

Skunk: A Love Story

by Justin Courter



About the Book

Employing a combination of tall tale, science fiction, and sardonic humor, **Skunk: A Love Story** tells the story of Damien Youngquist, a loner who becomes addicted to skunk musk. As his social difficulties grow increasingly (and hilariously) painful, Damien tries to isolate himself, first in an East Coast suburb, then on a farm in the Midwest, in order to indulge his addiction in peace. But he finds his efforts thwarted by disgusted coworkers, nosy neighbors, and dangerous rednecks. When he falls in love with Pearl, a brilliant scientist who has made revolutionary discoveries of her own, Damien's life gets even more complicated. Oblivious to the global impacts their pet projects will have in the hands of people driven by greed, Damien and Pearl struggle to save each other from themselves. **Skunk** is an imaginative exploration of addiction, chemistry, organic farming, and love.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel's premise involves the main character's ingestion of skunk musk, an act that people find repulsive. How did you react initially to Damien's behavior? Did your feelings about Damien or his behavior change over the course of the novel? Why do you think the author chose this particular behavior for Damien?
2. At the beginning of the novel, Damien's care for and attention to his skunks' needs and moods contrasts sharply with his intolerance for his coworkers and for the other people he encounters in his daily life. Why do you think this is?
3. What does Damien's projection of human qualities onto the skunks and his attention to their family dynamics tell the reader about Damien's insecurities?
4. The story is told in the first person. How do you think your understanding of the story would change if it were told from another perspective; for example, if the story were told from Pearl's perspective?

5. What did you think of Pearl's character? In what ways does Pearl repudiate female stereotypes?
6. Damien and Pearl are both are wary of outsiders. How does the scent of skunk function for Damien and the scent of fish function for Pearl? What do the animals with which each of them are associated reveal about their personalities?
7. Why does Damien run away from Pearl, though he is clearly attracted to her and she to him?
8. The need to escape is one of Damien's primary motivations. Why do you think this is? How does he go about finding ways to escape? In what contrasting ways is he thwarted in his efforts by Robby, Matt, Pearl and others?
9. Discuss the father/son relationship that develops between Damien and Robby.
10. At what point did you understand that Robby was stealing Damien's skunk musk to use it for his own purposes?
11. What roles do Jud and Matt Baxter play in the novel?
12. Pearl's reappearance in Damien's life causes him to rejoice, but he is also terrified of two new developments that have come along with her. What are they and what makes them so frightening to Damien?
13. Damien's blindness can be seen as willful in that he continues to indulge the habit that causes it. Does he also turn a blind eye to Robby's theft? If so, is he morally implicated in Robby's dissemination of the drug he makes and sells?
14. How has Damien changed by the end of the novel? Though he is blind, is he better able to see and understand his relationships and his own place in the world?

Author Bio

Justin Courter is the author of the novel **Skunk: A Love Story**, and a collection of prose poems, **The Death of the Poem and Other Paragraphs**. His work has appeared in the anthology *Paraspheres* and in numerous literary magazines, including *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Fugue*, *The Literary Review*, *Margie*, *The New Orleans Review*, *The North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Northwest Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Poetry East*. He lives in New York with his wife, the poet KC Trommer.

Critical Praise

"The story of Damien Youngquist --- the annoyingly anal copy editor turned junkie who nearly loses it all chasing the skunk ?musk dream? --- is as dark and twisted as it is tender and hilarious. From the love of Youngquist's life, a fish fetishist named Pearl, to his bumbling anarchist neighbor Robbie, Courter creates characters so grossly flawed and dysfunctional that they could almost be real. Skunk brims with repugnant imagery that defies genre, but also reaches new levels of coherent realism and maniacal science fiction. Addiction, love and finding a place in the world is Skunk's message, but the novel really jumps off the shelf because of Courter's wicked gift of description and keen sense of

story --- it?ll have you retching one minute, then trying to find a suitable skunk to milk the next."

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