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Janet Beard

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About this Person

Born: Tennessee, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

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PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born in Tennessee; children: a daughter. **Education:** Attended New York University; the New School, M.F.A. **Addresses:** Home: Columbus, OH. Office: Columbus College of Art & Design, 60 Cleveland Ave., Columbus, OH 43215. Agent: Rayhan Sanders, Massie & McQuilkin Literary Agents, 27 West 20th St., Ste. 305, New York, NY 10011.

CAREER:

Writer and educator. Columbus College of Art & Design, Columbus, OH, adjunct instructor of writing. Previously worked as editorial news assistant for the *Palm Beach Daily News*, Palm Beach, FL; also worked in Australia, England, and Boston, MA.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

- *Beneath the Pines: A Novel*, Two Dollar Radio (Minneapolis, MN), 2008.
- *The Atomic City Girls*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2018.

Contributes film reviews to periodicals and websites, including *Cineaction* magazine and *Artfilmfile.com*; also contributes to *Library Journal*.

Sidelights

Born and raised in east Tennessee, Janet Beard moved to New York City to study screenwriting and went on to earn a master's degree in creative writing. Beard teaches writing and works as a freelance journalist, primarily reviewing independent and foreign films. "I started my first novel not long after graduating college and wrote most of it while working on my MFA," Beard told *Washington Independent Review of Books* website contributor Adriana Delgado.

Beard's debut work, *Beneath the Pines: A Novel*, takes place in 1957. It tells the story of Mary Alice McDonnell, who lives in a small Virginia mountain town. Mary Alice was a rebellious teenager when she fell in love with a rich boy who moved into town from the north. Mary Alice's mother, Lavinia, is a devout Christian who is not happy that Mary Alice has feelings for a Yankee. Meanwhile, Mary Alice has become a biology teacher and by 2004 is a spinster who has not spoken with her mother for more than forty years.

When Lavinia dies, Claire, Mary Alice's niece, inherits the family house and moves to Virginia. Claire's appearance leads to an unraveling, through flashbacks, of Mary Alice's past and the boy she fell in love with, Michael Harrison, who is now a famous poet living in New York. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted that Mary Alice seems content to be "dowdy and prickly, devoted to her mundane, hermit-like routine" until Claire arrives.

Beard is also the author of *The Atomic City Girls*, a fictional account of women who worked on the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge,

Tennessee, during World War II. The novel follows June Walker, an eighteen-year-old who, in November 1944, goes to work on the top-secret project, one of hundreds of young women who operate massive machines but have no idea what the project is all about. The only thing they know is that they are not to talk about it to anyone.

When Beard began doing research for the book, she found out that her grandmother, Eunice, actually did administrative work in Knoxville that was related to the project. "Eunice gave me an excellent perspective on what it was like to be a young woman in that era," Beard told *Washington Independent Review of Books* website contributor Delgado. Commenting on why history largely focuses on the people in charge of the project, who were men, Beard told Delgado: "The stories of the brilliant atomic scientists, military strategists, and political leaders who headed the Manhattan Project are fascinating. But I've always been drawn to the characters in the background, who are often women."

In the novel, June has an affair with a Jewish physicist from New York named Sam Cantor. Sam is head of the lab where June works and, unlike June, knows what the project is all about. Meanwhile, June's roommate Cici comes from a poor sharecropping family and is out to nab a wealthy husband. Living in separate facility, Joe Brewer is an African American construction worker who is happy to be making good money, even though he had to leave his family behind temporarily. "Beard depicts a hierarchical society with distinct classes and differing levels of privilege, security clearance, and hardship," wrote *Fiction Writers Review* website contributor Ellen Prentiss Campbell.

Eventually, a security breach occurs that connects the fate of both Joe and June. Furthermore, following the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, by the United States, June and her coworkers realize what they have been working on, leading June to question many things about the war and loyalty to her country. The "fascinating narrative brings to life four people with different outlooks and dreams whose fates memorably intertwine," wrote a *Publishers Weekly* contributor. Noting that "Beard has ... injected a human element" to the story of building the first atomic bomb, Stacy Shaw, writing for *Booklist*, went on to call *The Atomic City Girls* "approachable, intelligent, and highly satisfying historical fiction."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, November 15, 2017, Stacy Shaw, review of *The Atomic City Girls*, p. 32.
- *Publishers Weekly*, July 21, 2008, review of *Beneath the Pines*, p. 141; January 1, 2018, review of *The Atomic City Girls*, p. 35.

ONLINE

- *Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb*, [http:// www.deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.com/](http://www.deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.com/) (February 6, 2018), Deborah Kalb, "Q&A with Janet Beard."
- *Columbus College of Art & Design* website, <https://www.ccad.edu/> (July 7, 2018), author faculty profile.
- *Denver Post Online* (Denver, CO), [https:// www.denverpost.com/](https://www.denverpost.com/) (April 5, 2018), Monte Whaley, "Staff Pick: America's 'Atomic City' Draws a Diverse Cast to Create Ultimate Weapon."
- *Fiction Writers Review*, [http:// www.fictionwritersreview.com/](http://www.fictionwritersreview.com/) (February 13, 2018), Ellen Prentiss Campbell, review of *The Atomic City Girls*.
- *Janet Beard* website, <https://www.janetbeard.com> (July 7, 2018).
- *Washington Independent Review of Books*, [http:// www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/](http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/) (March 27, 2018), Adriana Delgado, "An Interview with Janet Beard." *

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