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Latha Bourne, the attractive postmistress of Stay More — a small town in the Arkansas Ozarks — didn't expect to see Every Dill again. More than ten years before, he had raped her, robbed the bank, and vanished - leaving her pregnant. Now Every has the nerve to reappear. An erotic yet wonderfully innocent tale of loss and of finding.

Lightning Bug Details

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From Reader Review Lightning Bug for online ebook

Sue says

Well I just wrote a review I absolutely loved and the system killed it! Now I don't know whether to try again or give up. I doubt I'll be as successful this time but here goes.

Once again, On Southern Literary Trail has introduced me to a wonderful new author. Donald Harrington has created his own world of Stay More, Arkansas, in the Ozarks, and peopled it with odd and occasionally somewhat mythic men and women (and a few children) who live in this tiny mountain spot with nature and not much else. Latha Bourne, mother nature, the town's Post Mistress is the focus of attention for the novel, being the center of others' love, lust, enmity, and occasional spite. But being the almost magical being she is, she floats above most of what happens around her, aware, sometimes directing the action, wondering about the future and the past (for there are gaps in her life). I am not going to fill in those gaps here...that is part of the magic, and Harrington's telling is quite imaginative.

This is a novel of magic and sex and the backwoods and love and hope and despair. It's a novel of humans basically. And fun!

I love the final paragraph of the book. It seems the quintessential description of the American summer evening.

IT WILL END WITH THIS SOUND:

*the screen door pulled outward in a slow swing, the
spring on the screen door stretching vibrantly, one
sprung tone and fading overtone high-pitched even against
the bug-noises and frog-noises, a plangent twang, WRIRRAAANG,
which, more than any other sounds, evokes the heart of
summer, of summer evenings, of summer evenings there in
that place, and ends the music, ends the song, on a last
quavering tone of loss and search and finding, of an open
door about to close. WRENCH. WRUNG. WRINGING.*

Do screen doors still make that sound, the scream of the metal coil and the slap of the wooden door on the wood house? Now the doors are of man-made materials and they slide shut with springs made to be silent. Are there other summer memories being created now?

Definitely recommended. 4

Connie D says

I have mixed feelings about this book. There are certain appealing aspects for me: quirky characters, unusual

story and interesting writing style (often using 2nd person "you" point of view). Some of the unappealing aspects are similar: oversharing (for me) of quirkiness and sex, unnecessarily strange point of view, irritating characters, and an interesting but rather unpleasant story.

P.S. After finishing the book, I read a note that said Donald Harington lost his hearing at the age of 12. This shocked me because sound is one of the most effective aspects of this book. Harington's description of sounds at the end of the book is beautiful and encyclopedic...and shows much higher awareness than your usual hearing person.

David says

The lightning bug, or firefly, is neither a bug nor a fly, but a beetle. I like bug, because it has a cozy sound, a hugging sound, a snug sound, it fits her, my Bug.

Deep in the dark blue air sing these lives that make the summer night. The lightning bug does not sing. But of all these lives, it alone, the lightning bug alone, is visible. The others are heard but not seen, felt but not seen, smelled but not seen.

Lightning Bug is set in the early 1930s, in the fictional Ozark town of Stay More, Arkansas. Stay More (falsely called "Staymore" by the U.S. Postal Service) is a tiny town that's only getting tinier. It has a single post office, run by Latha Bourne, who is taking care of her niece, a beautiful girl named Sonora who provides the town's nightly entertainment with the boys who gather on Latha's front lawn to fight for her attention.

Stay More, like most small towns, is full of secrets and petty grudges. Years ago Latha was engaged to one man and in love with another. They both went off to war, and only one came back. Every Dill wanted to marry Latha, but she refused. Then Every was run out of town. Before he left, he raped Latha and robbed the bank.

Years later, he comes back to a town that still remembers and hates him. Now he's a revivalist preacher, and he's still in love with Latha. And Latha might still be in love with him.

Latha is a very earthy woman; the narrative shifts between third-person limited and the first-person POV of "Dawny," a five-year-old boy in love with Latha at the time of the events in the story, relating facts and history and his own still-burning torch for his pre-pubescent crush. Is Dawny the author, Donald Harington? It's not clear because the author is an unreliable narrator, just as Latha is when the third-person limited omniscient narrator dips into her thoughts. The story is an interesting little small-town drama about the return of Every Dill and the unveiling of all of Latha's secrets.

I was impressed by both the plotting, which held suspense and interest even in such a low-key story, and the prose, which really expressed the mood of a 30s Ozark summer. Harington's Ozarker dialog was flawless (well, not like I would actually know, but it seemed authentic without being forced stylistically, or unreadable). And the book was a fine blend of humor with a streak of darkness, from the Reveneruer tied up in the barn who seduces his captor's daughter to Latha's escape from an insane asylum to the final will-they-won't-they? between Latha and Every. Latha refuses to marry Every until he makes love to her; Every

refuses to make love to Latha until they are married.

