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Book Review - Slab: On That Hallelujah Day When Tiger & Preacher Meet

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Off the SHELF

Slab: On That Hallelujah Day When Tiger & Preacher Meet by Selah Saterstrom (Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2015: 978-1-56689-395-4, \$12.99)

A slab, just a slab—that is what is left of Tiger’s Mississippi home after Hurricane Katrina. Author Selah Saterstrom, the director of the PhD program in creative writing at the University of Denver, has created a mixed genre novel on Tiger’s four-generational dysfunctional southern family life. Many of the stories are bleak, but Saterstrom is to the point in her writing. This succinctness helps the reader in dealing with these harsh realities. Saterstrom acknowledges that she gathered stories about Hurricane Katrina from her Mississippi Gulf Coast and Louisiana family, friends, and strangers.

Since Tiger is a performance artist, the book is formatted as a play. It is divided into two acts. Act 1 is “Tiger,” which takes place on a concrete slab. It includes sixteen scenes. Act 2 is “Preacher,” which consists of one scene located on an abandoned beach. Within the book, there are poems, drawings, recipes, a photograph, a postcard, and interview questions from Barbara Walters.

Some of the tales of Tiger include her: life as a stripper, reign as Miss Mississippi (her cause was gun awareness), profession as a mystery

and a cook book author, and avocation as a drawer of Rebel flags. Her wide-ranging thoughts match her wide-ranging life, as she ponders the association between dogs and death, her grandfather’s suicide, and the devil. Act 1, scene 1, “In Which Tiger Gets Her Name,” begins with Tiger working as a stripper. She hears a TV preacher say, “Prepare your mind,” so she gets a library card. Since she is now an

avid reader, the girls at the strip club get her the book *Profound Women* for her birthday. The first lesson her mind prepares her for is, “Boredom can lead to new opportunities.” She decides to update her dance routines by incorporating two of her favorite “profound women,” Helen Keller and Florence Nightingale. She gets her name from the latter. You will need to read the book to find out why.

Saterstrom has created a novel told in several genres. Her writing is succinct and her language is coarse at times. Though the book deals with some hard issues, there is

sensitivity throughout the book. This book will not be everyone’s glass of southern sweet tea, but if you like something a bit unusual, and you appreciate new approaches to storytelling, this may be the tale for you.

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