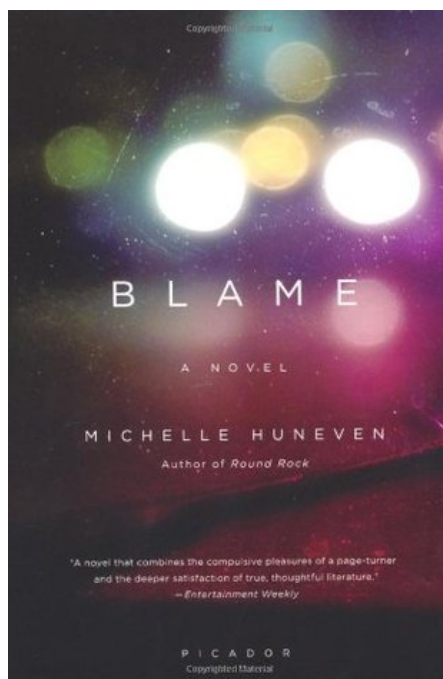




Blame

Michelle Huneven

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Blame Michelle Huneven

The story: Patsy MacLemoore, a history professor in her late twenties with a brand-new Ph.D. from Berkeley and a wild streak, wakes up in jail yet again--after another epic alcoholic blackout. "Okay, what'd I do?" she asks her lawyer and jailers. "I really don't remember." She adds, jokingly: "Did I kill someone?"

In fact, two Jehovah's Witnesses, a mother and daughter, are dead, run over in Patsy's driveway. Patsy, who was driving with a revoked license, will spend the rest of her life--in prison, getting sober, finding a new community (and a husband) in AA--trying to atone for this unpardonable act.

Then, decades later, another unimaginable piece of information turns up.

For the reader, it is an electrifying moment, a joyous, fall-off-the-couch-with-surprise moment. For Patsy, it is more complicated. Blame must be reapportioned, her life reassessed. What does it mean that her life has been based on wrong assumptions? What can she cleave to? What must be relinquished?

FINALIST FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD

FINALIST FOR THE *LOS ANGELES TIMES* BOOK PRIZE

CHICAGO TRIBUNE FAVORITE FICTION OF THE YEAR

O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE TEN TERRIFIC READS OF THE YEAR

A *WASHINGTON POST* BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR

A *KANSAS CITY STAR* 100 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Blame Details

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From Reader Review Blame for online ebook

switterbug (Betsey) says

It's another morning in the county drunk tank for Patsy, who is sadly inured to this ritual. She wakes up in her vomit and her filth, with no recall of last night--she experiences frequent blackouts when she drinks. A young, talented, comely, and statuesque college professor, Patsy is nevertheless on a grease skid to oblivion due to untreated alcoholism. This time she is accused of running down and killing a mother and daughter in her driveway, and her life subsequently takes a turn to prison.

The first part of Patsy's story reflects the jacket blurb and marketing for Blame--bracing, taut, suspenseful. The book description even contains an unnecessary, thoughtless spoiler, which doesn't affect my rating of the author's work but does illustrate that the publishers are intent to mislead readers into thinking that it is one kind of book when it is entirely another. The author is a superbly talented writer, i.e. her use of language, the written word, is obviously what earned a sterling endorsement from Richard Russo. Her metaphors and turns of phrase are verdant, fragrant, lyrical. Her characters are sympathetic and genuine. There were no false notes there. Her erudition is in the contemplative, the characterizations.

I adjusted to the temperament of the story, which often meanders and slows down to a staid portraiture of a collection of people. The narration actually reads like a 19th century novel at times, even though 20th century issues were involved. Now, that was unexpected. The author seemed to forgo what she started out to do and then changed course. The fuel-injected thriller morphed into a balmy sea. I went with it, but I want to warn readers--if you are looking for a tight, twisting, adrenaline-pumping thriller, look elsewhere. This is a cerebral look at rehabilitation and redemption. AA plays a vital role in this story, and the author does a stellar job of capturing the impact and life-altering possibilities of its sobering influences on existence.

