



## Black Sheep Boy: A Novel in Stories

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## **Black Sheep Boy: A Novel in Stories** Martin Pousson

Meet a wild-hearted boy from the bayou land of Louisiana. Misfit, outcast, loner. Call him anything but a victim. Sissy, fairy, Jenny Woman. Son of a mixed-race Holy Ghost mother and a Cajun French phantom father. In a series of tender and tough stories, he encounters gender outlaws, drag queen renegades, and a rogues gallery of sex-starved priests, perverted teachers, and murderous bar owners. To escape his haunted history, the wild-hearted boy must shed his old skin and make a new self. As he does, his story rises from dark and murk, from moss and mud, to reach a new light and a new brand of fairy tale. Cajun legends, queer fantasies, and universal myths converge into a powerful work of counter-realism. *Black Sheep Boy* is a song of passion and a novel of defiance.

## **Black Sheep Boy: A Novel in Stories Details**

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Author : Martin Pousson

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# From Reader Review Black Sheep Boy: A Novel in Stories for online ebook

## Tim says

Colorful writing and a cleverly assembled book. Imagery abounds; the story is conveyed less through words than it is through pictures. Imagine standing before a massive oil painting that contains a whole story on its canvas or a floor-to-ceiling fresco that covers all four walls of a room. That's how Black Sheep Boy is reads: word pictures.

We follow the life of the narrator from when he's a toddler through early adulthood. The perspective is first person but I felt weirdly disconnected from either the principal character or anyone else who appears in the book. While I enjoyed the words and the author's technique, neither elicited any real emotion.

The book's opening sentence informs the reader that Acadians, who make up the ancestry and heritage of our narrator, sang songs that confused Americans and that was part of the point of the songs. This turns out to be a bit of foreshadowing though I wasn't so much confused as conscious of being outside the circle of the narrator's very personal experience. And perhaps being deliberately held outside that experience.

Disappointing because I am roughly the same age as the main character - the same songs were playing at my high school prom down in South Carolina. I wanted to feel some sort of camaraderie, some sort of recognition of shared experience, but it never happened.

Beautiful but not evocative.

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## Kazza says

This really is an extraordinarily good piece of writing. Queer lit-fic, so not "MM" romance. I don't have enough superlatives for the writing and the story. There's 24 status updates attached here to give you an idea of the writing, if you're interested.

I'll add something more here later but a full review is on the blog. I can't spoil the book because it's too fluid yet complex to write a spoiler review.

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## Richard Read says

Full disclosure: I've known Martin Pousson for a long, long time. Decades, in fact. It can be a little awkward having artists as friends: will I like their new work? What will I say if I don't? Thankfully, that's never been a problem with Martin. He's a master of language and a magnificent storyteller.

In some ways, Martin and I had similar upbringings. Our parents came from humble, country backgrounds. Our mothers strove to give us the best of everything: clothes, toys, an education, far more than they'd had

growing up. Our fathers worked day and night to meet our mothers' demands, and as a result, they figured less into our lives.

But Martin's mother was ambitious in the extreme. In his writing, she's always pushing, nagging, coddling, scolding, concerned about appearances and keeping up. (She reminds me a little of Rebecca Wells' mom in *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, but so, so much crazier. And more real.) Not surprisingly, his mother figures prominently in his first novel/memoir, *No Place, Louisiana*, and in his second, *Black Sheep Boy*.

You might wonder how someone could wring two memoirs out of one childhood, but in Martin's case, there's plenty of material to explore, and there's astonishingly little overlap between the books.

More importantly, they're written in dramatically different styles. They're companion pieces, best read together.

*No Place, Louisiana* is the fairly straightforward story of Martin's childhood. I'd describe it as creative nonfiction: a real-life, start-to-finish story laid out in stunning prose.

*Black Sheep Boy* is told through vignettes, 15 stories of events that took place over the first 20-ish years of Martin's life. They unfold, unravel, dip, and climb through chapters, paragraphs, and sentences comprised of pure poetry.

Put another way: in *No Place, Louisiana*, Martin goes from Point A to Point B to Point C, connecting the dots of his own story. In *Black Sheep Boy*, the connecting lines disappear, and Martin dives deep into the dots themselves, exploring and explaining how he's come to be who he's come to be.

As such, *Black Sheep Boy* doesn't have a conventional plot; Martin himself is the throughline. Each chapter brings its own story, its own mesmerizing turns of phrase, its own climaxes -- sometimes literally. It's a magnificent read for anyone, but for this gay man of a certain age, it wasn't just beautiful, it was a look at part of my own life.

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### **Travis Copeland says**

What started off as promising devolved into a nonsensical, self-indulgent mess. I had high hopes for this book based upon critical reviews, but was so disappointed. Rebellious \*and\* self-loathing is pathetic, not revelatory. Polluted with not even gay stereotypes, but homophobic caricatures that made me cringe. Lots of self flagellation with zero joy - would not recommend this book to anyone.

