



Still, the Sky

Tom Pearson

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Still, the Sky is a labyrinthine poetic epic that fleshes out a resilient and multifaceted mythological brotherhood.

The Greek myths of Icarus and the Minotaur are reimaged in Tom Pearson's poetic epic *Still, the Sky*.

Toggling between Icarus and Asterion, these poems are a deep exploration of the relationships of both figures. Pearson merges the two myths, configuring an alternate universe in which these two—and, by extension, their families—met and spent time together. A close bond between Icarus and Asterion is elucidated and is shown to see them through rough family relationships, especially the ones between fathers and sons and between siblings.

The collection opens with a photograph of a card catalog, "The Archives of Asterion." Additional images of the catalog's contents are placed between the book's poems and at intervals. These are pieces of a larger exhibit that also includes portions of the poetic text.

In some ways, the photographs act as companions to the poems. "Notes & Stanzas," note cards featuring poetic fragments, are placed at the beginning of each piece. They hint at what the poems will explore, with topics like partnerships and reflections. Miscellaneous ephemera, as with the entries "Bee Mausoleum" and "Wax Labyrinth," are represented separate from the context of poems. In total, there are fifty-seven photographs.

The poems themselves concern an extracanonical "shared youth" for Icarus and Asterion. Understanding the subtle shifts and nuances requires knowledge of the individual myths of Icarus, the hubristic creator of wax wings, and Asterion, the Minotaur. Here, Daedalus, the father of Icarus who appears in passing, is the designer of the labyrinth that is Asterion's home and prison. Further, Asterion, Icarus, and Ariadne, the Minotaur's half-sister, grow up together, adding a layer of tension and melancholy as she helps the hero, Theseus, in his fatal pursuit of Asterion through the labyrinth.

The poems work in tandem to tell the individual stories of Icarus and Asterion while also creating a shared present for them, as though they are writing to each other. Rich with images of ancient landscapes and waterways, each of the seven ballads has seven movements of varying length that serve as chapters of a sort, alternating between the two figures. A sense of foreboding permeates the collection, mirroring the figures' doomed brotherhood. Even in this remixed retelling, they meet their original ends.

For Icarus, this inevitable end is summed up in this stanza from "iii. Flight":

*My father was afraid to fly, unfathered and
Leaving vague instruction. What was there but
Fly to the sun, fall featherless/fatherless
Into the sea?*

For Asterion, his resignation is in these stanzas from "vii. Asterion":

*Before we understood what we were,
We knew its consequence, and we showed
Our reticence to look at it in the light,
Romanticizing*

*It in obscurity, the blurry edges,
More compelling than definition, prison
More ours than freedom, you and
I enshrined in stone.*

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (July 19, 2022)

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