Blame opens in 1981 and spans twenty years. The weakest area of this story is its architecture and structure. Some characters are introduced as poignant, but elusive. And then they recede or disappear awkwardly (which is too bad, since she creates compelling characters). Direction is lacking, uneven; it is as if the author had several books or story ideas and then labored strenuously to fuse them together. It came off as choppy and indistinct. She kept my interest up because of her beautiful passages; the warm and dusky tone; and the characters of Patsy and her gay friend, Gilles, whose brio is scene-stealing.

The concocted denouement was prosaic, tipping toward bathetic. As if the author decided to get back to writing a thriller again. I sighed. And the anticlimax was dour. Events felt cobbled together, the story was circumvented--and yet I read every word. And I would read her next book, too. She is a classy wordsmith, a sensuous writer, a fathomless thinker. Another draft or two would have helped this story to coalesce.

Jade Eby says

Originally published at my blog [Chasing Empty Pavements](#)

So my review of this novel is kind of like reviewing an old friend because I've been reading this book over the course of the last couple months for my Novel Writing class. Reading something over a couple months span I've realized has its pros. I feel like I have a really firm grasp on this novel and the characters because I've spent so much time with it. For my class, I had to break down the novel and really spend an adequate

amount of time with the chapters analyzing plot, character, pacing etc. Normally I don't spend that much time with a novel so I feel like this might just be one of the most well informed reviews I'll ever have up here.

The Good: Michelle Huneven really knows how to develop memorable characters. Joey, Brice, Patsy and Gilles are brilliant characters. Huneven takes her time developing them and by the end of the novel, Patsy pretty much jumps off the pages. I love the concept of Blame because it's based on a situation that could (and probably has) happened. A woman gets black out drunk and runs over two people killing them. It's not an overly abnormal situation, it's happened and it's not too hard to imagine a situation like that happening to someone today. Huneven takes this reality and really delves into the consequences with Patsy. We get a real sense of what prison is like for someone like Patsy and we learn how someone might handle their guilt and transition into society after their prison term has ended. We learn that Patsy settles for things in life that she normally wouldn't have just because she feels it's all she deserves. It's a way to punish herself, to remind herself of the crime she committed. I love the slight but powerful nod to the gay community and the start of the HIV virus that Huneven slides into the story. She also throws an enormous wrench in the plot towards the end that is crazy awesome and makes the story that much more deep and meaningful. I also thought Huneven did well adding comic relief to the parts that were a little depressing. It's not a book I felt utterly sad about when I was done. I felt a sense of accomplishment when it was over. I also thought the ending was very well done. It wraps up the loose ends but not in the "everything-ends-so-perfectly" way.

The Bad: Nothing really negative to say about the novel except that I HATE IT when authors don't put dialogue in quotations. I don't know why it irritates me as much as it does, but really.... That's why the quotations were made. What is the reasoning behind not using them? It bugs the crap out of me. But that really is just a nit-picky detail. I really don't have anything else negative to say about it.

Overall, I really thought this was a great book. It was well written, the plot and characters were fully and wonderfully developed and it was really a polished piece of literature. I give it an A!

Leslie Jamison says

I might destroy my credibility by making my first review five-stars, but I thought this book was wonderful: moving and surprising, unsentimental but unafraid to court deep feeling in its attention to characters and the quiet stasis of their pain, their small moments of redemption. I've often seen literature portray AA in blandly unequivocal terms, but here it comes a character in its own right--a bit unwieldy but totally powerful, a deeply human site for power wrangles and incredible empathy. The writing nails hard moments between characters and does (I'm biased here) a great job with SoCal--there's a harsh west-ness to it, a kind of gritty mythology. Anyway: it's good.

Sterlingcindysu says

[when you are drunk, you can't defend yourself because you don't know for sure what ha

Melissa says

Patsy wakes up in a jail cell to find out she's killed two people while driving drunk. After serving time in jail, Patsy must adjust to life after such a horrible experience and the guilt she feels.

One of my biggest problems with this book is the fact that it tells you there's a "huge twist" on the dust jacket. Once you start reading it you are just waiting for the twist, which is obvious from the start, but doesn't happen until almost the end of the book. I was incredibly disappointed that the publishers had decided to market the book this way.

