



Gunslinger

Ed Dorn

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Dorn's high-spirited, crazy-quilt, complex anti-epic is a masterful critique of late twentieth-century capitalism and is one of the great comic poems of American literature. Dorn is one of the few political poets in America; this fantasy about a demigod cowboy, a saloon madam, and a talking horse named Claude Levi-Strauss, who travel the Southwest in search of Howard Hughes, has become a minor classic.

Gunslinger Details

Date : Published August 22nd 1989 by Duke University Press Books (first published 1975)

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Author : Ed Dorn

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From Reader Review Gunslinger for online ebook

Morgan Podraza says

GUNSLINGER is a funny, wild ride through language and philosophy. There is no other direct way to describe the long-form poem other than this: it's a narrative about an alien turned cowboy traveling through the Southwest with a bizarre cast of characters.

Bret says

One of the most amazing books of poetry. Dorn's use of the pastich, kitsch, and theory create a pscyodelic hodgepodge of stragne imagery.

Edmund says

I found this book to be utterly baffling, honestly. Until I got to a couple unexpected velvet underground references. I read it in tandom with Ed Dorn Live, which is a new book of interviews, etc., and it cleared up alot about the guy for me. I never really knew him, but did sit at the dinner table with him once or twice and saw what some of his manners were like.

At his best I'd say he is a great rhapsodic intellect--not like the subsequent boring majoroity generation of poets of whom a great many don't even read their own work well. He is of that earlier generation born around the thirties or into the forties who grew up without television and receieved classical educations, but who were also hip in a way that can't exist now--when the social divisions in the country were still physical, rather than the abstractions we have today in economics and the odd mix of news saturation/deprevation we endure for essentially no reason. Back to Gunslinger: I will need to read this again at some point in my life, maybe after filling in some gaps in my education. Dorn never explains himself, he just lets his wit carry the poem threads; but this is essentially a long wild conversation among some strange characters. The fact that people are actually talking is what sets this apart from a large amount of poetry today--though I won't bother with a further decrying of that type. Anyway, check it out as a must while you can--this edition in is from 1989, and I don't know if a reprint is imminent, though this type of work should never be long out of print.

Charles says

The funniest, most mind-expanding, most challenging, poetic epic of the last fifty years, or more. Read it!

Adam says

For the most part psychedelic drug-influenced epic poems are more fun to write than read, but this feller did make me chuckle a lot with really obscure puns, most of which over my head. A spaced-out 60s take on the Wild West. The poem set in the middle (Book II) was just too too difficult but the dialog that frames it in the

other books is fantastic.

Mitch says

Brilliant epic poem, a faux-western complete with talking horse rolling massive joints and playing poker, a character named i who dies, and lots of psychedelic ontology. One of a handful of long poems post-Maximus that matter, Gunslinger establishes Dorn as a 60's icon, a pedestal that he never got used to being on. If you haven't read it, you've missed out on one of the most enjoyable works of poetry of our time. Simply a masterpiece!

Wendy says

um, yeah mind blow-r. to call this an epic poem is an understatement. this is an epic unconventional braided tale(s) of glorious proportions. the wild west circa the 60's (makes me think of w. s. burroughs' use of 'the west'). undeniable word choice, unexplainable concepts. endless avenues of divine chaos that i could never, in a lifetime, explain. the poem is about Everything. edward dorn where have you been all my life, really?

Ted Burke says

There comes the occasional need to clear the poetry that becomes a wax sediment in one's ear by returning to an old standby, a dependable set of poems that fired an imagination decades ago that can still inspire one to think imaginative writing is indeed the method with which one can "break on through". This isn't a slight against anyone I've been reading, though there are hills and dales in the perpetual reading list I keep; it's just that I want the gravity and grit of sentences that distinguished themselves from the common expression.

So I go back to Ed Dorn, introduced to me by poet Paul Dresman back in the late Seventies, particularly his epic poem "Gunslinger". Equal parts myth making, satire, phenomenological investigation and an expansion on the Charles Olson projectivist project that twined style and diction, personality with the physicality and accumulated history of region, some of what Dorn was up to now reads psychedelic and out of sync, of it's time, the Sixties, but there remains beyond the dated lingo the verve of a writer that understands the absurdity of all manner of defining rhetoric and which finds purpose in exposing what's under the cornerstones of dogma.

