



Lord of the Barnyard: Killing the Fatted Calf and Arming the Aware in the Cornbelt

Tristan Egolf

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A literary sensation published to outstanding accolades in America and around the world, *Lord of the Barnyard* was one of the most auspicious fiction debuts of recent years. Now available in paperback, Tristan Egolf's manic, inventive, and painfully funny debut novel is the story of a town's dirty laundry -- and a garbagemen's strike that lets it all hang out. *Lord of the Barnyard* begins with the death of a woolly mammoth in the last Ice Age and concludes with a greased-pig chase at a funeral in the modern-day Midwest. In the interim there are two hydroelectric dam disasters, fourteen tavern brawls, one shoot-out in the hills, three cases of probable arson, a riot in the town hall, and a lone tornado, as well as appearances by a coven of Methodist crones, an encampment of Appalachian crop thieves, six renegade coal-truck operators, an outraged mob of factory rats, a dysfunctional poultry plant, and one autodidact goat-roping farm boy by the name of John Kaltenbrunner. *Lord of the Barnyard* is a brilliantly comic tapestry of a Middle America still populated by river rats and assembly-line poultry killers, measuring into shot glasses the fruits of years of quiet desperation on the factory floor. Unforgettable and linguistically dizzying, it goes much farther than postal.

Lord of the Barnyard: Killing the Fatted Calf and Arming the Aware in the Cornbelt Details

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From Reader Review Lord of the Barnyard: Killing the Fatted Calf and Arming the Aware in the Cornbelt for online ebook

Andrew says

This shit was fantastic. The literary touchstones are myriad, with John Kennedy Toole being a particularly obvious one. But in its humor, there is something far, far darker and filthier. Unlike the good-natured farce of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Egolf opts to show the sheer disgusting, almost Harmony Korine scuzz of postindustrial Middle American existence. Almost like a white trash Dostoyevsky. John Kaltenbrunner isn't a comic hero-- he's much too charmless and laconic for that (a redneck Raskolnikov)-- and the only constants of life seem to be the monotonous rhythms of industrial production and an alcoholic haze. If you like John Kennedy Toole, Dostoyevsky, Celine, or maybe Richard Brautigan, than this is a book for you.

Jonfaith says

There's a good deal of history here. Back when I wore plaid and carried Nietzsche books everywhere there was a scene here. It was in the Highlands in Louisville. There were hordes of pseudos, but there was a core. There was a group of serious people involved with art, music, literature and activism. Most moved away - the Northwest, NYC, abroad etc. A few died. Recently a number have passed, mostly from cancer. Mostly my age. There was a coffeehouse that hosted readings and concerts. There was going to be a lecture series on Foucault. My best friend Joel and I went. The guy delivering the spiel was our age. He had a firm handle on his Foucault. There were a number of points open to debate. This I did. I am not entirely proud of said behavior. I wasn't heckling. I wasn't drunk (Stephen Malkmus, please forgive me) but I did interrupt, politely. A great deal was discussed.

A few years later Harold, who owned Twice-Told Books in Louisville, asked me if I had heard of *Lord of the Barnyard*. I hadn't. Harold explained that Egolf had lived in the area for a few years doing research on river towns in Southern Indiana. Harold noted that he also spoke about Derrida and Foucault locally. Oh shit. Well apparently Mr. Egolf was busking in Paris, his manuscript had been rejected by every publisher in the US and UK. He wound up involved with a publisher's daughter from one of the French heavies.

Mr Egolf distilled life in Southern Indiana and displayed such with aplomb in his first novel. I loved it. I remember reading it while walking to work, something reckless I have since outgrown. Because of Mr. Egolf's abrupt conclusion in life, I haven't found the nerve to read his other work, which I have collected.

Michael says

I think this is one of the finest stories written by a young American in the past ten years. I've had it around for a while, maybe even read it back in Colorado. An absurd story. But new, and I dare anyone to try and forget this one. The local outcast brings the town down by organizing the garbage men to quit working. The town starts to disappear under trash. A mean story kind of, but so funny. It is a shame this guy is gone. He was really good. Highly recommended.

Scott says

If you're like me, reading the very first acrobatic sentence of this book will let you know that you're in for a serious treat.

Though Barnyard has some flaws--things seem to slow down when the action is ostensibly rising to an impossible apex--the many moments of perfection in language and style certainly make up for any weaknesses. Divided into three major sections, part one of this book is absolutely packed with plot, myth, language and bravado. It could conceivably stand on its own as an excellent tale. As the myth of John Kaltenbrunner continues to expand in parts two and three, there are moments where the third-person narrative style may contribute to a loss of momentum, but even then it's a great book--just maybe not as tightly wound as its beginning.

