

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

On Wings of Song
by Molly Lynn Watt
Ibbetson Street Press
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Review by Bert Stern

"ON WINGS OF SONG" (Ibbetson Street Press) is a clear-eyed account of racial oppression in the US and of the people, black and white, who struggled to end it. What gives the book its special authenticity is the point of view, which is intimate – a positioning of the narrator's eye gained by Watt's own lifelong efforts in the struggle.

While the book is historical, it is also lyrical. "Crayola World begins:

*Robin draws sky-blue arches
burnt orange sun sepia earth sprouts
maroon father strums raw-umber guitar
bittersweet mother hold pink flower
purple sister suck plum thumb.*

And it ends when the child-artist

*. . . picks up black
draws herself in the center
that's me
the most beautifullest.*

Bushels full of poems have been written about Billy Holiday, but Watt's "Billy Holiday Sings "Strange Fruit" tops them all. It begins with a close-up picture of Billy herself, and ends, in an astonishing shift, with a first-hand account of an observer's experience at a lynching.

"On Wings of Song" is canonic. It restores for all of us the beating heart of an evolving conscience that may never be complete.



Bert Stern is the author of *Silk*, "Steerage," and "Winter in China".