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Going the Distance: A Novel

Michael Joyce
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Dig deep into this experimental novel, and discover the pleasure of strategically implemented phrases and words.

Intriguing and a bit surreal, *Going the Distance* explores hidden elements of the human mind and introduces the curious to a cast of eccentric characters. An injured major-league baseball pitcher finds an unfamiliar woman in the passenger seat of his car on the day of the 1979 all-star game. Laced with mystery and offbeat humor, this baffling though enjoyable novel ambles along a bumpy road with excursions down unpaved fictional territory.

Experimental, even quirky, this literary work requires dedication and effort of the reader in order to comprehend it, for its near-stream-of-consciousness technique can be puzzling to the uninitiated: “Onion and fatback. There was this story I read for a class in college. It was mostly bullshit, but with some real beautiful stuff about hiking in the pine forests, and about the river. Anyway, the guy in the story takes an onion sandwich with him when he goes out to fish.”

Those who savor the exploratory, as opposed to the traditional, approach to narrative will discover a feast in Joyce’s writing. His messages are like hidden spices in an unusual dish. In reality, there is not a run-of-the-mill moment in this potent story, which is intended for people who want to interpret events and read for the pure pleasure of playing with skillfully implemented words. Even meandering moments are strategically placed, allowing one to read a character’s thoughts or see an interesting landscape from a bizarre perspective.

With occasional parenthetical asides, Joyce launches into tidbits of information that otherwise would have stalled a straightforward style: “My father… (Flynn pauses and shakes his head. He is clearly having trouble getting this out. For a moment it looks like his eyes are glazing over, but then the Flynn control reasserts itself.)”

One startling discovery may confound those who cannot accept a fictional insolence without blaming the author. In isolated places, the novel veers into a precarious and decidedly racist description of African Americans. Though high-quality literary work often conveys the prevailing attitude of the period in which the story is set, this can be offensive. But sometimes these phrases can act as an intentional deterrent by exposing immorality.

Michael Joyce is a prolific author as well as a professor of English and media studies at Vassar College. This latest novel of his will delight not only fans of baseball but also fans of the great American love story.
JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (November 30, 2013)

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