Jens Gärtner says

Leer esta *crónica* fue como embarcarme en un frenesí de cafeína y ejercicio excesivo durante dos semanas. Rápida, directa, parca y muy entretenida al mismo tiempo que extensa, barroca, elocuente y frustrante. Las virtudes de su prosa sobreviven incluso a la traducción; nadie insulta, nadie lanza peroratas, nadie se remuerde en una espiral inmanente de resentimiento y asco como este narrador y --casi-- nadie puede dar un cariz tan objetivo e imperturbable.

La historia es el lado oscuro del *coming-of-age*, la perfecta narración de la caída vertiginosa que puede ser crecer. Tres lecciones:

- 1· Lo del karma no es cierto. No todos reciben lo que merecen. Hay gente que posee «el don infalible de estar en el mal sitio a la mala hora».
- 2· «No se puede matar lo que se niega a morir».
- 3· «Un objeto en movimiento tiende a permanecer en movimiento».

Ganas de volver a empezarlo es lo que me quedó al terminar este libro.

Sarah Key says

I loved this book. Amazing story, and Egolf had such style as a writer.

This is not humor. There is an occasional witty or sarcastic sentence from time to time that will leave the reader with a cocky grin on their face, but for the most part, this was a very sad book. Or at least, it was to me. A man loses the woman loves, are you laughing? A man is brutally hurt and losing his very grasp on reality, is it humorous to you now? A story about someone as misunderstood as John Kaltenbauer is not a funny one, not to me. It's sad and terrible.

There is dialogue. I define dialogue in a book by two characters speaking. I don't need quotation marks for there to be dialogue. People do talk to each other in this book. If you missed it, you were probably skimming. It is a common literary trait for writers not to use quotation marks.

This is not an easy read. The paragraphs are long and detailed. It was a book that I could not read if there was a mess of noise or commotion surrounding me. I read this book in long spurts of silence in my room, focused with a cup of my coffee, and my dog Bandit.

I almost cried when the main character, John, contemplated suicide. I couldn't help but wonder during those few pages if these were the character's thoughts, or Egolf's.

I liked the way Egolf tackled the topic of how much trash people produce each day/year. It is something that has been on my mind a lot in the past year. Every time I pay for something at the grocery store or at a gas station, I can't help but wonder how much of the money I just spent is going to the packaging alone and then later on to rot in a landfill.

Rainbowgirl says

Il s'agit de rétablir la vérité sur l'homme qui devint une légende dans la ville fictive de Baker - pas une légende glorieuse, non, mais plutôt celle d'un criminel, d'un fou, d'un diable apparu de nulle part pour semer le malheur et le chaos au sein d'une bourgade jusque là (presque) sans histoires. Il s'agit d'expliquer comment, en l'espace de si peu de temps, tout a pu tourner à la catastrophe, et quels hideux secrets ont rendu John Kaltenbrunner prêt à tout pour obtenir sa revanche.

Ce roman fut une lecture étonnamment agréable (la première phrase ne le laisse pas présager). Le style est riche, le drôle se mêle sans cesse au tragique et on se laisse transporter dans ce trou du fin fond des États-Unis jusqu'à en avoir les narines remplies de l'odeur du croûton. Au bout de l'aventure, pourtant, mon ressenti est un tantinet mitigé.

Toute la première partie du livre se dévore avec le plaisir exaltant et légèrement masochiste qu'on a à descendre en luge une piste cabossée (oui, je suis allée à la montagne récemment). Mais tandis que les malheurs pleuvent sur John en continu, le récit, qui ne fait pas économie des effets d'annonce apocalyptiques, adopte un point de vue de plus en plus extérieur, qui me le rend de moins en moins touchant. Cet anti-héros n'est déjà plus qu'une créature lointaine (car mythique ?) lorsqu'on en arrive au final, sans doute épique, mais surtout interminable, la dépeinture du bordel général étant dressée jusqu'au moindre de ses détails saugrenus. Si j'ai apprécié l'effet recherché, j'ai trouvé son exécution poussive et j'ai fini par lire en diagonale un certain nombre des cent dernières pages.

