



# Hard Rain Falling

*Don Carpenter , George Pelecanos (Introduction)*

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## **Hard Rain Falling** Don Carpenter , George Pelecanos (Introduction)

Don Carpenter's *Hard Rain Falling* is a tough-as-nails account of being down and out, but never down for good—a Dostoyevskian tale of crime, punishment, and the pursuit of an ever-elusive redemption. The novel follows the adventures of Jack Levitt, an orphaned teenager living off his wits in the fleabag hotels and seedy pool halls of Portland, Oregon. Jack befriends Billy Lancing, a young black runaway and pool hustler extraordinaire. A heist gone wrong gets Jack sent to reform school, from which he emerges embittered by abuse and solitary confinement. In the meantime Billy has joined the middle class: married, fathered a son, acquired a business and a mistress. But neither Jack nor Billy can escape their troubled pasts, and they will meet again in San Quentin before their strange double drama comes to a violent and revelatory end.

## **Hard Rain Falling Details**

Date : Published September 8th 2009 by New York Review of Books (first published 1964)

ISBN : 9781590173244

Author : Don Carpenter , George Pelecanos (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 308 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Novels, Literature, American

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## **Melanie says**

**Hard Rain Falling** covers vast and desolate territory. Reading it required a degree of commitment that I was unprepared for and it took a beat to adjust to the relentless cycle of desire> action>consequence which enacts quietly, intently. It's like everything transpires within a tight fist, fists flyin and all.

Out of the wild action, truth is delivered with clear-eyed lucidity and although the characters talk of self-pity quite a bit, the truth is clean of it. Clean of regret.

There is something amazing about this novel. I'm a little awed. I've always been fascinated with the concept of personal freedom and what that entails and although the novel explores societal, sexual and moral territory - there is an undefinable emphasis on a truer form of freedom.

*You know enough to know how you feel is senseless, but you don't know enough to know why. Sitting in another lousy hotel room waiting for a couple of girls you've never seen before to do a bunch of things you've done so many times it makes your skin crawl just o think about it. Things. To do. That you dreamed about when you couldn't have them. When there was only one thing, really, that made you feel good, and now you've done that so many times it's like masturbating. Except you never really made it, did you. Never really killed anybody. That's what you always wanted to do, smash the brains out of somebody's head; break him apart until nothing is left but you. But you never made it.*

If I had to boil this down, **Hard Rain Falling** is **immensity**. Jack had the right idea; his first reaction to the immensity of the ocean was to smile, wild with curiosity. Did anyone expect that of Jack? I just didn't. But it was so perfect that he did. In that moment, I believe he 'made it' in a way that really counted.

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## **Glenn Russell says**

Don Carpenter (1931–1995) - American author who grew up in Berkeley, California and lived most of his life in the Pacific Northwest. *Hard Rain Falliing* was his first novel, published in 1966.

*Hard Rain Falling* - A clear, honest story of Jack Levitt, a young man abused and brutalized in his years growing up in an orphanage and, after running away to Portland, Oregon at age sixteen, living his hardscrabble life among his buddies and cheap whores, in and out of sleazy pool halls, dilapidated boarding houses and hotels, reform school and prison, lots of prison, all the while drinking whiskey and fist fighting his way through seething anger and rage.

Author Don Carpenter's prose is so sharp and vibrant, I had the feeling of standing next to Jack every step of the way. I also got to know, up close and personal, a few other men and women in Jack's life, like Billy, a teenage pool shark with yellow skin and kinky reddish-brown hair, young tough Denny who loves any kind of dangerous, illegal action and, last but hardly least, wild woman Sally. This is such a powerful novel, other than my own brief comments, I'll stand aside and let the author's words speak for themselves.

Although he had clear blue eyes and curly blonde hair, even at age seven Jack looked like a seasoned boxer.

Here's Jack on his experience at the orphanage – and no wonder he ran away as soon as he could:

“Because the children of the orphanage were taught, all week long every week of their lives, that the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, was purely a question of feeling: if it felt good, it was bad, if it felt bad, it was good. . . . And work, they were taught that work was good, especially hard work, and the harder the work the better it was, their bodies screaming to them that this was a *lie*, it was all a terrible, God-originated, filthy lie, a monstrous attempt to keep them from screaming out their rage and anguish and murdering the authorities.”

