



Why Things Burn

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For many performance poets, the simple act of writing down the words can kill a poem's spirit and energy. Not so with Daphne Gottlieb. In *Why Things Burn*, Gottlieb tackles sexuality, lesbian issues, rape, urban life, and a host of other topics with the same power of her live performances.

Why Things Burn Details

Date : Published June 25th 2001 by Soft Skull Press (first published 2001)

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Author : Daphne Gottlieb

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From Reader Review Why Things Burn for online ebook

Lisa M. says

Title: Why Things Burn

Author: Daphne Gottlieb

Structure: 4 parts

Page count: 125

Plot: This is a poetry collection. The poetry is free-verse and often involves found text or interesting forms. A lot of Gottlieb's poetry follows troubled women, sexuality, and love. This collection, like other Gottlieb books, drags you through shitty emotions. Some poems end in empowerment. Some don't.

Reaction: To be honest, I've been pretty down for the last few days. I felt pretty apathetic while reading this, so my reaction might be muted compared to how I usually would feel. Even when I'm in an apathetic mood, I really enjoy Daphne Gottlieb's poetry. It is sparse and very accessible. I would suggest this collection or any of her work to anybody who is interested in reading poetry, but scared of "understanding" it or of particularly abstract work. Although her work is spare, Gottlieb does not fall into abstract rhetoric-- she always paints vivid pictures. Her word play is always impressive and clever; her metaphors are always delightful. She experiments with form in great ways. One thing I really appreciated about this collection is that her pop cultural references were not totally out there-- some other collections were harder for me to comprehend until I did research to get them. Most of her work is a snapshot of the character in the poem at their worst, and perhaps when they climb out of that hole. My only problem at times with Gottlieb is that she has developed such a strong voice, that it gets old. I'd like to see her break out of her norm a little bit.

Poems that stand out: "speaking siamese in england," "to whom it may concern," "you never forget your first," "you have one new message, sent today at 12:43 am"

4*/5

Katie says

Yet another amazing Mills professor. But that's not why this book is on my "all time favorites" list. Daphne's poems are piercing, witty, and at times terrifying, but always full of fresh and brilliant images.

dara says

This collection of poetry was a quick read. Gottlieb's work is sometimes feminist--empowering even--with subjects as varied as rape, gay/lesbian, Cinderella, Barbie, conjoined twins, suicide, race, and even love poems. Her style leans towards experimental, which sometimes works for me, and sometimes doesn't.

A few examples of her work:

"you never forget your first"

out of town boy junior high school party just 14 vodka drinks things i don't remember vodka drinks english
beat *she said will you remember*

said i'll never forget you the next day in the hall at school you told me you were a state-hurdler you told
everyone i was easy never saw you again

you left me a secret ripped stockings passed out bloody legs vomiting in a pink bathtub your name bruises

you hugged me in the hall you told everyone i was easy i'd rather be easy than raped

i came to with no clothes no clothes were thick enough wearing shame for underwear i shoved the bloody
stockings into the bathroom trash

apologized to the host for messing up the bathroom and left you were already gone

i pushed at the bruises trying to remember your touch

once the hangover and internal injuries were healed i had nothing to remember my first time with except sex

i bruised my way through thousands of fucks snake charming men out of their pants looking for another
rapist like you so i could do it again so i could do it better

found another one he led me by the hand into a dark room at a party i punched him in the throat and got
away he wasn't you

the bruises you left bone-deep fossils of your desire it's better to be irresistible than raped

if you hadn't wanted me so badly you would have done it so gentle like candlelight i know it i know if you
hadn't needed me so violently you could have waited until i wasn't passed out

you could have given me rose-sweet kisses i could have been your preteen penthouse playmate i would have
said yes but you never asked and i couldn't speak

do you ever think of me the way i think of you was that your first time too you never forget your first rapist

it's been 15 years i never touched you when you hugged me in the hall at school you were with another girl
did you like her better? never saw you again

come back so i can say yes this time do it again now that i know what to call what you did

this time i'll be ready i like it rough now and i'm done with romance i never met another man who loved me
so much at first sight he had to hurt me to do it

"kissing with the lights on"

You told me you like my mouth.
You want to kiss me.

