



## Tanya

**Michael Parlee**

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As a book title *Tanya* may be misleading. Readers would expect Michael Parlee's lengthy tale of Canadian rural life in the mid-twentieth century to revolve entirely around a character of the same name. To be certain Tanya Osmond Parker figures prominently in the story—we are privy to her thoughts and feelings her joys and anguish and ultimately her tragic fate. Yet a closer inspection of the story may lead to the conclusion that Tanya's presence is no more prominent than the supporting cast. (To appraise the book's cover which looks too contemporary for the story's setting the young woman representing the heroine appears small and discarded in a corner compared to the men on prominent display). What can be said with conviction however is that Tanya is the glue that holds the story together the conduit through which friends and relatives interact; everyone is affected by the woman's radiance and strength.

When the novel opens Tanya is not yet born yet like a pawn in a board game she has already been positioned at the center of great turmoil when her very pregnant mother deals decisively with her drunken husband during a binge. Intervening on behalf of the mother Betty is neighbor and friend Jed Osmond whose protectiveness of Betty eventually grows into true affection. That Jed is black and Betty white doesn't affect friends and well-wishers and Jed takes Tanya as his own daughter when he marries Betty naming the newborn for his departed first wife. To Jed Tanya represents a new beginning with the hope for a renewal of love he thought he would never experience again.

Within the 300-plus pages of Parlee's novel the reader is swept through the landmarks of Tanya's life with occasional cuts away to paralleled events involving Tom Parker who will become Tanya's love interest then husband. From the moment they meet (Tom rescues Tanya from a would-be rapist) their lives are intertwined in successive joys and strife. Another war arrives separating the two then years later their marriage is tested when Tanya seeks consolation in the arms of another man. From this series of events comes a shocking coda to what is otherwise a rather normal life.

Author Parlee affirms on the back cover that *Tanya* is a debut effort and was written to satisfy his own need to get the story on paper. As such the book bears a number of hallmarks of freshman writing. There are constant POV switches numerous instances of telling instead of showing and pages of exposition. Yet those moments are not a real deterrent to the full enjoyment of the story. Readers will find *Tanya* rich and enjoyable despite these minor speedbumps for Parlee has given his story the depth and soul needed to make characters real. That Parlee gleans the realism in *Tanya* from his own experience there is no doubt and readers will remember this first novel for a long time.

(August 21, 2009)

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