One night a reform school guard lines the boys up and accuses them of unnatural sex practices, then grabs one of the frightened kids around the neck. Jack lashes out at this injustice, fists first, nearly killing the guard, an action that lands him in a dark, isolated cell for over four months. And that's dark as in completely black; no light for 126 days:

“The punishment cell was about seven feet long, four feet wide, and six feet high. The floor and walls were concrete, and there were no windows. In the iron door near the bottom was a slot through which he passed his slop can, and through which his food and water were delivered to him. They did not feed him every day, and because of that he had no way of knowing how much time had passed. . . . At times, all his senses deserted him, and he could not feel the coldness of the concrete or smell his excrement, and the small sounds he made and the sounds that filtered in through the door gradually dimmed, and he was left alone inside his mind, without a past to envision, since his inner vision was gone, too, and without a future to dream, because there was nothing but this emptiness and himself.”

When Jack is in his early 20s, after stealing a car and breaking into a house of rich people away on vacation and being caught drunk in bed, he is sent to a county jail:

“The boredom of it all, the sameness, the constant noise and smell of the tank, were driving him crazy. The fact that he was in was driving him crazy. . . . They had no right to do this to me, or to anybody else. He hated them all. But was crazy to hate them. So he decided he was going crazy. It was a relief for him to go berserk at last: it was an act of pure rationality that had nothing to do with McHenry or the poor fool Mac was taking over the bumps. It was an expression of sanity, a howl of rage at a world that put men in county jails. Everything finally got to be too much and he let go of his passion.”

Jack in San Quentin prison, on his bunk, looking up at the stark white ceiling, reflecting on our constant itch for sexual pleasure and the reason he was born in the first place:

“It struck him with horrible force. His parents, whoever they were, had probably made love out of just such an itch. For fun, for this momentary satisfaction, they had conceived him, and because he was obviously inconvenient, dumped him in the orphanage, because he, the life they had created while they were being careless and thoughtless, was not part of the fun of it all; he was just a harmful side effect of the scratching of the itch; he was the snot in the handkerchief after the nose had been blown, just something disgusting to be gotten rid of in secret and forgotten. Cold rage filled him, rage at his unknown parents, rage at the life he had been given, and for such trivial, stupid reasons!”

There's a lot of scenes where Jack Levitt talks, drinks, smokes and takes action with Billy, Denny, Sally and others, even reaching a point in his life where he reads Joyce and Faulkner, but day and night, and that's ever day and every night, Jack has to deal with his rage. Again, as honest and as clear a novel as you will ever read.

Special thanks to Goodreads friend Jeffrey Keeten for writing his penetrating review of this American classic thus prompting me to read *Hard Rain Falling* and write my own review.

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## **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

I've been having this Western problem lately, maybe the last year or so, where I've been reading good books. Hear me out. I mean, I've been reading books that are good. I liked them. I enjoyed them. They were well-executed, they were thought-provoking, they were stylistically interesting and experimental (or at least engaging), I did not regret reading them, they were good. I liked them. I liked them, they were good.

Dear god, I am a bored housewife to these good books. I blame goodreads in part for opening me up to things I would never have known to bother to try without it, and setting me on a path to learn about the new-n-weird through all y'all digital book reports and bibliographies, so now, it is rare that I read a shitty book. However, I've been on this well-advised/misguided path where I've been trying to really shake up what I read, instead of sticking with things that have been vetted by hundreds of years or two whole Penguin editors, books about the simple, mundane, multifarious monster that is the huuuuuman condiiiitiooon, Buuuueller. In that sense, it was strange going back to a straight, clean, navel-gazing narrative with a limited-ish cast engaging in commonplace-ish scenarios over a long-ish stretch of time. And by strange, I mean - like eating a bowl of bran after weeks and weeks of burritos. Don't be shy, you know what I'm sayin'.

I can't talk this book up enough, but I will asterisk my vehemence with the fact that it was just high-time I read something just exactly like this exact book, so my bias in its favor can not be overstated. It is pensive, ponderous, and yet at times sassily pithy, and more depressing than an Oklahoma tittybar at 2 pm. Trust me, I've experienced both. It is morose, yet purposefully and effectively so, it is loving and cold and back again. It is the best and most honest, inviting book I have read in quite a while. Also, it has moments of genuine hilarity. The characters breathe, and their actions make the frantic non-sense of the craven, impulsive, realistic, commonplace, wrecking-ball behavior which some of the less controlled sorts of folks have come to know so well \*cough\*. Even the sex scenes are convincing yet coy and concise, and I rarely ever find that in anything, anywhere. The mockeries are hard-earned, the victories much-deserved and resoundingly unrewarded, but to an end beyond "man, that shit's just sad." It is not depressing for the sake of arrrrrrt-uh, if that's what you were afraid of. Things happen just exactly as you would imagine they would happen, given the circumstances of this fictional world, though the story still remains winding and dynamic. It is tragic and lovely and hopeful and crushing and you should just read it, ok?

