

## *Sonny*

By Mary Burger (New York: Leon Works, 2005)

### Reviews



In bits and starts, by simple steps, Mary Burger assembles lives at first surprising for their simplicity but which quickly and quietly prove themselves struggling under the weight of the 20th century's most difficult discovery. In its ability to move from an abstractive distance to the pained particulars of individual lives, to move from facts and theory to the bareness of a boy and a girl fumbling out the logic of a changed world, *Sonny* is a powerful and moving book, unlike anything else out there.

—Brian Evenson  
Author, *The Wavering Knife*

The first book from Renee Gladman's Leon Works, *Sonny* is a poem-cum-novella that explores and explodes notions of narrative, history, memory, and genre. It is the story of a family told from the point(s) of view of a sister, "this girl"/"I"/"me," but also "we," about a brother, "this boy," and others, "they." The wavering perspective and lack of names makes this family saga hauntingly impersonal; however, the book isn't meant to be a simple family drama. Running concurrently is a story of the construction and detonation of the atomic bomb, and, through it, a story of America (this family) in the twentieth century. How Burger weaves the personal and impersonal, all the while insisting on individual and collective involvement in the various stories of creation and destruction, is the book's emotional core.

—Danielle Dutton, in *Context #18*  
[http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no18/book\\_reviews.html](http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no18/book_reviews.html)

There are moments, instants, where *Sonny* feels like a work "predicted" by the writing of David Markson, Don DeLillo (especially the desert sections of *Underworld*) & Carole Maso, yet where Markson & Maso construct works that function like arrows, moving ever progressively toward a conclusion that feels like a bullseye (or, possibly, a trap), *Sonny* opens out & is more comfortable with the indeterminacy of its implications. In this sense, it's less of a performance and a far more human book than these other authors tend to produce. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the one moment of true gore in *Sonny* is not atomic [one of the book's parallel tales is of the Manhattan Project], but rather the simple farmyard act of skinning a rabbit, described in almost clinical detail.

—Ron Silliman  
[http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2005\\_08\\_01\\_ronsilliman\\_archive.htm](http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_ronsilliman_archive.htm)  
August 11, 2005