



Glad You're Not Me

Jonathan Harnisch

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This provocative new work from a writer who revels in exploring the darker sides of the mind creates an unforgettable experience.

In his latest work, *Glad You're Not Me*, controversial writer Jonathan Harnisch follows his most primal instincts into a literary jungle of lust, violence, and moral paradox. The book's graphic and sensational imagery creates a disturbing and unforgettable experience.

Harnisch is a schizophrenic who explores his own mental illness through writing and art. *Glad You're Not Me* can be characterized as a work of transgressive fiction and is heavily autobiographical. In contrast to therapeutic or reformist ways of thinking, transgressive writing seeks moral and psychological truths by crossing boundaries, violating social mores, and subverting status-quo values. Harnisch's narrator revels in this task: "Wander the reader astray, do not attempt to care for the reader, kill the reader."

The book's preliminary "contract" promises to engage in "normal, healthy, positive, nonviolent, and consensual" erotic content. The statement rings with irony, leaving questions of what is normal and healthy behavior and who decides. As if to break this initial contract, a subsequent chapter, "Ode to Granny the Tranny: Nurse Natalie," unleashes a profusion of violent sexual imagery. Perversely lyrical, the chapter demonstrates how the death instinct, the desire for self-annihilation, can lead to intense experiences of love. "Cremate me and eat my ashes," demands the narrator. Lovers consume each other until the anarchic experience of sexuality has obliterated all confines of personality.

This intensity, however, comes in fits and starts. Many passages in between are insipid. For instance, correspondence with a writing friend is serialized in several chapters, some entries as scant as three lines. The narrator also obsesses about celebrity and prestige. He calls his own writing "some of the most original and thought-provoking of modern day." Whether viewed as self-parody or self-importance, the aggrandizing detracts from the more interesting and humanizing aspects of the nonlinear narrative.

Harnisch succeeds most as a writer when he uncovers honest insights about the ego. "We narcissists tend to have low or no self-esteem," the narrator says at the end of "Never Follow an Outline." In "Queer Theory/Why I Write," he talks about trying to "seduce" the reader: "Try to. Fail with glorious misery." This failure, though, leads to a keener sense of humanity: "We all have hearts. They just seem to go astray for a while."

Glad You're Not Me raises more questions than it answers. To call it a provocative work would be an understatement. Its entire purpose is to provoke. For readers who can handle the darker side of human experience, it may prove a worthwhile read.

SCOTT NEUFFER (February 24, 2016)

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