



Render / An Apocalypse

Rebecca Gayle Howell

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Poetry. "To enter into these poems one must be fully committed, as the poet is, to seeing this world as it is, to staying with it, moment by moment, day by day. Yet these poems hold a dark promise: this is how you can do it, but you must be fully engaged, which means you must be fully awake, you must wake up inside it. As we proceed, the how-to of the beginning poems subtly transform, as the animals (or, more specifically, the livestock) we are engaging begin to, more and more, become part of us, literally and figuratively we enter inside of that which we devour." Nick Flynn

"This is the book you want with you in the cellar when the tornado is upstairs taking your house and your farm. It's the book you want in the bomb shelter, and in the stalled car, in the kitchen waiting for the kids to come home, in the library when the library books are burned. Its instructions are clear and urgent. Rebecca Gayle Howell has pressed her face to the face of the actual animal world. She remembers everything we have forgotten. Read this! It's not too late. We can start over from right here and right now." Marie Howe

"In every one of these haunting and hungry poems, Howell draws a map for how to enter the heat and dew of the human being, naked and facing the natural world, desperate to feel. I did not realize while reading RENDER how deeply I was handing everything over." Nikky Finney"

Render / An Apocalypse Details

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From Reader Review Render / An Apocalypse for online ebook

David Joy says

Quite frankly the best book of poetry I've read in years. Gritty. Raw. Lithe. Turns like switchbacks. Rebecca Gayle Howell is the real deal.

Karen says

The format of *Render: An Apocalypse* by Rebecca Gayle Howell reminds me of a survival manual. Or a religious tract. Or both. Thin, with a cover that looks like it has been made out of cardboard, this collection contains poems with such titles as "How to Kill a Rooster," "How to Wean a Hog," and "How to Build a Root Cellar." Indeed, these are directions for survival. And much more.

Certainly, at first glance, the content of the poems sound practical, if not a bit brutal and violent. But hey, afterall, with a collection title containing the word, "apocalypse" one may expect a bit of brutality. For instance, in "How to Be Civilized," the poet states, "Make the pig think/she has a choice//she can defecate/away from her feed//she can still be clean." In another poem, "How to Kill a Hog," the poet explains the directions for after the kill: "Gather her organs up/into your arms//like you once did your mother's robes/when you were a boy who knew nothing//but the scent of sweat and silk."

Taken at the literal level, the poems could be seen as mere instructions for physical survival. But they are more -- metaphors dug from the dirt and grit of farm life that explore all aspects of our daily lives. In "How to Be an Animal" the poet cautions us saying, "Forget you ran with them//Wild among trees/wild in your cheer" as if telling us that mere survival means distancing ourselves from what we once were. In "How to Build a Root Cellar" the poet juxtaposes the physical act of digging with finding and struggling with our own identities: "To build a root cellar//burrow cold from the ground" and "Call your own name until/you have one."

An interesting and inventive read!

Amy says

Visceral & compelling; tough-as-nails and yet utterly human & vulnerable.

Sophie Price says

As I began to read *Render*, I could not fully appreciate the poetry within it. The idea of butchering farm animals was one that was too foreign to me. Instead of reacting to sounds and feelings of the poetry, I reacted to my thoughts about the basic surface meaning of the poems. I think part of this was because some concepts, like punching a cow, were so obscure to me that I didn't know they were actual methods to being a farmer. It

was not until I heard Rebecca Gayle Howell read her own poetry that I really focused on the sounds. When she reads it, she annunciates on the last sound in the word. This is not what I have been focusing on; usually when I focus on a poem I notice the first sound of the word. Now that I have heard her read in the way she meant for the poem to be heard, I focus more where she does. After rereading the book, I found that the poem that articulates the talent of this author is her poem A Calendar of Blazing Days. The way that she reuses the ending sounds of “n” open up her poem to be heard in a serious and yet soft way that matches the opening repetition sounds of “s” and “m”. From there, she harshens her opening sounds with “r” and “b”, and begins to make her ending sounds softer by repeating “o” sounds. The switch is slight, almost as though the reader shouldn’t pay it to much attention; but the feelings within the poem strengthen through it. I think this is a good example of how talented Howell is. She makes a powerful poem about machinery in a traditionally

