

The Wasp Eater



[The Wasp Eater_ 下载链接1](#)

著者:William Lychack

出版者:Houghton Mifflin Company

出版时间:2004-1

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780618302444

From Publishers Weekly In this slight first novel, 10-year-old Daniel tries to reunite his parents after his father, Bob (a man with a "sweepstakes smile and sly charm"), is kicked out of the house for having an affair with a waitress. On one of Bob's fleeting visits home, Daniel is given a pawnshop receipt for his mother's engagement ring. Thinking the ring might be the key to reconciliation, Daniel takes a bus from New England to New York to buy it back, but he runs into trouble and his father has to come and get him. Rather than return home, father and son set off on a road trip, an expedition limned with menace instead of tenderness because Bob is not a very nice guy. Even he admits as much, telling his son that, for the rest of his life, "You'll borrow fathers. And that'll be better for you much better." The honesty of Lychack's portrayal of a father's failure to make good is undermined by awkward shifts in perspective and by strained lyricism, which make this heartfelt story limp awkwardly along. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From The Washington Post's Book World/washingtonpost.com Spare, realistic prose at its best evokes what's not there. Say what you will about Hemingway, but as he leads me down a path, through trees, in wartime, I know what his characters want and feel, even if it's not spelled out. Many contemporary purveyors of unadorned realism lack that skill. They seem to embrace spare prose for

its own sake, regardless of whether it suits their stories. They take up the mantle of Raymond Carver, Russell Banks and Richard Ford, but too often their fiction can't quite carry it. The results are lean but unsatisfying novels -- elliptical stories focused on the minutiae of everyday life and lacking emotional impact. William Lychack's first novel, *The Wasp Eater*, strikes me as one of these. It's not that Lychack can't write. His prose is fine and gentle, the story full of promise. The novel opens just after Robert Cussler, variously referred to as "the man" and Bob, has been kicked out of the house by his wife, Anna ("the woman"). She informs their son, Daniel ("the boy"), this way: "Your father's not going to be home for dinner tonight." Daniel doesn't realize that anything's awry until later that night, when Anna launches into a diatribe about life in their foundering Connecticut mill town. She decries the chokeweed and carp stinking up the river and says she has "half a mind to just pick up and leave." The year is 1979. News on television is devoted to "gas lines in California" and "Skylab falling." Lychack establishes the characters' desolation and the recession era in the first few pages, so that when Anna spends the night shuffling around in her room above Daniel's head and the ringing phone goes unanswered, the gloom is visceral. The next day, recalling the "shit-eating grin" Bob wore when she found him in flagrante delicto, Anna tosses his clothes on the lawn. That night Bob pounds at the door and on his son's window. Following Anna's lead, Daniel ignores him. Most nights after that, Bob appears at the window, smoking. During the day, he paces through the house, hoping to connect with his son. Daniel hides in the attic. Finally, Daniel takes a ride with Bob and accepts money, which he slips into his mother's purse. At night he hands each of his fears "over the sill like an apple" for Bob to "take and kick them aside." Yet the reader learns nothing of Daniel's fears except that they center on bills and Anna's nightmares. No fearful conversation is depicted. The scene is lovely but fails to evoke any actual terror. This marks the first spot in which the subtle, realistic prose starts to grate. Rather than coy similes that conflate fears with apples, Lychack might have given his reader the real thing. He might have shown Daniel articulating his fears, depicted the boy experiencing them. Instead, the author conveys emotions in a summary fashion. The reader is told that school "seemed such a comfort to Daniel -- his friends, field trips, films in science class" -- but the few scenes between Daniel and his classmates feel like filler, like passages designed to show that Daniel does things other than pine for his parents' reconciliation. He begins to swallow things -- thus the title -- but while the swallowing is metaphorically interesting, its function as a meaningful device is hampered by a thin portrayal of Daniel's inner life. Lychack does a better job with Anna. Descriptions of an impoverished girlhood in Brooklyn, of her desire to escape "every piss-sour street" in the borough, illuminate her decision to marry Bob and what she hoped to gain from the union. But her story is not the central one. More conflicts emerge in due course. Bob keeps Daniel out too late. He barges drunkenly into the house, demanding that Anna let him stay. He causes a scene at Daniel's baseball game. He flirts, and possibly dallies, with Anna's niece. Meanwhile, Daniel realizes that Anna is serious about leaving town and heads to the city on a mission to reunite his parents. He springs to life on the trip, interacting with strangers, running wild in a jewelry store. But when Bob and the niece retrieve him from the police station, Daniel becomes a closed book again. As for Bob, he's larger-than-life but inscrutable until the end. What's more, until the epilogue, set "years from here," it's difficult to get a sense of the passage of time. The characters float unmoored even on a close second reading. I don't doubt that Lychack has some vital points to make about the emotional disconnect between fathers and sons. But while there's some fine writing in the pages of *The Wasp Eater*, Lychack's succinct prose style prevents any lasting insights from reaching the page.

Reviewed by Maud Newton Copyright 2004, The Washington Post Co. All Rights Reserved. See all Editorial Reviews

作者介绍:

目录:

[The Wasp Eater_ 下载链接1](#)

标签

评论

[The Wasp Eater_ 下载链接1](#)

书评

[The Wasp Eater_ 下载链接1](#)