



Janice Kulyk Keefer

The Ladies' Lending Library
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Q: Why did you decide to use the film, *Cleopatra*, as the theatrical backdrop for so many of the events that transpire in the summer of 1963 at Kalyna Beach?

A: The last time I was moving house I happened to come across a box of papers that my mother had saved for me—school reportcards and highschool essays and, at the very bottom, the program for the film *Cleopatra*: I had completely forgotten about the role that this film and all the scandal and gossip in which it was enmeshed had played in my life: reading the program, looking at the photographs of the film's stars and minor players, brought back a host of memories and questions and launched a lot of fictive possibilities.

Q: You are of Ukrainian heritage. To what extent do you feel a moral obligation as a writer to examine the lives and experiences of characters of Ukrainian descent in your fiction?

A: The history of Ukraine and the stories of its emigrants are extraordinarily rich and haunting. Any writer would be happy to delve into such fascinating material; for writers with a Ukrainian background

there is also a desire, I think, to give voice to lives and experiences which have been largely submerged or disregarded vis a vis North American culture. I believe that any one who is the child or grandchild of immigrants feels an obligation, moral or imaginative, to understand as much as possible about the hopes and sacrifices, the struggles and the joys involved in their families' dislocation from all that was familiar and in their embrace of the staggeringly new and different world to which they journeyed.

Q: You acknowledge a debt to the author Katherine Mansfield in *The Ladies' Lending Library*. How influential has her work been for you as a writer?

A: Mansfield's short stories, and her writing on the art of fiction, the account she gives of the challenges and often horrendous difficulties of writing well and honestly have been hugely important to me. My novel *Thieves* is an attempt to explore both the extraordinary dimensions of Mansfield's short, brilliant, poignant life, and the debt I owe to her, as a writer.

Q: How did the decision to write a novel set at the beach inform the contours of your novel's plot?

A: The beach—or cottage country in general—is for me more than an attractive setting. I spent the best and most important times of my childhood at my aunt and uncle's summer cottage, as part of a community of children and adults whose experiences were heightened by the air of possibility exuded by the very idea of holidays, of being somewhere where the rules and conditions of ordinary life are altered so that you really do have a chance to learn those things about your self and others that, for better and worse, comprise your true education in being human. If we're all haunted by the idea of lost or misplaced paradises, then mine is Georgian Bay in the 1960s, with its mix of pine trees and cedar-smelling cabins, driftwood and crashing waves and sun-struck sand!

Q: Why did you decide to devote as much attention to the teenage characters as to their adult counterparts in *The Ladies' Lending Library*?

A: Adolescence doesn't make sense as a lived experience unless it's seen in contrast to the certainties of childhood on the one hand, and the mysterious country of adulthood on the other. One of the most memorable—and problematic—aspects of my adolescence had to do with my perception of the way in which my own mother, and the mothers of my friends were shaping and grooming their daughters to become women just like them—in spite of the painful or frustrating limitations they had experienced in becoming ideal wives and mothers, according to the cultural norms of the 50s and 60s.