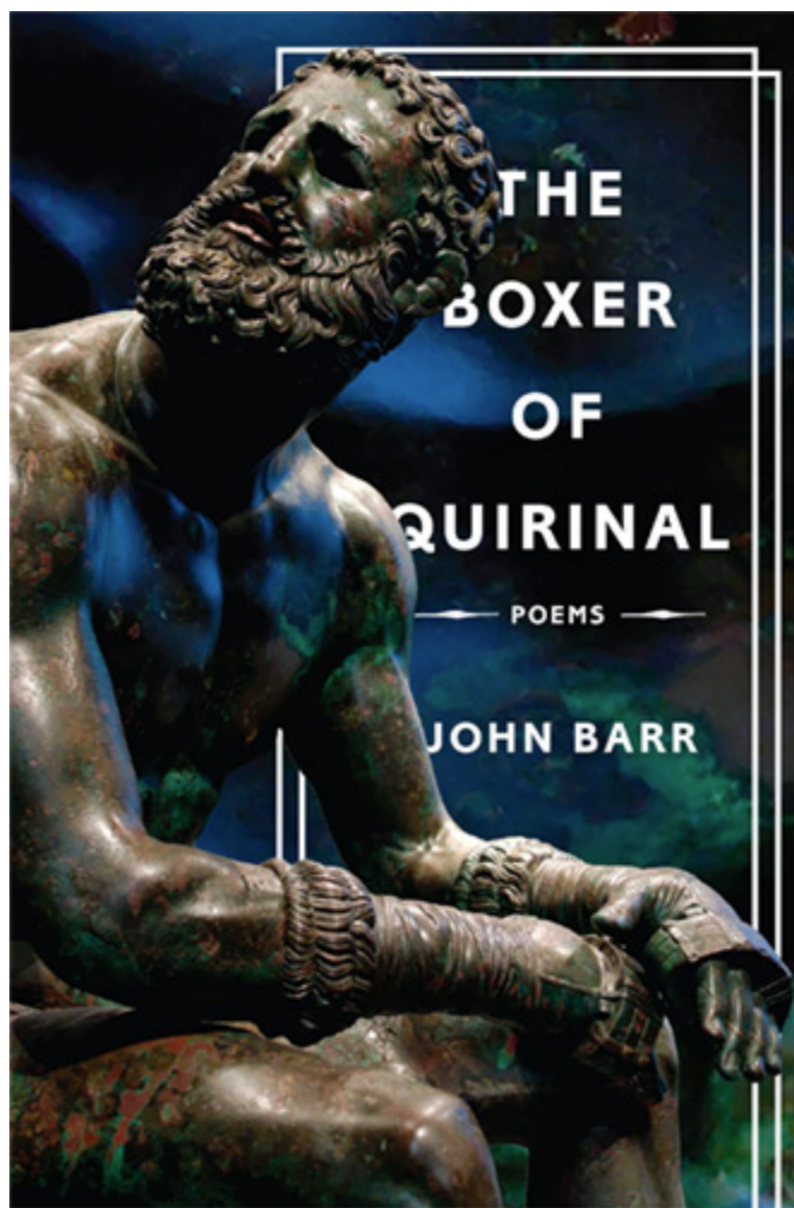


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## The Boxer of Quirinal by John Barr



*The Boxer of Quirinal* (Red Hen Press, 80 pp. \$22, paper) is a new collection of John Barr's poems. Barr, a former president of the Poetry Foundation, served as a Navy officer on destroyers for five years which included three tours of duty in the Vietnam War theater of operations. This is his tenth book of poetry. Some of his previous books, including *The Hundred Fathom Curve* (2011), contain poems inspired by his service in the war.

The poems in *The Boxer of Quirinal* deal with life and death in the natural world as well as in conflicts created by humans. The title comes from an ancient Greek statue depicted on the cover.

A good example of Barr's poetic style is in this stanza of "Season of Spores":

*The scatter of moon-colored stuff*

*erupts from the mire, unfurls*

*a bric-a-brac of fluke and ruff,*

*lavender cap, topiary puff.*

Here is the entire poem, "The Hoard":

*A weekend seeker, sweeping his detector*

*through abandoned fields, hears the tone.*

*Digging deep he finds no urn of coins,*

*penannular pins, but a box—locked*

*and full of unsigned poems. Words*

*beaten thin and fitted to a face;*

*the shaped whistle of a master's voice*

*from a world not ours —overheard.*

*Fascicles in an Amherst attic,*

*bulls on cave walls in Dordogne:*

*Troves of inner gold, hidden—*

*but why? And if not us, who for?*

The book also contains a poem about Scotland's first lending library, and one titled "In a Taverna" that consists of a conversation among Greek mythology's Leda, Europa, and Cassandra. "Chicago, Tell Me Who You Are" celebrates the people and culture of the city, but the first stanza won't allow you to forget its early history:

*I'm a city with a past, a memory*

*of fire. No fear is like the fear*

*of a wooden city on a windy day.*

*Even the people were on fire. "Throw me in the river.*

*she told her husband. "I'd rather drown than burn."*

These words from "The Gods of War" very well could evoke what Barr saw in Vietnam a half century ago:

*Each side claims the other fired first.*

*In the soft dark, sudden muzzle flashes,*

*tracers arching orange against the sky'*

*star shells falling terrible and red*

*like the gates of hell opening, closing.*

John Barr creates dense, thoughtful poetry that will challenge you at every turn. Stay with it and you'll be the better for it.

Barr's website is [johnbarrpoetry.com](http://johnbarrpoetry.com)

—Bill McCloud

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