

Schultz

craft question

Incorporating backstory is an art form. In this story, how does Marty's backstory with Agnes contribute to the importance of the fire in the forward-motion story?

reader response

Marty's life contains a long string of emotional blows, from his father's early death and the loss of Agnes to being denied the chance to serve during the war. Was it inevitable that Marty would wind up in his current state? How much of our lives do we have control over and how much is left to chance and/or fate? What role does duty play, and how does it affect the paths our lives take, the choices we make?

Blue Snow

craft question

Poetic language is a chief feature of this book. In this story, lines such as "like a spooked pheasant her heart had lit" and "light soon started to drain from the afternoon" force the reader to slow down and listen to the music of the prose and purpose behind the verb choices. What other lines make the reader think about the work not only as a consumer of a story but a student of poetry?

reader response

Were you bullied as a child, and if so, how did you cope? Or were you the one doing the bullying? In what ways do you think being on either side of childhood bullying affects people's adult lives?

Beneath My Skin Like Honey

craft question

At first glance, this story seems to be an outsider in the collection, with its young narrator, first-person p.o.v., different setting ... How does the author connect this story to the others?

reader response

As the narrator says, we don't just *hear* sounds, we hear them and subsequently "wince, shudder, stop breathing, set our jaws tight, or feel our cheeks flush the color of old barns and tractors." What sounds never fail to summon physical and/or emotional reactions in you?

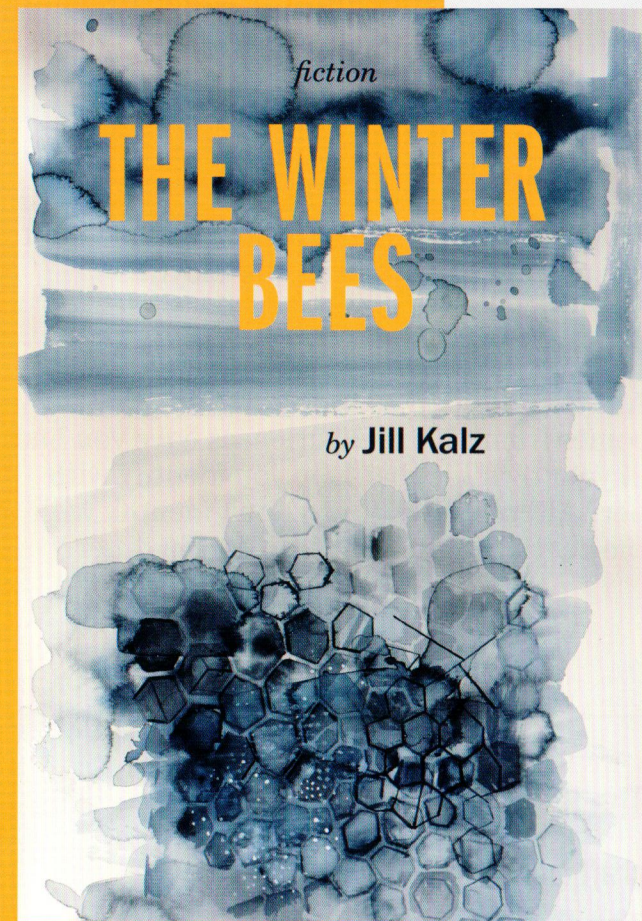
Ana's End

craft question

We begin and end with Ana and the whole history of her lonely life. How did the author incorporate the "outside world" and its events to infiltrate the events of this one woman's experience?

reader response

Alcohol use in Ana's community is as common as breathing, a cultural norm for many German-American communities. In Ana's family in particular, it plays both the role of savior (provides income through the saloon) and devil (leads to her brother's cirrhosis). Considering the characters in this story and those throughout the collection, their jobs, and the setting, do you think alcohol is a "necessary evil"? Why or why not?



HC: 978-1-7322-0820-9

PB: 978-1-7322-0821-6

fb.me/jillkalzauthor

Readers' Guide

Minneapolis Valley Press

www.minneapolis.com

Last Call

craft question

How does the setting of the bar complement the tension between Ana and Lloyd?

reader response

Ana is so stoic. Where do you think that comes from? What experiences have you had in your own life that help you identify with her? Alternatively, if you don't identify with the character, in what ways do you differ?

The Humming Bee

craft question

The ghost of Art hovers over Shirley's life. How does the author connect Shirley's relationship with her dead husband to her relationship with Joe, the beekeeper?

reader response

Shirley is both sympathetic and deplorable in this story. In what ways do you like her? In what ways do you not?

A Yin-Yang Year

craft question

The theme of opposites and polarizations is strong in this story. How does the author show the Yin-Yang concept in the various settings and characters?

reader response

Marjorie spins a number of possibilities in her head for why Luther didn't show up at the library at the end of the story. What do you think happened to Luther? Provide evidence for your answer.

The Flight of Herman Engelmann

craft question

This story comes from Herman's point of view. How would it be different if it came from Lila's?

reader response

When pushed to the line of acting on their feelings for one another the final time they're together, neither Herman nor Lila crosses it. Do you see Herman's restraint as a strength or a weakness? How about Lila's? Why?

Blue Bird of Happiness

craft question

"Blue Bird of Happiness" is an example of a small moment that suggests a larger meaning. What is the importance of the garter? What is the subtext here? What does the author mean for the reader to infer about Virgil?

reader response

This story came from a simple prompt: "Write about a lost object in 500 words or less." Why do you think lost objects often make such intriguing story seeds?

The Siebenbrunner Nose

craft question

Peripheral characters add so much texture to this story. How does the author use the priest and the few people that attended the funeral to boost the tension?

reader response

Some people might feel that Eleanor failed her sister Greta by not securing proper medical/mental-health treatment for her. Others, such as Eleanor's husband, believe that we're all responsible for our own choices, that there's a limit to how much we can help others, especially if they don't wish to be helped. What are your thoughts on Eleanor's relationship with Greta? Do you believe she loved her? Explain.