Doc Swain jumped out of his car and kicked it viciously with his foot. "Goddamn scandalous hunk of cruddy tinfoil!" he yelled and kicked it again. "Sonabitchin worthless gas-eatin ash can!" Then he turned wildly about, yelling, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

"Here's your true sign, Every," Latha said to him. "The Lord wants you to be a doctor."

"Naw," he said. "I'm afraid it's something else."

"A horse?"

This book is Ozark-literary — there are interludes about the chemical properties of lightning bugs, and Latha has a poignant, humorous, and semi-profound conversation with Jesus, and in between there is an awful lot of sex.

That said, if the idea of a woman holding a torch for her rapist turns you off, this book might make you throw it against a wall. But if you believe a rapist can be redeemed, then Latha and Every's "romance" is kind of twisted, yet believable and oddly touching.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"The smells of things in the air of the night are the calls of lives wanting to be found. Why else are fragrances fragrant?

We see to find, we hear to find, we smell to find and be found. Until we find or be found, we are lost and wanting."

The theme of the mood of an ending is of a loss or finding. I first came across Donald Harington 20+ years ago. He wasn't a priority because, heck, I was working in the bookstore business, and new and exciting books were passing beneath my nose every day. I was also trying to make a dent in the established classics, and Harington, as he does today, falls somewhere in that middle ground between a classic and I-will-never-get-around-to-reading-him. In the book world, Harington is a cool author to have read, but no points off for never hearing about him.

Recently, Daniel Woodrell was on tour, and I wish I'd made a trek to see him. I did send my books to a friend in Houston who kindly had Mr. Woodrell sign them for me. I would have liked to have asked Woodrell about Donald Harington because geographically they resided not far apart, and their writing, though distinctly different, could share the same shelf. If anyone sees Woodrell before me, do ask him about Harington. I will bet he has an opinion worth hearing.

Latha Bourne is our main character, and what a main character she is. *"She's got eyes like a startled doe's, and a mouth like a pink morning-glory just openin, and hair like the smoke in a kerosene lantern, and she's tall and built like a young cat."*

Donald Harington

Donald Harington grew up in Little Rock, but spent his summers with relatives up in the Appalachian mountains. Due to illness at a young age, he was nearly deaf, but his ear was tuned to the cadences of those hillbilly relatives. Latha and the people of Stay More speak a version of English that I could probably understand better after a couple of mason jars of moonshine and after my jaw had worked through a twist of tobacco.

MOONSHINE

Thinking about Donald, or Dawn as he was called up in the hills and also the name he uses as the narrator of this book, is a 5 to 6 year old boy who is the youngest member of the legion of males in love with Latha Bourne. I would be a little nervous about my son spending that much time up in the hills exposed to the skewed morality of those folks. Case in point: *"Latha had already lost her virginity, at the age of eleven, to some third or fourth cousin of hers. (Well, as they say in this part of the country, a virgin, by definition, is a five-year-old girl who can outrun her daddy and her brothers, so I guess Latha was a late-developer or else just lucky or, from another point of view, unlucky.)"*

Latha has a vivid imagination of the sexual nature. Harington gives us explicit detail in what she would like to do with the ice delivery man, the tomato farmer, and man who happens to stumble into the same fishing spot as her (well she went a little beyond imagination with him). I recommend keeping a fan close to hand to cool down the flush in your cheeks for those moments in the book.

Latha is in love with Every Dill, a man of lower class (honestly, the class structure in this community from top to bottom could be separated by the width of a sheet of paper), a thief(unconfirmed), a rapist(up for interpretation) and a born again preacher(unsure if it is his true calling). The love story between Every and Latha is the glue of the story, and everything that happens revolves around whether or not they will or will not finally get married.

I hope that everyone has had an opportunity to be in a field at night when the lightning bugs are out. It is as if the stars have come down to earth.

I vacillated between 3 and 4 stars, but decided because I did enjoy the book and plan to read more in the Stay More saga that I would give it the bump up to 4 stars. Harington has captured a way of life that I will never, Zeus willing, ever experience first hand. Growing up on a farm in Kansas I did identify with: *"the screen door pulled outward in a slow swing, the spring on the screen door stretching vibrantly, one sprung tone and fading overtone high-pitched even against the bug-noises and frog-noises, a plangent twang, WRIRRAAANG, which, more than any other sound, more than those other sounds, evokes the heart of summer, of summer evening, of summer evenings there in that place."*

Bill says

first of all, many thanks to my good friend karen, who enlightened me as to the existence of donald harington.she has impeccable literary taste as every book/author she has recommended to me has been

great.

considering i have spent a fair amount of my life browsing new and used bookstores and libraries i find it amazing that i have never heard of or ever seen a book by a great author who has written 15 books.

lightning bug is the first of 14 books (unfortunately harington died fairly recently so there won't be any more) set in the very small town (pop. 113) of stay more, arkansas. if it's action-packed highly plot driven fiction you're after, you won't find it here. however if it's beautifully written, character based fiction you like, you should really give this a try. not that there is no plot, there very definitely is. however he writes mainly about fairly ordinary people doing fairly ordinary things. and that's just fine with me.