Other than that it was good. To me it really wasn't the book I was expecting though, because it deals with so many issues at once. Alcoholism, AIDS, adultery, prison, homosexuality, psychiatry, blended families, treatment of prisoners and their reintegration into society and more. It's a lot to take in, but it's a quick read and there are some great characters. I particularly loved Patsy's friend Gilles. There aren't any "good" or "bad" characters, instead there are flawed people who have all made mistakes. I liked this book, and it definitely made me think, but I had too many problems with it to rate it any higher.

Barbok says

Do not read the book jacket flap.

I don't read a lot of popular fiction. However, I couldn't stop reading this one--I read the entire book in one day.

Blame is about guilt, redemption, forgiveness, love, understanding oneself, and maturing. A young woman, Patsy, frequently drinks until she blacks out. You know she's headed for disaster before she finds herself in prison for killing two people while driving during one of her black outs.

I don't think I'm giving anything away, as every review I've seen--including the book jacket flap--tells you more than this. I won't tell you more, thought, as I don't want to ruin the story for you.

If you plan on reading *Blame*, I recommend you DON'T read any reviews or blurbs--that includes the book's dust jacket. Because of the hints that were dropped, I already had a pretty good idea of what would happen. It would've been much more enjoyable if I hadn't seen what was coming.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

If this book was 80 pages shorter I'd be writing how much I admired this masterpiece. Instead, I'm yawning.

Patsy Maclemore is no hero or survivor. For most of the book she is a conventional upper middle-class professor who finds herself in prison for half of the book and a wife and stepmother for the other half. Except for the usual minor dramas and traumas of American life, nothing happens. She learns the rhythms of the diminished and controlled environment of safe minimum security prisons, but because of her Ph.D., she is allowed to teach ESL classes to inmates. Many prisoners become her friends. Later, she learns how to fight fires by joining an inmate firefighting team, which allows her much time outdoors. Her family regularly visits and writes to her in prison. She also becomes friends with the family she harmed. When she is released from prison two years later, her ex-boyfriend, Brice Courtland, reveals he is gay and introduces her to his

adorable lover, Gilles. Between her loving mother, father and brother, her still loving ex-boyfriend and his kind and talented partner, some of her old friends and new convict friends, she is gently introduced back into society upon her release. Her PO is mean, but that ends when later he turns out to be a close friend of the man Patsy eventually marries. Patsy marries a rich man, who owns a hotel and a lot of real estate. She settles into a conventional and comfortable wealthy environment. There are a few clouds in her life. AIDS begins to devastate her gay friends, her stepchildren are demanding and take away some of her space and time, and her husband has no sharp edges and provides unquestioning support without any intimacy. However, her angst is eased when she gets her job back at the college where she had been working before as a professor without any problems.

This is as dull as dirt to read. The only thing that makes it worthwhile to slog through is the extraordinary way the author, Michelle Huneven, quietly develops each character into real breathing people. These folks are not peculiar or strange - they are typical of privileged middle-class American family life. Huneven draws each person for the reader so clearly through her writing they feel like actual friends and neighbors you actually know.

What has changed Patsy's life is a horrible accident. She is an alcoholic and she used to drive drunk, often in a blackout. Despite having her driving license suspended and being a regular guest of the local jail, she pursues alcohol as avidly as she does sex, picking up one-night friends, while her family despairs. Then, when she wakes in the local jail yet again, she discovers to her horror she has killed a mother and her daughter while driving up her driveway. They were Jehovah's Witnesses. She has no memory of it, not then, not ever. She never recovers from the guilt. Her edgy wild lifestyle dies with the battered bodies. Armageddon, despite it's WASP and upper-class nature, has arrived.

I am disappointed. For me, this is a flawed book.

