

Ohio

Stephen Markley

Markley's ambitious foray into fiction (following a memoir, *Publish This Book*) reunites four high school classmates on a fateful summer night in their Ohio hometown, in what reads like a darker-themed epilogue to *Friday Night Lights*. Hollowed out by a generation of war, addiction, and crippling recession, the quintessential Midwestern town of New Canaan serves as a magnet for our protagonists, as they struggle to break free of their shared histories. There's an antiwar provocateur whose activism gave way to drugs and alcohol, driving back into town with a package taped to his truck; a doctoral candidate whose forbidden lover has not been heard from in nearly ten years; a reticent war veteran who chose three tours in Iraq over a future with the love of his life; and the quarterback's ex-girlfriend, whose beauty and popularity mask a shame that she finally resolves to address. Markley's prose sparkles with insight and supports an intricate narrative architecture that recalls Nathan Hill's *The Nix* and Patrick Somerville's *This Bright River*. **VERDICT** This bleak but honest survey of 21st-century America is highly recommended for all literary collections.

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