

Venus Looks Down On A Prairie Vole

Graeme Daniels

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This ethically charged novel examines topics from the psychology of sex addiction to reporting guidelines, all to intriguing ends.

In *Venus Looks Down on a Prairie Vole* by Graeme Daniels, Daniel Pierce, recently widowed, becomes entangled with Lira, a prostitute with an ulterior motive. Does the concept of patient confidentiality trump the public's need to know in cases of horrific crimes? Daniels presents this conundrum in his serpentine story of a serious ethical dilemma.

Daniel Pierce is a lonely and unhappy psychologist who tries to make connections with people but seems to fail miserably. He becomes involved with a prostitute, Lira, who asks him for help locating one of his clients. Doctor-client privilege prevents him from giving her the information she seeks, but he becomes involved with her himself, leading him into a sober house where he rooms with the very man Lira is searching for. Woven through the story are real-life issues around California's required reporting guidelines for mental health professionals who treat sex offenders.

The major plot twists of *Prairie Vole* require the suspension of disbelief, particularly the fact that when Pierce finally agrees to go to a sober house, his roommate is the man Lira wants to find. Pierce himself is a less than sympathetic character, both arrogant and judgmental, though it is repeatedly suggested that he's a careful, nonjudgmental psychologist; this disconnect is left unresolved.

The text is further complicated by awkward phrasing, the extensive use of adjectives, and confused metaphor. Many sentences seem to appear out of context, lending an air of chaos to the story. While it is conceivable that the intention is to present stream-of-consciousness writing, the meanings of such strung-together sentences is elusive, as with the haphazard sentence, "Via the odd knowing look, I gathered that Andrew had been up early, mingling with other residents, the second staff member that stood to the side of Max, and had already curried favor for being gregarious, if manic."

The cover photographs are appealing and relate somewhat to the story line. There is little back matter to give an idea of what the book is about, and the obscure title may cause some confusion.

Those intrigued with the psychology of sex addiction or interpersonal relationships may find this book interesting. This won't be a book for everyone, but the examination of the California law that deals with reporting guidelines may also prove to be a reading incentive for some.

LYNN EVARTS (May 8, 2016)

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