The opening chapter is not that of Patsy's point of view, but of a little girl who is the niece of Patsy's boyfriend, Brice. Patsy drunkenly pierces the niece's ears, who later must allow the holes to close due to the crooked hole placement. Eventually, the niece gets her ears pierced correctly, setting it all right, which is the theme of the book. (Being painfully pierced crookedly, then being painfully pierced correctly leveled. Get it?) While I enjoyed discovering the author's mild and muted mystery plot behind the accident, the tamed life of Patsy after the accident became a chore to read through. Blame is a burden every character in the novel carries - or not, as some characters are unaware of any possible guilt or blame laying at their doorstep, but obvious to the reader - and I think the author aptly, if gently, explores how such a horrible event affects Patsy's life, who accepts the blame for her actions. This is not a happily-ever-after story, even though nothing ever devolves into a hint of noir or, to me, real losses, for Patsy. She is guilt-ridden, but not miserable. Her life changes because of the accident, but her suffering is made safe and easy by her wealth, class and loving family/friends. She is a success story, if dully and duly processed.

Ah, how we fret over normal life and common occurrences! How really awful and life-changing storms can beget quiet normal adult personalities, if becalmed too much, perhaps, with boredom.

I highly recommend this novel to those readers who adored <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/86....>

Judy says

Because I live in the Los Angeles area, Michelle Huneven, who lives in the suburb of Altadena, is a local author, beloved by the LA Times and friendly to our local bookstores. I've been meaning to read Blame ever

since it was published. One of my reading groups picked this title from among my suggestions and thanks to them, I have finally gotten to it.

Often I read as an armchair traveler, visiting locations I will never go to physically. But there is a special pleasure derived from a book set in my own city. No matter how proficiently an author creates a sense of place, I never feel as much "there" as when I have actually been there myself, driven or walked the streets, experienced the weather and the sunsets.

Patsy MacLemoore, history professor and functioning alcoholic, is a character I might have met in Altadena or Pasadena. Her friends, lovers, associate professors, and her eventual husband are all familiar to me. Patsy's downfall and gradual rebirth as a sober, mature and self-confident woman resonated with me and made her a more sympathetic character.

Truthfully, Patsy is not a wholly admirable person. She specializes in bad decisions, she survives at the expense of others, and she does not like people that much, including herself. Thanks to the tragedy which took her down and thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous, she does straighten out her life and acquire some likable traits.

Blame has a twist. It is a good one, along the lines of the view that life is neither predestined nor driven by one's choices but is essentially random. Unfortunately I had read some reviews with spoilers, so I knew what was coming. Knowing this and waiting for it did spoil some of my reading experience.

Michelle Huneven has written a novel that covers the human condition, that addresses crime and punishment, and most of all she delves into the female psyche as well as any of my favorite female authors. Without sentimentality or heart-warming conclusions, Patsy's story is not what I would call hopeful but it is true to life and uplifting. She is a survivor because she is intelligent. Intelligence can be a burden and in the end Patsy willingly shoulders it.

Lauren says

This was another strange read for me; even though I knew this was a "three-star" book for me, I finished it. Here's why:

- Again, I liked the author's writing style. A lot. She rivals my favorite authors with her use of language and her descriptions.
- The plot was somewhat compelling... but in an almost trashy sort of way.

Given #1 (and also #2) it made sense for me to finish it. I also thought it was worthwhile to finish this book because I wanted to explore what it was that I didn't like about it. And the plot and writing were tolerable enough that I was able to read on.

Here's the rough plot: Woman goes to prison for killing two pedestrians while driving drunk. The book is about her life in prison and her life afterward.

Here's what I didn't like:

- Reading the book felt like looking through a camera that went in and out of focus. The first chapter is told from the point of view of a young girl, and the book's protagonist is only a minor character in this chapter. The rest of the book is told from the point of view of the woman mentioned before. The girl reenters the

action later in the story, but the first chapter felt VERY odd as a starting point. It felt that way at the beginning of the book and by the end of the book. It almost felt like the author was exploring a different genre (interrelated short stories?) or doing a character sketch and she just switched gears. I saw no reason for the switch in perspective. It wasn't mirrored elsewhere or used again. Just there. Strange decision and/or editing, IMO.