Lexy says

I can easily see why this is a hit with the men. Latha Bourne, no relation to Jason Bourne, I'm assuming, is quite the sexy mama. She has men, boys, of all ages, vying for her attention. I mistakenly thought this would be a good book to listen to while working and uh-hum soon found out I should best have read this late at night under the covers with a flashlight. It is a good story though, by an author I have just become acquainted with, thanks to Southern Lit book club. I understand there are many more books following with the same characters as I need to understand more about Latha, such as her visit in the mental hospital. I will definitely need to re-read this as listening to the drone voice, I was not understanding that (some of?) the sexual conquests Latha was engaging in were merely in her mind and not actually happening. It was only in going back through the book that I noticed the layout, no pun intended, and understood. Oh, what a fool am I, haha. I think I also confused Latha with her daughter Sonora at the beginning. I really need to either give up working or give up listening to books while working....

Larry Bassett says

A cursory reading of GR reviews suggests that Donald Harington is an undiscovered gem. He is a recipient of the Oxford American Lifetime Award for Contributions to Southern Literature. Lightning Bug (published in 1970) is set in Stay More, Arkansas, a fictional Ozark Mountains town. He is certainly undiscovered by GR readers: this book has garnered only 9 reviews and 63 ratings. But, importantly, over 80% of the reviews gave the book four or five stars.

This is the leadoff book that introduces one of the main characters of a thirteen book series. If you like this one, there are twelve more just out there waiting for you. This book takes place in the 1930s. One of the descriptors of the series "gentle humor and earthy passion." This first book of the series is also called a "candid narrative [that] weaves into an erotic yet wonderfully innocent tale of loss and of finding." (Source: <http://www.donaldharington.com/home.html>)

Slapstick. Ribald. Bawdy. You may think of Shakespeare. But the bard might move over and leave some room for Donald Harington. Or should we say raunchy? Coarse? Rude? Vulgar? Lewd? But most readers like the book quite a lot. So what does that mean?

Ella Jean Dinsmore came running into the kitchen, hollering, "Maw! Baby Jim fell through the hole in the outhouse!" Selena Dinsmore smiled absently and said, "Aw, just leave him go Ella

Jean. It's be easier to have another'n than to clean that un up, even if we could get him out."

...

Latha had already lost her virginity, at the age of eleven, to some third or fourth cousin of hers. Well, as they say in this part of the country, a virgin, by definition, is "a five-year-old girl who can outrun her daddy and her brothers," so I guess Latha was a late-developer or else just lucky – or, from another point of view, unlucky.

...

Frank Murrison woke to discover he had a morning hard, but Rosie protested, "It's Sattidy. My day off." He waited for it to subside, but when it did not he went to the barn and used a ewe.

Also filled with country superstitions like

Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger
Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger
Sneeze on Wednesday, sneeze for a letter
Sneeze on Thursday, sneeze for better
Sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow,
Sneeze on Saturday, a friend you seek
Sneeze on Sunday, the Devil will be with you all week.

...

When the coffee was making, she noticed that the coffeepot was rattling on the stove. That was sure enough a sign that a visitor would come before nightfall.

...

Maybe this was all happening because of a configuration of those signs that morning: the redbird flying downward, the white cat in the road, singing before breakfast, the shirt on the wrong side out, sneezing on Saturday, the coffeepot rattling on the stove . . .

Initially I thought that the book stereotyped poor rural mountain people in what must be intended to be a friendly portrayal but comes across to me as mean spirited. In some ways I adapted to this (and it became less offensive) as I moved through the book and discovered additional aspects of the characters that gave them more depth. But I wonder what aspects of the book the author felt were true to life and typical.

This is another book recently obtained through bookswap. This is how I have discovered Harington, a southern author previously unknown to me. This book looks like new except that its spine is dried out and tends to crack when being read loosening the individual signatures. Regrettably, that falling apart will send the book to the recycling bin when I finish it. At least it will be recycled rather than sent to the landfill. Glad I got to read it before it died!

Post Script: The escape from the mental hospital in Chapter Four: Evening is seriously presented but so far into the realm of unlikely that it was almost embarrassing to read. How did the author come to believe that this part of the story was even slightly plausible even for a book of fiction? Oh. What? It's not supposed to be believable. And you will have to look up Pirandello yourself. Personally, I couldn't quite make the case. And the ending? Well, you had to be there.

Justin Haynes says

So LIGHTNING BUG by Donald Harrington is one of those good ol' Southern novels that you feel like you've read 100 times before. He talks about the bull frogs croaking and the whipperwills moaning and he describes the smell of honeysuckle and fresh dew on a warm summer morning. We've all read this a million times and it's boring as hell.

