ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

LITERARY

Yellow Fever: (Or Why American Men Have Better Sex in Canada)
Gannon Vries
Intelligent Box Publishing
978-1-4903-3136-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Poetic, compelling, painfully beautiful writing contrasts with controversial subject matter to create a genuine work of modern art.

If a young George Carlin, dealing with puberty and sexual frustration, set out to write a video-gamer's pornographic version of *Eat, Pray, Love*, he could have written a book much like Gannon Vries's *Yellow Fever*. The story fuses reality and virtual reality together through the imagination and intuition of Moniker, the sex-addicted protagonist who designs video games.

Monika, the European intern working in his building, is the closest thing Moniker has to a traditional girlfriend, although he clearly prefers Asian women and expounds on the numerous racial stereotypes which he feels make them superior. The book reads like a chauvinist manifesto about the perceived merits and faults of Asian, European, and North American women. It obsesses over the various intimate habits of each, including a great deal of attention given to women's grooming.

If the main characters, Moniker and Monika, were not so self-absorbed and apathetic, the reader could find enough good in them to want something better for them, or at least care about their indulgent lives. As it is, the plot is fuzzy, the characters are bratty, and the pervading attitude toward women is offensive.

Yet, however unappealing the skin and bones may be, Gannon Vries's writing can be poetic, surprisingly compelling, and at times painfully beautiful. This tension between the technical mastery of syntax and rhetoric and the depravity of the story itself makes this an impossible book to put down—however badly one may want to. In comparing the bodies of Asian and European women to the architecture of cities of the past and the future, Vries uses stereotypes to create buildings and skylines which make sense even as they might seem harsh and distasteful.

Vries's cultural generalizations about what certain races of women want from him

should make any reader uncomfortable, and it almost seems he deliberately wants it that way. No author could write about feeling that he has bought and paid for sexual rights to a woman through his gifts to her without knowing how a reader will cringe.

Be warned, *Yellow Fever* stands out as a genuine work of modern art. Controversial and unabashed about its subject matter, no reader will get through this book without feeling something. Some of those feelings may be disbelief, disgust, or anger, but all readers will have definite opinions, and some may find themselves talking about this book long after reading it. Expect profanity and well-crafted but extremely disrespectful language toward women.

As Vries's first novel, he should be slapped on the wrist and applauded with the same hand. Impressive and disappointing, clever and sophomoric, creative and tedious, *Yellow Fever* is an undisputed must-read for those with the stomach for it.

Sara Budzik