- To continue the "out of focus" metaphor, I didn't like the way in which the main character was developed. Again, she began as a bit character in the first chapter. In the second chapter she is charged with the crime, sent to prison, etc. And the author focuses in on the details of her life after realizing her crime, the mechanics of the trial, and her entry into prison. But the author goes light on the emotional detail, and I felt like I had very little background insight into who this woman was. We are to believe that the protagonist is a young (under 30) college professor with a horrible drinking problem, but we learn very little about her past initially or her immediate past -- just her present emotions. And at that point in the story she was a very improbable character to me. And I felt completely detached from her. Slowly throughout the story more of her character and history emerges, but I would have liked it sooner and I would have liked more. She still remained an enigma to me, as well as somewhat improbable. I kept feeling like the author was "writing what she knew" (young woman, academia) instead of writing a more probable character. Then again, I think that perhaps one of the messages was that alcoholism can afflict anyone, including somewhat improbable characters.

- Finally on the "out of focus" metaphor, I didn't like the way time was handled in the book. Parts of the story were told in great detail, and then parts flew by very quickly. It was hard to get the rhythm or pacing of the book. Initially it didn't feel like a Somerset Maugham or E.M. Forster or... some sort of epic story. But ultimately the story did take place over the course of decades, and we moved forward far into the future from where the book began. This can of course be done well, but in this book it felt erratic.

- There were a few characters in the book who also bothered me immensely, because they felt like stock characters or a woman's fantasy characters. There was the handsome ne'er-do-well rich boy with whom the protagonist cavorts in the first chapter. Then there was a cloying gay man later in the book who never worked for me, and I think there was supposed to be a lot of emotion around his character and his relationship with the protagonist. There were also two love affairs that also didn't feel worthy of a literary novel.

Ultimately I think that Michelle Huneven is talented in the mechanics of writing (sentences, descriptions) but not in theme or character development.

K says

Once again, a great premise and decent writing, while important, are not sufficient conditions for a great book. Once again, an author takes a complex story idea with rich potential and cops out by having it degenerate into Harlequin-worthy romance and ordinary family tale. Sigh.

Imagine waking up from an alcohol-induced blackout to be informed that you've killed two innocent people by driving drunk and are now in jail, awaiting sentencing. You, leading a standard middle-class life except for this unfortunate little alcohol problem, suddenly find yourself in a women's prison with people you never imagined you'd rub shoulders with. Great story concept, right?

Sadly, the execution left a lot to be desired. First, to borrow a line from one of Lisa's reviews, it's pretty annoying when books don't start on page 1. Instead of opening with the above scenario as I was led to expect, the book began with a long, marginally relevant anecdote in which the main character played a minor

role. This anecdote introduced some of the side characters but didn't do much else for the narrative other than delaying the story I thought I was going to read.

Eventually there was an abrupt shift in viewpoint and I arrived at Patsy's (the main character) shocking discovery. For me, this was the strongest part of the book – although I've never been in prison, the descriptions and interactions rang true and were gripping at times. Unfortunately the book began to go downhill and never made it back up. Patsy's return to sobriety, beginning with prison AA meetings and continuing after her release, seemed way too easy. When Patsy was released from prison, we were told it was a difficult adjustment for her but she seemed to be instantly surrounded by devoted new friends, including a young gay man who was clearly meant to be lovable and adorable but reminded me of Jar Jar Binks from Episode I of Star Wars. Patsy got involved with men again but this, too, was pretty simplistic and clichéd – eventually realizing that her first post-prison relationship was all about chemistry and didn't go deeper than that, Patsy rejected that guy for Mr. AA saint, who, like everyone else in the book, loved her with an unequivocal devotion that was difficult to understand. Some later ups and downs with Mr. AA Saint appeared to be more about Patsy's selfishness and somewhat inexplicable dissatisfaction than about anything AA Saint did wrong.

Other problems I had with this book included uneven pacing – some events were told in long, drawn-out detail while others were quickly summarized and moved past. I could not detect any rhyme or reason for the author's choosing to do this; the events which were described in full, even overwritten, were no more interesting or relevant than the ones which were mentioned in passing. In fact, overall much of Patsy's post-prison life was pretty banal. And maybe life really is like that, but I was hoping to be gripped by a compelling description of Patsy's struggle to get back into life, not reading endlessly about mundane details of day-to-day existence and uninteresting interactions.

