Clarion Review

Literary

Field of Vision
Michael Jarvis
Field of Vision Books
978-0-9885389-0-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

Michael Jarvis's *Field of Vision* is about a young photographer's visit to the fictional Caribbean island of Soufriere. Upon his arrival, Jacob antagonizes a local named Rollo, whose ensuing wrath is predicated on his rage at Jacob's disrespect. Despite being asked not to, the photographer took multiple photos of Rollo. When Rollo takes his revenge, he uses the language of racism to justify his acts. When he beats and rapes Jacob's lover, he tells her "Dat white stain muss be covered. You muss be filled wit black seed." What follows is a strange ride of revenge and violence that verges on the operatic.

Although he is angry and bent on revenge, Jacob lacks empathy in his response to his lover's rape. He informs her without preamble or comfort that what happened to her was between himself and Rollo. When Jacob makes advances, she declines, citing the need to go to a clinic first. Rather than expressing sympathy, he loses his erection at the mention of "clinic."

The result of scenes like this make Jacob seem insensitive. This is in part deliberate on Jarvis's part: the narrator perceives the external world in detail and yet he rarely looks within. Unfortunately, without insight into his psyche, the reader is left only with Jacob's wisecracks, lack of remorse, and appetite for women as indicators of his character.

Jarvis's descriptions of Soufriere's people and places are elegantly wrought, as are his sex scenes. Each romantic interlude (and there are many) is vividly realized in remarkable, concrete imagery. Echoing his character, Jarvis deftly tangles the language of photography, sex, and love. At one point, Jacob picks up his camera to watch his girlfriend through its mediating lens. When she asks, "Cahn you take us?" the reader wonders whether she wants to go to the US with him. She only means she wants a photograph of them together.

Field of Vision has the potential be a quality literary thriller, yet it lacks the polish needed to be of trade quality. For example, the fourth section of the text is written in second

person, whereas the rest of the book is written exclusively in first. In addition, many potentially great action scenes deflate under the weight of prose that is bogged down by wordiness and passive voice: “The truck bucking forward for footing, wheels cut to angle at the Nissan’s midsection, a rear door opening even as the truck returns, the metal bang and shock of impact felt as Glenroy brakes, kicks the emergency lever as well, tires sliding to a stop while the car teeters and then slips down the slope.”

A final challenge to the book’s flow is that many characters speak phonetically rendered dialect. This hijacks the pace as the reader goes back and forth, ascertaining meaning.

These unflattering details aside, *Field of Vision* is a formidable achievement from a talented new writer.

Leia Menlove