

The Man with the Overcoat

David Finkle

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Contemplation of the surreal and a fast-paced mystery merge to deliver this satisfying fever dream of a novel.

David Finkle's *The Man with the Overcoat* is a satisfying, surreal tale wrapped in a taut, neo-noir package.

Edward "Skip" Gerber, a thirty-seven-year-old real estate lawyer, unwittingly embarks on a life-changing adventure when he emerges from an elevator and a mysterious stranger hands him an overcoat. "Here you go, and be very careful with it," the stranger says before disappearing into the crowd. Gerber sets out following clues in order to return the coat to its owner, which leads him on a trail throughout New York City. During his quest, other concerns fall away as Gerber reexamines his own life and finally realizes the true purpose of the overcoat.

The Man with the Overcoat is not divided into chapters; this, combined with the compelling story, immerses the reader in a fever-dream reading experience. Finkle's protagonist is chased by mysterious agents as he makes daring escapes by taxi and on foot. Although the mystery of the coat and Gerber's pursuers keep the story moving briskly, there are also subtle, reflective moments that allow readers insight into Skip Gerber's deeper state of mind. In the midst of his adventures, Skip pauses to examine his face in a mirror and sees a reflection of his life thus far: "features of a chap for whom continued entitlement was a given, whose place in the wider sea of humanity was established as long as he rocked no metaphorical boats." Gerber then perceives a kind of earned nobility, the result of his initiative and efforts to return the coat: "He looked at the chin and noticed that despite the pain—or *because* of it—he was holding it a bit higher."

Finkle's writing can be enjoyably playful, even within the constraints of his chosen genre. Gerber frequently refers to his fake Rolex with an array of "faux" synonyms, and there are plenty of colorful characters along the winding trail.

The Man with the Overcoat is a literary novel that disguises itself as a mystery. It's both page-turner and provocateur, a book that leaves cause for contemplation reverberating in the minds of readers.

PETER DABBENE (Summer 2015)

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