On the cover: people always talk about these NYRBs like they are so pretty, and more often than not, they certainly are. This one? This one is not. Maybe this is 20 years of darkroom work talking, but that cover image looks like soup to me. The reason they call it "black and white" is because they have these magical filters and camera setting and printing methods where you can make your lovingly composed grayscale images into many crrrrraaaaazy other tones like black...and white. Just saying, if I had turned that image in to any of my photo professors, they would've cursed me up good before sending me back to the lab for a reprint. And rightly so. Hideous cover, beautiful book.

I guess I didn't describe the story at all. It's just a guy's whole life, is all. If you want to know more about plot, read the book. That's what they're for, dum dum.

Additional thought: Why is this book never (to my knowledge) mentioned on any LGBT book lists? Is it because the main character comes off as a stock tough-guy, or that the language is gender, sexuality, and race prickly? Just curious. I thought the romantic sub-plot between (view spoiler) was startlingly gorgeous, candid, and realistic, and yet I previously had zero idea that male-male love would be an element of the story, let alone one of the most important elements of the story.

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## Janice says

I recently read an article about Haruki Murakami and his writing process wherein he divided writers into two distinct categories; you're either an architect or a gardener. The obvious distinction being that an architect plans out every aspect of their story in advance, whereas a gardener starts out with an idea, and waits to see where it goes. (I know the definitions are obvious in this context, but bear with me, I've been conditioned to write this way for three years, and I feel naked without attaching a clear definition or explanation for things.) Murakami himself, identifies himself as a mix of the two. Personally, my experience with writing is limited to an academic or legal setting. I'm not a creative writer, and eschew spontaneity in pretty much every aspect of my life. Thus, I firmly classify myself as an "architect," (I always wanted to pretend to be an architect!\*) I can't write anything without constructing an outline first - I feel lost without a definite plan.

I think Carpenter is an architect that got a little bit sloppy in *Hard Rain Falling*. I think he started out with a distinct idea of where he wanted the story to go from the outset, and executed it well for the first 2/3 of the novel. In the last 1/3 or so, he started to lose me; and here's why: he starts out with a protagonist that is completely abominable in every way; despite his tragic beginning, it was truly difficult to find anything redeeming about him, and thus be able to sympathize with him. But, as the story progressed, I suddenly found myself on Jack's side. I realized that Carpenter had managed to successfully lure me in by slowly revealing the vulnerabilities of an otherwise repugnant character.

However, I felt that Carpenter was less successful in developing other aspects of Jack's evolution. Throughout the story, Jack is a character that is full of rage, and completely devoid of any kind of introspective qualities. Therefore, I thought Carpenter was asking a lot of his readers by accepting certain developments in Jack's character in the last 1/3 of the book, namely his newly self-aware, philosophical tendencies, his interests in literature, and his feelings on raising children. It didn't feel natural or consistent with the story to have Jack acquire these characteristics, especially after being released from prison, where he witnessed the violent death of the only person that ever loved him. To me, it's counterintuitive and inconsistent with his character that he didn't become more destructive and enraged after that. It seemed problematic that Billy's death served as a catalyst for Jack's rehabilitation without more insight on his internal development subsequent to that traumatic event. It's almost as if my copy of the book is missing 20 pages or so.

For the above mentioned reasons, I vacillated between giving this three or four stars. In the absence of an articulable standard of what exactly differentiates a three star book from a four star book, I've given this four stars. And admittedly, I'm grading on a curve. It would be unconscionable to give this three stars when I've given far lesser books three stars. However, I reserve the right to later amend this rating.

\*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DUPfQ...>

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## Mary says

Whatever made him run away from Oakland to the Wild West seemed to have been taken care of, one way or another. Maybe what he wanted was freedom. Maybe he looked around and saw that everybody was imprisoned by Oakland, by their own small neighborhoods; everybody was breathing the same air, inheriting the same seats in school, taking the same stale jobs as their fathers and living in the same shabby stucco homes. Maybe it all looked to him like a prison or a trap, the way everybody expected him to do certain things because they had always been done a certain way, and they expected him to be good at doing these strange, meaningless, lonely things, and maybe he was afraid – of the buildings, the smoke, the stink of the bay, the gray look everybody had. Maybe he was afraid that he too would become one of these grown people whose faces were blank and lonely, and he too would have to satisfy himself with a house in the neighborhood and one of the girls from high school and a job in one or another factory and just sit there and die of it. So he ran for the only frontier he ever heard about and became a cowboy. But of course he brought it all with him when he ran, and it kept at him, jabbing, destroying, murdering, until he himself was all gone and nothing was left but a man's body doing work. And finally that died too.

(p.9)

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## Garima says

When a book starts with a line which is immediately reminiscent of *Infinite Jest*, then it's alright to have some unrestrained expectations from it.