After reading this poem, I began to see connections of societal issues to the rest of the poetry. From the oppression of woman, which is clearly seen through her repetitive use of female farm animals, to her more drastic approach to the way we treat the earth in “How to Preserve”. Howell uses her own style to depict issues that are being picked apart in the media everyday. She uses sounds to aid this from her calm consonants with harsh endings, to her double lined to stanzas. Her own style adds more depth to the poem, and changes the way the reader views the farm animals that are being raised to die. Her images of love contrasting with death are strong enough to make the people who don’t grow and butcher their own food feel the guilt within having to kill to live. Her poems are incredibly strong willed in both meaning and voice.

Natalie Homer says

Not a pleasant book to read . . . but definitely powerful.

Pete says

intermittently amazing but overly Serious Art poems about womens agricultural work. cool shape/design/overall vibe (reminiscent of farmers almanac) but yeah not actually fun to read.

Amy says

Read for Poetry class. Not sure I liked this one so much... I couldn't deal with all the mentions of killing and eating farm animals.

Amorak Huey says

In 2014, the American farm is pretty much a romantic construct for most of us. It's an idea, a symbol, an image of the past when work was hard and mattered and done by real people with lives and loves and dirt under their nails.

Sure, farms like this still exist, but they're pretty distant from most of our lives; for most of us, meat comes in

plastic wrap and vegetables grow in a water-sprinkled array in the front corner of the grocery store, and the farm is run by a ginormous corporation, and we don't really want to know what happens to our food before we eat it. Everything safe, clean, sealed up.

The poems in *Render* are far from safe or clean. There's a desperation here, and pride, and a kind of loneliness in this book, which is structured as sort of a Farmers' Almanac. There are poems called "How to Kill a Rooster," "How to Kill a Hen," "How to Preserve," "How to Cure." The poems dig into the dirt and blood and shit of farm life and farm death. It's powerful, riveting, impressive. There's also a (mostly unspoken) narrative underlying these poems, the relationship between the farmer and his wife: lonely and intimate at once. We are defined by the distance between us. We are defined by what we must do to survive.

But the subject matter alone is not what makes these poems memorable; it's the language: stark, spare, precise, highly charged, erotic. From "How to Build Trust":

... and what a simple thing

for you to stop
stacking hay

hosing away her filth
stop, what, maybe to smoke

your hands already out of your pockets
your teeth already clenched

what a simple thing
her head wrenching toward light

your fingers thick with her wire
hair as you think about

the work ahead
its musk and hazard

how this is not about love

But, oh, it always is about love, isn't it?

I adore the poems in this book and will return to them often. (A minor quibble: I wish the publishers had omitted the foreword by Nick Flynn, which feels more like a tossed-off Goodreads review than a preface that improves the experience of reading the poems.)

Lindsey says

Rapt reading and re-reading these poems. Thankful for them, their pleasure in and truth about meanness and

love.

"Most mammals most mothers
eat the after

we bury it
and eat the before—"

If you want a meadow-filled bucolics, look somewhere else.

Winslow Schmelling says

Howell's collection is raw and real and each poem carries as much emotion as the last. I don't think I've ever read a collection so packed with feeling. It was weighty and serious but I couldn't stop reading it because it never stopped saying things.

I haven't read poetry actively in some years and so I'm a little out of practice in writing about it. I only recently came back to it because of a poetry class I'm taking and I'd say if it weren't for my class, I wouldn't have started reading poetry again, at least not yet. Not only am I happy I'm reading poetry again for the sake of just reading poetry but, also because I'm assigned amazing collections like *Render: An Apocalypse*. This is a collection that makes me want to read more poetry, makes me want to write. Howell is definitely a new inspiration for me.

Kevin says

Brutally vibrant and intense, this book of poems teaches and re-teaches the reader how to read and, for my reading, shook the foundation of my world-view and urban sentimentality for the floating signifier of "The Farm." Each of these poems radiate a poetic concision unlike anything I've ever seen. They each contain their own grammar and stylistics, and they play well together in the overarching logic of the text. An absolute masterpiece.
