

shigekuni.

Books, mostly.

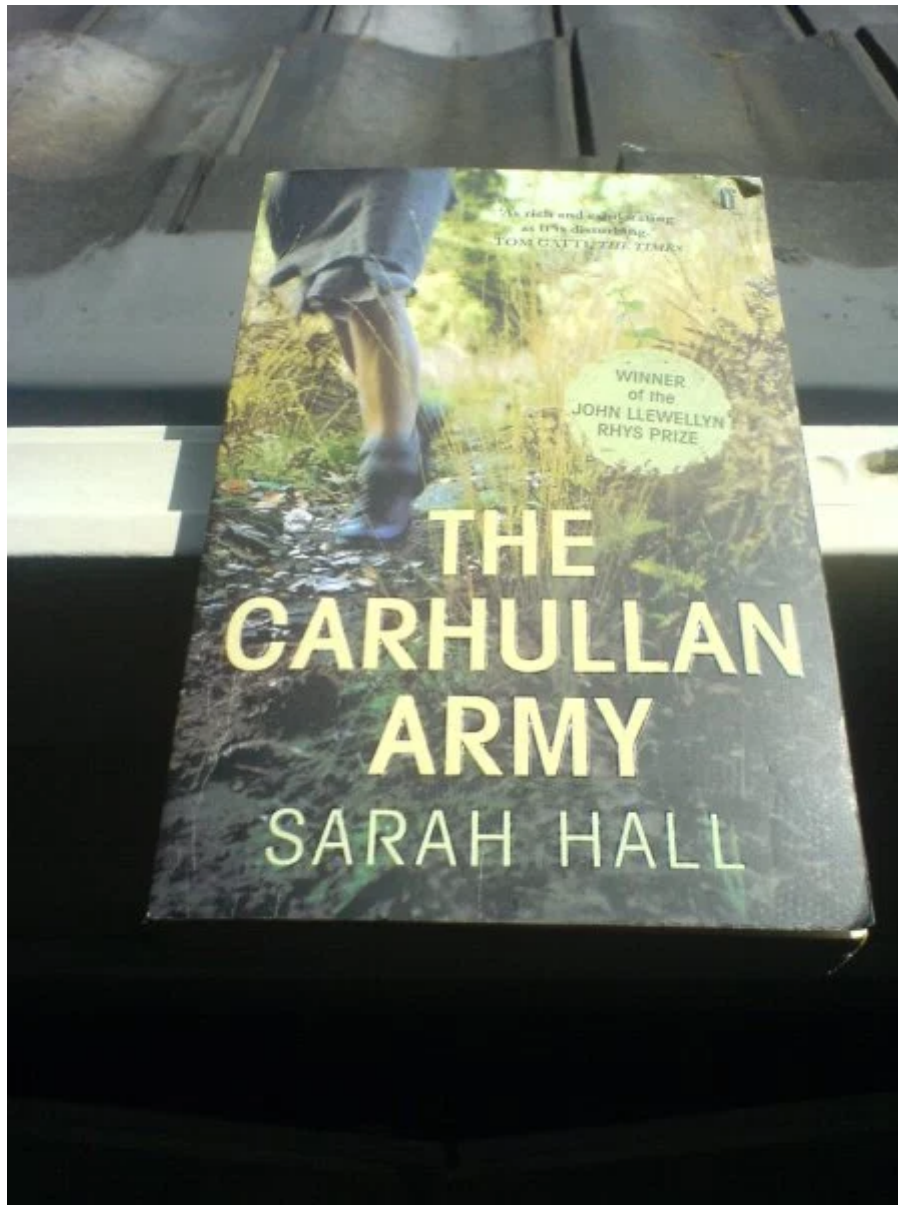
Sarah Hall: Daughters of the North / The Carhullan Army (rev.)

*Hall, Sarah (2008), **The Carhullan Army**, Faber and Faber
ISBN 978-0-571-23660-2*