Worst of all, while I certainly found Patsy's initial situation sympathetic I didn't find her particularly sympathetic as a character. Nothing about her resonated with me or made me want to read more about her or about her life. When she had an inner freak attack over her adult stepchild's accidentally nicking her fancy new kitchen counter I knew I was supposed to sympathize with Patsy, even admire her for her restraint in not blowing up at the stepchild. Instead I found myself thinking, Lady, I just don't want to know you. As someone who frequently opens my house to extended family members, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to have houseguests but still find it really hard to relate to a woman who actively resents her husband's allowing his children to stay with them because she wants to enjoy her top-of-the-line new kitchen unencumbered. A better author would have made me feel Patsy's pain despite the distance from my value system; this author failed in that respect. And by the way, ditto for guys who refuse to speak to friends for rejecting their decorating ideas. I'm supposed to like these characters?

Finally, the dramatic plot twist toward the end was visible a mile away; the book's description basically gave it away. The way this twist came about required a great deal of suspension of disbelief – too much – and in my opinion, while this development did raise a few interesting questions, ultimately it didn't do a lot for the story as a whole.

Too bad. I'm not a Jodi Picoult person, but I actually think this book would have worked better had she written it.

Laren says

Patsy wakes up in jail after yet another alcoholic blackout only to find herself charged with the death of two

Jehovah's Witnesses, who were found run over in Patsy's own driveway. Since she already had her driver's license revoked during her last blackout, and she doesn't remember anything from that night, she agrees to a plea bargain. The book follows her journey through prison, AA meetings, rebuilding her life after prison, and generally trying to atone for this act.

Then decades later, evidence turns up that proves she wasn't actually driving that night after all. According to one review, this is supposed to be "an electrifying moment, a joyous, fall-off-the-couch-with-surprise moment" for the reader, but frankly I already figured it out just by reading the book flap so this was wholly expected by me. What wasn't expected was just how extremely far into the book I was before this came up. I was also led to believe that the book is a study of Patsy's complicated life reassessments in the face of this new information. And yet, she didn't act like it was very complicated after all. She just quietly moved on in what little parts of the book she had left.

This book dragged through so much of her life, and yet so little of it was considered in the "reassessment" that I felt much of it was made irrelevant in the end and I resented being exposed to it at all. The book really only came alive with the character of Gilles, but then he died and wasn't mentioned much again, leaving me puzzled exactly why the author would spend so much character development for a character who appeared to leave no discernable lasting impact in shaping who our main character became. In fact, it was downright odd that our main character didn't seem to be bowled over with lasting grief by the loss of her supposed-best-friend who helped her get back into life after leaving prison. Basically, it emphasized to me that this character was still numb to life, but she just didn't need alcohol to make herself so anymore.

Meg says

This was such a fantastic book. I deeply cared about multiple characters and think this author writes characters with incredible skill. Blame is the story of Patsy, a young history professor and alcoholic who, after a night of blackout drinking, is found guilty of killing two Jehovah's Witnesses, who were walking down her driveway, with her car (and on a suspended license). Having no real memory of that night, Patsy is terrorized by guilt and endures prison while resolved to change her life through sobriety. We observe Patsy's life in and after prison, for nearly two decades before a shocking twist related to her case sends Patsy reeling and questioning everything she once believed. Minor characters, both family and relatives, are so finely wrought that it is hard not to read this novel without significant emotional investment. I had a lump in my throat through 2/3 of it, personally. Great story and messages without being moralistic, pertinent themes, and a great examination of collective mortal struggle. Bonus: While the plot is understandably grim, the characters themselves (and their beliefs and outlook) provide welcome humor throughout the story.

I've already reserved the author's previous novels at my library and I'm happy to have picked this book up on a whim.