The warning sounds again and again in Gunslinger against someone finding themselves described at all; set in a West of the imagination, where one can start over and start again potentially as many times as the imagination permits, being described imprisons one in another person's frameworks; you become what they think you are. The late Ed Dorn wrote a masterpiece with "Gunslinger", an anti-epic poem that prefigures many post-modern gestures from its 60s era starting point. Funny, cartoonish, erudite to the extreme, it also locates a tuned lyricism in the Western vernaculars that Dorn uses: the metaphysical aspect of our legends, the sheer questing for answers as Euro-Americans come treading closer to a West coast that will stop them and force them to settle and create lives from dust and ingenuity, comes alive in way that never escapes the zaniness of Dorn's narrating inquiry into the nature of the search.

A masterpiece

Melissa says

How to hear the many voices of time...

Isaac says

So rich. Pairs nicely with either scholarly glee or a couple grams of white widow. Or both. Digressive, entertaining, madcap, cartoonish, brilliant.

Pete says

Art poetry is not entirely my bag but I checked this out because I dig the mythology of the American West, especially the bent versions of it. This is a picaresque epic poem about a gunslinger, a talking horse, a girl, a few other people who honestly I stopped paying enough attention to keep apart. It's surprisingly silly and outright funny in parts -- lots and lots of puns, some great, some ... not really worth recording for posterity. Like if my friend said some of these things while stoned (e.g. spelling the word "shit" as "xit" it would be amusing a few times and then dumb and then we would not bother remembering it or writing it down. Ed Dorn does not feel the same way. This book is definitely at least in part about drugs, and if you are not on those drugs, it is not super interesting in big parts. There is a real line-level genius at work. Not sure why he only does that like <10% of the time. Definitely not recommended unless you like irreverent stoned poetry A LOT. Still, a few chestnuts from this are going in my notebook of delightful mind diamonds.

this like a bob dylan album with one good song on it. and also no music.

TK421 says

I can appreciate the cleverness behind this poem. Unfortunately, after about a 100 pages, the cleverness was not enough to sustain me. It soon became clear that Dorn had created a world that only he could truly penetrate. I wave the white flag.

Anthony says

A druggy mock-Western pop art Epic that follows characters with names like Kool Everything and Dr. Flamboyant... and, um, there's a talking horse... and it, um, rolls joints. I read this book online because I didn't want it sleeping on my couch.

mwpm says

Gunslinger combines the four books previously published by Edward Dorn (a sort of serial approach to the epic poem, which is appropriate given the pulp elements throughout)

I rate the books as follows:

Gunslinger Book I - 5 Stars

Gunslinger Book II - 4 Stars

Gunslinger Book III - 4 Stars

Gunslinger Book IV - 3 Stars

Note the gradual decline. I read the first two books effortlessly, the third book with a little effort, and the fourth book with a lot of effort. Dorn, it seemed, lost his direction; he became aimless. His characters, too, seemed to lose their direction. They started off with a clear objective (see: my review of Book I) but descended into a sort of aimless drifting. By the end I had the uncertain feeling that the characters no longer occupied a setting - Dorn had neglected to furnish them with a setting, and so they hovered on the page. Even their bodies were called into question... Not intentionally. (At least it didn't read as intentional.)

In my review of Book I, I considered the inspiration for this remarkable work, unsatisfied with the proposition that it was the product of the psychedelic sixties. By the time I reached Book IV, however, I was ready to accept this proposal. In the end, Dorn's psychedelic poetic vision burnt out like so many users of psychedelics - with a whimper, not a bang.

Dawn says

Oh Eddie YOU ARE the bossiest. You are the catchiest scroll of yarn. You are atangling into genflection, the post script, the making of a building with little windows and little doors. Billions and Billions. As I was saying at the Odium, a homeless preist wheeled by. You are so out loud, Eddie. So utterly and plowing and as you were saying Saying takes a breath. He replied. He echoed. He yelped. Yuckyuckyuck you American. You Eddie the Watcher, you Orange Yarn, you outline in the coolness, day breaking down, so we decide to play it out. Take heart. Take it to the NAMER in GALLOSHES. IS THAT HOW YOU SPELL GALOSHES?
