



The Death of Baseball

Orlando Ortega-Medina

Cloud Lodge Books (Nov 19, 2019)

Softcover \$14.95 (450pp)

978-1-9995873-5-2

Two men bond over sex, violence, and shared emotional and psychological trauma in Orlando Ortega-Medina's neo noir *The Death of Baseball*, about identity, sexuality, and nihilism in 1980s Los Angeles.

The novel is a study of contrasting moralities juxtaposed to the rigidity of tradition, as reflected in main characters Clyde and Ralph. Clyde lives a delusional, star-obsessed life; Ralph wrestles with faith. Each man confronts moral failures, emotional traumas, and the consequences of succumbing to destructive nihilism.

Clyde is born in the moment that Marilyn Monroe dies. In his childhood, he's a Little League star who's infatuated with his cousin. He lives in the shadow of his older brother, who committed suicide and whose room becomes an untouchable shrine. Clyde's alcoholic father hates him; his dotting mother is powerless to stop his father's violence; Clyde ends up in psychiatric confinement.

Ralph's a genius born on Yom Kippur; he uses prayer to thwart his kleptomania. His nonconformist behavior pushes his conservative parents to send him to Israel for atonement. Ralph falls in unrequited love with his cousin, and his rebelliousness leads to violence and a mental breakdown.

The men meet as adults in Hollywood. Clyde is haunted by Marilyn's ghost; Ralph channels James Dean. The two decide to make a film about the transmigration of souls. However, their psychological struggles and past emotional traumas derail their intentions.

The Death of Baseball is psychologically complex as it explores the consequences of mainstream society attempting to regulate nonconforming behavior. In it, authority figures lose their power and adolescents fall victim to their own instinctual excesses. A tight, Gothic tale of rejection, personal struggle, and acceptance, *The Death of Baseball* is a mirror that reflects back its characters' destructive pasts, though neither are able to abandon or overcome them.

NANCY POWELL (November / December 2019)

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