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### **Candi Sary says**

My daughter and I saw Martin Pousson speak at the LA Festival of books and we loved his vibe. We were so pulled into his authenticity we had to buy the book. It's a fantastic read! It's poetic and honest, painful yet beautiful. So many breathtaking sentences just made me stop, and I had to read them over and over. "Some secrets held such power they had to remain hidden, not in a closet or at the bottom of a chest, but out in the open, where no one would notice." As a novel in stories—some realistic, some laced with fantasy—the

narrater's life is broken up into powerful events. Detailed accounts of moments in his childhood, his school years, and his early years of adulthood come together in a fragmented yet intimate portrait. It's the kind of book that leaves out a lot of pieces of the story, but the character is so complete, so real, the experience feels whole.

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### **Book Riot Community says**

I was lucky enough to interview Martin Pousson a few months ago and we became fast friends, but I'd only had a chance to read a few of the stories in this book at the time, and so I finally sat down with it properly. A novel in stories about a Cajun queer boy growing up in Louisiana, this book is a gorgeous piece of literature. I loved the writing, which swoops melodically around while also being totally coherent (hard to do), and the flavor of Louisiana and Creole and Cajun traditions and their slow loss were incredibly affecting.

—Ilana Masad

from The Best Books We Read In April 2017: <http://bookriot.com/2017/05/01/riot-r...>

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### **Kirk says**

Tbh. Idk how I feel. The book was hard to follow. Tons of stories that I can't tell if they were real or analogies. Everything was so flowery and over discussed. I think I enjoyed the book, but then again I can't be certain. Also I don't think I would have understood the message of the book had I not read the back description.

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### **Heather McAlister says**

Beautiful book. Surreal, engaging, imaginative, provocative. Weaves words like a tapestry and mesmerizes you like a spell.

Full disclosure, I was a student of Martin Pousson's at Cal State Northridge for two semesters. He is very kind, and very well-read; infinitely intelligent and compassionate. He's also a master word-smith, able to bend and stretch the meaning of every word every way it can go for as far as it can go while still having technically the correct meaning. And he is SOOO well-read. You can mention any book, written by any author, from any genre, and odds are, not only has he read it, but he can name-drop at least five other works just like it to give context.

And his mastery of words and language are put to good use in this book, where he paints such a breathtaking portrait. Despite it being 180 pages, I blew through it so quickly it felt like it was over in only eight page. I was so enchanted that I blew through the book in an afternoon, though it was by no means light or empty or mindless. It was so wonderfully engaging.

I would highly recommend this to anyone.

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## A.M. Leibowitz says

**\*\*4.5 stars\*\***

This is a highly literary work, rather than the more common gay romance. It's a dense and somewhat difficult read, on the level of a college literature course. Readers need to bring their thinking game for this one.

After finishing it, I'm still not sure how I feel. It's extraordinarily well-written, and I definitely enjoyed reading something minus the usual tropes and plot devices. However, I'm not sure I can say I liked it, exactly.

What I loved: the beautiful prose, the Louisiana setting, and a story that wasn't a romance. I appreciated the almost tall tale quality to it all and the rich history and cultural flavor. Because it isn't tied with direct reference to a particular era, it has a timeless quality to it.

What I wasn't fond of: I didn't have strong feelings of any kind toward the story's first-person narrator. He was neither easy to like nor easy to dislike. He's unreliable in the way most literary first-person narrators are, so it's hard to tell how much of what he says can be taken as "fact." I actively disliked nearly every other side character, even the ones I suspect I was supposed to like. There was simply no one to connect to, which made it harder to enjoy at an emotional level. At the end, I really wasn't sure what the point of the story had been all along other than a somewhat voyeuristic look at this kid's life.

This was a tough read, and I found I could only appreciate it in an intellectual rather than an emotional way. I prefer stories which deliver both. However, I recognize that it is indeed personal preference and not at all anything the story failed to do.

Ultimately, I'm giving this 4.5 stars only because it wasn't to my taste. It's otherwise a phenomenally well-written book which I believe readers who enjoy literary fiction will appreciate.

**\*\*I received a free copy in exchange for an honest review\*\***

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## Tex Reader says

### **3.0 of 5 stars – Beautifully Prosaic, But Slow, Hard to Follow Story.**

This story was beautifully written, but sometimes because of that and because of its structure, it ended up also being a slow and hard to follow story.

This was what I call high lit; and as is sometimes the case for me, the prosaic style at times got in the way or was too much, almost as if it was written that way just to impress. Sometimes I lost the meaning of descriptions that were so obscure that I couldn't grasp the analogy or symbolism. And it kept going on with that symbolism so much so that I either got tired of it or I got tired of trying to figure it out. I do I'm not adept at reading this style, so this very well could be enjoyed and more meaningful to someone who loves poetry, hidden meanings, indirect language, and a lot of symbolisms and analogies to tell the story.

In a way, the style, the boy's story, the family, the cultural setting, and the gay aspects reminded me of Truman Capote's *Other Rooms*, *Other Voices*. That sets a high standard, but even so, this fell short of that. I will say that I enjoyed his descriptions of the Cajun culture and scenes. And I did sympathize with the MC (Martin) having to grow up gay in an oppressive environment – a “black sheep boy.” Pousson helped me feel and relate to that, which helped it along for me. Other than that, I don't think the first person POV of Martin worked out well. Seeing things through his eyes, I never grew to care much about him, and I didn't even like a number of the other numerous characters.

