



The Cow

Ariana Reines
winner of the 2006 Alberta Prize

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This text is filthy and fertilized, filling and emptying, filling and emptying, atrocious and politic with meaning. *The Cow* is a mother, a lover, and a murdered lump of meat, rendered in the strongest of languages. "I cannot count the altering that happens in the very large rooms that are the guts of her."

The Cow Details

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From Reader Review The Cow for online ebook

Joe says

Too late to this party. Oh well. Reines charts how gendered & species-ed giving, receiving, secreting, sawing, sinks, holes, waste, trash, production have been and are becoming in a kind of compost-cud poetics that draws on works from Stein, Baudelaire, Celan, D & G, Cixous. TC doesn't wear it's learning on its sleeve, however, as ideas, stances, gender & eco politics, slip in and out of visibility, are located in and rocket away from living breathing, viscous exchanging bodies and forms. New possibilities proliferate but not without acknowledging the toll/toil of the current situation—"Tonight three guys in a car said can we help you with your hardon. / That was the most genderfuck catcall I ever pretended I wasn't hearing as I walked by it. / I am so tired, deep deep inside. I am tired. / This ceaseless squabble. What Mandelstam said. / What. Now what Go on. Go on." No clue how the Koran stuff is operating (seems like a promising but unfollowed thread...step careful) but I care enough to reread, to be watchful, to let Reines run amok though my head and goop.

Jimmy says

Have you ever been to a landfill? Once I went with my dad to a landfill. I was surprised that it was open to the public. Vultures wheeled overhead. We drove through mountains of trash until we got to this one place where you got to dump your shit, all while the sun baked it all into a perfect souffle of stink. We unloaded some unwanted furniture. As we were leaving, I noticed a dead horse in the bed of a truck. Three men were pushing the dead weight off their vehicle. The horse flopped off the truck like wet carpet, rolled a little ways before stopping.

How come this is not allowed to be exterior to the poem. Because the poem does not shoot out from a source it is of the world. While American poetry dissolved its I the starvational and massacred bodies of all the world larded newspapers with their blood

and guts. Shit. LYRIC. An integrity must come back to a body, and from thence, into a world, a world where a body can adore another one, or the sun, or a part of a thought under it, or the night. Maybe nobody wants to kill you because of what they think you are, or rape you, or treat you like a piece of shit. Maybe you don't need an I. An I's a dress literature can wear to be everything. Want to be infinity. Speaking but over yourself. Can a book carry you into the world you have to pretend doesn't exist most of the time, can a book carry you back out into what first made you alive.

To be laid open, metaphorically speaking is not enough, must be carried out literally. The need for a kind of connection through the splayed innards of the poet, a bodily connection where a spiritual connection is lacking or impossible because. It's 2011. Ariana's strategy is shock-cum-deadened-mass, and I admire her urgency, her good intentions. She wants her reader to become deadened in order to realize their already deadened state, so that they can begin the work of discarding the corpse. Having the corpse rejuvenated in a million forms, into the plastic we eat and the plastic we sit on.

INDUSTRY IS EVERYTHING

Sometimes I think if I can find a way to really feel my mere going could become as succor to

the ruined women I love but it never does. The guilt of knowing the world's evil and still wanting to live in it.

JUST SAW OPEN AND SEE

That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten

END

The urgency to say the unsayable, but also that nothing is unsayable. That none of this is shocking, though so desperately wanting to be, is sad. So the unsayable takes the form of the unfashionable, the insensible, the silly, the personal (for the personal is the residue of shit, the casualty of lights). But extremities are absorbed into everydayness. We hear you not.

Where does life exist. What if everything could be as tender and durable as a genital.

I want to found a country where everybody feels.

Universes shooting out of matter so tiny you can feel it.

How to be liquid how to be gas how to be Freon, music, how to be flesh or inside of flesh that is living and how to be its equal, how not to be less than it, how not to divide the capital from the provinces, how to be.

Juliet says

I knew I was going to like this when the first piece of the book included "It is not easy to be honest because it is impossible to be complete."

Here is one of the shorter poems from the book, which I love:

SECONDS

Are you so intelligent your body doesn't have you in it.

Everything could be beautiful maybe.

If it wasn't already a factory.

A milking machine is a machine attached to the valve of a body that is living.

That body has veins and is a little rosy at the teat.

Sucking is the main thing. It is the first thing to be done.

What came first, the milk or the suck.