Is it worrying that a good deal of my more recent negative book reviews are negative primarily because of personal disappointment? Shouldn't an author's work be judged on its own merits, and not by what it could have been, might have been, should have been? But then, any competently written book might be deserving of a positive review and some, like Paul Harding's overall mediocre and complacent little debut **Tinkers** ([my review here](#) (<https://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2010/06/15/paul-harding-tinkers/>)), just don't deserve that. It is the author's fault if they don't work through their ideas and tangents in more than a glancing way. Recently, [critics like Lee Siegel](#) (<http://www.observer.com/2010/culture/where-have-all-mailers-gone>) have excoriated the contemporary novel, and while they were wrong-headed in their specific arguments, I think that the stark air of complacency that envelops much of MFA-produced prose contributed to Siegel's ire. Today's writers have an incredibly large array of themes and styles at their finger tips. They can emulate effective modes of writing with astonishing ease, hint at political or philosophical depths without ever having to deal with them in a thorough way. Books like Joshua Cohen's most recent novel **Witz**, which go beyond simple pyrotechnics to create prose of significance that is both technically dazzling as it is intellectually and emotionally rich, have become increasingly rare. Critics should, I think, point this out, and shun books that are content to explore the byways of MFA-approved prose artistry, flirting with poetry, ditching each and every commitment. Sarah Hall's third novel, **The Carhullan Army**, is both an excellent example of that kind of shallow writing and not. For me, it was a puzzling novel that was both annoying and interesting, both thoughtful and conventionally complacent. Ultimately, it is a fun book, a quick and easy read with some interesting tangents and possibilities that it never works through. A book meant and conceived to be a popular read, easy on the brain, presenting no hurdles, innovations or critical difficulties. And yet, there's a spark of originality in it, of careful thought. It is this spark that makes it worth reading.

(<https://shigekuni.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/dsc01486.jpg>).

Sarah Hall is a British writer and has published four novels so far. **The Carhullan Army** is her third, published in 2007. Its geographical and social reference are strongly British, and elements, like the title, appeal predominantly to a British reading public, which is why the title was changed upon publication in the US, where it was published as **Daughters of the North** (hence the double title of the review). The US title is more emotive, more simply evocative of certain gender-based dichotomies; it also serves to situate the novel firmly in a literary tradition both of writing about the

