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Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White." Edited by Sarah Huff Fisk and Linda Wright Riley. Huntsville: Big Spring Press, 2005. xiv, 216 pp. \$22.95. ISBN 0-9765836-0-7.

This book, written for the general reader, is a collection of religious essays, stories, and poems by the Huntsville artist and writer Maria Howard Weeden (1846–1905). Weeden achieved a measure of fame with the publication of four volumes of poetry between 1898 and 1904, written in “Negro dialect” and featuring sensitively rendered portraits of former slaves. The contents of *Lost Writings* date from an earlier period. They were originally published in various newspapers between 1866 and 1896, and were “lost” because Weeden wrote them under the pseudonym of Flake White. The editors, both warm admirers of Weeden, have combed the pages of the *Louisville Christian Observer* and several Huntsville newspapers to retrieve these pieces and present them to their readers as small gems of artistic and religious inspiration.

The works of Flake White have a quiet appeal. Her unpretentious but evocative style resembles her delicate artwork, some of which has been reproduced in this volume. Although well educated, she wrote with a simplicity that made her essays and stories accessible even to children. None of the articles in this large-print book exceeds seven pages. As the editors point out, however, the deliberate naïveté of Weeden’s essays cloaks some trenchant cultural criticism. For example, the article entitled “Rev. Sam Jones at Huntsville,” written as a letter to a doctor of divinity, is an apologia for popular revivalism. “The world always credits a miraculous power to such men” as Jones, Weeden writes. “There is a conspicuous absence of contemporary fashions and flavor of learning” (p. 34).

The themes Weeden treats will be familiar to students of domestic ideology: the beauty and spirituality of nature, the goodness of home and motherhood, the hidden power of humble people, the need for self-denial, the mysterious workings of providence. Weeden’s emphasis differs, however, from many writers of domestic fiction. Physically delicate, she never married, and her personal circumstances likely account for her relative lack of attention to romantic themes, and the focus she places on individuals who must discover their vocation outside the domestic ideals of marriage and motherhood. Four of her short stories feature the fragile Geraldine who is confined to a chair beside a window. Geraldine finds a new sense of purpose when an older woman tells her, “Believe me, a life like yours seems something wonderful. It is a life set apart, consecrated to holy uses. Lighthouses are stationary, but they do as much service as lifeboats” (p. 101).

Fisk and Riley have chosen a somewhat odd organization for their book. They have divided the Flake White pieces into four categories, "Essays," "Stories," "Christmas," and "Fables," each of which constitutes a section of the volume. There is considerable overlap between these categories, as the Christmas pieces are either stories or fables. The articles are not placed in chronological order within sections, although a chronological listing is provided at the end of the book. The editors apparently chose a thematic organization because the dates of composition could not be determined. They suggest that their format is in keeping with the intent of the author herself, who avoided specific references to place and time and sought to give her stories a timeless quality.

For readers interested in locating Flake White in her own place and time, the editors provide a short introduction that includes a description of their sources and methodology, as well as some very limited biographical information and analysis of Weeden's work as an expression of Victorian culture. The introduction also contains a brief history of the *Louisville Christian Observer*, the Old School Presbyterian newspaper that was Weeden's primary venue for publication. Fisk and Riley do not attempt to analyze Weeden's theological views or the effects of the post-war era on her thought, although the writer's own disparaging references to social change and industrialization indicate that she found the developments of the late nineteenth century dehumanizing (see pp. 25, 128, 134). The introduction contains some awkward grammar. The editors write, for example, that Weeden's subjects had "amazingly nothing to do with slavery" (p. x). The book has footnotes, but no index or bibliography.

Weeden derived her pseudonym from a white pigment that had been used for centuries to give paintings a luminous quality; Fisk and Riley suggest that Weeden's own heart "glows" in the same way from the Flake White writings (p. xi). Their goal in publishing this book has been to make Weeden's ideals and sensibility more accessible to the reading public. On the whole, they have succeeded.

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