*They can kill you, but they can't eat you.*

But with *Hard Rain Falling* I had to keep a lot many things in mind before letting *my* expectations go out of hand and to eventually give what I may immodestly pronounce as a fair reaction. The fact that this book was written in 1960's was something I constantly reminded myself. It helped when I came across lines like: *Nobody ever escaped from The Rock*. Sean Connery? I digressed and I had to Focus. This went on for almost halfway through the novel because I was coming across one thing or the other I have either read or seen before. So what kept me going? Don Carpenter's writing is one of the most honest narrative voices I have ever come across. There's almost a childlike innocence in his account of some of the events that I even let out a corny awww on certain occasions.

This book is all Americana and a little more. It has orphanages, reform homes and *Jack Levitt*. It has pool-halls, runaway children and *Billy Lancing*. It has petty crimes, prisons, paroling and philosophy. And since it's so huge in scope, the elements within are described in moderation. Nothing is over the top, nothing is under the bottom. Everything is there and that's it. Except one or two instances, this novel failed to excite me as a reader. It takes a long straight road stretching over a period of three decades, hardly takes any interesting turns and the episodic stops at the road side joints a.k.a philosophizing usually serves the same old existential food. It's like watching a documentary where the chronicles of a lonely person moves you in some inexplicable way but the same when written on a piece of paper doesn't deliver the same kind of impact. But I better give this book its due where it deserves. The scenes dealing with homosexuality are handled beautifully and if nothing else this book can be read for that part only. The internal monologues are good,

again thanks to the honesty of Don's writing but at times most of the things read like the paraphrasing of the same ideas.

*So what was his life? Look out there at all the ten million things life can be, and tell yourself which are yours, and which you will never do. And there was the agony of it; so much he wanted to do, and so little he could do.*

The above sentence sums the whole book pretty well. Just replace few words with freedom, sex and money. Considering it was Don's debut novel evoked some sensitivity in me but I'm afraid it doesn't seem to have the power to leave an ever lasting impression.

3 Stars averaging out on I really liked it, I liked it and It was Ok because the rain must be falling hard but all I felt was a mild drizzle.

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## David says

Okay. You can go ahead and believe the hype. This thing is pretty great. Initially, based on a few hot steaming barely-legal facials this book has been given on this very website, I was all ready to step up on *Hard Rain Falling*, throw my hands up in the air, and say, 'What you got, bitch? I di'n't think so.' Or, alternately, serve up the ever-effective 'You ain't bad! You ain't nothin'! *You ain't nothin'!*' -- in which scenario *Hard Rain Falling* is played by Wesley Snipes, and my black combat jumpsuit is really, really zippery and buckly. In other words, I served this book a challenge, and it answered accordingly.

I usually don't have high hopes for novels about angry young toughguys because, c'mon, hasn't the angry young toughguy schtick been done to death? When you read another one of these authors going on about *another* drunken or drugged-out lout who's 'livin' the life' (that's my code-phrase for an authentic®, antibourgeois, antisocial, antiauthoritarian life), you are really tempted -- if you're me -- to fiddle with your hangnail, sigh *fortissimo*, and let fly something semi-snide like: 'Oh goodie. I'm glad the grossly underrepresented angry young white male demographic *finally* gets its say in the vagicentric world of 20th-century American literary.' But then, if you read (or don't read) on the basis of these prejudices, the terrorists have won. And you, more importantly, have lost.

*Hard Rain Falling* is about this kid named Jack Levitt who's really mean and despicable, mostly. Sometimes he just gets a craving to go out and beat the shit out of some random stranger, so he hopes a passerby looks at him funny or brushes up against him on the street so he'll have a reason to unleash the beast. It's really horrifying in a way because it reminds you that there really are Jack Levitts out there in the world, and the only thing that's really protecting you from them is the statistical probability that you probably won't run into one of them.

As a prologue, Carpenter includes a short chapter, set in the 1920s, about Jack's parents who -- if we wanted to be flippant and elitist (which, of course, we do) -- would be described in contemporary culture as paragons of Wal-Mart Culture. I almost think it would have been better if Carpenter would have left out this seedy little prelude because it seems to want to provide some justification or impetus for Jack's later delinquency. But since both his parents died young and Jack grew up in an orphanage, it either appears to suggest (intentionally or not) a biological basis for his badassness or to point at some kind of degenerative contagion infecting and spreading through society in general. At any rate, the prologue (six-and-a-half pages) is not



nearly as unfortunate as the epilogue (three-and-a-half pages), which makes an awkward, unsatisfying leap from gritty toughmindedness to a gauzy, sun-dappled coda borrowed from Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*. I really, really despised the epilogue to this book, but because I loved the rest of it so much, I am willing to selectively forget that it ever existed, just as I refuse to believe that the *Star Wars* prequels were anything but the product of a fever-dream. They were never in fact made. I have to believe that. The religion of my youth depends upon it.