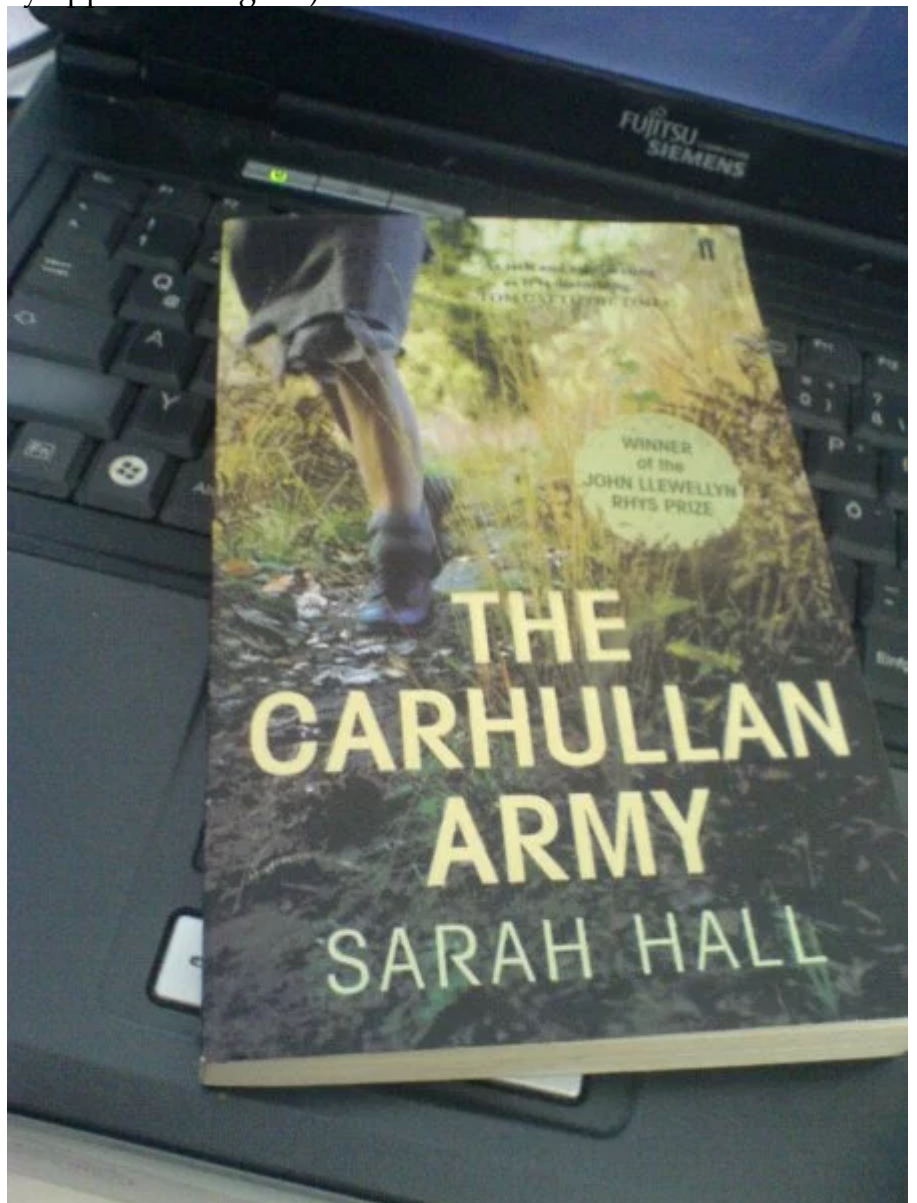


North, which is often symbolic of untamed, bristling natural landscapes (cf. Margaret Atwood's seminal critical texts, especially **Strange Things**), and of writing about femininity in a patriarchally structured society, the word, or term 'daughter' set to evoke both the more benign term 'mother' and the fatherly power structure that the daughter inherits. Readers will have no problem pulling up these kinds of references in order to contextualize the book. The title stresses the book's most simple and cheap elements, which are also those that inordinately dominate the novel's discourse. Thus, it fits the book far better than the more complex original title which deserved a more reasoned and complex book. But then, it is indeed significant to state that the book's wild North isn't the allegorical landscape of Atwood's more recent fictions. Sarah Hall sets her novel in a precisely defined region of northern England, Cumbria. The names of cities, rivers and towns either correspond exactly to existing cities, rivers and towns, or

resemble them strongly. The invented town of Rith has a mirror in the Cumbrian town of Penrith, and both the nearby river Eden, as well as the Carhullan holdings exist under these exact names. Not a native of that remote region, wedged between the bulk of England, and the adjacent Welsh and Scottish countries, I gather that some travel routes and small geographic details have been changed, that there are small divergences as far as minute details are concerned, made to fit the story, but the overall principle is one of geographical accuracy.

At the same time, Hall, who herself lives in Cumbria, appears to be well aware of the mystical and allegorical potential that this region offers. She has demonstrated this awareness in her first novel, **Haweswater**, a sad, poetic novel about the destruction of a rural community by the invading forces of modernity. **The Carhullan Army** harks back to that first book, adding layers of significance, writing a tale set in the near future rather than in the past. Hall's intent to make symbolically rich use of a landscape rich in vistas, resources and a rugged history is announced by the most central name-change. Penrith which means "Red Hill" or rather, "Hill Red", is shortened to just "Rith", i.e. red. As we infer from the rest of the book, Hall connects that color both to the Christian tradition of martyrdom (which, especially in Catholic traditions, is signified by the color red) and to the sense of guilt and accusation that literary forebears like Nathaniel Hawthorne made use of in creations like the eponymous scarlet letter. This, in relation to the biblical place Eden (via the Cumbrian river of the same name), allows the book's readers to connect what seems like a simple, sparse, somewhat post-apocalyptic tale of rebellion to a broadly Christian context of storytelling where women as adulteresses, temptresses and wily sneaks have traditionally been handed the short end of the stick. It

is especially in moments of crisis that masculinity, as the necessary force of stability and order, has been privileged over an unstable brand of femininity, and **The Carhullan Army** starts out with just such a moment of crisis. Due to a series of crises and mishaps, the British economy has collapsed, and Britain is now ruled by a military dictatorship of sorts, The Authority (an unfortunate name, recalling comics and satires more than an actually oppressive regime).



(<https://shigekuni.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/dsc01488.jpg>).

Written in 2007, the scenario of **The Carhullan Army** uncomfortably recalls the events of the past two years, “the ruthlessness of banks”, the dangerous dependency on oil not because of a lack of the necessary technology but because of a lack of “the will to invest”, and the downward spiral of governmental actions, breeding resentment against foreigners, arranging for “deportations” and, lastly, establishing the haplessly named military police force. Although, in the beginning, large crowds form in protest, The Authority ultimately manages to quell public unrest, until the British hunker down and accept everything. For **The Carhullan Army**’s narrator who goes by the name Sister (not her real name, but the one she eventually adopts. In the first chapter, she declares “You will call me Sister”), it’s different. As a woman she’s suffers more from the new laws, and develops a growing unease with the status quo, until a deeply humiliating and invasive mandated procedure, meant to keep women from conceiving children, a wire contraption inserted into their uteri, pushes her over the edge. Suddenly, without any warning, she drops everything and leaves in order to join Carhullan. In Sarah Hall’s future Britain, Carhullan has become, even before the geopolitical crisis really took hold, a female autonomous community of some 60 women, a refuge for those persecuted and discriminated against, a rough-and-tumble community of women who live off the land,