Bruce Stern says

Last night I finished reading a book that for three-quarters of it I disliked. My dislike was exacerbated by the hoopla about it, including a nomination for a National Book Critics Circle award. Was I missing something,

or many somethings, in my reading? How come many Amazon.com reviewers liked this book? I submitted a comment—no more reviews were permitted—in response to one of the reviewers. A woman who enjoyed the book answered me, in part, by encouraging me to finish the book. I did, and I'm glad I did.

Patsy MacLemoore is a recently minted, twenty-eight year old Ph.D. graduate in history, teaching at a small Southern California college. She's full of life, full of herself, a party girl, and an alcoholic. With several DUI arrests already, she is convicted of killing a young mother and her daughter while driving her car, an event she doesn't remember.

While serving two-years in prison, she reluctantly begins attending AA meetings. Patsy is aware of her responsibility for the tragedy, an awareness that has her consider how she's lived her life.

After prison she works to re-establish her life. There's uncertainty. She takes redemptive action, attends AA meetings where she forms new attachments, new friends, who along with the friends and family who stuck by her after her imprisonment form a family for her. She eventually marries. Most significantly, she grows up. Over the twenty-plus years of the story, beginning in 1980, she develops a strength of character, a strength of being, a loving compassion for herself and others, including a raffish and devoted former lover, a young gay AA confidante and close friend, who gets HIV/AIDS, and others who she is able to see the beauty within, and the flaws, as she sees and accepts her own imperfections. She practices fidelity to her marriage despite her encounter with a man who almost sweeps her away. She's loyal and supportive of friends and family; gaining strength and learning to trust her own voice and her intuition. Patsy becomes a self-actualizing person.

My one significant dislike of the book was the author's writing of dialog without quotation marks. It was challenging, confusing and made for unnecessary work for me.

"Blame", in short, is a quiet and intimate look into what makes life worth living, how does one live with a burden of responsibility which could incapacitate so many, and what is important about being in the world, and with other people.

Book Riot Community says

I'm currently writing a story that covers a long period of time in the life of one person and I'm finding it brings up some really interesting challenges. Blame covers a good 20 years in the life of a woman and the author does it so perfectly that it should be handed out to fiction writers as a passage of time master class. The story of Patsy, the protagonist, begins during a particularly bad drunken spell, continues through a stint in prison, her first days back on the outside, and then a long, sober life afterward. When I finished the book, I immediately went back and read the first chapter again and was so impressed with all the subtle and well-paced character development Huneven managed to accomplish.

— Tracy Shapley

from The Best Books We Read In October 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/10/31/riot-r...>

Kristen Jett says

This is a do-not-finish for me. In all honesty, it was really a dead on arrival but I suffered through 225 pages

before I got too angry to even care. I rarely ever DNF books - I'll choke it down and go through it no matter what. I actually started a twitter conversation about this. I couldn't care less if the main character (or most of them really) was hit by a bus Regina George style. I was so morally angry at the book and the author when I stopped that I knew I'd be furious if she did indeed take the book down the path where I thought it was heading. The most interesting thing about the book for me was the simple fact that I didn't want to read it.

I spent those 225 pages in a state of apathy towards the main character, Patsy. I didn't like her. Every now and then I might feel a small twinge of pity, but mostly I didn't care. The most interesting thing about Patty is that she drinks. There is some great insight at understanding the brain of an alcoholic - I found that intriguing. However, Patty's character is so...gray. Blah. No substance. We're told more about her than we see, and her own speech gives little away about her character or depth.

The "climax moment" about drove me to ripping my hair out, and was the final decision to not finish the book. If it went the way I thought it would, I'd be furious at the author and ready to go on a verbal crusade about alcoholism and how it morally should be represented. If it didn't go that way...well I still wasn't loving the book, so why finish?

I think this is a book that one either loves or hates. I sadly fell on the bottom side of the spectrum. I am curious to read something else by the author and compare. I didn't dislike her writing style - just this particular book.

Terry says

Another one of those books that when I look at my library record, I have to stop and think, what was THAT book? Never a good sign, no? Anyway. I liked this book... enough. It's fairly derivative of Anne Tyler's standard plot structure, so if you are a fan of Anne Tyler, you might like this, although the writing *style* is slightly different.

