UNCONSCIOUS STATES: A NOVEL

Rachel May, University of Rhode Island

Date of Award
2015

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy in English

Department
English

First Advisor
Peter A. Covino

Abstract

Unconscious States tells the story of three sisters in a rural New England town and aims to explore the class, racial, and agricultural tensions in central Massachusetts while addressing issues of addiction, the choices that three women face in making their lives, and a family’s struggle to sustain themselves after a devastating accident severely injures the oldest of the Roe sisters, Mary. The novel integrates the choices of educated women today—between scholarship, family, and work—and the racist underbelly, subtle but pervasive, in a New England town like Bolton, as well as the financial burdens that all families face in a struggling economy. The fragmented, nonlinear structure of the novel is intended to mimic Mary’s mental state—a severe head injury—and Junie’s attempt to “piece together” the last few years of the family’s lives since the accident (Junie is the middle sister and Mary’s primary caretaker). The lyric shorts are intertwined with my sense of physical repetition and aesthetics as a sewer and quilter; the piecing of material objects becomes metaphor for piecing a written text. This book is an argument for writing a story not structured around “beginning, middle, end,” but written in a spiral that circles through present and past and culminates in a change in Junie’s character and outlook—and then her circumstances and decisions. Junie’s change is ultimately psychological—in the end, she finds her voice again.

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/oa_diss/323

Terms of Use

All rights reserved under copyright.