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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Thanks Be to the World

Lindsay Boyd
Changeling / Trafford (May 2009)
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> *Art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship. It severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life….In former days the artist remained unknown and his work was to the glory of God.—Ingmar Bergman*

Late in his career, actor Larry Corbett is suffering from a restlessness and spiritual ennui. He decides to take a trip around the world to visit the locations of all the films he made with Mert, a movie director and auteur extraordinaire reminiscent of Ingmar Bergman. Larry and Mert had a close and nurturing relationship like the one between Bergman and Max Von Sydow. A friend and "father figure," Mert taught Larry more than merely filmmaking. He recalls that those days and nights he spent on location with Mert were instrumental to his growth as an actor and spiritual being. Larry remembers that Mert always had an anecdote or casual remark that put the crew at ease and gave them a sense of collaboration. Now, after his mentor's demise, Larry needs to find that essence in his own life.

At the end of his self-imposed exile, Larry ruminates "on those factors, or events, in his life that taught him to see in the way a blind man must learn to cognize the physical world, the world the seeing take for granted." In a letter to his unrequited love, Serenity, Larry recites Mert's philosophy: "…the Great Director (God) needs us as his agents, if you will, to bring fruition to his beautiful dreams…Every time you see an individual achieve something noteworthy think of it as the Great Director's bringing a dream of His to realization through that person."

Written in a Henry James-esque style, Boyd's novel is a blend of third-person narrative and epistles. Although his prose has a lyrical quality, he tends to overuse certain words (like "penultimate") which jar the reader out of the flow and magic of the story like a speed bump. Incorporating more apparent chapter breaks or font changes in the text would also help alleviate confusion for the reader as Boyd switches from flashbacks to third-person narrative to letters and back again.

Boyd shows great originality by including the four screenplays written by Mert. They work better than an epilogue and provide nuances that enhance the novel with epiphanies that are tiny explosions in the mind. The screenplays create connections between certain scenes in the movies and Larry's baptism through fire. *Thanks Be to the World* is a novel about one man's quest to bridge the gaps between spirituality, intellect, and love, reconnecting the humanism of art and the artist with the divine.
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