

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVE THESIS

MARKET VALUE

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2014

MARKET VALUE is a collection of seven stories linked by location about people struggling to make sense of their romantic relationships, sexual desires, and social positions when faced with the shifting economic realities of the recent financial crisis.

All of the stories take place in Fort Myers, Florida, an area hit particularly hard during the recession. While the city had seen decades of economic growth and new construction, and had even, in its early years, been an entrepreneurial paradise for innovators like Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, in 2008 the burst housing bubble left Fort Myers with the highest foreclosure rate in the nation.

The stories are set from the period just before the economic downturn to the present. As in Sherwood Anderson's story collection *Winesburg, Ohio*, the personality of the place influences and drives the people who inhabit it. Characters in MARKET VALUE must navigate an American landscape of stalled opportunities and uncertain futures.

The collection opens with "About the Reeds," in which a murder suicide shocks a small Fort Myers suburb and a backyard barbeque turns into an arena for conspiracy theories about what went wrong for the couple financially and socially. The gossip that begins in "About the Reeds" lays the groundwork for the co-workers, friends, parents, and lovers of characters in remaining stories to pressure them to live according to seemingly arbitrary standards of normality the characters chafe against.

In "Ready for It," fifteen-year-old Monica cannot understand why she's not physically attracted to the boyfriend everyone tells her is perfect for her, but finds herself drawn to an older stranger at the local bowling alley. Nate, in "Call the Storage King," assumes that his girlfriend is as committed to commitment as he's been taught that all

women are, but accidentally discovers evidence to the contrary when packing up their belongings so they can move into a new house together.

For some younger characters, like Malcolm in “Decent-type Folks” and Tessa in “All is Bright,” the cracks in the local economy allow them to see, for the first time, the disconnect between the values espoused by the adults around them and the way that those adults behave. When Malcolm’s father hides the fact that he reported their neighbors for squatting, Malcolm recognizes his home as a space of discontent and hypocrisy akin to the suburbs in A.M. Homes’s *The Safety of Objects*.

The stories in MARKET VALUE examine the ways these characters and others must struggle to adapt when they find their ideas of what makes a sustainable or personally satisfying life to be at odds with traditional narratives and external expectations. In this changing landscape, they form unexpected personal alliances and sever old ties, in order to come closer to their downsized American Dreams.