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Enon

by Daniel Scheffler

EDGE Contributor

Tuesday Sep 10, 2013

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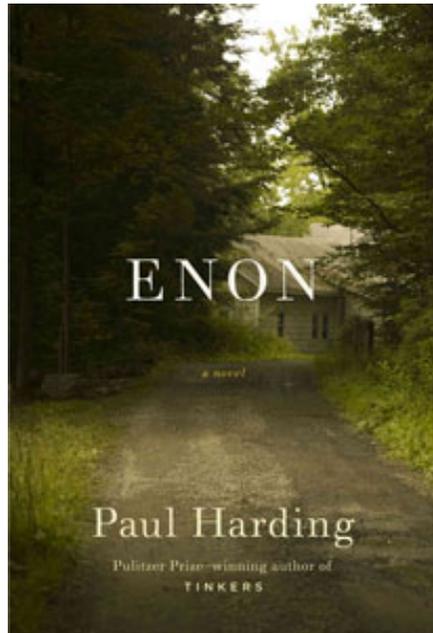
The latest novel by Paul Harding, who is known for his Pulitzer winning novel "Tinkers," is **"Enon"**. This is a novel so strong in its misery that it sucks a reader right down into an unexpected spiral of the blues -- the real dark blues.

Meeting simpleton Charlie, a Massachusetts lover of nature, the book jumps to a prose immediately reminiscent of "Tinkers" -- sweet and evocative. But when Charlie receives that phone call everyone dreads, where his wife tells him his pride and joy daughter Kate has been in a biking accident and didn't survive -- his world purges.

There is a melody of true sadness and blue tragedy that plays quietly on the stereo as the rain falls hard around these characters. Both Charlie, who falls apart, and his wife Susan come undone in the worst possible way. Charlie, the sturdy rock, changes his constitution and becomes a puddle of himself. Lost, self-defeated and filled with sorrow, Charlie slides into dreams and decay.

Harding, who considers himself a "self-taught modern New England transcendentalist," uses characters from "Tinkers" and finds them compelling enough to give them their own worlds. And he is right; Charlie and the gang ooze their guts and lives for us to find empathy and distaste and, eventually, love in all of them.





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The novel drifts into magical realism through the help of dreams and drugs (prescription) and crosses the lines of masochistic behavior in smart prose. Harding has that perfect way of leading you to the truths within yourself that you are unwilling, and probably afraid, to see or admit. The novel pours scalding milk down your throat as an act of mother's care and explicit damage.

What gives this novel its gravitas is the lack of direction that Charlie so helplessly portrays; familiar and painful, it demonstrates the exact moment when reason and rational thinking change gears to become unsettlingly crazy. It's a moment we recognize, fear, and probably suppress for as long as we can. But as Charlie reminds us, the crazy (in whatever form or level) is within you. It just needs a sliver of hurt, pain, or bruising to become all-consuming. Harding, a writer that gets family dynamic, has given us a new version of the family fragment.

"Enon"
Paul Harding
\$15.60
Random House

by Paul Harding

Daniel Scheffler is a writer who spends his time in New York, Cape Town and India. Follow him on Twitter

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Portraits by Bob Dylan on Display in London

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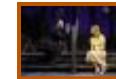
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