

Martin Clark. *The Many Aspects of Mobile Home Living*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. 345 pp. \$24, cloth, ISBN 978-0-375-40725-3.



Reviewed by W. M. Hagen

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Sociologists be warned: this is not about mobile home parks, or even prominent people living in them. There's one mobile home and it's no big thing; have to leave it to Jim Lehrer to write about the governor who lived in a triple-wide.

Instead, the novel focuses on mobile people. Its main character, Evers Wheeling, a North Carolina circuit judge, seems little burdened by all the power and responsibility of his official position. He and others act out, and deal with what happens, without ever seeming to control outcomes. Maybe that quality, coupled with their disdain of social niceties, is what holds one, even when one is puzzled as to why a character might behave in a certain way. To help the reader suspend natural disbelief, Clark cleverly includes a character who continually voices scepticism about what is happening.

Judge Wheeling's marriage has failed and he has little going for him, apart from a small group of friends, who behave generally like stereotypical fraternity boys -- drinking, talking, smoking, playing board games, and taking road trips. Most notable among them is Wheeling's brother, Pas-

cal, whose mobile home -- the only one in the book -- serves as a sort of frat house for the group. Pascal, true to his name, embodies the "philosophy" that moves the main characters: enjoy the trip, accept the day, however it turns out; within limits, do what you will; above all, remain loyal to each other.

With this operating credo, the characters try to act and accept in a world that is dense with seeming clues and free floating information. At times, Clark reminds one of DeLillo in his attentiveness to what some might call the hyper-realistic. On the way, involved in a sort of heist, a murder trial, and romance, the characters even encounter luck so unexpected that Pascal's veneration of a beautiful woman's white tears seems somehow ratified.

At the end, we are given a choice between an incredible spiritual and a more logical explanation which includes randomness. What seems to matter most, however, are the contrary impulses of human beings involved with one other, and the moral dilemmas that arise from acting on those impulses.

Once I set aside categorical expectations of a suspenseful heist or con-game plot -- expectations encouraged by two misleading book cover blurbs -- and set aside similar expectations of local color, or a string of tales pulled from a certain small town's past, I could better appreciate Martin Clark's ear for dialogue, his sensitivity to the spontaneous turns of heart and mind, and his obvious relish for the odd, chance events that can fall into any life.

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