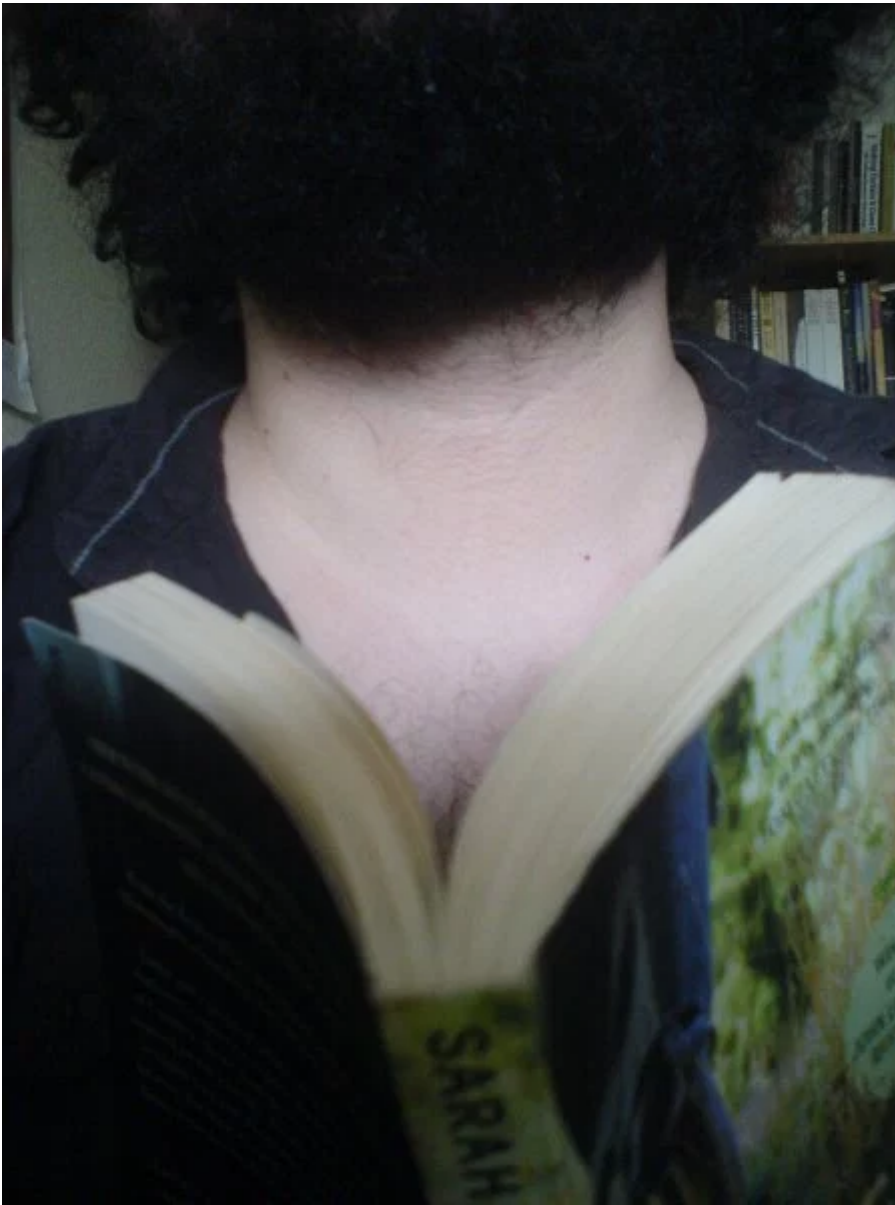
completely independent of governmental facilities and structures. Water, power and food are all produced on the lands of the Carhullan farm. Although no men live in Carhullan, the farm has not become some hot exotic lesbian fantasy world or a prim world of celibate gardeners. Granted, many of its inhabitants do live in same-sex relationships, but several others frequent nearby farms, striking up emotional and sexual relationships with Cumbrian men. Men may not be allowed on the farm, but the Carhullan ideology is not misandric, it doesn't try to expunge male influence or anything. Instead, the point is to create a safe haven for women, to provide an opportunity for them to have a choice whether they want to seek out the male gaze or not, whether they want to play gender-fantasy roles or not, empowering women by taking them out of the patriarchal system (in several different ways).

