



American Owned Love

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A novelist who introduces in the first pages of his novel both a river that turns black and a character named Heart is willing to take risks, and that willingness to take risks is one of Robert Boswell's most attractive traits as a novelist, even if the risks do not always work out. In the ambitious novel AMERICAN OWNED LOVE, Boswell explores the interaction, not without tension, within and between two groups who live on either side of that river. On one side is Persimmon, New Mexico, a predominantly white, middle-class community; on the other is Apuro, inhabited largely by Mexicans in the country illegally.

The sharp opposition this suggests could result in a didactic, reductively political novel, but Boswell resists that temptation. On one side of the river, he focuses on Gay Schaefer and her daughter, Rita. Rita is making her way through adolescence as a member of a family whose arrangements are hardly orthodox. Gay finds her unconventional, open marriage to Sander, who may or may not be Rita's biological father, threatened by her attraction to Denny, the new basketball coach at the local high school.

On the other side of the river, Boswell brings us into the dark consciousness of Rudy Salazar, his most compelling character. Rudy is driven by a rage that is without definite object, but that makes him potentially a threat to anyone who approaches him. This rage drives him inevitably across the river, and into the lives of Gay, Rita, and those close to them. Ultimately, the threat Rudy represents will force a confrontation between himself and Rita that will change both of their lives and will also have a major impact on Gay's relationships with her husband and her lover.

AMERICAN OWNED LOVE is an uneven novel. As a character, Gay simply does not have enough weight to justify the attention the reader is asked to pay her, and many will find her simply tiresome. There is also some failed straining after significance in the novel's last part. Yet there is a basic soundness to Boswell's relation to his characters and situations, and Rudy Salazar is a powerful and haunting creation. Finally, it is refreshing to find a serious contemporary novelist willing to tackle the theme of redemption, even if his treatment of it is not completely successful.

Sources for Further Study

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