

The Center of the World

Thomas Van Essen

Other Press

Softcover \$15.95 (384pp)

978-1-59051-549-5

Imagine a painting so powerful it rekindles passions, revives the libido of a septuagenarian, captures the imagination of dispassionate art collectors, and cause a conspiracy to shroud its very existence. This is the topic of *The Center of the World*—a lost and much-desired J. M. W. Turner painting so erotic that all those who behold it are changed for life.

It begins in nineteenth century England. A writer visits with historic figure Lord Egremont, his mistress, and Turner himself. In modern times, a woman searches for the alleged painting for her art-dealer employer. Meanwhile Henry Leiden, family man, afflicted by ennui, finds it hidden in his shed. Henry becomes obsessed by the Turner, finding it changes his life and his marriage. He longs for the world and the sexiness it exudes. “No words of mine or even my memories are adequate to the thing itself ... Every time I try to recall it, I am aware that my memory is a poor shadow.”

In alternating chapters we learn the story of the painting. Meanwhile, those searching for it are closing in. Mature readers will relish the intellectual examination into the powers of art and eroticism.

The Center of the World is Thomas Van Essen's first novel. He holds a degree from Sarah Lawrence and a PhD in English from Rutgers University.

LEIA MENLOVE (Summer 2013)

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