Then something happens. The real meat of the novel starts and I realized I have this wonderful treat on my hand. It's like a cool popsicle on a hot August afternoon(sorry). This sweat, erotic, intensely political, and wholly innocent coming of age tale about an Ozark postmistress and her life long love affair/hatred for a traveling evangelist makes for one of the better reads I have had in quiet sometime.

LIGHTNING BUG is the story of Latha Bourne and Every Dill and their dysfunctional love that somehow stands the test of time. It's a story hope and redemption; pain and loss, and it's narrative-chocked full of intense prose and geographic dialect-weaves the reader on this wonderful tale like kudzoo overtaking a house(dead gum!).

In the end LIGHTNING BUG is not the greatest Southern novel. Harrington was not concerning himself with the same issues found in Faulkner, Wolfe, or O'Connor. But what Harrington did with LIGHTNING BUG is craft a story that reminds what it's like to be an outsider and reminds us what it's like to be in love. And for that we as readers should be thankful we once had the talents of Donald Harrington.

The theme will be of loss. Of loss and search, of losing and finding, of wanting. The cow wears the cowbell so she can be found; the distant dull thing-thang of the cowbell must now sound like a French horn, which sounds of loss and yearning and the always possible finding. The cow can be found. The cricket chirps, the tree frog peeps, the bullfrog croaks, to find, to search, to be found. In the finding-time, which is evening, night.

The lightning bug flashes to find, and finds by flashes and is found by flashes. But is lost until found. The flashing is of loss, and yearning.

Eh?Eh! says

Set in Harrington's fictional, beloved representation of a town of Stay More, we learn about the mysterious, beautiful postmistress, Latha Bourne. I'm glad I was directed to read *The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks* first, because I have a frame of reference for the characters and events...anyway. Harrington is terrific and I wish I'd been told about him long ago.

I'm finding that I have difficulty liking a book if I can't somehow imagine how the character feels, if I can't imagine myself being that character. If I tried to tally the books that I've really loved, they'd probably weigh heavily on the side of female protagonists. Not that I'm much like Latha Bourne, but the way she was limited, the agony of bad choices, not being permitted to decide, I can sort of identify with it.

This is a long-delayed love story, set during one very eventful day with flashbacks that show what happened

and why things turned out the way they did. There's quite a bit of yearning and loins, hah, and a little boy narrator that I wasn't able to figure out what happened to him.

Wonderful.

Warwick says

I can't quite work out if what I just read was supposed to be a parody, or take-off, or lampoon of romantic conventions, or if it was just...really objectionable. You know all those trashy romance novels set in the Wild West, where there's a small dusty town and one feisty, independent woman, and there's a hero who's super manly and beats up all the other men but then he's all shy and tongue-tied around the girl, and there's some scene where he has to take his pants off so she can apply lotion to his injured thigh or stitch up his torn clothing, and he's so embarrassed that he starts working his way through the American Dialect Dictionary – *well now miss, I declare I sure am mighty a-feared that old man Toomey might be a-walkin in on us in this here dad-blamed un-com-pro-misin position* – except when they actually have sex he's all rough and imposing again, he's just gotta have her, he's not going to take no for an answer...

Well this book is like that, only much darker. Late 1930s, small town in rural Arkansas (the kind of place where a virgin is defined as 'a five-year-old girl who can outrun her daddy and her brothers'); a feisty oversexed postmistress, to whom the locals say things like

"By God, Latha, I may be gittin on in years but I swear I can still coax a respectable stand out of the ole dingbat down here, so if there ever comes a time when you feel like you just got to have it, then I'll gladly be at your service."

—to be read in the voice of the grizzled old sailor from the start of *The Little Mermaid*. And there's this strong-but-silent guy who is obsessed with our heroine. He asks her out and she says no, he follows her around and she tells him to fuck off, eventually he ties her to a tree, rips her clothes off, gags her, and rapes her. This is described rather in the manner of an amusing romantic anecdote. Then he leaves town. A few years later he tracks her down in another state, rescues her from a predicament, and rapes her again, this time in her sleep while she is supposedly recovering from a severe mental trauma. This time it's described as a sweet moment of emotional intimacy.

This is quite some meet-cute, I think you'll agree. So then ten years later he comes back into town, tells her that he's still obsessed with her, and she – completely unironically – thinks:

My hero...It's like a fairy tale...

And I'm staring at this thinking **WHAT!??** in the tones of Ross Geller; and it's not that I'm not enjoying the book, because it's written quite nicely, and there's some not-uninteresting formal experimentation going on, but I'm thinking – everyone must be going mental about this on Goodreads, surely, isn't this the sort of thing that Young People on the Internet write to their congressmen about? But I look here and everyone's like,

'sweet...sentimental...comically romantic' like it's the fucking Waltons and I just...I don't know, is it because I've just read that history of virility and a load of books about gender relations that this stuff is jumping out of the page and slapping me in the face?

