

# Love Park, a Novel of Greek American Coming of Age

By *Editor*

Created Nov 16 2009 - 4:30pm

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Reviewed by Mischa Geracoulis



[1] **Love Park:** your purchase benefits in part LCC (click

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*Love Park* may be for the City of Brotherly Love what cult classic *Confederacy of Dunces* was to the Big Easy. At first glance, *LOVE Park* is a timeless coming of age story in which the angst-ridden protagonist struggles to find his way. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is the stage for this modern day Greek tragedy, though at times it might have been the ancient Philadelphia of Asia Minor. The University of Pennsylvania and Temple University are akin to *Dunces'* Tulane University and the University of Louisiana, and Greek Orthodoxy rather than Catholicism explains the religious zeal and anguish.

Fictional Peter Pappas is the middle son in a Greek-American family ingrained in Old Country ways, yet vested in American pop culture. He lives with his priest father, mother and extended family—a family intent on keeping secrets in the name of tradition and sanctity. Both Peter and the plot itself straddle a ubiquitous midpoint. Details like Peter's July 4th birth date serve to accentuate the central Greek-American theme.

Peter's world is juxtaposed against a family history steeped in grandfathers who escaped the Turks' bloody ethnic cleansings of the Hellenic world. The stories of grandfathers with a sense of destiny and courage, and were it not for them, Peter never would have been born to a comfortable life in suburban Philly, fall flat on Peter.

I wanted to like Peter, but never sincerely did. I'd hoped that I might eventually find his inertia and passivity endearing. Instead, I was impatient with his slow and bumbling journey into manhood. I was annoyed by the way he clammed up, incapable of expressing himself to others, and irritated by his lethargy.

Peter Pappas is reminiscent of *Dunces'* Ignatius Reilly in his mental masturbatory monologues and tangential fantasies born of repression and religious guilt. Peter, like Ignatius, seems content to let life pass by if not for those around him making his decisions. A former art history professor he idolizes signs a book to Peter, "The best ideas of men have been left unrealized." In these words, Peter finds justification for doing nothing. It's not that Peter's lazy, but rather paralyzed into passivity. He is caught between worlds: Greek and American, traditional and modern, iconographic and popular, childish and adult-like. Rather than take responsibility for his life, he appears dumbstruck, opinionless, and lacking character.

This same professor expounds on the virtues of painting. "It's not just about self-expression; it's also about the world around you.... It's about having a point, and believing in it." Peter reveres this wisdom, yet applies none of it to his own life.



<sup>[2]</sup>**Author Jim Zervanos** Even the antagonistic uncle Theo ("theos" is Greek for uncle) tries to light a fire under Peter. He references Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living." In the end, it's Theo who launches Peter out of his parents' basement and off to Greece; ironically, going back in time to reconcile the present.

The story is confessional. Secrets and dysfunction give way to honesty, forgiveness and acceptance. Ultimately, Peter begins to face his issues with religion, tradition and heritage.

Author Jim Zervanos <sup>[2]</sup> memorializes Philadelphia the way Woody Allen does New York. In this book, art imitates life, and *Love Park* pledges allegiance to the art of Philly. The book itself is named for Robert Indiana's pop art sculpture. Perhaps boding fortuitously for Zervanos, he achieves in life what John Kennedy Toole did only in death.

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