What is truly remarkable about *Hard Rain Falling* is that it feels refreshingly honest. So many midcentury contenders for 'the great American novel' seem so artificial and burnished to me. It's like when you watch one of those Merchant-Ivory adaptations of an E.M. Forster novel... Life was never really like *that*. I'm sorry. It just wasn't. This is reality refracted through Forster's concept of 'polite literature' and Merchant-Ivory's concept of 'tasteful filmmaking.' A double refraction, my friends. But yes, even in the rarified halls of *Howards End*, life was never quite so neat and tidy. How do I know this? I'm a human being, that's how. Ruth Wilcox farted. And Margaret Schlegel queefed. And when people 'only connected' sometimes it was just for a second-rate blowjob. (But -- to rephrase Woody Allen -- even a second-rate blowjob is a-okay in my book.) What I am saying is that there is a messiness in life that literature and art (necessarily) tidies up. We would be frustrated by a novel that was as pointless, random, unstructured, meandering, and unintelligible as real life.

But I think *Hard Rain Falling* contends with this messiness to a greater extent than do most novels of its era. You won't find anything approaching ethical simplicity in this novel, so if you crave high-contrast moralism, avoid this. Don Carpenter does something fairly noteworthy here. He creates a character (Jack Levitt) who is reasonably unlikeable in an abstract sense; if I listed off his traits, attitudes, and behaviors from most of the novel, you'd be left with a mental image of the bastard offspring of Courtney Love and Dick Cheney. In a word, *unsympathetic*. And yet... and yet... Carpenter does not trick you into condoning Jack's behavior by providing cheap rationalizations, but he nevertheless creates a real, complex character whom you, the reader, wants to see better himself, on many levels. Carpenter makes you care. And let me tell you... that's hard work! It's hard to make people care about (mostly) uncaring characters.

Carpenter's treatment of race and homosexuality is also worthy of mention here. We can not, with any degree of sincerity, deny that racism and homophobia were significant components of mainstream American culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Hell, we can't deny that they're still fucking things up in a major way even today... not just in America, of course, but everywhere; perhaps the categories of 'otherness' are different in other cultures, but they're almost always there. But when an average black man lives his life, I feel confident saying that racism is a 'mere' fact; now it may be a fact to be combatted or acquiesced to, but there are always other facts. An average black man's life isn't structured like a novel about racism (as an issue to be foregrounded), and Carpenter recognizes that. Ditto for homosexuality. These realities may be more significant and influential to the individual's life, but they never express the totality of experience. I think that many authors tend to fetishize social injustice. It might seem as though I am saying that they *overstate* it -- which is far from the case; I actually believe that by rendering it so extraordinary, they *understate* it. I mean, racism is depressing, yes, but racism standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the banal miseries of everyday life is almost unbearable. But this is real life, and I think Don Carpenter does an admirable job of approaching it in a way no author of his generation did.

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## D. Pow says

Don Carpenter's *Hard Rain Falling* is the best novel I've read this year. Originally published in 1966, and

long out of print, it has been brought back to readers in a handsome trade paperback edition by the New York Review Books Classics imprint, with a thoughtful introduction by current crime writing doyen George Pelecanos.

The book is epic in scope, covering over three decades of eventful action, from late 1920's subsistence horse ranches to the San Francisco of the early '60's, on the cusp of the sexual revolution, but still in thrall to more repressive mores. The book is mainly set in the Pacific Northwest and in Frisco. Its main protagonist is Jack Levitt- who when we first meet him, is a hard-bitten reform school thug with no talent other than fighting and a capacity to endure physical pain. Levitt's parents are the subject of a heartbreaking opening chapter where they meet, mate and part, in a collision as ultimately as destructive for its principals as two asteroids colliding in the silent abyss of space, one that leaves you little hope for little Jack's life trajectory. The book follows Jack through low-end working class postwar America, the pool halls of Portland and flop houses of Frisco, thorough tortuous episodes in reform school and an arc of ascending criminal activity until Levitt finds himself in San Quentin doing hard time.

Jack's life intertwines with Billy Lancing, whom we first meet as a young, talented pool hustler in Portland when both Jack and Billy are teenagers. Billy is black and a runaway. One of the unique strengths of *Hard Rain Falling*, especially in comparison to its ostensible genre and other major novels published in the same era, is the clear eye and lucid prose it casts on race in America, post WWII. Carpenter poignantly captures Billy's hurt core of being, when he recognizes his skin color makes him outcast among outcasts. There is none of the hipster jive Mailer tossed out at blacks, nor the muddled glorification some of the beats viewed blacks with.

