

KIRKUS REVIEW

In Snodgrass' (*Kitchen Things*, 2013, etc.) novel, a complex construction project teeters on the brink of failure, pitting workers against each other.

Furnass is an economically ailing mill town in southwestern Pennsylvania with some hope that a new high-rise building project will revitalize the area. However, Jack Crawford, the cantankerous job site superintendent, is ordered by his superiors at Drake Construction to delay the pouring of concrete columns. The company hasn't received payment for months, partly the result of ballooning costs, and partly due to the collapse of the bank responsible for the project's funding. The architect, Vince Nicholson, whose thoughts grandiosely toggle between the ideas of architects Mies and Le Corbusier, desperately tries to save a project that's threatened by his own hubris. Meanwhile, Jack conducts an extramarital affair with Pamela, a nurse who performs nude dance performances before her apartment window, to the delight of rapt construction workers nearby. Jack inexplicably introduces Pamela to workman Bill van Hayden, also a married man, and they begin a torrid affair of their own. Bill becomes increasingly infatuated with Pamela, and tells Jack of his intention to leave his wife for her; the resulting tension evolves into open animosity. Snodgrass displays virtuosic skill at relating the technical nuances of building construction. However, the chief strength of the book is how he profoundly captures his complex characters, who are each wounded in some ineradicable way. He even deeply develops supporting players, such as Gregg Przybysz, a newly minted building inspector trying to prove that he's up to the task. The prose is poetically ambitious and sometimes wildly unrestrained, which is well-suited to the pervasive sense of chaos and urgency: "...*the bells of the Church of the Holy Innocents, the bells of the Angelus, ring out over the little town, ring out over the layers of rooftops to the hills on the other side of the river and back again.*" The pace is unhurried but inexorable, a relentless march toward a shocking conclusion. This is a sinewy first installment in a planned trilogy—artistically unflinching and morally unsentimental.

An audacious, gripping, and wise novel.