My mouth is a wound and you
want to kiss me.

But you're like
that: You want to go
leaping over cliffs--
you want to go
drinking poison
and then write pretty poems about it--
and all I want to do is
fuck you.

You want flowers and sonnets and us
to be together until the end of the world and I'd
just like a blow job, I'd just like
to be friends.
that's what I'd really like.
Something warm and snuggly like a friendship.
and to fuck you.

The flowers are going to die and the cliffs are
going to erode and we might as well go fuck
since we're going to anyway.
We'll fuck and fight and eat and drink and smoke and fuck and smoke and fuck and
get married

And in six months from now
we'll stop making the world stop
to fuck each other

and one year from now
I'll get fat and you'll go bald and
I'll take prozac and you'll take viagra
I'll get obsessed with my biological clock
and my career
and you'll get obsessed with your hairline
and your career

and two years from now
you'd rather watch reruns than fuck me
and I'd rather be drinking than fuck you
so we'll drink in separate bars and one night
someone who likes my mouth will buy me a drink
that drink will be attached to a hand
there will be a human holding that drink
the kind with ears

and I will tell whoever it is
all about you
and how we used to forget to eat when we were in bed for three days
and your ears will be burning across town
where you are telling whoever it is how I don't understand you

and two years from now, that girl with that drink
she will nod that yes that I am nodding at you tonight
that nod, that yes that means you're not coming home
because just for a second the world has gone away
because just for a second there's someone who understands you

and that night it will be her pretty mouth you want
and that night I will pass out at home, alone
with a bottle that reminds me of us
because it'll be empty
because it'll be gone
I will pass out waiting for you
to come
home
listening to country music--and I hate
country music--
but I'll be feeling tragic
it'll be the most romantic moment
I've ever had and
I'll be alone

and you'll be across town
with that girl who right now is in high school
and right now I just met you
and right now I think you should take me home and fuck me
because it only gets uglier from here
we only get uglier from here
so take me to the edge of that cliff you love
and pour me a shot of your silky poison
you can take this mouth
this wound you want
but you can't kiss
and make it
better.

"the personal is political"

It kills me, the way the world is.

Literally.

I sat down to write about it, about how

every 15 seconds a woman is battered in the United States
about how a woman is raped every 1.3 minutes, about how
1 in 8 women develops breast cancer
and what I wrote was
I like you.

This is a problem. The world already has
too many of those. I already have too many
of those.

I sat down to write about how
desire and hate killed Matthew Sheppard
and when I write desire
I think of you
I like you
my pen sprouts snuggly kittens and spring flowers and
I hate myself for it

I like you so much I had to have
therapy for it
and
I like you so much
I fucked other people
to get rid of it
and the weekend you went to disneyland
I tried to grow mouse ears
I tried to be your e-ticket
I tried to grow up to be your
full-service hotel except
I won't throw you out for
using bad words like they do
so if you say
oh fuck me
oh god
oh take me
I'll take you back to bed

I like you so much this
isn't in my agenda; I like you so much but this
should be a poem about breast cancer
and I like you so much this
should be a poem about genocide
and I like you so much this
should be a poem about ending capitalism
smashing the state
stating the obvious
getting smashed
to tell you
I'll fuck capitalism and patriarchy and totalitarianism

to get next to you
I will deep throat my politics
I will get more therapy that I won't need if you're near me
because therapy and politics are all about
making the world a little more perfect
when I close the door and it's you and me
the world is a little more perfect
whenever you smile at me
in a world that doesn't offer many smiles
the world is a little more perfect
the world is perfect
whenever
I'm with you.

Sassa Miffrass says

Visceral, powerful anger in some of these poems - those were the ones I identified with/felt the strongest (hm).

You really need to read it aloud in your head for maximum impact, given them a voice. These are pieces very suited to performance.

For angry and scared young women, hurting and reflective women, and the people who want to know what it is like to be them, or want to re-live what it was like to be one, so you can work out what those experiences mean to you today.