Speaking of structure--the book has an utterly bizarre and unjustified opening. It begins from the point of view of a teenage girl and continues on at some length from her POV, but what she witnesses is so tangentially related to the subsequent plot, and the way she interacts with the person who ends up being the actual main character of the book, is--again--so tangential that it really makes no sense whatsoever. When the teenage girl shows up hundreds of pages later it just... is jarring and almost nonsensical. I just have no idea why the book begins with one character and then switches to another character for the REST of the ENTIRE novel. It really made no logical or stylistic sense at all.

Melissa says

This book had promise: Patsy, a woman in her twenties, a party girl with some DUIs in her past, wakes up in jail and learns that she killed a mother and daughter while driving drunk. It sounded like a great premise for a novel, but the author didn't do the story justice. Patsy is sent to prison for two years. Granted it's 1981 and the very stringent drinking and driving laws were only evolving, but only two years? The author spends very little time on Patsy's prison experience. She attends AA meetings while in prison and continues them once she is paroled, but you don't get a sense that Patsy has any real difficulty maintaining her sobriety. Out of prison, she has virtually no problems returning to her previous life (sans alcohol). Instead, the author chooses to focus on Patsy's love life and her choices in men, and it's all downhill from there. The supposed climax/plot twist is so coincidental that it is unbelievable and underwhelming. Also, any conversations in this

book are presented without quotation marks. Why? The one winner in this book is the town of Altadena, California, which is where the story takes place and where the author lives in real life. It sounds like a wonderful place to live, and the author does a better job of portraying her hometown than her characters.

Vegantrav says

Blame is an incredible example of a character study: the protagonist, Patsy, as well as Gilles, Brice, and Cal are all brilliantly drawn. We readers come to know and understand these characters intimately, deeply. And we grow to love Patsy and Gilles, and even Brice.

The plot itself is extremely intriguing though there's not a lot of action: this story is a slow simmer throughout, never quite coming to a boil; even the critical moment is reserved and quiet, though nonetheless enthralling.

When one hears people talk about literary novels as opposed to mass-market-appeal fiction, this novel should come to mind. Michelle Huneven's ability to paint a portrait of the human psyche is genius; she is a most apt student of human nature. She tells her story slowly and in, at times, laborious detail, but it is an intriguing, captivating tale, though the typical fiction reader will have to be patient to reap the rewards of this tale. There is nothing rushed or hasty in this novel.

Blame is quiet and elegant. It's probably not for everyone, but for those who like great literature with complex characters realistically drawn, this novel will not disappoint.

Nette says

This was like the best-written soap opera ever -- elegantly plotted, gorgeous prose, but full of juicy drama and surprises and coincidences. Also, talk about timely, it's set in brushfire country -- Arcadia, Pasadena, Altadena -- and even features scenes of prison fire crews. I couldn't stop reading it. (My only quibble: she doesn't use quotation marks in her dialog. Only Roddy Doyle can get away with that, and that's because his books are nothing BUT dialog.)

Jjanovyak says

I'm sure I should reflect a bit before I post this, but I think I'll decline to control the impulse and just go with it. I enjoyed this novel thoroughly and I want to say so right now.

Huneven is a beautiful writer and I am off next to reserve her earlier titles at my local library. She moves this story unflinchingly through pain and betrayal, and doesn't cut anyone any slack. Yet she treats the characters kindly, and doesn't reduce anyone to a cartoon.

My vote for best quote from this book comes from Burt, brother of the lead character, Patsy: "But don't you find as you get older, you say to hell with that psychology and self-help crap and just start doing what you want?"

But the moment when I felt the most identification came with Patsy's response: "I have no idea what I want."

Both sides of that exchange are so human.

ADDED THE FOLLOWING DAY: Yep, I should have given it a bit of time before I posted that. Re-reading, I see that I need to explain what I meant.

The way in which Huneven steers her people through circumstances from which they emerge without bitterness is her great achievement here. They're not elevated to a glowing, saint-like cartoon of pure goodness. They're kept to a human scale, and, because they are, the reader is given the chance to think. As we consider the compromises and satisfactions that allow these characters to go on, we are aware of our own.
