Clarion Review

General

A Field in Arlon
Marek Nowina
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Suffering from a permanent mid-life crisis, “forty-something” Melly Cheval decides to chase the 1999 solar eclipse from his home in England to mainland Europe—more specifically, to a field in Arlon and then to the steamy red light district of Amsterdam.

Marek Nowina’s (pronounced noh-vee-nah) adult-themed novel, *A Field in Arlon*, is the well-written but disjointed record of Melly’s several months journey. Laced with references to hard and soft drugs, layered with coarse and foul language, and highlighting rough and unconventional sex, the novel’s appeal will be to a limited audience of adult readers interested in an author’s attempts at pushing the envelope of both literary form and substance, as with Frank Harris and Henry Miller.

Given that Nowina’s novel is about Melly’s travels—as well as his search for sexual and emotional fulfillment and his addiction to tripping by “smoking”—the title *Melly’s Trips* might be a more suitable choice. The structure of the story also lends itself more to the suggested title. There is the first trip initiated by the eclipse, and another of his return to England for a stopover before returning to Amsterdam to find Talish—also known as TiTi—a young prostitute half Melly’s age with whom he had several “trips,” real and fantasized, during his first journey. Melly has also written a story about his erotic escapades with TiTi entitled “Melly’s Trip” that plays a central role in the novel, especially on his second trip when he finds another young prostitute he deems to be more fitted to being the heroine of his story.

Melly’s trips while smoking, and those of others on hard drugs, are also detailed. Then, there are his trips into the memory log of his life with his wife, ten years his senior, and of his various affairs after a son is born. As well, there is a final “trip,” entitled “Melly’s Strip,” that is an extended conversation with the Dream Maker. While Melly inhales deeply from a “polythene bag of Bahamian grass,” the Dream Maker tells him, “Live or die, you decide, but quick, chop,

chop; you're out of time."

Nowina's novel is a commendable debut but needs a more disciplined edit. There is, for example, a serious gaffe when Melly's wife, Jean, calls TiTi by her correct name of Talish when Jean is not supposed to know Talish and TiTi are the same person. There are also various incidents, such as the winning of two lotteries, that are too contrived for credibility. Some of the minor characters, such as Melly's son and Melly's male pals in Amsterdam, are one-dimensional. On the other hand, the sex and drug scenes, although graphic, are not gratuitous indulgences but are necessary for the artistic integrity of the story, as are the warts-and-all depictions of the main characters tripping out in one of the world's most notorious red light districts.

Wayne Cunningham