



Hard Child

Natalie Shapero

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Thought-provoking and sardonically expressive, Shapero is a self-proclaimed “hard child”—unafraid of directly addressing bleakness as she continually asks what it means to be human and to bring new life into the world. *Hard Child* is musical and argumentative, deadly serious yet tinged with self-parody, evoking the spirit of Plath while remaining entirely its own.

From Hot Streak

Actually it's ridiculous to opine on what kind
of a dog I would be, were I ever a dog, as I don't
contain within me half enough life to power
a dog. I WOULD BE A DEAD DOG, THAT'S
WHAT KIND, or
maybe a mere industrial object
boasting a low-grade animation, some odd beep

or flicker, like a dryer or a bulb. So, sure, I could
be a reluctant bulb, the only one still offering light
in an otherwise burnt-out fixture bolted
hard to a row house porch. And all those moths,
with no other place to die. Can't they murder
themselves on someone else?...

Natalie Shapero has worked as a civil rights lawyer and is currently Professor of the Practice of Poetry at Tufts University. Her first poetry collection *No Object* was published in 2013, and her writing has appeared in *The Believer*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, and *The Progressive*. She lives in Massachusetts.

Hard Child Details

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From Reader Review Hard Child for online ebook

Steven says

"One was charged
with delivering blood through the dim
aquarium of her body..."

"To be, he said, an American, is to find you have lived
your whole small life on the back of some
starving and saber-toothed creature that has,
all the while, been killing and killing and killing."

"And the heat, with its uncertain grip,
like a child's hand required to always be held
when crossing streets."

Matthew says

There is a bit too much "humor" in these poems. Not my teacup.

Jackie says

I was going to read one poem and then I read the whole thing and then it was past my bedtime. Oops. Read if you like your humor dark and deep, and covering a core of substantive feeling that goes all the way to the bottom of the well.

Gena Smith says

I rarely write reviews on poetry collections because it's such a subjective interaction and I hate to condescend to readers by telling them "this one is good, this one is bad, etc." particularly in a space where it's quite trendy to be hyper critical of female authors. That said, if you can meet this collection where it is, you'll find a lot of beauty. The subjects won't be relatable for all readers, the period covered in the speaker's life won't match up with every reader's, but regardless, Shapero can reach you if you let her. It's contemporary, it's polished, it's down to earth. As a student of poetry (both literally and figuratively) this collection is just objectively well done.

(Kind of bummed that I read this one after I had already voted for There are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé in the Goodreads 2017 contest. BUT THAT ONE WAS AMAZING TOO!)

Angela says

Two thumbs up ??

Brian says

There's a darkness and a well-reasoned, descriptively clear sense of anger in these poems. The anger however is tempered by an underlying sense of humor and, ultimately, a sense of compassion. But, then, maybe that's just me...

"... the dinner/ of neighbors at which man I never/ had met before said "I don't fear dying"--/ "look at the past, people have been dying forever, and--"/ then he stopped and shook his head--/ "I drank too much. I was almost saying/ that people have died forever and all/ of them survived, but of course"--he made/ a hard laugh--"God, of course they didn't survive."

Caroline says

4.5 stars

Overlooking the unfortunate cover (so literal!), I really loved this collection. Shapero is a poet that takes risk, and I appreciate that. Maybe not every metaphor and conceit worked out, but the ones that did... man, did they work. She touches quite a few subjects, but the collection is pretty controlled; they all seemed to tie in together. I have to say I feel very concerned for Shapero after reading this, but I know poems /= the poet necessarily. But seriously, things get pretty dark in this collection, so don't read it if you're easily triggered by mentions of suicide and depression.

The poems about motherhood were some of the strongest for me, weirdly, since I am not interested in the subject in general. But that's the power of her writing. It takes you by the shoulders and forces you to listen. Shapero really doesn't mince words. I know that's a phrase that gets said a lot, but for real, she doesn't hold back and she doesn't coddle the reader. I frequently cringed while reading these poems, but I couldn't look away. And I made sure to only read this book at times when I was completely undisturbed and undistracted, because I felt like they deserved my full attention (the fact that I don't always read every poetry collection that way is perhaps not good, haha).