Whatever she is so full of it.

What came first, the milk or the suck.

She is full of it, full of it, full of it.

M. says

yeah. gonna need to live with this one a while.

though i gotta say, mischievously, that i wish i had written this, if only for the "megan milks' the cow" jokes
-- ah, childhood persecution

Jacob says

I just can't get into this book.

I have been reading this book and at times I think that I am starting to get into it, starting to like what it's doing, and then I feel taken out of it, yanked by my collar, no, by the scruff of my neck, no, grabbed by my beard and yanked up out of my chair, out of the book, to somewhere else entirely. Then I start reading it again and I start slipping into the text, into the body of the text, into a phantom body of the author. I look at the titles of the poems and consider the cost of printing that text in color. Is this typographical feature artful or excessive? Is this the result of University money? Again, I'm away from the book yanked up by my beard. I think about the beard of Mohammad and that someone told me once that they have part of it wrapped in gold leaf in a museum in Turkey. This book is kind of based off of the Koran. Maybe, I'm starting to really get into this book.

mis fit says

This book is seriously amazing. Reines writes these bold, disgusting, but sometimes really hopeful poems-- and that mix is so so good! I feel really excited about life & poetry after reading this, oddly enough-- it's neat to see someone writing about gender, bodies, violence, sex in this way.

Rusty says

A brutal, ugly, beautiful book. If you're looking for an intellectual edge in your poetry, this is it. You'll be picking pieces out of your teeth for days.

Mary K says

1. Reines is brave and honest because she's willing to admit that being socialized as female is, effectively, being trained to be a corpse.
2. This book starts out politely invitational and theoretical, but something terribly scatological happened about 20 pages in where the lingua bacteria exponentially multiplied. I realized my readership wasn't

shaking the book's hand, but was actually fisting this orifice of resistance Reines had carved out of our shared pulpy body.

3. This book is shit. Not as in “this book is bad,” but as in this book is shit because all language is shit. It’s what we excise and roll around in. This book is shit, an accursed share, a corpse I’m eating that looks so much like my own corpse (see 1). Just like the brains of cows that are forced to consume their moms and sisters liquefied bodies, all of my lady friends’ brains are full of holes. Except instead of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, our brain’s holes look like typographic counters. Our prions will never be quarantined because language and gender have gone septic and you, reader, want to fuck these holes.

4. This book is one of the most righteously helpful books when talking intersectionality between women and non-human animals. It steers the discussion away from pitfalling into an anthropomorphization of non-human animals, and away from reductively equating humans as animals end transmission. Instead, it refocuses: it’s about flesh. This book acknowledges a certain type of flesh whose primary mode of being is one of corpsing.

Vincent Scarpa says

Reines frequently lands on some prolific, breathtaking insight—lines you instantly want to write down, to never forget, to perhaps tattoo someday—but the poems here (and in MERCURY, which I finished, and COUER DE LION, which I abandoned ten pages in and found just godawful) just as often strike me as contrived and extra-affected. Reines is undoubtedly **extremely** intelligent and extremely well-read, and that shows. I’m interested in how she fucks with theoretical concepts by making them interfere with the “lowbrow,” but her strategy ultimately reveals itself—approximately half of the poem will be interested in making or unmaking meaning, and the other half will be jumbled, magnet-poetry nonsense strewn with cunts and dicks and semen and blowjobs and shit-taking and shit-eating and vomiting and vomit-eating and bleeding. Which I’m all for, I suppose, but too often it felt like Reines was asking me to be shocked, or asking me to disrupt my train of thought, by forcing me to confront what she’d placed before me, but that’s difficult to do the more her poetic strategies reveal themselves, page by page.

None of this is to say that I think Reines is even remotely untalented. I think she’s probably just not for me. But I’m very interested in her work, and I’m glad to have read her. I like the opportunity to challenge my sensibilities, and Reines is a great writer to turn to if that, too, is your objective. And I’d read her next book, too.

Farren says

Holy Jesus.

Read this book, cover to cover, in rapt horror. Then read it again. Topically:

The industrial processing of cow carcasses, piece by piece, stage by stage, for complete consumption.

The formal (in broken, wild manic clipped lines, in borrowed material from John Ashbery and the Merck Veterinary Manual, in long digressions and expletive laden outbursts) and literal violence to traditional and

contemporary poetry ("While American poetry dissolved its I the starvational and massacred bodies of all the world larded newspapers with their blood and guts. Shit. LYRIC. Maybe you don't need an I. An I's dress literature can wear to be everything. Want to be infinity. Speaking but over yourself.")

