



Barnburner

Erin Hoover

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Poetry. *Barnburner* by Erin Hoover is the winner of the 2017 Elixir Press Antivenom Poetry Award. Kathryn Nuernberger, contest judge, had this to say about it: "The epigraph to *Barnburner* is a call to burn it all down: 'According to an old story, there was once a Dutchman who was so bothered by the rats in his barn that he burned down the barn to get rid of them. Thus a *barn burner* became one who destroyed all in order to get rid of a nuisance.' There is honesty in this epigraph, raw and brutal, like the narrative voices in Erin Hoover's poems. But there's an irony at play here, an irony perhaps borrowing a bit from the ironies of Frost's 'Mending Wall': these poems don't burn down the cruelties of a homogeneous, racist patriarchy. Instead, they make a muse of it. A muse that can be objectified, stripped bare, and put on a pedestal for all to scorn. Hoover fridges that muse so that one speaker of a heroine after another is vaulted by the shock of such violence into a journey of personal discovery. There are mean-spirited, ruthless characters in these poems and, in a kind of reverse Bechdel test, Hoover wipes away their inner lives and never lets them talk to each other about anything except those they have hurt."

Barnburner Details

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From Reader Review Barnburner for online ebook

Michelle Hogmire says

Extraordinary debut poetry collection, informed by the simultaneous sad desperation and proud stubbornness of rural Appalachia--squeaking by on call center salaries, blatantly buying drugs in hotel lobbies, subsisting on land plagued by environmental destruction. Hoover is at her finest when tackling the thorniness of female sexuality and embodiment, although I have a different favorite subject here. (Completely biased reading, relating to me personally) I adore "With Gratitude to Those Who Have Made This Book Possible," Hoover's rowdy criticism of the NYC literary scene: "I look / at the acknowledgements of certain books / and find I've been the plus one at birthdays / for Brooklyn literati, people whose patios / reminded me of the time needed to write a book, / how the sting of rejection might be reduced / on a golden cloud. Of course I was dying to go. / I've got a talent for noticing these friends' / failures, their bakery scones staling in the sun, / not an oily kernel left of my corn salad. My job / is to notice."

Ace Boggess says

Barnburner is a rich, powerful collection of poems--a mix of narrative and confessional. They explore hopes and histories, nostalgia, regret, and becoming. Some of the scenes and subsequent meditations burn your fingers as you read. Others bring sadness, hurt. In every line, though, Hoover's writing is so compelling won't be able to stop following where she leads as if this is a mystery novel rather than a book of verse. It's that good. I'm sure I'll read it again soon.

Matthew Henschel says

This is such a powerful book. I read the poem "The Valkyrie" before the book came out, and it was legitimately one of the best poems I've read in a long, long time. I found myself coming back to read it again and again.

Barnburner is full of similarly moving poems. These are poems that speak to desperation and defiance with authenticity. "PR Opportunity at the Food Bank" speaks to the sort of experience I had many times in the nonprofit world, but the poem articulates truths that I had never realized—at least not at any conscious level—until I saw them on the page and recognized them as truths about my own experience.

I think that's what great writing does. It always points you in the direction of the authentic, the true experience that the writer helps you recognize in yourself or in others. The truths in Barnburner are sometimes dark, and always difficult, but they are the truest truths.

Eliot says

Bitingly dark, eyes-wide-open, tightly crafted poems.

Keith says

"No discussion of a protagonist's poverty, defamation, or existential helplessness goes without comparison to those who've got it worse. The most venomous screeds against former lovers, the cruelty of strangers, or even a lowly ATM mugger are still woven through with the idea that everyone plays their part in creating the larger murk of unhappiness and desperation that is, more and more, becoming the real shared truth of life in our modern world."

full review here: [The Poetics of Anger](#)

Jaime says

I'm not a huge poetry reader, but this was really excellent. The poems touch on such a wide variety of topics - fertility, economic issues, class/privilege, intolerance, politics - but they all flow well together. I couldn't stop reading this, but when I was done, I went back to some of my favorites - ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES, WHAT IS THE SISTERHOOD TO ME?, WITH GRATITUDE...among others, and just read them again, letting them pour over me. These poems are urgent, smart, insightful, and timely.