And because the book is, as I say, well-written, part of me is impressed despite myself – maybe it's a good thing to have engineered a romance out of this background, these things do happen I guess. But the characterisation of the hero, if that's what he is, is just calculated to make me hate him. I can only take so many scenes where we are shown how he is tougher than other guys and irresistible to women – this is him at the carnival:

A girl offered herself to him for ten dollars; he thought about it, and bought the girl a soda and talked with her some; but finally turned her down. He rode the shooty-shoot. A girl offered herself to him for free; he declined. He visited the ball-pitching booth, and won a giant stuffed Panda. He placed it in the hands of the first girl who passed; her escort took umbrage and accused him of getting fresh, and picked a fight. The man was a big fellow, with much beer on his breath. They squared off. The man swung a roundhouse; he ducked under it and deflated the man's intestines with one jab, then broke his jaw with an uppercut. The girl thanked him for the Panda. He walked on.

My hero! It's like a fairy tale!

Well, maybe it is all some kind of elaborate parody. This is the first in a series of thirteen novels set in Harington's fictional hamlet of Stay More, Ar., and if we set this upsetting romance to one side for a moment, there really is a lot to like here in terms of prose style, sentence structure and chewy Ozark vocabulary. This novel left me confused but I find I do want to read more. Maybe I'm suffering from the same kind of Stockholm syndrome as the heroine.

I'm going to be in rural Arkansas myself in a couple of weeks, and this has left me somewhat unsure of what to expect. Though I have learned that if there's three brothers called Earl, Burl and Gerald, the latter is pronounced in such a way that they all rhyme. This, I think, will stand me in very good stead.

Autumn says

After reading Harington's other Stay More novels, I was dying to learn more about Latha Bourne, who shows up in so many of them. This book didn't fully help me understand her charm or allure. I wanted more from this short book. Very atmospheric and hazy (a perfect book to read during a heat wave).

Debra says

Absolutely wonderful. So funny, sad, heartwarming, heartbreakng, philosophical and VERY unique. I had already read The Pitcher Shower (also wonderful) when I realized it was part of this series. So..... as always, here I am starting from the beginning, but I don't think I'll be anything but delighted while on the journey. Highly recommended.

s.penkevich says

While Donald Harington is relatively unheard of, he is an author you should probably make yourself familiar with. From the first few lines of his second novel, Lightning Bug, Harington's immense talents can be discerned as he magically transports you into the vast, vibrant Arkansas summer nights filled with starry skies and flashing bugs. You can literally smell the land and feel the heat as you sit on the wooden porch of the Stay More Post Office beside Latha Borne, Harington's beautiful heroine and object of his affection. Not only had I felt guilty for never hearing of this man, but I felt a twinge of guilt for having strayed so long from novels written in my own country (almost an entire year), and it was refreshing to hear the language of the south singing so clearly from the pages. This comical novel is reminiscent of Steinbeck's sentimentality, a more playful and carefree Faulkner, and is infused with an enduring innocence and wry humor to deliver a sweet, simple story about sweet simple people.

First, I would like to say that this book came highly recommended through someone whos literary opinions I very much respect. I would recommend also reading his eloquent review.

It was a shame to learn that Donald Harington passed away in 2009 from pneumonia in obscurity, aside from his small circle of fervent followers. His creative abilities and infectious writing is incredible and I am surprised this hidden gem has remained so well hidden. A bit of snooping through the internet will unveil an amazing life story. Harington published 14 novels, all but his first set in the semi-fictitious town of Stay More, Arkansas, and taught art history at various universities, but the truely amazing part is that he went deaf at the age of 12 from meningitis. During his short period of hearing, he was able to pick up upon the intricacies of the Ozark dialect and delivers it onto the page brilliantly. He is very much insistant upon the reader hearing the speech *exactly* as it was intended and shows a powerful grasp on linguistics in doing so. Much like William Faulkner, Harington's dialogue is spelled out how it would come across phonetically, which often brought about a chuckle. He makes sure the reader is familiar with the sound of each character's name, such as Sonora who is heard as 'Snory' or the brothers Earl, Burl, and Gerald who '*you should know that the way they say 'Gerald,' he rhymes with his brothers'*'.

Harington's grasp of language is astonishing. He illustrated the town of Stay More in my mind so vividly, it was as if I was there all the while I read this novel. His descriptions of landscapes and of the people makes one feel him reach his authorial hand out and give them all a loving caress. This love radiates off the page and into the reader and it is practically impossible not to feel some affection for these people and their town. For a short period of time, you are one of them and know all their histories and the town gossip as if you had been resting your feet in Stay More all along. Harington also displays a impressive ability to swoop back and froth between perspectives, having parts written in third person, some in first person from the point of view of the auther as he is the 8 year old 'Dawny' of the novel, and occasionally he even describes a scene from first person as it *might* have gone down. The novel is moves seemlessly back and forth through time in a way that is able to build up mystery to be looked back upon later, which really keeps the story effortlessly flowing forward and grips the readers attention. The selection of Every's harrowing break-out scene is one of the most comically romantic hero scenes I have read in a long time.

