp)

978-1-936097-42-5

Over the course of more than a hundred microstories, *Plain Air* outlines the stuttering lives of the inhabitants of Winesburg, Indiana.

Winesburg is the definition of a flyover town. It even has the contrails to prove it. But when the railroad was in frequent use and the factories were producing, Winesburg was bustling; it needed four elementary schools, two junior high schools, one high school, a tech school, and two private schools. Now, with the highway making the nearest big city easier to access, the town is so empty that the cancer center nurses spend much of their time knitting, and the local handyman builds, tears down, and rebuilds his scaffolding materials just to keep his skills sharp. Winesburg has become a melancholy town, but its people continue to live and work there, just as they always have.

Two maps at the beginning of the collection sketch out the boundaries of the town, its various locales and their relationship to one another, and the land features, like the railroad, highway, and river. These maps are not critical to understanding the stories themselves, but they are important to understanding the size of the town. With everything from homes to farms to businesses right on top of each other, the close-knit community atmosphere of the stories becomes more believable.

Some stories are about a person, other stories about a place, still other stories are a combination of both, sharing individual and collective memories imbued within objects or actions. Through these stories, Winesburg emerges as a town where nothing much happened, but that was still memorable for those who lived there.

By turns bleak and hopeful, *Plain Air* is a collection of stories that reveal a small town on the verge of disappearing.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (September / October 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.