In a string of extremely competently written flashbacks and straightforward storytelling, we are apprised not only of Sister's personal history before coming to Carhullan, but also of her stay at the farm, of her discovery of its structures and inhabitants, of her amorous relationship to one of the women. It is a story of self-discovery, with all the yawn-inducing conventional cliché scenes and images one would expect. **The Carhullan Army** contains a few sex scenes, which are almost all of them risible and cheesy instead of erotic and involving. The same applies to the book's depictions of Carhullan's revolutionary leader and her ideology. It is as if Hall decided that all the worst implications about femininity and the images and contexts of it in male-dominated prose were all correct and worth emulating and reproducing. The embrace of cheap clingy stereotype is the single worst part of the book and I can personally understand every reader who broke off reading the book after the first or second of these scenes, although it is certainly worth persevering. There is only one (albeit central and important) difference to established discourse. Unlike some who foster a deeply sexist discourse that would have women as benign beings, intrinsically incapable of violence, a discourse that tends to posit a fantasy matriarchy, based on shoddy anthropology and archeology, as a pacifist, peaceful kind of reign, Sarah Hall has none of that and for that at least, she is to be commended. The Carhullan inhabitants are not averse to violence, and the Carhullan leader, a former soldier, harbors dreams of setting up a revolutionary army of women. **The Carhullan Army** firmly and clearly shows that this is not due to male influence or patriarchal society around them. In fact, in many ways, it seems to extol violence as a means of retaliating against an oppressive, nocent society, one that brands them with a scarlet letter and that invests its Christian creation myths with a foundational female misdemeanor. And even if you turn out to disagree with my reading, the novel's ambiguous treatment of revolution and communities is closer to Hari Kunzru's most recent novel or Heiner Müller's tantalizing plays, than to essentially reactionary books like Dana Spiotta's competent but noncommittal 2006 novel **Eat The Document**. ([my review here](https://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2009/07/13/saying-it-dana-spiottas-eat-the-document/) (<https://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2009/07/13/saying-it-dana-spiottas-eat-the-document/>)).

(<https://shigekuni.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/dsc01490.jpg>).

Thus, the book's ideas and story have both good parts and shortcomings. Where Hall really lets down the reader is the book's narrative and formal structure, which is written in the most tired, conventional way possible, although Hall is clever enough to suggest otherwise, suggestions that eventually add up to a huge feeling of disappointment. The writing and artistic vision is tame, making me think of a crossing of the work of a clever essayist and a mediocre if competent novelist. The book consists of seven chapters, each of which is called "File", and each of which carries either the comment "Full recovery" or "Partial recovery". A prefatory note states that the book to come is the

English Authority Penal System archive record no. 498: Transcript recovered from site of Lancaster holding dock. Statement of female prisoner detained under section 4 (b) of the insurgency Prevention (Unrestricted Powers) Act.



It would, I gather, be fair to assume that what follows is in some way a transcript of a spoken statement, and would follow, in diction and form, the exigencies of that situation. Really, one would hope or assume that the novelistic parts of the book would reflect the odd nature of the book in some way at the very least, but it never really does. Except for the first and last paragraph of the book, the situation that Sister is in never penetrates the sleek surface of the narrative. There is no sign that anything in the book was actually spoken by a person, and even for a written statement, it is weirdly calm and measured. It is impossible to overemphasize how utterly unremarkable, dull and conventional Sister's narration is. As if she was writing a humorless version of a 19th century novel, we perambulate through the story, with flashbacks and commentary shedding the necessary light on every detail and every scene. The writing is simple, with small streaks of poetic prose. Given the far richer prose of her previous novels, I gather Hall has tried to

simplify her style to fit the occasion, but the result is merely a tad less florid. It's still smooth and warm, easy on the eyes and brain. A book you can read on the beach, on a train or during a dull world cup game.

Even the 'partially recovered' chapters turn out to be a trick without real narrative consequences. Flashbacks help fill in all the necessary gaps, and what we don't know, we don't want or care to know. The effect is disappointing, yes, and deeply puzzling: why would the writer hint at complexities she clearly has never really attempted to include in the book? It's false advertising, that's what it is, and what's more, it fits the general air of undisturbed cliché scenery. For every interesting idea there are five ideas and scenes that reproduce ideas and scenes we all know, ideas and scenes that barely manage to coalesce into creating any kind of interest in the book's developments for its readers. There are riches hidden in these connections, but Hall never really avails herself of the cultural vocabulary to make us of all of that. For the reader, it's a bit frustrating to see these ideas taken up only to be discarded lazily a few pages later. It's like reading a writer whose heart's not in the story she tells. This is why I found the American title **Daughters of the North** more fitting: it is simpler, and the meaning of it is apparent and obvious. The original title **The Carhullan Army** is more complex: see, Carhullan is a farm, and until the last fourth of the book, its inhabitants do not have an army in the literal sense. However, the aspect of violence I mentioned, the revolutionary and vengeful motivations of its inhabitants, most of which have already committed a violent crime to

avenge behavior that was harmful to them, this makes the Carhullans an army even before they ever decide to become one. Women who come to Carhullan have to understand that their earlier, submissive behavior was part of the abuse, to quote Sister:

I began to understand that I owned the abuse. I was the only persecutor.