I observed but wasn't emotionally engaged; and with all that language in the way, the plot progressed slowly to the point of being boring in spots. Indeed, the first 40 pages mostly described Martin's Mama and her past (not about him), which didn't interest me. And from there, the story was a bit convoluted. Even though this was intended to be (as the subtitle says) a series of "stories," they were too disjointed, I wanted them to be tied together more smoothly. The ending was ok, if I understood it correctly; but then the Afterward threw me, presenting me with something the opposite of what I understood was previously said. Even the acknowledgements are muddled and a mystery in meaning.

This was a difficult, and at other times beautiful read, making it a hard one to rate. Ultimately, I went with how I felt, not how I think I should have felt because it was high lit; so I'd say it was ok. I enjoyed the language, and appreciated its creative approach, but it still didn't go further than that for me, especially when I compare it to similar kinds of stories.

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### **Michelle says**

A good candidate for my best-ever fictionish shelf this "novel in stories" absolutely stunned me. I highlighted entire chapters because the writing is just that good and Pousson makes words come together into unforgettable images... written with a level of vulnerability that reminds me of Justin Torres, these stories transport the reader deep into a world where real and unreal, true and untrue lose all sense of meaning.

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### **Sara Khayat says**

Black Sheep Boy by Martin Pousson is a novel in the form of a short story collection. This vivid story, rich with imagery & magic, creates a dreamlike narrative for the reader. This coming-of-age story seamlessly tackles topics of home, sexuality, abuse, and the city of New Orleans. One of my favorite books of all time.

I purchased this book through L.A.'s fabulous book mobile, twenty stories. You can find them on Instagram @twentystoriesla.

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### **Joshua says**

Breathtaking.

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## Genevieve says

The writing is so sensual that it's almost fantastical. Absolutely heartbreaking with no pity, either given or requested.

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## Mike says

I had the great fortune to see Martin Pousson speak at a panel of LGBTQIA+ writers at the LA Festival of Books. His voice stood out in particular because he championed both an aesthetic and political queerness to me; some of the other writers seemed perfectly content writing without plan or purpose and some remained contentedly tone-deaf to the urgency of liberation in the current political climate. Martin stood true. I had a feeling he was doing something right when an audience member asked outright what "brand" he was because he seemed uncomfortably hard "to pin down." A white gay man, obviously, asking to pigeonhole another member of the community. Shocking, I know.

*Black Sheep Boy* has pages of perfection in it. The entirety of "Revelator", for lack of a better word, is revelatory. The prose from beginning to end for that story in particular is abjectly stunning. Likewise - for those with the hardcover edition - take a look at pages 112 through 114 for a stirring portrait of a mother's multi-valence not only in background or culture but in the evolution of her disposition, her attitude about a queer child.

Pousson's focus is laser-sharp on the queering of his writing: it is an internal story for its protagonist and therefore only depends on dialogue for the most crucial moments; its conclusion is one not borne out of a direct tracing of a hero's journey or any comfortable verdict to his narrative, even if emotionally fulfilling; much of the narrative blurs together the magical and the realistic not in a Rushdie or Marquez way, but in a deliberately queer way. Pousson imbues the unsung aspects of the Cajun experience with chameleonic qualities, hammering home the qualities of shape-shifting and metamorphoses that both its queer protagonist and its Cajun characters must perform. As a certain bayou culture falls prey to oil men and exploitation, Pousson's protagonist struggles to allow his eccentricities to prosper in either a Pentecostal or Catholic swampland. Sometimes this approach dangerously flirts with the more stigmatized aspects of "literary fiction," but nevertheless Pousson has fused these paradigms and made them his own, and for this I give him credit.

And yet I do find this laser-sharpness elicits plenty of myopia on other aspects of this novel in stories: how much it relies on objects being crawfish red, how much it clings to mentioning wings in moments of levity, how the stories are vignettes that only cohere by sharing an author or a certain mood. *Black Sheep Boy* is thankfully short because near the end of the book, the world Pousson creates exercises its own metamorphosis and becomes claustrophobic. The mystical bayou rife with religious fervor begins to narrow even as the protagonist's visions start to expand. Surreal improbabilities in Louisiana give way to real drug-induced hallucination. Sequential arcs that engage with sexual trysts and certain niches of the gay community are appropriately raw, but imbue the book with a less-than-magical familiarity. The style started to lose momentum.

Pousson has dual muses in both geography and identity, as, I suppose, we all do. In some stories he fuses



these two together spectacularly, and in others it seems that combination favors one too solidly over the other, or the recipe is effective but the focus could use more breath and breadth to be more exquisite. It's hard to "diagnose" a book that is so committed to evading all of the usual symptoms of queer literature, and that for the most part succeeds. *Black Sheep Boy* is perfectly enjoyable as a whole, admirable in its purpose, and dazzling at times.

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