Sexuality too is displayed in a mature, thought-provoking manner. Levitt begins his life in an orphanage because of an 'itch' his parents couldn't help but scratch. And that same itch hounds Jack and befuddles him throughout the book, makes him feel one moment gloriously alive, one moment less than human. Carpenter's compassion and empathy in this arena of life extends to homosexual love when it is encountered in San Quentin. It is neither viewed with contempt like latter-day tough guy scribes like Tarentino or Guillermo Arriaga nor fetishized into absurdity as in Genet. It merely *is*.

When Jack and Billy meet again in San Quentin, after equally heartbreaking paths, Jack further into crime and violence, Billy with an aborted attempt to maintain a family, the relationship takes on a searing intimacy and naked vulnerability that is found nowhere else in the book and that is unlike anything else I've read in 1960's American Literature.

If *Hard Rain Falling* was merely a prison/coming of age novel it would be a wonderful success-it is a model of clarity, brevity and precise observation. But what sets it apart is the wonderful interior ramblings of Jack Levitt as he tries to make sense of the brutally senseless world he lives in, of his own rabid dog impulses, the nature of power and powerlessness, and the labyrinth and often self-lacerating ways of the human heart. It is not merely about prisons made of concrete and steel, but of the prisons of failed relationships, the odious lock-ups of diminished and dying expectations, the unforgiving solitary confinement of our own screaming skulls. NYRB on the back cover has dared to compare the novel to Dostoevsky. I don't think it's hyperbole. Levitt's journey from violent thug, through the bowels of the prison system and out the other side with something like wisdom and grace touching him, easily echoes Raskolnikov or the narrator of *Memoirs from the House of The Dead* in its capacity to evoke redemption in the face of brutality.

*Hard Rain Falling* is a great American novel that NYRB deserves lasting credit for pulling from the bonfire of oblivion, even if for a short time. Carpenter deserves to be read into posterity for his technique and for his genuinely wise and empathic take on the marginals of this society, the society that marginalizes them

thoughtlessly, and the tenderness, sacrifice and love that can blossom in the most heartless places imaginable.

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## Tony says

Is Jack homosexual? It's a fair question because Jack asks himself that. It's just an *itch*, he rationalizes. *Think of a creature so constructed that in order to survive, eat, sleep, procreate, get the snot out of its nose, it had to be triggered by pleasure instead of rationality.*

Jack has a lot of time to think, see, because he is often in the slammer. And he's there for things he's done, for things he hasn't done; but mostly because of who and what he's not. A parable? So he scratches his itch, at least situationally if not fundamentally, and gets to the more philosophical question: what would you do for love?

And he thinks of life on the inside and life on the outside:

*But these people were not in prison, not even in a metaphorical prison. Jack had known convicts who said that everybody was in prison, that life was a prison, or society a prison, even being stuck with your own identity was a prison; but Jack no longer believed that: prison was a prison, nothing else. People might be in trouble, or feel stifled or restricted, or even trapped, but they weren't in prison. It just wasn't the same thing at all. The hotel might be a "glittering trap" for the bored and lonely, but that was a hell of a lot different from being sent to prison.*

He gets out, meets Sally. Where would you take a recently released con, a latent fire? Why, to a production of *Waiting for Godot*, of course.

*When they left the theater and she began talking about Beckett's use of language, Jack interrupted her and said, "Hell, it seems simple enough to me. They're waiting, that's all. It don't matter what for."*

*"Doesn't," she said automatically.*

*"Doesn't. They're just waiting. What did you want?"*

*"It's not that simple," she said, but she wasn't sure why it was not that simple.*

*"I've done a lot of that waiting jazz," Jack said. "I know what it's like."*

*"So have I," Sally said. "What do you think I do all day?"*

-----  
I guess we're all waiting for something.

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This was a definite page-turner with much to ponder. It was, perhaps, a little cinematic, which is my only criticism.