The plot to itself is touching. This is a simple story of loss and reclamation. Of long lost loves and the hope that keeps a heart yearning for another wondering if their eyes will ever grace the face of their beloved. Like the multilayered metaphor of the Lightning Bug, Harington shows how we roam through the darkness of the world, looking to find and be found by love.

The smells of things in the air of the night are the calls of lives wanting to be found. Why else are fragrances fragrant?

We see to find, we hear to find, we smell to find and be found. Until we find or be found, we are lost and wanting.

The theme of the mood of an ending is of a loss or finding.

This was Harington's first novel about Stay More, which he based on his childhood vacation town, and he fills it with a variety of interesting townsfolk, many of which are based on real people from his life. You learn much of the past and future of Stay More, and it is good to know that you can always return here in all of his subsequent novels. This reminded me of Faulkner's Jefferson, and knowing I can return to Stay More is a big selling point for Harington.

If you have never heard of Harington, I encourage you to try him out. If you already have, then I encourage you to read more. Lightning Bug brought smile after smile to my face as it played joyfully over themes of love, lust and loss, and mangaged to tie together several subplots quite nicely. I wish Donald Harington an eternity of peace within the land he so loved enough to transport me there to experience it with him. I will seek out more of his novels so that I can stay more in his wonderful creation.

4/5

Lawyer says

I have to thank "The Oxford American," a journal devoted to southern literature and culture, for introducing me to Donald Harington. The fine folks at that magazine let me know about him way back in 2006, when they handed out their first Lifetime Achievement Award for Contributions to Southern Literature to this guy from Fayetteville, Arkansas. Donald who? It pains me to say it, but I'd never heard of the man.

You'd think I would have run right out and bought every Harington in sight, but this is one time I just got it wrong. It happens to all of us from time to time, I guess. You just can't read every book out there. And, if you'll bear with me here, because you've probably figured out, this won't be the typical book review, I have to admit, being from Alabama, you take your pleasures where you can find them at times.

Other than college football and a few other sports, my beloved home ranks about last in every positive category of American life. Now, note I said beloved, because I do love this state, even with all its faults. It's only human nature that when you're low down there on the totem pole, it's always nice to know there's a couple of notches occupied beneath your lowly position.

It used to be said, if you were an Alabama resident, "Well, thank God for Mississippi." Then those Mississippians unbuckled their bible belt and legalized gambling. And all of a sudden, Mississippi's got better roads, some really nice schools, new welcome centers, new train stations, and other amenities all brought about by what most Alabamans still consider a mortal sin, with the exception of those folks who regularly cross state lines to legally gamble and buy lottery tickets in Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida. It's amazing what a little sin can do for a place, you know?

And THEN, Oxford, Mississippi was named one of the top 10 places to retire to in the whole "Newnited States of America." That just about did it.

So about all an Alabama boy could say was, "Well, thank God there's still Arkansas," not that we ever really considered them part of the SOUTH. Darned if it doesn't hurt to say out of literary pride--yeah, we got a few authors from around here--I figured I could just skip Donald Harington. After all, we've got Nelle Harper Lee. No, I don't believe Truman Capote wrote "To Kill a Mockingbird," before you ask. However, I do think Ms. Lee had considerable to do with "In Cold Blood." We take partial claim to Truman because of his Monroeville, Alabama relations. We have William March, Winston Groom, Mary Ward Brown, T.S. Stribling, Carl Carmer, Hudson Strode, Mark Childress, and Jimmy Buffet. Yes, I am an aging pirate way past forty parrot head. I didn't think I needed Donald Harington.

Then, back in November, 2009, I saw Donald Harington died. I read the obituaries. Donald Harington, born in Little Rock Arkansas, December 22, 1935, died November 7, 2009. The accolades astounded me. The man's life flat floored me.

Harington lost his hearing at age twelve after a bout of meningitis. Yet, in those few years he caught the dialogue, the lingo, the argot of the Ozarks. In 2010, I ran across that old copy of the Oxford American. I re-read the bio and the award, swallowed my pride, and ordered a copy of "Lightning Bug." It came in from Amazon. I shelved it, forgot it, and then darned if Amazon doesn't go and buy the entire Toby Press catalog which happened to contain the complete works of Donald Harington. I could read it for free. I was between books and through the miracle of FREE whispernet service (Does that make you wonder if Amazon is going to get around to charging for downloading an e-book?) whoosh, I had my own free copy of "Lightning Bug."

For those of y'all wondering if this Alabama confessional is going to turn into a book review, well, here it is.

I flat love Donald Harington. It made me glad I voted for Clinton. Twice. It's enough to make a man want to go on pilgrimage to the Ozarks. First, Harington made me laugh. He could make me cry from laughing and he could make cry from the mere tragedy of what it sometimes means to simply be human. "Lightning Bug" is filled with references to old Ozark folkways and superstitions. To some, and you'll find Harington's detractors right here on goodreads, Harington's dialogue is so thick with what they refer to as hillbilly ignorance, they can't abide the man. Having relations in the northwest part of this state, I can hear some of the same phrasing, terms, and superstitions I recall growing up in Alabama and visiting those family members. It's true. It rings true. And for Arkansas natives who have crucified Harington for portraying their kinfolk as ignorant, well, it's just about as well they no longer call Arkansas home.

