



The Travelers

Keith Wayne McCoy

Champagne Book Group (February 2014)

(142pp)

978-1-77155-061-1

Meditations on introspection and bravery prove thoughtful in this mysterious, eloquent novel.

The debut novel from Keith Wayne McCoy, *The Travelers*, is an involving tale of personal redemption set against a backdrop of supernatural events. It's a brief and frequently eloquent read that offers many surprises.

A filmmaker named Guy is reeling from the sudden dissolution of a cherished relationship aboard the Queen Mary, where he's buried his concerns beneath his work. The documentary at hand features one-time passengers of the notorious vessel, including Jim and Jess, a divorced couple who rode the ship to America at the conclusion of WWII. Guy is immediately drawn to Jim, whose love for his ex-wife is still palpable, and Guy's curiosity about the couple is soon forced to resolution.

In a corridor of the ship, electric air and eerie sounds portend the arrival of a mysterious woman, who weeps and holds out a talisman bearing Jim's name before disappearing again. Even the Pentagon gets involved in her arrival: is she an alien, a time traveler, or something else?

Guy takes it upon himself to retrieve Jim and Jess in advance of a hoped-for next appearance by this mysterious figure. At the woman's bequest, the couple shares memories of the children they raised, and through their relations of love and loss, Guy is able to approach his own revelations.

The organizing events of the novel involve a short time span, and McCoy often manages related tension well. However, Jim and Jess somewhat frustrate the pace by indulging in overly descriptive dialogue ("They joyfully ran barefoot over the lawn and their giggles and squeals carried on the country breezes well into the evenings," Jim recalls of his children in a particularly flowery passage), and by clinging to the quotidian even as the clock runs down on the mystery woman's reemergence.

Readers intrigued by the supernatural elements of the book will ultimately find less satisfaction than those interested in the dramas of Guy's life, or of Jim and Jess's. The government is granted access to their close encounter, but only Jim, Jess, and Guy find real answers through it. The most powerful passages of the novel are those in which Jim and Jess push Guy toward personal growth, and meditations on introspection and bravery herein prove thoughtful.

Still, that such relatable dramas are played out against such an extraordinary backdrop leaves the novel on often uneven footing. The Queen Mary is a luxe setting, and the origins of Jim and Jess's family are fascinating, but both are made somewhat superfluous before Guy's commitment issues and Jim and Jess's long languished relationship. The most original elements of the plot elude both clarification and resolution.

Prose trends toward the purple where Guy waxes metaphorical (the Queen Mary becomes a less than sexy mistress when introduced as “hopeless” and “an enormous monument to the fragility of time”), which impedes his appeal as a protagonist. A moment in which Jim finally yells Guy’s foibles down proves satisfying, though trusting subsequent improvements may involve a leap of faith.

Overall, *The Travelers* is a fast, often provocative read whose turns are both surprising and engaging.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (June 26, 2014)

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