



The Quelling

Barbara Barrow

Lanternfish Press (Sep 25, 2018)

Softcover \$18.00 (314pp)

978-1-941360-18-7

The rush of a whodunit pales next to Barbara Barrow's what've-they-done-and-why, *The Quelling*. The novel instantly achieves page-turner status through vexing questions. Why are two youngsters being raised by television nature programs instead of their own parents? Whose body was discovered in their house? What prompted such violent behavior at such a tender age that Dorian and Addie are confined to a psychiatric ward from their childhood, through puberty, and beyond? And, finally: Are the ward's "quelling" sessions intended to cure the girls or to extract memories about the murder for some more sinister reason?

As the sisters, their doctor, and nurses take turns fleshing out the story, these lures are swiftly superseded by more immediate, equally engaging ones. Characters' insightful, vivid renderings of circumstances and events contribute to a collective narrative greater than the sum of its parts. Layer upon layer of intertwining perceptions and mysteries mount until enigmas specific to this story give way to those more universal and philosophical in nature.

When conversations, behaviors, or events are recounted from differing vantage points, consistencies abound. Yet the new information inevitably boosts suspense by negating what might have been anticipated based upon previous versions.

Shifting from escalating tension to benign normalcy to surprise, the plot mimics those anxiety-provoking movie soundtracks where heart-pounding thumps incite slashing violins to a frenzy, only to climax in a silly scene with a playful tune. Then, when least expected, the audience is slapped out of their sense of relief by the most horrifying shocker of all.

The cure known as the quelling presumes that symptoms of a disorder must be quelled for the sake of order. However, through allowing its characters and secrets to reveal themselves in whatever order, to whatever extent, and through whatever point of view best tells their story, Barrow's book invites inquiry into which of the two—disorder or order—is more deserving of reverence than cure.

LINDA THORLAKSON (November/December 2018)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.