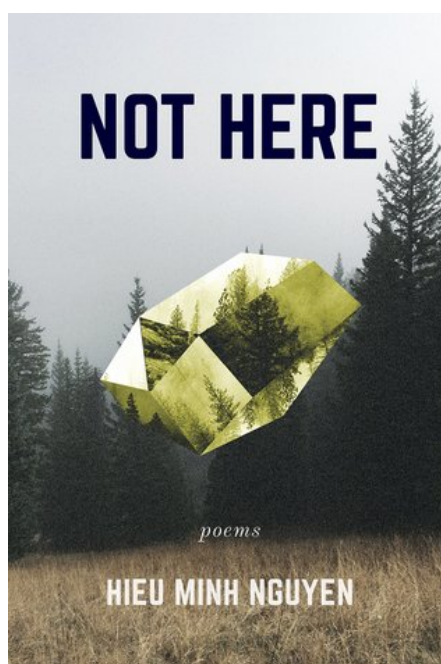




Not Here

Hieu Minh Nguyen

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Not Here is a flight plan for escape and a map for navigating home; a queer Vietnamese American body in confrontation with whiteness, trauma, family, and nostalgia; and a big beating heart of a book. Nguyen's poems ache with loneliness and desire and the giddy terrors of allowing yourself to hope for love, and revel in moments of connection achieved.

Not Here Details

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From Reader Review Not Here for online ebook

Caroline says

4.5 stars

Stellar collection. Clear-eyed observations on the bond between mother and son, mental health, and race.

"I'm trying to understand that memory / is not a technology, a full charge / will get you nowhere, if you're stuck / tracing the perimeters of your dull nostalgia / for an exit." -from "Punish"

"Too often, I don't tell people / (people I love) I am sad. I don't think that's some- / thing they would want to hear. Because they love me. / Because I don't want them to feel like the currency of / their tenderness isn't enough when it has been & will / be again." -from "Notes of Staying"

Standout poems for me were "Still, Somehow," "Elegy for the First," "Attending the Party," "Note," and "Notes on Staying."

A good read for fans of Saeed Jones, Ocean Vuong, and Richard Siken.

musa b-n says

Many many content warnings that I definitely wish I'd been given before I read this - abuse, child abuse, parental abuse, fatphobia ... this poetry is incredibly and speaks to me more than a lot of poetry has in a while. I'm glad to have read it. It is definitely achingly sad.

Will says

Hieu Minh Nguyen is an unstoppable light? An incomparable force? A delight to the senses? Yes. Once again, Nguyen has written a collection that left me gasping for breath and grasping for more. His poems are introspective, reflective, and gorgeous. He spills what feels like his whole being on the page writing about childhood trauma, sex with strangers, his relationship with his mother, and being a depressed person just trying to get by. What he leaves is a collection full of a passion, at times cool and at times red hot, that simultaneously welcomes the reader and indicts them in their own voyeurism. So many excellent works in here, from learning about brotherhood through a cockfight to his ongoing "White Boy Time Machine" series. I truly loved his poem "Monica West is Moving to Omaha, Nebraska," like one of my favorite poems ever and hearing him deliver it at his release was *chef's kisses*. Also, Hieu designed his own cover, I STAN!

Liam says

This is my favorite book of poetry that I've read this year.

Michael says

My review, as well as my other thoughts on reading, also can be found on my blog.

Over the course of a few dozen poems, Nguyen confronts his relationship to space, memory, and pain as a queer Vietnamese-American man. The collection consists of a mix of long and short pieces, addressing everything from childhood trauma to the loss of love, and it features a wide array of forms. Nguyen's versatility as a poet is mesmerizing, as are the cadences of his poems. His images are lucid, his language uncomplicated and moving. The poems considering Nguyen's relationship to his mother are among the strongest in the collection, but all the poetry is compelling and worth rereading.

Roxane says

Outstanding collection of poetry about queerness, boyhood, sons and their mothers, what we carry when who we are is not enough for the people who should love us best, desire and the thrall of want. Cockfight is a real stand out but all the poems offer something beautiful, razor sharp, intelligent, interesting, memorable.

Lauren says

Nguyen's debut collection is outstanding. If you have enjoyed the work of Kaveh Akbar, Ocean Vuong, and Chen Chen, this is very much in the same thread. It is an exciting time in poetry.