Au bout du compte, si j'aime les histoires de vengeance pour la satisfaction jouissive qu'elles peuvent apporter, celle-ci m'a surtout laissé du dépit. Il m'a manqué, au fil du récit, deux ou trois notes d'espoir qui m'auraient rendu la désespérance plus poignante, le renoncement moins rapide, la fin moins vaine. C'est un livre que j'ai réellement aimé lire, mais dont l'arrière-goût m'est trop amer pour que je ne reste pas sur des regrets.

Ghostcat says

Recommended by a collègue this was a complete discovery, both the book and the author and it will take time for me to digest this story, universe and characters. There is high quality writing style here, detailed background that makes the whole city feel like a creature itself and not a single feel like it is useless. I liked most of all the sense of disappointment in humanity, the mysanthropic tone but now that I learned that the author took his life away because of depression, it makes even more sad. I loved that book even though it

was painful to read.

Steve says

So I wrote the review below in 2007 or something, after reading the book in 1999 and again in, I don't know, 2003 or something. Then I picked up a used copy for a dollar last week (2010) and read it again. I don't like it *nearly* as much as I used to. The story and the writing style are both deeply problematic. Several plot points are just completely implausible--for instance, crowds of people in a hospital waiting room viciously attack our hero for no particular reason; also, all the faculty of all levels of the public school fear and loathe him as if he's a horror movie villain, just because he's an unkempt misfit, basically. Also, the language (of the omniscient narrator, not dialogue--there isn't any direct dialogue) is almost constantly overwrought. This manifests itself in a few different ways, and I'm surprised it didn't bother me more in the first place.

A confounding book---I love and dislike it all at once.

The story is tremendous fun, but I have some real issues with the way it's written.

The writing style is weird and troubling. The dialog is all indirect quotes, not direct. It seems throughout most of the story as though it's a kind of third-person omniscient narrator, or rather someone from the town but unidentified and with an omniscient view and literary voice. It ultimately becomes apparent, though, that it's being recounted from the perspective of someone from within a specific character set.

It seems impossible to account for such a narrator within that group of characters. He plainly places himself among them and yet accounts for all of them in such a way that the group can't actually include him. I suspect it's an oversight by the author, though I can't be sure. It pisses me off.

The language often used, in the narration and the dialog, is completely implausible coming from either this narrator or from the hero. Implausibility hurts the cause.

On the other hand, as irritating as that implausibility is, the language itself is frequently mighty fun to read. Also, I love the story. Love it. In some ways, it rings of truth, and in other ways, it's totally ridiculous, but it's consistently full of unconventional and interesting adventures of a peculiar protagonist, who suffers, endures, excels, and stirs some shit up.

Stefan Martiyan says

The story, the style in which it's written, and the context are no doubt all in one their own. While some areas of the book do drag on, in seemingly self indulgent redundancy, Lord of the Barnyard contains some of the most memorable and outrageous scenes (like a Confederacy of Dunces, Fight Club hash), and several lead, flawed characters that leave the reader w/a metallic tasting, lasting memory. Highly recommended to any and all who enjoy marinating in main character misfortune and tumbling out of control.

Phong Pham says

Think you've had a bad day, week, or even life? Then you haven't met John Kaltenbrunner. Sure he could walk around grouching "I hate my life" like the rest of us or he could put his nose to the proverbial grindstone with singular determination to do what he knows to be right and to exact perhaps the most outrageous vengeance you'll ever read about. The writing style takes some getting used to (there's no direct dialogue in the entire book) but don't let that deter you. Shame Tristan Egolf is no longer around- RIP (he had such a cool name too).

Janet Tomasson says

This is a shattering book. Despair is increasing throughout the plot, without hope, without a ray of light — a story of *Les Misérables*, which presents American reality from its darkest angle. Writing is a burst of literary talent, with remarkable ability to illustrate even if the descriptions are sometimes tricky. I think this is a literary gem that is a pity to miss, also if there are parts that are too dated in the book.

Robert Beveridge says

Tristan Egolf, *Lord of the Barnyard: Killing the Fatted Calf and Arming the Aware in the Corn Belt* (Grove, 1998)

Few books published in the last decade have garnered as much attention and as many favorable reviews as Tristan Egolf's epic debut novel. It has achieved endless comparisons to John Kennedy Toole and William Faulkner, made ten-best lists the world over, and been lauded as the book most overlooked by all the major literary awards. Needless to say, after all that, it's roughly the literary equivalent of the 1963 shock film *The Tinger* (no pun intended); with all that buildup, someone's bound to get let down.