One poem in particular perfectly describes my first relationship, shame I never want to hear from the fellow ever again and therefore cannot share the perfectly summarised anger with him. It wouldn't offer him any opportunity for growth anyway, he's a read-only sort of a guy. But some comfort to know others experienced the same problem, and have them summarise it so perfectly.

Jennifer says

A re-read prompted by my trairpse through my poetry shelf to catalog for goodreads. An acquisition from the period when I was obsessed with Soft Skull Books. One of the few books I lent to Jessa that I demanded back before she moved to Germany.

This is a book for young feminists -- deeply entrenched in the war of the sexes. Raw from the evils of misogyny in the world -- street harassment, abuse, domestic violence, rape... and the way women fold themselves up to live within the narrow confines that will will them approval, or at least safety. Poetry for fans of Michelle Tea, of *Cunt*, of the fierce feminist warriors of spoken word...

Reading this again so many years later brought up a bewildering mess of emotions from when I , too, was raw from constantly being grated against the Global Accords on the Fair Use of the Sex Class. The shock of strange men showing me their dicks as they passed me on the interstate. Being overwhelmed by righteous

grief each time I listened to Ani DiFranco's "Hide and Seek"... The rage of hearing stories like the disappearing women of Juarez. The ache of watching yet another friend redefine their entire life around an unexpected pregnancy that was never more than an inconvenience or a punchline to the man "responsible."

All of this shit is still in the world. I'm both grateful and horrified by the distance my current reality lets me put between my daily life and these horrors. Reading this poetry is like licking the wound and finding it still new, electric.

Chris LaMay-West says

I started reading this collection of poems a few years back, but never got around to finishing it. I guess it just wasn't the time, but I'm glad I returned. These poems are excellent, searing, and grounded in the inner realities of the heart and the outer realities of urban life, which tends to be some of my favorite poetic (and generally literary) territory. You can read the rest of my review here:

<http://chris-west.blogspot.com/2012/0...>

Steven says

I'm a fan of voice, of emotional honesty, which this collection is brimming. These poems ring most true when the voice expresses anger, rage, and pain, less so when it expresses political agendas. Gottlieb also experiments with intertext by weaving her lines through found texts such as graffiti on advertising posters and instructions lifted from flyers, books, and pamphlets, which creates some surprising connections in the new artifacts. Less effective, seemed her typographical experiments with the arrangement of white space, the use of capitalization, and with jumbled spelling.

Fiona says

I'd like to list the pieces within this amazing collection by Daphne Gottlieb which, in my experience, mind and heart, felt strikingly resonant. I love the form and ferocity of her words. Here are some of the poems which, as I was reading them, felt as though they were being branded into my skin.

a girl never knows when she's gonna need to soak up some blood:

mastering the art of poetry
attacquette (tips for girls)
nature and fate
sanctuary
legion of doom
patient

lather, rinse and revolution:

you break it, you bought it

the gun is of the opposite sex:

the persistence of revision
the doctor's daughter
you never forget your first
letting it happen

my mouth is a wound and you want to kiss me:

why things burn
inductance
cut it out
devotion
the personal is political

I first discovered the creative writing of performance poet Daphne Gottlieb in *Live Through This: On Creativity and Self-Destruction*. I will most certainly seek to explore more of her writings.

Liza says

this person is special to me because she wrote on my livejournal when i was 16 ok.

Azile says

Kay so I heard of this book by the commonly posted poem on the internet "kissing with the lights on" so I thought it'd follow this trend but the majority of the book really doesn't reach me. its just "im an s and m rape victim feminist bi over sex drive" thing and tries too hard to shock me. Maybe I'll feel differently later and this usually happens when you have too high a hope for something. And its annoying how theirs no way to tell if she's drawing from real experience or just from her imagination. Probably a mixture of both. Its like one of those albums where a song or 2 is catchy and put on the radio but the rest of the songs are filler. Theirs a handful of good poems in their but you have to find them. Also her stuff often reads like Slam Poetry. It's be sick if she did that she'd be so good I feel.

