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## Iowa Multiverse: Stories

Darek James Benesh

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IOWA MULTIVERSE: STORIES

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts of English

Darek James Benesh

University of Northern Iowa

May 2006

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## ABSTRACT

This work of creative writing consists of two stories, each of which concerns characters in closed communities in Iowa: an apartment building and a small town. The stories play with the concepts of interconnectedness, multiple perspectives, linearity, and “emergent meaning”—that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. The first story is comprised of interconnected third-person threads and alternate perspective views. The second story is concerned with multiple first-person vignettes dealing with interpretations of shared experiences. These stories imagine the concept of perspective as a moveable, free-floating “mind camera,” able to follow any character at will, viewing the same events from different angles.

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May 2006

This Work of Creative Writing by Darek James Benesh

Entitled: Iowa Multiverse: Stories

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts of English

3/7/06  
Date

Dr. Grant Tracey, Chair, Thesis Committee

7 Mar 06  
Date

Dr. Vince Gotera, Thesis Committee Member

3/7/06  
Date

Dr. Julie Husband, Thesis Committee Member

4-4-06  
Date

Dr. Susan J. Koch, Dean, Graduate College

To Kayoko, my wife and friend

Thank you for your patience, understanding, and insights. *Ai o komete.*

And to Go

*“Go-kun yata!”*

And to my parents, Jim and Esther Benesh

Thank you for your guidance and support throughout the years.

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My classmates in fiction and poetry workshops over the past two years, whose comments and suggestions have been invaluable, especially “Bill” Bilstad, Salma Akbar, and Luke Pingel, and most especially Claire Davis, who first suggested in the fall of 2004 that “Mill Junction” could be a story cycle (I remember asking: “What’s a story cycle?”);

And finally, Kayoko and all my family and friends who read early versions of this thesis and who gave critical and helpful feedback.

## FOREWORD

I first met Darek Benesh when I began to date his sister Wyndee, whom I later married. My wife and I started, and have maintained, a tradition of reading to each other at night before we go to bed. Amidst the short stories of Alice Munro and William Trevor, sprinkled in whenever he has finished a new work, has been Darek's fiction.

His works, while diverse, often return to the ideas of longing and loss, and in the two works submitted as this thesis, he has chosen to explore those ideas within the context of closed communities: the six apartments of "2006 W. Parkway," and the small town of "Mill Junction." The connections between the members of these communities are very different. In "2006 W. Parkway," the characters, despite living only feet from each other, are isolated and know nothing about the lives being led next door—or even within their own apartments. In "Mill Junction," on the other hand, everyone knows too much about the lives of other people. Every action is noticed and judged by the community, and every decision affects other lives in this interdependent rural Iowan community.

The individuals who make up these communities often want something other than what they have, and want to be people other than who they are. In a parable of this desire, Lee tells Julianne in "2006 W. Parkway" about a Korean song that Ji-Eun, his former girlfriend and lost love, used to sing about a doll made of salt:

The doll wanted to know about the ocean, wanted to know about what it means to be something and to want something, and so the doll traveled many miles until at last it came to the ocean, and there it asked, 'What are you, Ocean? What am I?' The ocean called to the doll to come closer and wade into the water, and the doll waded in because she was curious, because she

wanted to know . . . until she slowly and completely dissolved. Ji-Eun told me it was only then that the doll understood about the ocean and about herself.

Like the doll and the ocean, longing in Darek's works is often painful. Sometimes this hardship is due to barriers that communities place between human interaction. Prejudice, arrogance, and pressure from the judgment of society are factors especially present in "Mill Junction." Other times, as with Lee and Ji-Eun, what Darek's characters want is something from their past that cannot be regained. They wish to recapture times when they were happy, or when those they loved were still with them.

With his hits as well as his misses, I've always considered Darek to be a gifted and engaging storyteller. In his best works, however, these narrative gifts are supplemented with unique perspectives and voices, powerful themes, and memorable settings. "2006 W. Parkway" and "Mill Junction" have all these elements, and I consider both to be remarkable works. Ours is a world where loss and longing are hidden behind walls (whether they exist between apartments or among people in small-town Iowa); Darek's fiction endeavors to peer behind these walls, to help us see our neighbors—and ourselves—a bit more clearly.

—Patrick Breheny

## INTRODUCTION

I am interested in emergent meaning, in the whole being more than the sum of its parts. I am interested in giving the reader the pieces to a moving mosaic—each piece a scene or story in its own right—and enabling the reader to see the larger picture and the meanings which emerge among shifting and diverse connections.

As each person passes in and out of the lives of others, residual impressions remain; ripples form in the various streams of realities. I seek to explore the ambient light of transient relationships, how a particular person is the result of past interactions, how nurture trumps nature. My characters affect others and are at the same time held captives by their pasts.

Within my stories, I present the color of an apple, the shape of an apple, the flavor of an apple, but I do not present the apple itself. The apple is the larger picture. The various aspects of the apple are the pieces of the moving mosaic.

“2006 W. Parkway,” the first story in this creative thesis, was written in the ten days prior to the start of the fall semester, 2005. Its title was changed from “2005 W. Parkway” in order for the number element to correspond with the year of the completion of this thesis, and to align with the time line presented in the second story in this thesis. (A main character in the first story is a peripheral character in the second story.) “2006 W. Parkway” concerns the lives of sixteen characters who inhabit or visit an apartment building. Characters are presented in various stages and conditions of life, each one, perhaps, a foil for another.

If “2006 W. Parkway” can be viewed as representative of my recent work, “Mill Junction” can be viewed as representative of my earlier work. Originally written in October 2004, “Mill Junction” has undergone several revisions to reach its current form. It is the first story in a story cycle of a projected seven parts (four have been written to date, with another three loosely sketched out). An alternative title for “Mill Junction” is “The Walls.” The story concerns the lives of many characters and their perceptions surrounding certain mysterious events in their small town. Although this story is self-contained, certain elements do not come to fruition until later in the story cycle.

In many ways, I suppose, these stories contain a mixture of the past and the present, of many times in my life, of many people I have met, and of the places I have lived. Inspiration for these stories comes from several sources also, but generally, I can say they were conceptualized while walking home from the university, and written late at night while eating chocolate and drinking coffee.

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The creative works referenced in this graduate thesis, consisting of pages 1-88, currently are not being made available in electronic format through UNI ScholarWorks.