This is fascinating, interesting, and thoroughly out of character for the book as a whole. But clearly, it would not have needed to be, and yet the timid allusions to contemporary politics, the lack either of a thorough indictment of the things that are, or of an original, powerful vision of the things that could be, this pushes novels like **The Carhullan Army** into near irrelevance and opens up the possibility of attacks like Siegel's. It is a good read, but would the world have been poorer had it not been written? I don't know.

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July 8, 2010 by Shigekuni - Book Blog Categories: Literature (British), Reviews | Tags: Sarah Hall | 19 Comments

19 thoughts on “Sarah Hall: Daughters of the North / The Carhullan Army (rev.)”

Pingback: [Sarah Hall: The Carhullan Army - World Literature Forum](#)

2. *jp says: July 8, 2010 at 5:37 pm*

I tend to agree with you here. I was drawn into the intensity – and concision – of this novel at first. Later, some of the shallowness shows through.

One thought: I felt that the character of the leader of Carhullan was the core of this novel; a portrait of an insane leader who builds her following by turning them as insane as she is. I don't think she is a validation of anti-feminist stereotypes but a clever way of dressing up a basically vile character in ideological garments that some of us may be inclined to sympathise with. Perhaps we are meant to see that avowed ideology is unimportant when held by a completely pathological person.

I also felt that Hall projected a zero-sum game: Sister runs from a hopeless world into an equally flawed resistance. The only way she can escape is by embracing the Carhullan madness and making it a part of herself, by ceasing to try and find a sane alternative, which is also a way of admitting defeat. This could have been a much more stark and powerful counterpoint to the Wyndhamesque 'cozy catastrophe' if handled with more rigour.

It's the lack of rigour, to fully engage in the ongoing discourse that dystopian novels have established over the last had century or so that bothered me the most. It's as if Hall didn't really want to write a dystopic novel but chose to dress her portrayal of pathological group dynamics in dystopic robes with a salting of feminist and environmental issues to mix things up a little.

[Reply](#)

3. *jp says: July 8, 2010 at 5:40 pm*

One more thing; I felt the depiction of sister's Indian-origin lover shamefully resorted to stereotypes.

[Reply](#)

4. *shigekuni says: July 8, 2010 at 7:52 pm*

I disagree vigorously, the leader isn't vile. I'll comment more later.

[Reply](#)

5. *jp says: July 9, 2010 at 2:51 am*

She's a vile lunatic who, if given power, would simply initiate a different phase of tyranny!

[Reply](#)

6. *shigekuni says: July 9, 2010 at 3:03 am*

Ok. Here's the thing: I completely disagree, and I think the book does, too. Her revolution is predicated on the idea that people need the outside push to rise themselves. She doesn't want to take over, she wants to set things in motion. She says so repeatedly (especially the very well done scene where Sister reluctantly tells the others about herself. brilliantly done since we don't know what she tells, and have to piece it together from what we know. we know the gist of it, i.e. that she would have risen up had someone helped her), and on the very final page we learn that people have indeed initiated uprisings everywhere against the vile regime. I mentioned Heiner

Müller, didn't I? I think the book relies on a Müller-ian revolutionary ambiguity. It is one of its few strengths, that it sometimes opts for ambiguity, and those moments are very very good. Even the farm isn't a tyranny, really, it works through co-operation and understanding, and even harsh measures are supported by a majority. I think you are dead wrong about this.

Reply

7. *jp says: [July 9, 2010 at 3:08 am](#)*

Those harsh measures are initiated by one person who has already converted her followers into fanatics by the strength of her pathological personality. She may claim not to want to rule while not yet in a position to do so but I think she is clearly shown as the sort of person who would gladly assume control if she won – just because no one else could be trusted to sort things out the right way, plus her trained fanatics all voted her in.

Reply

8. *shigekuni says: [July 9, 2010 at 3:25 am](#)*

no. sorry for being so harsh but you didn't read the book properly.

the people on the farm: most of em are violent criminals, and we get one example of that violence: retaliation against misogynistic violence. THIS WE KNOW. We also learn that she wants to push for decentralized uprisings. THIS WE KNOW. We also learn that her plan works exactly as planned, with uprisings springing up all over the country. THIS WE KNOW. We also learn that her command as it is is not dictatorial, she is more like a representative, and people came to her who were like-minded. The farm existed before the crisis and it attracted people of a similar mind-set. THIS WE KNOW. The arrival of sister, with the handgun in the box and the photo of Nixon is a sign of the same: she comes because fundamentally, she agrees with Nixon's goals. THIS WE KNOW. The book works with strong imaginistic scenes. The discussion where Sister explains to the women on the farm that they are not alone in thinking as they do enlarges the focus to make the farmfolk symptomatic of the wider world. THIS WE KNOW. And we also KNOW, it bears repeating, that this analysis wasn't wrong, that it was indeed correct and events played out as Nixon thought they would. THIS WE KNOW.

