

# OITM REVIEW: THE MUSEUM OF LOVE

Steve Weiner  
 Overlook Press  
 Antony S. Galbraith

*The Museum of Love*, a first novel by Steve Weiner, is the bizarre story of a French-Canadian boy's coming-of-age, which becomes a horror story of nightmare images and scenes piled upon one another with ever increasing intensity. At times the book is rather difficult to follow because the novel possesses little in the way of plot, but the story moves well and is written in a beautiful and often frightening, lyrical style.

The main character, Jean-Michel, comes from a disturbing family--an ugly, abusive father and a beautiful mother on the verge of insanity as she is plagued with mystic visions of saints and God. His younger brother, Ignace, is thought to be a living saint, both by his parents and the people in the town. Despite Jean-Michel's own tendency toward seeing mystical visions, he does not accept religion as readily as those around him, and as a result he becomes somewhat of an outcast.

Once Jean-Michel's family and hometown are introduced, the novel progresses into a nightmarish freak show as Jean-Michel begins a cycle of running away and returning home. During these cycles, he meets new and terrifying people, listens to each of their

own tragic life stories, and is confronted with his homosexuality. Throughout the novel he is called a homosexual by the strangers he meets--he is kissed by a childhood friend and on another occasion he witnesses two men having sex. He never responds to the accusations and events, it is rather like he is watching a film--he does not participate in his own life, but is more content with watching everything pass him by.

While on his travels, he meets grotesque and violent characters. They are missing arms, eyes and one boy he meets has no bones in his fingers--even Jean-Michel is lame in one leg. The novel grows more grotesque and bizarre as Jean-Michel, during his mystical visions, visits the Museums of Death, Life, Negritude and Love.

The novel plays out like a horror movie of image after image and while these scenes are exquisitely written, they are confusing and contribute very little. Jean-Michel never really seems to come-of-age, he simply gets older. The events never culminate into anything, they just stop. Issues of sexism, racism, classism and homophobia are brought up and then left wide open without resolve. It seems clear in the end that Jean-Michel is homosexual, but we are left to wonder if he knows yet, or if he ever will. ▼

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