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## **brian says**

eighth grade i had an economics teacher called dr. cole.  
first day of class he gave us a list of qualities we'd potentially possess as adults.  
wanted us to rank them from 1 - 20 in order of importance.  
some of the stuff on the list:

rich  
healthy  
happy  
married  
employed  
famous  
intelligent  
powerful

cole was a strange bird. a thin meticulous type; kind of a well-toned george will with a contemptuous sneer. he watched as we scored the rankings and held them up to be collected. he didn't want them. he stood up front and asked how many people put 'happy' as number one. a bunch of us raised our hands. he looked out at the class and said 'anyone who didn't raise their hand is an idiot'. and that was it. no more on that. he handed out the syllabus and went into all the class requirement bullshit. most of the kids thought he was a typical teacher asshole but all that 'happy' and 'idiot' palaver stuck with some of us.

i love love love lerve luff looooooove *hard rain falling*. let's make it the next goodreads cause célèbre, yeah? let's resist the temptation to be mannered and reasonable and not shout our heads off so as not to feel like an asshole later, ok? let's just belt it all out and have a few extra slugs and get all giddy and excited and dance around a little and get behind this one. it's a ten-ton truck of existential dread. and we love it.

donald wrote a review i can't top, won't even try, lays out all that is great about this book:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

carpenter should've been a bestseller and acknowledged great-writer-of-our-time. instead he fell between the cracks and his book came back into print sixteen years after he blew his brains out.

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## **AC says**

Many of these NYRB's are wonderful, but the truth is that not infrequently one gets the sense that they are scraping not the bottom of the barrel, of course... but not the cream either -- and that what they are republishing often are the second and third level books... of first-rate writers or first-rate books of second (or third-rate) writers... interesting books that are... certainly 'good'.... but not always great. The books look great, though -- and so I buy them... but they don't always live up to the hype.

Some of the reviews I saw of this one (more on AMZN than on GR) led me to think that this one, too, might not quite live up to the hype, and so it sat around for a couple of years... falling lower and lower in the TBR pile... until suddenly I decided WTF to crack it open... and

O, what a gem..., what a gem of a book...!

It is raw, gritty, honest... almost never feels like the author is "striving for effect" -- just genuine, humane, intelligent... and authentic... and...

What especially caught me is the way the book, as it moves from the 1930s to the 1960's captures the feel of those changing times... it 'freshens', so to speak, as it moves along... even as the story deepens...

Consider this a 'pound the table', gotta-read-this review... of a fabulous book.

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### Jeffrey Keeten says

**"He was legally a fugitive from the orphanage, and in that sense he was 'wanted'. He did not feel 'wanted'---he felt very unwanted. He had desires, and nobody was going to drop out of the sky to satisfy them. He tried to milk a little self-pity out of this thought, but it did not work: he had to recognize that he preferred his singularity, his freedom. All right. He knew what he wanted. He wanted money. He wanted a piece of ass. He wanted a big dinner, with all the trimmings. He wanted a bottle of whiskey. He wanted a car, in which he could drive a hundred miles an hour. He wanted some new clothes and thirty-dollar shoes. He wanted a .45 automatic. He wanted a record player in the big hotel room he wanted, so he could lie in bed with the whiskey and the piece of ass and listen to....That was what he wanted. So it was up to him to get those things."**

Those are not big dreams, right? I mean a guy should expect to have a slutty girlfriend, a gun (it is America after all; there are more guns than people), decent clothes, good music, a fast car, a big meal once in awhile, and be able to spin the cap off a fresh bottle of whiskey when he needs to forget how shitty his life is, even when he is walking around in his thirty dollar shoes. For Jack Levitt, who has never had anything, those dreams are so big they seem like millionaire dreams.

His parents came to violent ends at very young ages. Jack was not cute; in fact, even when he was little, he was kind of tough looking. It is hard to find adoptive parents when you look like a future felon at eight. He is in the system so long he becomes part of the system.

Jack meets a pool shark by the name of Billy Lancing, and though they only intersect for a few hours, before Jack is hauled back to juvie, that meeting will prove fateful. They don't meet again for decades. Jack might be white, and Billy might be black, but there is no color barrier for poverty, desperation, and the feeling that there has to be more than this. **"But I don't want to be a negro; I don't want to be a white man; I don't want to be a married man; I don't want to be a businessman; I don't want to be lonely. Life seemed to be a figure eight. It terrified him, sitting on the bus, as if time had opened black jaws and swallowed him."**

Jack has a similar epiphany about his life. He meets up with an old friend, Denny. *"Lived in half a hundred arid furnished rooms, pretended the vacuum was freedom, wakened almost daily to the fear that time was a dry wind brushing away his youth and his strength, and slept through as many nightmares as there were nights to dream. He just sat and smiled at Denny and saw what time had done to him and wondered, now comfortably, why he was so bothered by time. It happens to everybody this way, he thought, we sit here and get older and die and nothing happens."*

Anybody who has ever been to a high school reunion knows about the ravages of time. I've never been to one, but someone always sends me pictures from the latest reunion as enticements, I'm sure, to come to the next one. I'm getting old enough now where people have warped, melted, and expanded to such an extent that they are becoming unrecognizable. Little Tommy has become BIG Tommy, and there is barely a glimmer left of the beauty that made the prom queen the lead actress in a series of pornographic dreams.

