

Translation

Pure emotion. That is perhaps the loveliest thing a book can offer. Brian Leung, a young American writer of Chinese extraction, presents us with that gift in "Lost Men." A novel simple and handsome, written on the edge of a soul--of two souls. A father. A son. Years after abandoning the family of his deceased wife, a father invites his son to join him on a trip to China, the country of his roots. The shame of the father; the anger of the son. The reunion is badly planned. The journey is long and strewn with traps before the father receives his pardon, before the son finally discovers his identity, (and) the freedom to be and to love.

Brian Leung's novel is told in two voices. The voice of the father Xin and the son Westin, intertwine, their hearts and souls strike again each other in the dark, in their blind quest to find the invisible ties that finally join them. Lost Men is a chaste, understated story, almost whispered that reveals with the slow pace of a man's life, the misplaced pride, the wounds that can never heal. Xin and Westin guard secrets that are difficult to confess. Xin is not sure he's Westin's father and with difficulty discloses the dramatic circumstances of his conception. Westin, cut off from his father's love, is handicapped in love: he's known only one relationship--platonic--with a man who disappeared.

Omnipresent China

Both men carry with them a fateful message. The father, a letter from his wife that resolves the mystery of Westin's paternity, but that he's never dared to open. The son, a mysterious box, given to him by an old Chinese lady when he eight, and which he is to open in China, but only "at the right time."

The two men gradually tame each other, through tiny miracles during their somnambulant journey, from which emerges a modern China, at the same time, petty, staggering and grievously human. The strength of Leung's novel is that the overarching story of our two heroes never falls into navel-gazing or smothering (self-consciousness)--the world, which vibrates and swirls in the background, gradually compels them and us. Little by little, the China the father fled and the advent of Communism completely penetrates them. Behind the tattered attempts at reunion of Xin and Westin, the palimpsest-like story of an entire country unfolds.

These lost fathers and sons are legion, frustrated at not being sufficiently spoken of, heard, understood. The two heroes of Lost Men symbolize the almost impossible but necessary dialogue between generations needed to assume (create?) the complete life of man. Brian Leung's book brings to mind one of the loveliest of pop songs, now forgotten, "Father and Son" of Cat Stevens. A song for two voices, which speaks of a son that one loses and a father one "kills;" of the life of a family lived not like a comic sketch, but like a drama. A drama of love.