Anyway, to circle back to motherhood... Shapero writes about the misgivings of bringing a child into a world with so much war and vice, this "thwarting era" as she calls it in "Survive Me." Some of the poems in the first section suggest miscarriage. My favorite was the poignant "What Will She Goes As?" which ruminates on possible costumes for a baby who would be born on Halloween, and coming up with historical babies who were lost (Moses, Baby Jessica, the Lindbergh baby). "This costume works best if the baby is nowhere to be found." In the opening poem, "My Hand and Cold," she talks about having two lists of baby names, one for if the baby survives and one for if the baby is lost, and somehow ties it into enclaves (yes, the geographical concept). She does that kind of thing throughout the collection so masterfully, and every time I was amazed by the creativity. That's what I meant by saying she takes risks. This whole collection, I felt like I was reading things I'd never read before, even on subjects that were familiar. Only she could have written

these poems. That's so rare to find.

Later poems deal with postpartum depression. "Home Scale," which is featured on the back cover, hit me like a ton of bricks. You just really need to read this poem. Trust me.

The collection also touches on religion, but not in a preachy way, more of a spiritual questioning way. It made sense, what with all the existential angst going on.

I definitely recommend this one.

L.A. says

Is it still post-partum depression if you were depressed BEFORE you had the baby? Asking for a friend.

Shapero's speaker does, indeed, come across like a friend, if you have a tendency to befriend tough-talking pessimists. Divided neatly into two parts, Shapero spends the first half describing the speaker's worries and state of mind during her pregnancy, then turns darker with poems that reflect the speaker's love of her child, but also her desire to just not be on this fucked-up planet anymore. It's a fine line, and readers who have themselves suffered post-partum depression will want to read this only if doing so would be cathartic rather than triggering.

Shapero's speaker reminds me of the way people talk back home: tough and no-nonsense. That this matter-of-factness makes good poetry might surprise the snooty set, but is no true revelation to those of us who have always found the beauty of hard things. Recommended for all poetry collections.

Gary says

I loved this book of poems. I gave it a two because I had just read a book of poems that was horrible, and my 2 is as high as I want to go. What's more important is I killed a baby sparrow that had fallen out of a nest and latter I felt so guilty I donated my entire collection of Jazz CDs to the local friends of the Library. I'll never be the same after Ms. Shapero. I'd love to attend Tuffs to learn how to write like that. Life is pain and to struggle is art when elaborated on so gracefully as in this book. I'm not so pissed at myself anymore and Hard Child is why.

Amanda Moore says

As with many contemporary poetry books, this one drags a bit in the middle, the same tricks again and again instead of reinvention, variation. Still, Shapero employs her wit and distinct voice to good effect, offering lines and transitions that crackle on the page.

Frank says

I'm sure Shapero selected her smiling author's photo on the back cover in order to reassure readers that she's fine, really a happy person, not to worry.

The main themes in this volume's collection of poetry are her pregnancy, her alienation, and thoughts of death. And biblical musing. There's not a spot of joy to be found in any verse.

Her poems read like explanations of her thoughts, feelings and observations which lead to considerations. Conversational, but more like monologue.

Nice use of language, thoughts and feelings well expressed. While we are mostly very different I did find a little commonality with Shapero.

Jennie says

Not my style.

Too many books to read.

Tom says

So good. I need to read it one or two more times to thoughtfully comment. It's emotionally intense. Painful at times. I think this is a close summary, "All I have coming in this / world is a joke that hits me later" (from lines 2-3 in "Winter Injury").

Laurel L. Perez says

Shapero contemplates the long investments and fleeting attachments humans make in their turmoil-ridden lives, exuding both mischievousness and melancholy while maintaining a sort of crude optimism. A new mother, her admission in the title poem that "there isn't one/ human tradition I would choose to carry/ forward" reveals as much about her poetry as her lack of interest in doing things conventionally. Shapero demonstrates an ability to follow observations to unexpected ends.

Shapero's way of entering poems is irresistible: "Museums of war, they bore me." They are a comedian's hook, already prodding the audience to anticipatory laughter. In the body of the poems she deploys what I'd call one-liners, even if they aren't: "A bird screams out my window like an alarm I have / set to notify me when a bird is there."

This collection of poems is united not only by mode and voice, but also by its particular obsessions, including the surrealism of motherhood, a dubious God, and that "worst / sort of lurker," death.

J & J says

Many of the poems relay what seems to be the loss of a child and I can relate to that (or perhaps she was the child, metaphorically, and she felt lost) but overall, most of the words/concepts in the poems felt scattered and I had a hard time making sense of many of them.
