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Red Hen Press

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# *The Boxer of Quirinal*

POETRY BY  
John Barr

Poems of our struggle to give proof of life in the eternal presence of war.

All animals struggle to survive. In John Barr's poems, the success of the heron hunting, the albatross breeding, and the inchworm spinning give proof of life. But for us, that struggle includes the eternal presence of war. Does the fall of Rome, the Battle of Shiloh, the Normandy Landings—and today's wars—give proof of life or only of the struggle?

## **PRAISE FOR DANTE IN CHINA (Previous Collection)**

“W. H. Auden once longed for the return of a ‘civic poetry,’ by which he meant two things: a poetry whose subjects would be interesting to people who had no primary investment in the art, and a poetry that managed to entertain and instruct at the same time. How happy Auden might have been with this inventive, various, and large-spirited book by John Barr! I hope it finds the wide audience it certainly deserves.”

—**Christian Wiman**, author of *Once in the West*, finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award

“The book's powerfully imagined final poem, ‘Aristotle's Will,’ is like nothing in our poetry. . . . It is a wonderful work.”

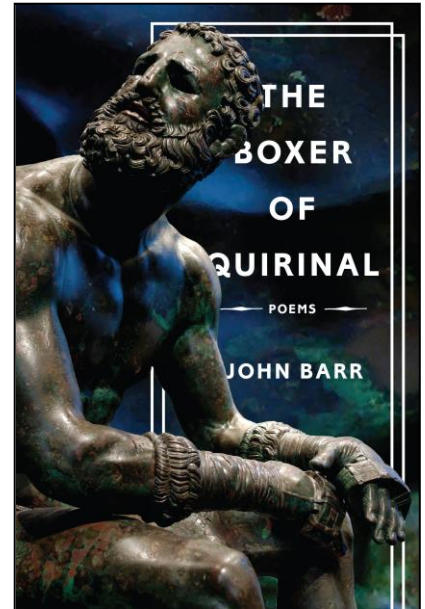
—**Ilya Kaminsky**, co-editor of *The Ecco Anthology of International Poetry*

“John Barr's poems stake out the intersection of wit, philosophy, grace, shadow, and an unabridged dictionary. And they travel far.”

—**Sarah Lindsay**, author of *Debt to the Bone-Eating Snotflower*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

John Barr grew up in a rural township outside Chicago. An honors graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Business School, he served on Navy destroyers for five years, including three tours to Vietnam. His poems have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Poetry*, and *Flaunt Magazine* among many periodicals, and in anthologies published by Bloodaxe Books, *National Geographic*, and the *Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of American Poetry*. He was president of the Poetry Foundation and publisher of *Poetry* magazine for its first decade. *The Boxer of Quirinal* is his fifth book of poems to be published with Red Hen Press, and his tenth to be published over the past thirty years.



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**FROM THE BOXER OF QUIRINAL**

**Heron**

*For Warren Douglas*

He comes when the light is right,  
banking the pond's perimeter  
to land and step into a statue's stillness.

When the light is right the fish come in to feed,  
feeling it safe to nose among the weeds,  
to risk the proximity of feet, of legs  
that rise like reeds to a distant body above.

Once I saw him come in heavy rain,  
knowing it would roil the fisheye view.  
I watched his neck—a question mark—release,  
his beak harpoon a startled shape,  
and saw it go head-first down the hatch.

Perfect hunger. Perfect hunter. Perfect prey.  
I wait for the heron to come.

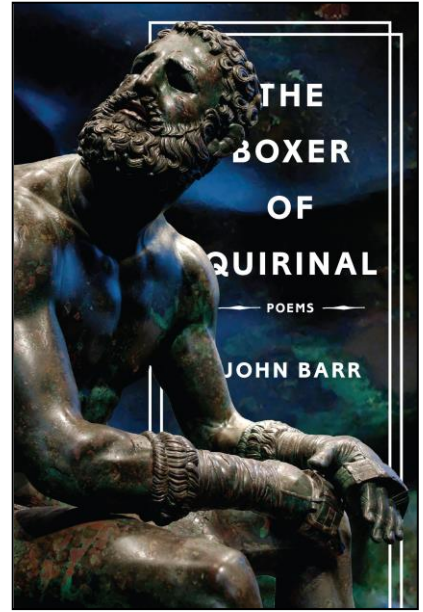
**The Boxer of Quirinal**

*For two gross of statues,  
For a few thousand battered books.*  
Ezra Pound

When Goths cut the aqueduct  
the Romans buried you with care—  
a bronze presence to protect.  
Lost a millennium and more,

you were found, foundry-perfect:  
hide-wrapped hands, ruined head—  
battered nose, ears, neck  
still fresh with copper flecks of blood.

You look up, spent utterly  
by what laurels cost the victor,  
see with an explosive vacancy  
Europe girding for the Great War.



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