A number of years back, a good friend gave me a copy of "Pissing In the Snow." It's an anthology of Arkansas folklore. She was a raven haired beauty and I was more than half way in love with her, but the timing was never right for either one of us. She could give me that book and laugh about it, because she was from, guess where--Fayetteville, Arkansas. Much of what I read in "Pissing in the Snow" could have come straight out of Harington. The catch is, what was in the pages of that book of folklore shine through on the pages of Harington's writing.

While reading the book, I posted a few comments along. Having completed the book, I'll stick with my original impression. Reading Harington is about like reading Faulkner who had just about enough nitrous oxide to make him slap happy. Harington's story is quirky. The people are quirky. Some you'd like to call neighbors. Other's will make you run in the opposite direction--and you'd be smart if you did, because some of them would as soon kill you as look at you, especially if you're a revenoover threatening one of the best stills in the hills.

It is a sheer delight to tell you fellow readers that Harington created an entire, surreal and quirky world around the small township of Stay More, Arkansas. I have the intense pleasure of announcing I have eleven

more Stay More novels to go. As Harington tells you, you won't find it on any Arkansas map, but by the towns he names that do appear on any decent Arkansas atlas, you can figure out pretty much where Harington knew it was. And, at least in Harington's mind it might as well have been a real place. Perhaps it was. He just changed the name to protect the innocent and the guilty.

There should be no surprise that there's a lot of innocent and guilty to protect in Harington's world. Over there in Stay More, Latha Bourne is the postmistress and she runs the most popular general store in the community. She's got a head for business. When that candy drummer comes around in the summertime, Latha won't buy too many Hershey bars because any damned fool knows they're going to melt in that Arkansas heat. But she's smart enough to see that the postal delivery service also crates in enough block ice to keep the soda pops cold. Her competition refuses to consider the extravagant price of carting in block ice, but can't figure out why all the men folk hang out over at Latha's.

Well, I can tell you why they do. There's not a man in Stay More, Arkansas, that's not a little in love, or at least lust with Latha. Her allure defies description, although her sharp wit and keen intellect cause a man to pay more attention to her than just because of her curves. Even Donny (pronounced "Dawny")Harington who works his way into the story as a five to six year old boy, expects to grow up and marry Latha. He loves her unquestionably, because of the attention she sheds on him, the ghost stories with which she entertains him, and the fact that she provides him shelter from some very, very rigid and unloving relatives with whom he lives.

"Lightning Bug" is largely the story of the romance of Every Dill and Latha Bourne. They were lovers. He was twelve and she was eleven. However, after their adolescence, the powerful Ingledew clan of brothers who consider Stay More their own personal town, and in some ways are, as they own the bank that carries the mortgages on almost every resident of Stay More, decide that Latha should be betrothed to Randall Ingledew. We don't know Latha's rationale for deciding to accept this betrothal, but she puts Every Dill out of her life.

Even World War One cannot break the hold of the Ingledew family over Randall's betrothal to Latha. Although Every Dill returns from the war to report that Randall died, tied to a tree by the Germans as a decoy to lure American doughboys into the path of a machine gun nest. Every, still in love with Latha had promised that he would take care of Randall while overseas. He failed in that mission, though the scars of machine gun bullet holes piercing both legs indicate he made every attempt to save his rival for Latha's affection. That was the kind of love he had held for her since early adolescence. However, the Ingledew's threaten Every with his very life if he approaches Latha. Until Uncle Sam says Randall is dead, he's not--at least not officially. They remind him there's seven of them and one of him. If they have to, eight may take a walk in the woods, but only seven will come out. The meaning is clear.

"Lighting Bug" spans the time from pre-World War One to some time after 1939. During those years, many changes come to Stay More, most for the worst. Stay More is a dying town, especially after someone who might be Every Dill robs the Ingledew Bank.

Dill does leave Stay More. He has one more encounter with Latha, professing his love for her. What transpires some would call rape. Whether it was, or wasn't is subject to interpretation.

The following years are a blank in the life of Every Dill. His absence is not explained.

Latha spends a good deal of time with her sister Mandy and churlish husband in Little Rock. Latha spends almost three years in an insane asylum there. The only facts this reviewer will reveal regarding those

circumstances are that her committal was involuntary, and while she clearly needed emotional help it could easily have been supplied by loving family members had they chosen to do so. In 1925, Latha escapes from the Little Rock Asylum. We next find her running the general store and being the efficient Post Mistress of Stay More.

With the exception of "Dawny's" sleep overs, her only company is her sister's daughter, Sonora, living with Latha in Stay More temporarily. Of course, she has her customers and visitors during the day.

