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Book Review: Nasty Women & Bad Hombres: A Poetry Anthology

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Thursday, June 28th, 2018

Nasty Women & Bad Hombres: A Poetry Anthology

Editors: Deena November and Nina Padolf

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Get used to crumbs

...Be thankful

When the blows cease.

("Brief Note To America" by Terri Niccum)

Did the November 2016 presidential election leave you sleepless? Unsettled? Queasy? According to the new anthology *Nasty Women & Bad Hombres*, edited by Deena November and Nina Padolf, you are not alone. The anthology is a collection of mostly poetry in a broad range of styles and forms with some flash fiction and personal essays added to the mix. It began with a core of poets with a Pittsburgh connection, writing in response to the 2016 election. However, the book is inclusive of diverse voices from everywhere in the U.S. Reading it, I feel like I've traveled the country, knocking on doors, hearing the testimony of almost a hundred writer-witnesses. Their reactions to the 2016 election and resulting presidency range from déjà vu to ironic laughter, to sadness, to fear and horror.

The origins of the title of the anthology *Nasty Women & Bad Hombres* are clues to its contents and its political/philosophical stance. During the presidential debates, Donald Trump referred to his female opponent Hillary Clinton as a "nasty woman." He promised to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border to keep out "bad hombres." So, as explained in "Sorry...Not Sorry" by Deena November, being called a "nasty woman" is actually a compliment, "reassurances that I am finally doing something right." The same is true, I believe, about being called a "bad hombre"—"bad" is good.

The anthology spotlights personal experiences

This anthology highlights the personal experiences of people impacted by the presidential election. For example, disabled people felt devalued by the election results (“Call Me Simple” by Judith A. Brice). Those with a past involving sexual abuse or rape were among those frightened by the new president’s fondness for “pussy-grabbing” (“Bare Hand” by Richelle Buccilli). “[L]ike apples fall babies from his branches / he sneezes out hurt / ...seeding only very sad girls” (“Poem” by Sarah Katz). Those with mental illness felt the election as a blow because it reminds them they “used to start each day with how [to commit suicide]” (“Against Suicide” by Jan Beatty). A teacher notes in “Younger than 9/11” that her immigrant and first generation students are terrified of being deported,” regardless of legal status (by Elizabeth Ashe). And a young mother’s reaction was: “Listen, now; I deal with a toddler all day / And don’t need one as a U.S. president, okay?” (“Nursery Rhymes for January 20, 2017” by Leah Sandals).

The election increased the reasons young black men had to fear for their lives: “When you walk to work and eye the trees, you may wonder which of these would be a good place to die” (“Advice to Young Black Men Named Cameron, After the Election” by Cameron Barnett). And young black women felt like Black Barbie, a doll “relegated to the bottom of the tool box, your plastic head mashed in” (“Instructions to a Black Barbie” by Dionne Irving).

A person didn’t need special reasons to be sick about the 2016 election and its aftermath. People “watched the election together, texting first in fear, then in shock and horror as it became clear...” (“The Day After” by Lauren Gambill). For many, it brought on fears of swastikas, dictators, and Kristallnacht (“Swastika (November 8th)” by C. M. Crockford, “The 45th Reich” by Jack M. Freedman, “On the Anniversary of Kristallnacht, Donald Trump is Elected President” by Alison Stone, “Déjà vu, 2016” by Randy Minnich, “Royal Oak, November 9th, 2016” by David Joz Villaverde).

Moreover, this election evoked both the nightmare of the bomb (“Fallout Shelter” by Angele Ellis) and the determined spirit of the 1960s marches (“Marching Again” by Randy Minnich, “Why I Marched” by Jamie Wagman).

There were reasons to fear and distrust those who had voted for putting the new *enfant terrible* into office, especially when considering their fondness for guns (“That Day” by Robert Walicki). “We live in [a] reality where people think it’s okay to say they’re not racist, but to use their vote to put one in office” (“A Reason to Hang On” by Lainy Carslow). After all, our new president is “white” as “mayonnaise on white bread with ham and cheese / ...his white is sugar daddy white” (“His White” by Nina Padolf).

The (dark) humor of the election

The anthology *Nasty Women & Bad Hombres* is full of humor—mostly of the dark, ironic variety, but funny nonetheless. Has there ever been a president so easy to mock? Tony Medina says, “I am seeking a certificate of live birth for Donald Trump’s hair” (“Hair! Hair!”). Another poet urges people to buy the new product called “Solium” that, “taken twice a day,” gives a person a soul; apparently, there are folks who lack one (by Charles W. Brice). The new president is re-imagined, for example, as a comic-book character (“The Orange Menace: Origin Story of a Comic-Book Villain (excerpts)” by Dan Shapiro). And this tidbit: “my dog suspects nothing” (“November Aftermath” by Maryfrances Wagner).

So what do we do now that we're in this mess? The anthology *Nasty Women & Bad Hombres* supplies some answers. For one thing, you should "[f]ind your own words, your own voice, / then shout it, open your mouth" ("Advice from Wonder Woman" by Valerie Bacharach). Teachers can communicate with students—"keep reading / if you hate it, / if it frightens you...." ("I Urge My Students" by Megan Merchant). "We will create new flying dog houses / for our ripped off tails," says the speaker in "I'm Not Voting For Your Fake Dog Treats" (by Juliet Cook and j/j hastain). And, ultimately, everything hinges on love. "[S]ometimes we say the word love and it isn't / something abstract" ("Survival" by Kristofer Collins).

The anthology *Nasty Women & Bad Hombres* edited by Deena November and Nina Padolf is valuable, above all, for its thoughtful viewpoints—there were too many excellent works to mention them all.

This book is healthy with good writing. Emotionally speaking, it's great medicine. Take as needed for pain.

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