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REVIEW: Creola's Moonbeam

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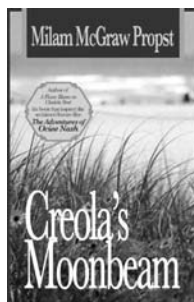
FICTION

Creola's Moonbeam by Milam McGraw Propst (BelleBooks, 2006, ISBN 0-9768760-3-5, \$14.95).

Atlanta author Milam McGraw Propst employs the device of story-within-a-story to paint a portrait of an author at midlife, struggling with writer's block while at the same time looking back at the events of her childhood and her life as a wife and mother.

Having thrown her latest manuscript in the trash, Honey Newberry has retreated to her favorite spot on the Florida coast, vowing to take a vacation from writing. Events conspire against her, however, as the spirit of her beloved nanny Creola seems to be everywhere — even embodied in Beatrice, the free-spirited new friend Honey meets on the beach. Memories come flooding back, and Honey commits them to paper. The present-day narrative moves at a leisurely pace, interspersed with an assortment of domestic vignettes from the past. Honey gradually begins to embrace Beatrice's zest for life and to come to terms with her own life passages, including her relationship to her craft as a writer. The gentle homespun humor and depictions of Southern family life will appeal to readers who enjoy the *Mossy Creek* series and Karin Gillespie's "Bottom Dollar Girl" books. Consider purchasing for public library collections where demand is high for clean, down-home stories about women "of a certain age." ►►

— Reviewed by **Sarah Trowbridge**
Fayette County Public Library



The Meat and Spirit Plan by Selah Saterstrom (Coffee House Press, September 2007, ISBN: 1566892015 ISBN: 978-1566892018, \$14.95).

Southern fiction isn't always moonlight and magnolias, as Selah Saterstrom demonstrates in her gut-wrenching novel, *The Meat and Spirit Plan*. Dark humor and sexually explicit paragraphs interspersed with terse surrealistic poetry frame the devastating coming-of-age experiences of a girl from the fictional town of Beau Repose, Mississippi. The young main character, daughter of a drug-addled and mostly absent mother, cannot wait to plunge headfirst into a pathetic cycle of drugs, liquor, sex and more drugs and sex. The dismal underbelly of Beau Repose is the girl's favorite stomping ground as she pursues a path that seems certain to destroy her. She is sent to reform school where she fails to reform, but even so, she earns a scholarship to study, of all things, theology in Scotland. There Saterstrom dangles in front of the reader a glimmer of hope for the anti-heroine of *Meat* in the form of a love affair with an ex-con. Unfortunately the girl discovers that years of self-abuse have ravaged her body. Violently ill, she returns home after receiving more bad news about her mother and is immediately hospitalized. In a near-death state, she looks forward to morphine drips and unusual nocturnal visits from a male nurse who may or may not actually be the janitor. At long last on the mend, she decides, "I don't know what I'm doing. It's liberating and depressing. I could move to Hawaii, but once there, what would I do? I've got to come up with a plan." She