The systematic debasement of the female form, both as a potentially-sexual object, the sloe-eyed, oversexed "cow" of a mother (Ma Ma. MOUTH MOUTH / Mean ME ME everything I can feel inside/ What skin. What hair. What eyes, gold tooth. What muscles. What udder. / What are hooves. The liver, what liver. What stomach. Horns. Where isn't she. Where isn't she inside her body. Where is she / not. Where is she least. / There was a whole body that went before me: it was her. / Stretch marks on her stomacher.") And to a lesser extent, the used-up woman, the Hag.

The broadly scatological, by which I mean all taboo bodily processes, but especially shit and semen.

But all of this in a heap, in a constantly-moving, dissolving, reemerging, aligning and breaking with itself. The themes are so familiar but the wild, lawless, free-associative construction of the line/poem/text really fascinated me. Deliberate, surely, but what was the aim?

The image, finally, was of a stomach. A great, textual cow-stomach in which all of these things dissolve into an associative mass through which some things filter out and are disposed, and some nourish.

After this essay Reines penned in Action Yes! Quarterly, it was all, DUH:
<http://www.actionyes.org/issue6/reine...>

POEM POEM GET UP POEM

And of course, and ALWAYS:

"You have got to goad yourself toward a becoming that is in accordance with what you are innate. You have got to sometimes become the medicine you want to take. You have got to, you have absolutely got to put your face into the gash and sniff, and lick. You have got to learn to get sick. You have got to reestablish the integrity of your emotions so that their violence can become a health and so that you can keep on becoming. There is no sacrifice. You have got to want to live. You have got to force yourself to want to."

I had a lot of feelings about this book. It got INTO my head. That doesn't happen very often.

Lightsey says

This is one of the more disturbing and disgusting books of poetry I've ever read. Still, Reines's verve and Steinian wit are keeping me going.

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Update: I find myself resistant to the process part of this book (not a section but a strand). I know the project--put the flesh back on the bones, acknowledge the mess, etc--and Reines even addresses the reader's unwillingness directly--but to address is not to convince, still less to impel. I'm just not going with it. . . I can't help thinking that the project of redirtying the house of literature just takes us in a circle. . . Still, all

books/works fail; I like that this one tries (and then there's Reines's talent to consider, too). I'll certainly look at her next.

annakatrina says

This book was disgusting, indulgent, technical, scatological, and begging me not to enjoy it, but I loved it.

Leanna says

I wanted to like this book. And there were a few lines that amazed me. And I generally like the creepy project of exploring female physicality through the lens of cows and their slaughter!

But there was a lot of uses of "signification" "meaning" and other phenomenological terms that made the whole book feel like of lit grad school-y. I think the author was, like, 25 when she wrote it, so it's a pardonable crime! But while I liked the premise, this book was executed in a way that took itself SO seriously, that was SO interested in spelling out its meaning-making, was SO interested in being a hipster's Gertrude Stein. Also, there was an emphasis on shit. Lots of shit.

This book felt rather pretentious and amateurish to me. But because of the handful of stellar lines that I loved, I should probably withhold my judgment a bit more.

Sandy says

I have been on kind of a poetry bender but find it hard to write about poetry. This is a totally amazing collection that works around a set of bovine themes - the relationship between capitalism and the body, gender, sex, relationships, family, writing. These are not all obviously cattle-related but Reynes does more than make the connections work, she's a materialist, anchors them all in body fluids and tangible humiliations. Her writing is beautiful and painful, hilarious resistant to linear meaning and constantly welling up and erupting with, uh, insight - I don't know, that's kind of banal, I mean lines that rear up out of nowhere and punch through my defences. I wish this was the kind of book a bunch of my friends would read so we could turn her zingiest lines into in-jokes and repeat them endlessly out of context. "When I die I will become everything A TURDUCKEN." This would be facile or whatever but also devastating so I don't know.

Nathan Hirsteins says

This a terrifying fuckbook, and it sort of makes me wish my asshole weren't so dirty, and that I didn't ever want my parts to touch other peoples' pieces, and that everybody had kittens instead of cocks and bowls of milk for vaginas. Like everything was in a picture book your mom read you. But guess what. This is life and we're living where our temples are in sewers and it is fucking repugnant.

