

The River Warren

Kent Meyers

Hungry Mind Press The (September 2000)

\$21.00 (216pp)

978-1-886913-23-3

Somewhere between the weight of Faulkner and the ease of Kesey, Kent Meyers brings to American fiction a tenaciously gripping story that moves with the subtle subterfuge of an aging river current. Once caught in the tow, the reader is helpless against the story's powerful current that steadfastly moves towards a cathartic conclusion.

The River Warren, Meyers' first novel, is a story about fathers and sons and the narrow scope of a small Midwest farming community. Through the eyes of seven different narrators, Meyers weaves his tale much like a river follows a winding, bending course, often allowing a view of what might be up the bend, and just as often bending into blind rapids or fast water. The tale begins with the first, second and often third hand perspectives of an incredible incident that involves a semi-truck loaded with cattle, the deaths of Two-Speed Crandall and his wife LouAnn, and an entire town. By using multiple narrators, Meyers zeroes in on the heart of the story—the relationships between two friends and their vastly different fathers and families.

Meyers creates characters—real enough to be your own neighbors—largely through their own introspection and that of the other character-narrators. Luke Crandall is perhaps one of the most refreshingly insightful, yet infuriatingly dense characters to evolve from American fiction in recent years. He is a sort of Huck Finn for the X-Generation whose disquisition on “bullshit” is as intriguing and insightful as it is symptomatic of the state of youth in the 1990s.

Meyers truly shines within the confines of each character's different narrative and perspective, with all parts becoming a whole, not unlike the tributaries of a river system moving toward the main, moving body of water. The River Warren is a seductive and dark tale that closes with a welcome sense of light and fulfillment.

JIM FILKINS (September / October 1998)

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