All this is in the book. Brainwashing IS NOT. Your speculation what might have happened IS NOT. Indeed, these seem to be based on a cardboard idea of revolution and uprisings, too (sadly) stereotypical for this book, which is subtle and complex on this point (and its the only such point).

I would indeed argue that Nixon knew she would die, and that she harbored a death wish ever since her lover died and wanted not to die of old age or an infection, so that the farm disintegrated without her, but die changing the world. I'm pretty sure the book makes that death wish very, very clear. The whole 'tyranny afterwards' idea of yours is pure fantasy.

Reply

Pingback: [No Present Like Links « Torque Control](#)

10. *kev mcveigh says: [July 10, 2010 at 10:23 pm](#)*

First of all let me note that the County (not region) in which Sarah Hall works, and sets The Carhullan Army is Cumbria, (Umbria is in Italy), a political construct formed in 1973 from the far older counties of Westmorland and Cumberland. The real Carhullan is close to Haweswater, setting of Hall's first novel, and lies in what was Westmorland, whilst Penrith was in Cumberland. Most of the two counties heavier industry and larger towns/ports were in Cumberland whilst Westmorland was a farming area of more isolated communities. From this it is easy to see an echo of Haweswater as the rural is destroyed by the industrial.

Having said that, even people living a dozen miles away are probably unaware that Carhullan is a real place. So I'm not sure how valid your assertion of the British ness of the true title actually is.

You may be right in saying Jackie has a deathwish, but I don't see that as contradicting her role as dictator. Her adoption of an inner cadre who enforce discipline and get priority is clearly stated. She sets the rules and the agenda for Carhullan.

[Reply](#)

11. *kev mcveigh says: [July 10, 2010 at 10:36 pm](#)*

When I interviewed Sarah Hall she comments that The Carhullan Army is about fanaticism and that Jackie 'uses people' and 'knows which buttons to press'.

<http://thelunecyreview.wordpress.com/2009/03/10/sarah-hall-interviewed/>

[Reply](#)

12. *shigekuni says: [July 10, 2010 at 11:59 pm](#)*

Hi

first of all, thank you for the comments. I corrected the umbria/cumbria issue.

I am aware of the facts about Cumbria you relate here, the historical facts, I looked them up before writing the review. Do I misrepresent the issues?

Also, yes, I am aware that Ms. Hall has talked about the book in that way. In fact, when I scoured the Internet for information about her, it seemed to me to be one of the books that she was most often asked about. I think that the hapless and witless and uncourageous use of various elements does not speak for Ms. Hall's perspicacity in the use of her material. In one interview she referred to her writing in general and this book in particular as 'inconvenient' or 'edgy', and nothing would be further from the truth. The book is comfy, easy beach reading, both on the level of the actual writing as on the level of its contents. What ambiguities the book possesses, it probably possesses despite, not because of, Ms. Hall's intellectual 'prowess'. Also, you may confuse the role of a dictator and that of a consensual representative. The book quite explicitly discusses about the tightening of discipline and the hectoring of dissenting voices that happens at the end as exceptional, disturbing events that drive one among the inhabitants to flee. By the way, interesting ambiguities are quite often there despite the author's narrow, insufficient comprehension of some issues. I didn't claim for more than ambiguities, and I would argue that I'm right about the ambiguities I describe.

Thank you for commenting and thank you for the link.

Have a nice sunday.

[Reply](#)

13. *kev mcveigh says: [July 11, 2010 at 2:40 am](#)*

Funnily enough, no I didn't confuse a dictator with a consensual representative. Historically many of the former began with a semblance of the latter. They are not exclusive.

p161 Chloe says 'you're not fucking Mao, Jackie!' and others try to argue with Jackie only to be stared down. Clearly some of the Carhullan women view her as dictatorial.

p163 'in the dormitories and within my work group I had heard talk of her aggression and paranoia, her obsessions'

p170 'we're not going to be your hostages, Jackie. .. who do you think you are?' she responds 'that's my fucking prerogative. If you leave now you're on your own.'

That's not what I would consider consensual, do you?

