The Drowned Girl

Karen Brown Gonzalez, University of South Florida

Graduation Year
2008

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree
Ph.D.

Degree Granting Department
English

Major Professor
Rita Ciresi, M.F.A.

Co-Major Professor
Hunt Hawkins, Ph.D.

Committee Member
A. Manette Ansay, M.F.A.

Committee Member
William T. Ross, Ph.D.

Keywords
Stories, Women, Connecticut, Suburbia, Adultery

Abstract
The Drowned Girl is a novel-in-stories that depicts the lives of eight characters living in a small Connecticut town. This work is one told through varying perspectives. Characters are mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, daughters, sons, and lovers. Their lives intersect physically, and emotionally, and the separate stories reveal the facets and repercussions of events both past and present: the death of a son and brother in a car accident, the life and death of a notorious town figure, the past and tragic future of a young woman, Jules, whose body is found one spring in the Connecticut river. The Jules stories, six in all, document her spiral into despair, and involve the other characters as friends, lovers, and parents. As the locus of the cycle, Jules and the mystery of her death prompt characters to re-view their own circumstances, and the way in which past decisions have played a part. These revelations—of betrayal, and loss, and the way they affect key characters, are effectively inscribed in the story cycle's ability to convey a communal dispersateness. Each character's story brings a new perspective, and the accumulation of the parts provides a more encompassing view of the whole.

The focus on an upper middle class neighborhood called Ridgewood—a subdivision built on dairy farm land in the mid-sixties—is key to the thematic link that ties the stories together. I am interested in revealing the corruption of the natural landscape, the carving up of rural areas after World War II to create suburban communities in which family incomes and demographics are almost completely homogeneous. The suburb of Ridgewood is mapped by roads designed to conform to a hierarchy that includes cul-de-sacs, and a pattern leading to residential areas of greater affluence. This setting serves as a backdrop to the complex disintegration of the family.

Scholar Commons Citation
https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/265