

Aspects of Nature Review by Mariel O'Neill Karch

I have just finished reading your “age appropriate” stories, which I thoroughly enjoyed. They are smart, touching, funny, profound, and very musical, both in tone and subject matter. Your characters are strong, intelligent, and capable of controlling their own destinies. A deliciously unique, compelling, fast paced collection.

The various references to the Holocaust were very moving. As you so aptly write, how could “the countrymen of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Schubert [and] Mahler” have failed their fellow humans? And yet, today’s Germans have allowed in countless Syrian refugees...

The references to creative writing also jump out: “She’ll snatch your words and prick your brain and make up her own ending”, which is exactly what good writers do. And this profound wisdom: “Fiction distances him, allows him to tell the truth.” No matter what we write, it is always, directly or indirectly, about ourselves and how we see the world.

You underscore the fate that awaits us all: “We are all in the end (no pun intended) pieces of meat in a chorus line.” And then you pen this sobering thought, about personal grief being “only one microscopic part of the world’s sorrow”. Hard to rationalize, when one is caught up in it, but necessary to remember.

Very interesting (for someone who is not Jewish), to see how you place believers in three categories: too Jewish, not Jewish enough, and just right. Reminded me of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. In any case, I agree that fundamentalism, in any culture, is dangerous.

Alzheimer’s appears in various stories, and touches both famous artists and ordinary people: “Where did it all go, and how did this happen? [...] hope, sadness and despair, wistfulness. Fantasy.” Very well observed... and frightening.

The narrator has a sharp, understated sense of closure, which is especially apparent in the last sentence of the book: “Shayndeleh will set her lips in a straight line and say not a word.”

These are involving, imaginative stories, with underlying musicality, and I am very glad to have had the occasion to discover these *Aspects of nature*.

Mariel O'Neill Karch
Professor French Literature, U of T