First, to address the Toole comparisons: putting *Lord of the Barnyard* side-by-side with the unreadable piece of dreck that is *A Confederacy of Dunces* is to compare a Mozart sonata to a six-year-old plinking out Chopsticks on a toy piano for the first time. Everything Toole tried to do, Egolf succeeded in doing. That said, *Lord of the Barnyard* confirms what I have been saying for years; even if Toole's godawful tripe had succeeded in its lamebrained effort, it still would have sucked. *Lord of the Barnyard* doesn't, but that's less a factor of the personages and situations therein than it is indicative of Egolf's narrative style (hence the Faulkner comparisons).

The difference between Egolf and Faulkner is much more subtle, and the comparisons therein are more understandable. Where Egolf fails and Faulkner succeeded is in the subtleties of character development. Egolf falls into the same trap many modern authors do where his characters are concerned; he mistakes event + event + event + event = accurate picture of character's psychological profile, and then goes on to point out the dysfunctionality of the events in question, assuming that those events will go on to fully explain the character's adult (to use the term loosely) behavior. This sort of thing is acceptable, even to be encouraged, in genre writing, where the plot is usually far more important than the characters within it anyway (and which is what makes someone like Stephen King so refreshing). But if you're going to write capital-L literature, where characters are equal in importance to (or greater in importance than) the plot, the author needs to understand that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; character development is as much in what you

don't say as in what you do. Faulkner was a master at figuring out the art of putting together the whole. Egolf has a bit more work to do in that regard. He could also take a few pages from Faulkner's abilities with spare writing; what might have barely cleared a hundred fifty pages as a Faulkner piece soars to over four hundred in Egolf's hands.

And that is the book's main failing. While there are certainly a number of chuckle-inducing scenes in the book, they're tied together with seemingly endless streams of explicatory prose that exist for little reason. Egolf doesn't seem to want the reader to work for anything here, and the result is almost unbearable logorrhea. Nothing would have been lost, and much gained, by editing this manuscript down another hundred or so pages.

In short, there's nothing about this novel that doesn't correspond to the majority of first-novel failings; one just expects to see them less with such a universally-lauded book. It's entirely possible that Egolf's next work will live up to the standards the press set him for this one. We'll have to wait and see. ** ½

Aaron says

I've owned this book since June of 2006 and have never seen fit to crack the spine.

It was given to me as a birthday gift by my best friend Stephen. He was a playwright as well, and a big fan of this writer. Stephen seemed to think that I would enjoy him, too. I put the book on a shelf with every intention of getting to it. But then. . .the October after I received this book. . .Stephen died in a horrific car accident. This novel, among others, went untouched. Perhaps I was too afraid of the nostalgia it would evoke.

Recently, my wife and I moved into a larger house. We haven't unpacked the books yet, but I needed something new to read, so I opened the first box at random and just grabbed something out. This novel won the lottery. I held it in my hand for a long moment, contemplating if I really wanted to do this to myself, but, in the end, I decided that I was ready.

Yes, it made me nostalgic. Not just for my departed friend, though. It made me nostalgic for another writer whose work I greatly admire, but who left us far too soon. I'm talking about David Foster Wallace, the author of *Infinite Jest* and *The Girl With The Curious Hair*. *Lord of the Barnyard*, in its phrasing and plotting and all-out absurd goofiness, could have been written by my old pal DFW.

Of course, once I finished the novel, and did some research on other works by this writer, I learned that Egolf himself departed the world too soon.

So. . .I'm now stuck with the feelings evoked by my experience with one novel that had an immense impact on me because of its connection, for me, to three dead writers. With that said, if I am able to separate the melancholy of reading it and absorbing it from my experience of just, you know, reading it and enjoying it without all that other bullshit crowding in, I would still recommend this novel very highly. I can say, without regret that I really enjoyed it. I actually wish I had read it when it was given to me. I would have enjoyed the conversation Stephen and I might have had.

If I have a complaint about this novel, it would be the numerous book reviewer's jacket blurb insistence that this novel is a brilliant work of comedy. Brilliant, yes. Comedy, no. It's sarcastic, to be sure. But not

exceptionally funny. So be warned if this is why you've picked this novel up.

No other complaints, though. It's an otherwise fun and fast-paced bildungsroman that will remain on my shelf despite the feelings it evokes. It will share a spot next to DFW and Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis and all those other writers who have made me think about a novel's form more than its content.

James says

Stunned. In my opinion, a meteoric work that captures the futility of the cogs in the American Dream better than maybe anything I've read. Egolf very likely wrote my generation's version of the great American novel.
