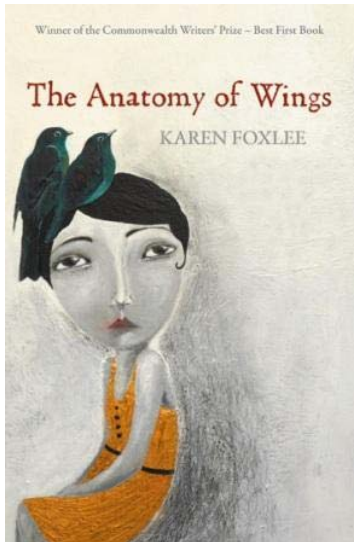


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BOOK CLUB NOTES

THE ANATOMY OF WINGS

KAREN FOXLEE



Published: 2 February 2009 | ISBN: 978 0 7022 3681 5 | Fiction |
288pp | AU\$24.95

Jennifer and her best friend Angela attempt to unravel the mystery of Jennifer's suddenly vanished singing voice. To do so they must revisit a very painful and difficult series of events that lead up to the death of her older sister Beth. Jennifer uncovers an abundance of gossip and secrets in her small mining town. As she tries to sift fact from fiction she must eventually come to her own conclusions and make her own choices about the rest of her life after the death of her beloved sister. Jennifer's innocent investigation into her sister's death becomes a painful coming-of-age story.

1. "Patrick called our town No-where's-ville which made the Brisbane cousins laugh and Jonathan tipped back his head and looked down his nose at us with one of his smallest smiles." (Pg 6)

How does the author set the scene for us? How does she draw the time and place? Does the setting add to the story or could it just as easily have played out in an urban environment?

2. "This is the story of Elizabeth Day. I have pieced it together with my own two hands. I have made it from things I saw and things I did not see but later knew. It is made from the tatters of terrible things and the remnants of wonderful things." (Pg 17)

How does the author deal with the fact that our guide in the story, Jennifer, was not present at some of the important scenes in Beth's story? How would the story have changed if she had chosen a different narrator?

3. "'She's a sweet girl I know,' said Mrs McNally, 'but trouble follows her everywhere she goes. Some people are just like that. We wanted to give her a go but your girl's beyond help'"

The town seems to judge Beth for her wild sexuality. Does the author, and ultimately the audience judge her too? Is this a morality tale?

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4. "Mum had a worried face. She put the tree away and vacuumed up all the tinsel. "I'm not sure about this Miranda girl," she said." (Pg 41)

"My mother blamed Miranda. In the end she'd hated her. She thought Miranda Bell was the problem, not Beth. My mother had hissed the name Miranda when she said it but mostly she didn't say her name at all. She said she and her and that girl. Miranda had led Beth astray." (Pg 59)

Miranda, Beth's best friend, was seen as a negative influence. How important is the influence of friends on a teenager? Can they be easily 'led astray'? Was Beth led astray or do you think it was more complicated than that?

5. There are many 'coming-of-age' stories that focus on the lives of boys, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J D Salinger, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton. *The Anatomy of Wings* is very much a girl's coming-of-age story.

How does a girl's coming to sexual maturity differ from boys? If Beth were a boy how would the story have been different?

6. "She needed miracles. All the light shining and whispered golden words floating out of mouths and rainbow-coloured angel wings and heavenly voices." (Pg 104)

What role does religion and the supernatural play in the story? Why do you think this element is present in the tale?

7. "After my singing voice got stuck I could still feel the sudden songs inside me piling up in a queue. I didn't know which songs they were just that they were there. I could feel the outlines of them. It felt wrong". (Pg 67)

What does Jennifer's singing voice represent in the book? What is the significance of its return?

8. The seven stages of grieving are said to be: acceptance, anger, denial, depression, fear, guilt, shock.

How does grief play out for Beth's mother, father, grandmother and for Jennifer? Are there definite stages that the characters go through?

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9. Their mother seems to feel the impact of the death very acutely.

“Let me help you,’ pleaded Mum.

But she only stood at Beth’s bedroom door wringing her hands and crying because she didn’t seem to know what to do.” (Pg 100)

Is there a particular relationship between mother’s and daughters that differs from other familial relationships?

10. “Beth said she’d come home. Everyone was to begin again. Everything was to be forgotten.” (Pg 244)

Was there a point of no return for Beth? Could the family have saved her at any stage of the story? Ultimately is there anyone to blame for Beth’s death?

11. “Beth rode past our house. I was sleeping. I did not see her go.”

What do we actually know about Beth’s death? How much does the author leave to the audience to fill in? Why does she do this?

12. *The Anatomy of Wings* is equally at home in the fiction section of a bookshop or library, or the Young Adult section. To quote from the judges’ notes from The Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards, Karen Foxlee “has created a narrative voice that will appeal to adult and young adult readers alike (in a way that is reminiscent of Mark Haddon’s bestselling English novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*”). There seem to be more and more books that bridge the gap between Adult and Young Adult readers; *Some Day This Pain Will Be Useful To You* by Peter Cameron, *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, *The Harry Potter series* by J K Rowling, the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer.

What qualities does this book have that allow it to cross over between the Adult and Young Adult readership? Is it more suited, in your opinion, to adults or to teenagers?

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