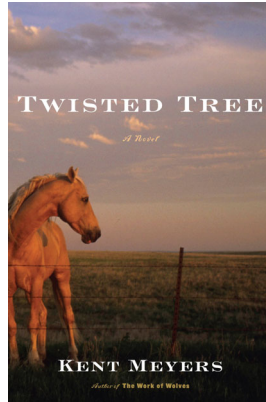


# How **TWISTED TREE** Came to Be A Note from Author **Kent Meyers**



→When I first heard about pro-Ana websites, I was fascinated and disbelieving. They seemed to resonate with a kind of quasi-religiosity. Having been raised in a strong Catholic tradition, I was very aware of the power, guilt, and attraction of self-denial and the existence of these sites suggested to me very complex reasons for anorexia. Subsequent research revealed that, in fact, many medieval women saints were likely anorexic and that they gained a great deal of power in their communities through what was then considered their extreme asceticism. Issues of food, of course, have always been central to religious practice and experience. All of this informed the writing of the novel in various ways, including the ways the character of the killer emerged, and his relationship with Hayley Jo Zimmerman in the first chapter.

→As a father I have long been interested in the vulnerability of young people to the Internet, and the effects of the Internet on communities. One of the biggest issues I think we are facing as a culture is how to safeguard our private lives against encroachment by the public realm and by anonymous strangers. These issues informed and shaped the novel. Another impetus was my novel, *The Work of Wolves* and the town of Twisted Tree itself. When I finished *The Work of Wolves*, I felt that Gregg Longwell, from that novel, was a character who had more to “do” and “say.” While I didn’t know exactly what, the question drove this new book. *The Work of Wolves* also contains, at its core, questions about how much particular cultural formation stories—e.g. the story of Abraham—inform and shape lives in the contemporary world. I was interested in pursuing that question with another such formation story, and the working title of this book when I first began it was “Other Resurrections,” a title that referred to the idea that many of the characters in the novel undergo, or seek to undergo, some kind of resurrection from an old life to a new. That idea shapes the book in many ways, though it submerged as the novel progressed.

→Finally, the book was in some ways a literary challenge, a puzzle and task I set for myself: Could I write a novel where the major character—Hayley Jo Zimmerman—is a character in the lives of other people more than a character in-and-of-herself, but could I nevertheless recount her entire life and maintain her centrality? My original—and as it turned out, ridiculous—hope was to write a novel where each chapter contained only a single sentence recounting Hayley Jo Zimmerman’s life, so that I would have, at the end, a dozen or so sentences developing her—and yet those few sentences, within the context of the lives of others, would be a “novel,” with her as the central character. Part of my interest, obviously, was to explore how much an individual life is actually made up of the lives of others—and how much, then, recounting the lives of others sidereally recounts the life of the central character.

→As I said, this original conception proved ridiculously difficult, and as I worked on the book it became clear that I had to provide more than one sentence per chapter dealing with Hayley Jo Zimmerman. Nevertheless, the challenge I set for myself in conceiving the novel drove and powered a great deal of the writing—as such artistic challenges always do.