Thomas says

3.5 stars

A vulnerable, moving poetry collection written by queer Vietnamese American author Hieu Minh Nguyen. As a queer Vietnamese American myself, I related to so much of the content here, including how Nguyen describes confrontations with whiteness and racism, difficult and nuanced relationships with family, and general moments of sadness and connection. Though his words felt relatable to me, he has a distinct voice all of his own. Certain lines took my breath away, like "I'm told to be open to the possibility of not being a monster," as well as the idea of "enduring the labor of forgetting" in regard to not taking offense at a racist joke. I particularly appreciated his honesty in sharing his trauma. Nguyen has such an admirable, open heart and I am curious to read what he writes next. Would recommend to poetry fans and those invested in reading diverse voices.

(As you may discern, my rating stems from my own lack of ability to *get* poetry, as some of this collection did not make sense to me or did not fully resonate, which is most likely on me.)

SabirSultan says

This is not a collection that is easily digestible. It sits with you. Sits heavy on your mind and tongue. Loops circles in your brain as you try to unthink it. It made me think about sex and who we are to each other when we have it.

It's subject is trauma - sexual, familial, historical. The site of the trauma is the poet's voice & the poet's body. The poems point backwards and forwards as the voice uses sexual encounters to reenact the various traumas again and again. All the while the voice strives to achieve some sense of self-love as it tries to recognize itself not as a monster, not as a location on which to burn itself, but as something worth loving. It touches on weight and mothers, how both can be overbearing and create definitions of self you fight against.

Emotionally it is a rough read. It is well written. The poems can call up both stillness and urgency. The use of space on the page can create a startling power at times. Nguyen has an obvious facility for language and often achieves moments of grace.

Noteworthy poems include - "Heavy," "Hosting," "Note," "Cockfight," "Mercy," & "Nguyen." The series "Notes on Staying" was also excellent.

Elizabeth Willis says

"Like all agony, there are pleasant moments / but only when we forget / what carried us here," says Hieu Minh Nguyen's *Not Here*. His is a brutally beautiful collection of poems that considers home, queerness, Vietnamese American identity, whiteness, trauma. It is imbued with a hungry wit, seeking belonging, seeking existence, seeking survival. The speaker interrogates his own origins: the blanks, the empty spaces, the words whited-out. "Oh, but why am I here?," he asks. The memories he encounters are fossilized creatures, unearthed as these poems kneel down in a field and sift the dirt of childhood through their fingers, looking to see what forgiveness they might find.

jenni says

went into this only knowing that hieu went to high school with one of my best friends and that last week I definitely reached out to him on twitter and said he could take a picture of my butt for unstated artistic purposes and then I picked up his book at the library and all I could think about was Minneapolis and how much I long for it and how beholden I am to the entire oeuvre of this poet community that I am trying to offer up my own literal ass as a boon to mark my appreciation

Emily Polson says

*Bless language
its impossible walls
its flexible agony
a thin line*

I keep tripping over

Hieu Minh Nguyen faces his issues head on with these poems, discussing molestation, queerness, racial identity, and his complicated relationship with his mother. The collection picks up speed in the second half, where nearly every poem made me pause, ponder, and reread. My favorites were, in order of appearance:

- "Attending the Party"
- "Punish"
- "White Boy Time Machine: Override"
- "Changeling"
- "Commute"
- "Heavy"
- "Notes on Staying"

Lisa Lieberman says

Absolutely lovely, heartbreaking poems. I found the epigraph for my current novel:

Let me be clear: any love I find will be treason.

Can't remember which friend recommended this, but THANK YOU!

Blythe Baird says

This is one of the best books of poetry I've ever read. Poignant, beautiful, startling, captivating.

Ken says

This was recommended by a fellow poet and did not disappoint in that it had some beautiful lines along the way. Nguyen tackles issues surrounding his coming-of-age as a gay Vietnamese-American, so the extremely personal topics touch on racism, homophobia, and his own inner turmoil growing up.

Some poems cross into TMI territory, but I most appreciated the poems concerning his mother and grandmother, father and uncles--that is, the way coming out can create anger, fear, hysteria, and hate within a family itself. For LGBTQ people, acceptance, if it arrives at all, is slow in arriving.

Overall, a classic example of the new wave in poetry: very personal, first-person POV poems, often highlighting minority experience in an entrenched "majority" world.
