

Wintering



Krissy Kneen

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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Praise for Krissy Kneen and *Wintering*

'Kneen's writing, by turns playful and elegant, is never less than stimulating, in the literal and figurative senses of the word.'

Stella Prize 2017 Judges' Report

'Endlessly curious and inventive, provocative and inspiring.'

Sydney Morning Herald

'One of Australia's hidden literary gems. With each new book, I find myself hoping that readers will finally discover her quirky, sexy and incredibly beautiful writing.'

Books+Publishing

'Highly unusual, very ambitious...but I think Krissy Kneen achieves it.'

Radio New Zealand

About Krissy Kneen

Krissy Kneen is the award-winning author of memoir – *Affection* – and fiction: *An Uncertain Grace*, *Steeplechase*, *Triptych*, *The Adventures of Holly White and the Incredible Sex Machine*, as well as the Thomas Shapcott Award-winning poetry collection *Eating My Grandmother*. She has written and directed broadcast documentaries for SBS and ABC Television.

A reader's introduction to *Wintering*

Krissy Kneen creates a sense of threat from the very start of this novel, as Jessica finds the impaled remains of a possum on a stalagmite in the caves that she loves but that scare her in equal measure.

She had anticipated skulls and skeletons, and she half expects the ghosts of massacred Aborigines to rise up, so the caves are established as a possible place of

horror and fear. But they are also where her glowworms live – 'her tiny miraculous, larval galaxy' (85).

Likewise her house is at once haven and hazard. The place where Matt cares for her and cows her; and, after he has disappeared, a place where she takes shelter but feels watched.

As the novel progresses, some threats come to nothing while others turn out to be very real.

Matt is, of course, the most obvious threat to Jessica. Flashbacks reveal his abuse and show us that she was captivated by him. His behaviour is typical of an abuser – isolating her, hurting her but saying he never meant to, controlling her. But it eventually becomes clear that he has changed into something beyond an abusive man – or perhaps a natural extension of it.

Jessica, a scientist who is reeling from grief, finds it hard to find the truth about Matt and the theories of the twelve 'crazy' widows. Seeing intuition as a relic of her past life with her mother, it takes a long time for her to accept that Matt is both man and thylacine. Can she (and the reader) accept the proposition that 'Tasmanian tigers rise up and take people' (108) as a scientific fact?

Eventually, Jessica must face all that is threatening her and take action, mostly alone but with the support of the other widows. 'It's going to be all right now. You just do what you have to do, then get on with it,' Crystal tells her (254).

Questions for discussion

1. Matthew cooks for Jessica, makes her put on sunscreen, leaves trails of flowers for her. 'He liked to protect her.' (74). Is there any good in Matthew and in their relationship?

2. Does Matt stand for all abusive partners? Does the being that he turns into stand for all abusive partners?
3. Is it significant that Matthew's family's ancestors had 'joined the killing lines, hunting out the real locals, and killing everyone in their path' (47). Discuss the references to the massacres of Aboriginal people in Tasmania.
4. As discussed in the introduction, the cave is full of both beauty and foreboding. Why does Kneen make it hard to pin down a single symbolic meaning to the cave?
5. Have you read other pieces of literature in which caves are a feature and a symbol? How are they the same as and different from the caves in *Wintering*?
6. Do the glowworms change the symbolism of the cave? Are they their own symbol? Do they have conflicting meanings?
7. What other symbols caught your attention?
8. 'The pie shop, her boyfriend, the wind. Everything an omen' (76). Is everything an omen? What do these omens portend? Are these real omens? Can there ever be real omens?
9. Why is the concept of 'winter' and the associated cold so important to the novel?
10. At what point in the novel did you acknowledge that there were supernatural happenings?
11. Why do you think Kneen has chosen to make Jess a scientist?
12. 'Science remained an ever-ticking clock. The secrets of the universe revealing themselves day by day, and there is no magic, only things that we do not yet understand' (178). Are we meant to believe that what we might see as supernatural is actually explicable by science?
13. Jessica whispers questions to the universe she sees in the glowworms. 'She pretended to be a woman of science but she was still her mother's daughter, looking for signs and miracles' (87). Is there a divide in this novel between science and the supernatural?
14. How significant is Jessica's background with what she calls a congregation and what others call a doomsday cult?
15. Jessica herself has the capacity for violence, only in her thoughts at first (her antipathy to the annoying child in the early pages, for example) and later in her actions. Do you sympathise with her violence?
16. When Matthew disappears, Jessica is struck down by apathy, and an inability to think clearly, except for when she's writing her scientific articles. Does Kneen's portrayal of grief ring true?
17. When Matt disappears, his brother Glen reminds Jessica that the 'dogs' (the 'local fellas') will be after her, even while he himself seems predatory. She remembers the menacing Silas from her childhood in the doomsday cult. But there are men who aren't threatening: her colleague Gus, for example, and, of course, William. Is Kneen setting up a good man/bad man divide?
18. Does Matthew deserve his fate?