Occasionally, Latha takes off the day, spending the time fishing in a fine spot, Banty Creek. There, Latha meets Dolph, also taking the day off from work on his farm in a town up the road. Latha is a woman of strong sexuality. Her exercise of it occurs rarely. But when it happens, the term "la petite morte" was never more applicable than to Latha, who literally faints and remains unconscious for a period of time, waking up with a tremendous sense of well being.

Dolph complicates matters by making it his sole purpose in life to marry Latha Bourne, a task she doesn't make easy for him, as she gave him a false name and her residence in a town other than Stay More. Latha doesn't see the need to complicate her life by marriage.

Of course, Dolph does track her down, eventually. She tells him she's married to a fellow that works over in the canning factory in town. That's not true either.

It's at this point that Every Dill reappears in Stay More. His occupation? He's become a preacher. He's returned to post fliers around Stay More announcing his intention to preach a revival. Dill's transformation from soldier to bank robber to preacher dumbfounds the residents of Stay More.

Every buys tacks from Latha to post his fliers. He returns to borrow a hammer to put them up. Clearly, Every is of the mind that Latha is his intended and their love was something meant to be from the time they were barely out of childhood.

Latha's niece, Sonora, flat out confronts Latha with her belief that Every is her father and that Latha is not her aunt, but her mother. She can see their features in her face and this is a fact that she recognizes intuitively.

Within a short time, Latha succumbs to Every's continued proposals of marriage on the condition that she make love to him before the marriage. Every's commitment to the Lord prohibits him from committing the sin of fornication but insists on putting a ring on Latha's finger.

In a recent discussion of whether authors intentionally interject symbolism into their works, I can't speculate on Harington's position on this subject. However, I will say that Every's last name is Dill. Of course, his nickname he was stuck with was "Pickle." Not only is Every a stand in for every man, within the context of this novel, Every's Pickle stands in and up for male sexuality with a priapic vengeance. And Latha's not interested in just an every man's pickle, but the one that belonged to her first love.

What follows is an impasse that can only be resolved by Every's conversation with God and Latha's own conversation with Christ. To say the episodes are dreamlike and surreal is an understatement of the greatest magnitude. I will say that Latha's conversations with Christ and his references to what his Dad would think provide some of those moments of tears resulting from laughter. I'll limit the summary to the fact that Christ's and Latha's conversations occur over each of them sharing peaches in an orchard and a different twist on the incarnation of mortals by whichever aspect of the Trinity the reader so desires.

"Lightning Bug" is a tangle of flashbacks and narrators. It is one of Harington's masterstrokes on what makes this novel work so well. I've seen one reviewer who questioned the significance of "Dawny" and his fate, and the identity of the other narrators in this tale.

In this reviewer's opinion, Harrington combines techniques of omniscient narrator, a very subjective narration speaking as to another person through the use of you. That second mentioned narrator is "Dawny" as a grown man, reminiscing of his coming of age in Staymore. The object of his narration is none other than Latha Bourne, addressing her as "Bug," for Latha is the ultimate human form of lightning bug that mysteriously appears on those warm summer nights and makes each of them the magic we carry with us from childhood till death. And it is Harington's use of himself as narrator through which we are able to unravel the mystery of Latha's past which the omniscient narrator does not, will not, or perhaps cannot provide us. For Latha Bourne is one of those unique and magical individual which, once she becomes a part of our lives, we are forever incapable of forgetting the impact she has had on our lives.

I'll leave this review by saying the reader will find complete satisfaction with Harington's resolution of this novel. Love never dies. I'd say that's a good thing.

For more on the works of Donald Harington, I found these references particularly fascinating. I sincerely hope you'll come by the PO down at Stay More and join me there. I think the place and the people that live there have a whole lot to tell us about what it means to live.

"Donald Harington's Stay More Novels: A Celebration of Thirty-five Years," Bob Razer
<http://libinfo.uark.edu/specialcollec...>

wn.com/Donald_Harington (This site includes biographical information, video interviews with Donald Harington and other helpful information

"Donald Harington Interview" by Edwin T. Arnold, <http://www.donaldharington.com/interv...>

"Remembering Donald Harington and Stay More," Bob Razer,
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail...>

"Donald Harington, Ozark Surrealist, Dies at 73" By WILLIAM GRIMES, Published: November 12, 2009, New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/art...>

Connie (Ava Catherine) says

Lightning Bug is set in Harington's beloved fictional town of Stay More, Arkansas. The postmistress Latha Bourne is beautiful and mysterious. Latha has been limited in life, agonizes over her bad choices, and isn't permitted to decide for herself. These are concepts that women in the 1930s lived with.

This is a love story, set in one very eventful day with flashbacks that tell what happened and why things happened the way they did. There is quite a bit of lust for sex and sex. However, the narrator is a very young boy, who is in love with Latha and spends much of his time on her porch to be near her. I like the way the author uses the lightning bug to discuss sex and mating.

This book started off very slowly for me, but it did get much better. I think it took me a while to acclimate to the dialect. It is a funny, sweet book, and the writing is pitch perfect.