I find myself having to agree with Jack and Billy...this is it? This is where we strive to arrive? I've had a much better start, middle, and hopefully, finish to my life than what Jack and Billy experienced. Regardless, life is a heartless, cold blooded witch, and no one gets through life unscathed. The scale is constantly tilting back and forth between bitter experiences and sweet experiences. I try to focus on the good memories and blur the bad memories, but the older we get, the battle scars start to show.

### **We become unrecognizable at high school reunions.**

Billy and Jack end up incarcerated in the same prison and, in fact, the same cell. They have both failed at almost everything in life. Jack spent some time boxing but discovered he is too thin skinned and bleeds too easily, but he can take care of himself physically. Billy made it briefly into the middle class, but he felt trapped by the responsibility that proved too heavy, and all he could think about was running away from... the weight. He is smaller and gets the wrong kind of attention in prison. (Never die protecting a virgin asshole.) They forge an alliance that becomes built on more than friendship.

This book is hardboiled with a capital H. Once institutionalized, it is hard for people to ever not be institutionalized. They don't teach you how to survive outside the system. Is it any wonder that too many orphans of the state end up being wards of the state in prison or halfway houses? They have no blueprint to achieve their dreams. They struggle, and when they fail, there is always some judge willing to put them back into the system. They understand life inside. They don't understand the real world. After all, isn't it just as hopeless with more responsibility on the outside? Well written, clipped, hard prose with philosophical musings that will have you nodding your head as you realize that the difference between us and Jack and Billy is the fickleness of fate.

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I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **kohey says**

Though it is hard to categorize this novel(it might not be necessary),I'd say it is more of a human tragedy than a noir or a crime.Prologue is superb and I'd go so far as to say that this part strongly influences the entire story and the way of life the protagonist tries to lead or avoid.

The story line is simple yet somewhat destined so that readers can leisurely stop to consider why the characters think and act in the way they do in certain situations and relationships.It seems like they try to get out of a life of spider web in which they go elsewhere at some points,but always end up where they started.Fate plays a nasty part there.The ending is not so clear as I expected,but me being a reader who favors strong characters and good passages rather than plots,it is for me a great read.

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## Richard Derus says

Wanting is not the same as having; having is not the same as making.

You can love and love, never saying the word, never getting eye-to-eye with the core of your need and gift, and be no closer to the beloved than bodies can get. Only children can be utterly consuming love objects, though far too often they aren't. And lovers? Far too scary to love unguardedly, I think, but most don't even get near to the guardrails before swerving back to the middle of the road.

It's the carnage from their fear-driven lurches that takes out the innocent bystanders. That's what this story is: The record of Jack's fear-driven, rage-fueled lurchings back and forth as love ungiven, ungivable, rots him from within, taking an agonizingly slow time to finish its dreadful work.

A dark and terrible story about a life unlived, only sweated out.

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## RandomAnthony says

How much emotional strength does a man have, and does it matter?

*Hard Rain Falling* might be as stark and uncompromising a novel as I've ever read. The story focuses on Jack, raised in an orphanage and proficient in petty crime and bad decisions, and Billy, a pool hustler who starts losing his touch at the tables and makes his own harrowing mistakes. The two meet in Portland as teenagers and reconnect years later in a California prison. Jack's post-incarceration search for meaning comprise the novel's last third.

Carpenter's talents lie in his psychological analysis of desperate, dead-end characters; his reference to Jack reading classic Russian novels is no accident. Both Jack and Billy are too smart to engage in self-pity, but when they face the world without it, their clear-eyed perceptions don't leave much on which to hang meaning. Physical and emotional hunger can be sated but not for long, and neither hold much substance. And while a man with a very slim margin of error and no status can stay out of trouble for a stretch, under duress, one mistake and he's totally fucked. No one is inviting Jack or Billy up the social ladder. There is no relative to bail them out. They find a small measure love and significance in both their own relationship and, later, Jack's relationship with his son. Still, the terror of losing both, along with the fear of the effect they'll have on each other and their children, leads to sacrifice of the saddest nature.

Holy hell, if I'm going to be straight, *Hard Rain Falling* is 99% fucking depressing, but I felt like if I didn't finish I would be A) missing out on some deep, honest writing, and B) I would be a big wuss. Some passages are mesmerizing. Carpenter's description, for example, of Jack helplessness when his son is sick, is brilliant. This is a brave book, and you better be in damn good mental health to tackle this sucker. Joy Division has nothing on Don Carpenter. I'm not surprised this novel is respected but not popular. Read *Hard Rain Falling* when you're ready to explore the darkness of prison, isolation, and the unfairness of existence.

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