[Reply](#)

14. *shigekuni says: [July 11, 2010 at 3:02 am](#)*

In my previous comment I labeled what "happens at the end" as "exceptional", and mentioned Chloe, if not by name. What unravels in the final events is different in a lot of ways, and Sister is the linchpin to these events. Just think about the fact that one major disagreement with Jackie is not whether violent action is justified per se, but whether women/people outside share the ethos

and ideals of the women inside. This is a major point of contention, and is only somewhat settled when Sister explains her motivations in front of the women. Also, I mentioned this to JP, but it's worth repeating: many of the Carhullan women have committed crimes, some violent, and we as readers only get one example of these crimes, and it's an act of retaliation against a misogynistic act. Yes, there is disagreement, but it touches on many different points, and the basic idea of what happens at the end is part of Carhullan's very essence. To call Jackie a dangerous fanatic is to ignore that many of the women have, before coming to Carhullan, been 'dangerous fanatics' in their own right, so to say. Although many have mellowed down, this is a point worth making, and is part of what I meant by consensus.

Reply

15. *shigekuni says: July 11, 2010 at 3:18 am*

By the way, I found interesting, without suggesting that it was intentional, that Chloe, who annoyed me immensely, was very branded ideologically in a very specific way. That Mao comment, her attachment to that man. I mean, if there is a great thing about the book it's how we are told of a larger group of events or things and Hall then singles out one very telling, very interestingly slanted one. So, although we learn that the Carhullan women have sex with men, the book singles out a handful of specific circumstances, and it's Chloe's, that is the most conventional, 'old world'-ish, and so when it's Chloe who runs from responsibility, who tries to act as if the world hadn't changed, who whines at every turn, we are not surprised.

Reply

16. *shigekuni says: July 11, 2010 at 3:32 am*

Ok, so before going off to sleep, two more things. Jackie is a consensual representative, although she used to share that honor with her lover. You could try and make the point that what she attempts at the end does not square with the basic consensus and so the final events transform her into a dictatorial figure, but you'd overlook that Carhullan is premised on the idea of insurrectionist violence. Yes, it's a refuge, but the book makes clear that that is not the main point. The best and most conclusive point is Sister herself, who packs a gun (which is almost symbolic) when she leaves her past behind to join Carhullan. She reconnects the farm, which has strayed from its premise, to its origins. Are there conflicts? Yes, why should there not be. Are people annoyed by the changes that Jackie underwent after she shot her lover? yes. But these are frictions that are part of the process, and which are part of any representative government, by the way.

Incidentally, I have always thought that the two people Jackie shoots on the farm, her lover and Chloe, that she does both out of love and that the book, by establishing the parallel, and by emphasizing the almost sacred nature of Vero's death, suggests a sanctioning of the other, or alludes to the future possibility of that.

Reply

17. *shigekuni says: July 11, 2010 at 3:37 am*

"Clearly some of the Carhullan women view her as dictatorial."

by the way, consensus does not mean everyone agrees, it merely means a majority agrees. Disagreement is natural and only to be expected especially given the tumultuous changes, from Vero's death to Jackie torching the damn farm.

Reply

18. *kev mcveigh says: July 11, 2010 at 11:09 am*

That's an interesting point about the parallels between Vee's and Chloe's deaths. I'm not sure I agree, I'd say they might be contrasted actually. Although Jackie pulls the trigger Vee's death is clearly a communal and consensual act. It is stated that many (all?) of the women are present and understand. Jackie sends the others away before shooting Chloe and there is shock and Sister says

she has nightmares later.

Carhullan becomes a collective group with an element of insurrectionist violence but not predicated on it. The women as Sister first sees them are an ill-defined community working the farm as a farm amidst rumour and innuendo. When she sets out for Carhullan she is envisaging refuge and community in contrast to Rith where she barely knows or trusts anyone. The rifle is an offering but for defence rather than aggression.

There's a clue in Sister's father's comment that 'it would only take a small twist of the dial to make Jackie Nixon a menace to society' p49. That twist happens to Jackie with Vee's death and to Sister with the coil and the authority oppression.

Reply

19. *shigekuni says: July 11, 2010 at 5:06 pm*

I'm not sure that your (largely valid) points add up to a disagreement with my arguments. Especially since you can never forget that people eventually, on the last page, take part in the uprising, and the "society" that the women are a "menace" to, is not one worth preserving, and most of the women on the farm would agree with that. As to the gun, the book alludes multiple times to Sister's suppressed urges of aggression not only against the physicians who violated her body, but also against the larger society. She says that she hasn't "yet found a voice" to verbalize her feelings, a voice that is growing within her, getting "angrier". Sometimes aggression is another mode of defense, the book makes, I think, very clear that this is the case. The women as they came to the farm were angry. Sister was angry. Again, some have mellowed out a bit, but the militia, before it became the army, is composed of volunteers. These women are angry.

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