



# Neighbors

*Thomas Berger*

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## **Neighbors** Thomas Berger

Suburban regular guy Earl Keese confronts the yawning pit of chaos in the persons of Harry and Ramona, a younger couple who have just moved into the only other house on their dead-end street. Literally overnight, Earl's painstakingly controlled world is turned upside down. Soon he is engaged in guerilla warfare with his new neighbors, who seem to threaten the very fabric of his carefully constructed reality.

## **Neighbors Details**

Date : Published 2005 by Simon Schuster (first published 1980)

ISBN : 9780743257961

Author : Thomas Berger

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Genre : Fiction, Humor, Literature

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## **From Reader Review Neighbors for online ebook**

### **abby says**

Unlike any book I've ever read, in a way that is hard to explain. Banal yet surreal, with really interesting stylistic choices. Quick and engaging read, more of a long short story than a novel.

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### **Mark Desrosiers says**

The key to this relentless nightmare is right there on page one: "Were Keese to accept the literal witness of his eyes, his life would have been of quite another character, perhaps catastrophic, for outlandish illusions were, if not habitual with him, then at least none too rare for that sort of thing." And so as we read on, always from Keese's point of view, you're led to doubt whether depictions of his neighbors Harry and Ramona are accurate -- that they may be the ramping up of his own peculiar malady. Another novel can be written of the same weekend's events, from Ramona's perspective (for example) depicting Keese as a twitchy paranoid psychotic in deep need of help and restraint.

As a narrative, there are broad themes kicked around in here about "country" versus "city" and the monstrous violence that is barely suppressed in quiet civil towns. But on the whole I think Berger is hoodwinking us into believing the new neighbors are nutzoid, when in fact it's our central character whose brain has created this nightmare -- let's not forget the sudden ending (no spoilers here) which seems to join hands with the page-one statement above as some sort of anatomical inevitability. The last turn of the worm.

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### **Jim says**

The reviews for this book are all over the place, and I can see why. It is a darkly humorous book, extremely well written, but one whose twists and turns are designed to make the reader uncomfortable. Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed the twists and turns, as characters repeatedly responded unexpectedly to new situations. The characters are all well-developed by the end of the book. Just say Ramona...

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### **ginny says**

Weird and funny and disorienting. As someone who is frequently the new family on the street, it was an engaging read. The plot centers around a middle aged man (and his wife) who leads a pretty banal existence in a quiet neighborhood with only one other house on his street. Crazy new neighbors move in, zaniness ensues and the pratfalls/pranks get progressively more aggressive and weird. I kept waiting for the punchline but the ending, while good, left me still asking so many questions.

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### **Dennis says**

Most people know this story more through the film with Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi than through the book. to be honest, the book read more like an overlong Playboy short story than a novel and didn't really take me anywhere except to take the theme of neighbor-from-hell to another level, without leaving you liking anybody in the end (or in the middle or from the start...) Fortunately, it was short.

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### **Seán says**

This is the fourth book I've read by Berger, and it's probably my least favorite. I have a sneaking suspicion that makes me an idiot.

The blurb said it best: it's as if Henry James was writing "Waiting for Godot." Clearly brilliant and deploying a sharp eye on convention and real life, but a bit too out there for little old me.

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### **Dennis says**

A feud between two neighbors over a 24-hour period. Momentum shifts throughout. For me, this book represents a new discovery of a writer who also wrote *Little Big Man*, which was made into a well-regarded film starring Dustin Hoffman. *Neighbors* was also made into a film -- a bad one starring John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. Funny, I can't see them in this role. I picture Jason Alexander for Keese and Dennis Quaid for Harry.

This is a black comedy so you have to prepare yourself properly. I didn't. The events that happen in this novel are so outrageous that I put the book away thinking it was crap. I came to this conclusion (premature, I admit) because I was reading mostly realistic novels and stories, so to suddenly find myself in the land of the strange, I couldn't cope. After a week, I picked it up again and decided to really teach myself how to read this author -- his unique style, content, and vision. This is important because things will happen in the novel that will not be in synch with your (or anyone else's) reality. The end result? This was probably the most entertaining book I've read all summer (and I've read quite a bit, thank you very much).

It's very dialogue-heavy, which was the first major obstacle for me. (I don't like characters who talk too much) The decision-making of the characters was the second major obstacle. Frankly, I couldn't believe people with such judgments existed in real life! But these two obstacles turned out to be non-issues as soon as I learned to enter Berger's world of misfits.

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### **Ted Sweeney says**

Saw the film years ago. It was difficult not too see the actors as I read but still I found a lot to like about it. Riding through the story, now directly inside the mind of Earl Keese was enlightening. The feeling of contrast was practically tangible between my memories as a boy watching a film which was funny but entirely unrelatable to a reading a novel that felt very familiar and personal as a man who now has a home and family and NEIGHBORS!

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## **Cecily says**

This is like no other book I have read. Twenty four hours in nearly 300 pages reads almost like real-time, which works well in this story of strange neighbours. Each individual incident is plausible, but in combination, it creates an acutely observed surreal nightmare of escalating paranoia.

Earl and Enid are in their late 40s (but seem older) and long time residents of a quiet road. Their predictable life is overturned by the arrival of new neighbours. Harry and Ramona's unabashed presumptuousness and mind games make Earl lose touch with reality and doubt his sanity: trespass, pointless lies, vandalism and worse.

It's bad enough when strangers are weird and unpleasant, but it is far worse when they are in your own home and when your own family, friends and even random strangers seem to be against you for no reason. And it is relentless, "He believed that she and Harry worked by attrition" so that "Every time he believed he had got things in hand at last, another threat appeared".

At one point, Ramona says "ownership means everything to you" and also asks "how far would you go to avoid humiliation?", which are the crux of the mental assault. This makes Earl behave increasingly out of character, "His persistent conviction that he had been mocked... relieved him of the claims of decency".

No matter how he tries to play it, Earl finds himself wrong-footed by bizarre behaviour and strange non sequiturs. At one point, Ramona has taken over his bed and when challenged, says "It's your house, your bedroom, your bed. What's fair? Do we get any kind of vote?"

One quirk is the overuse of the word "chagrin", even as a verb, "chagrining though it might be"! Nevertheless, it is a painfully realised and expertly written book.

Near the beginning, it mentions that Earl is prone to hallucinations ("he was at odds with humanity as to one of its incontestable truths: seeing is believing"), but it is not mentioned again. So how much of the story is real?

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## **Bill FromPA says**

Previous: Arthur Rex: A Legendary Novel

Next: Reinhart's Women

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## **Sarah says**

Very black - like a bad dream that keeps getting worse.

It reminds me of A Confederacy of Dunces because the characters are so irritating.

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## **Mike McPadden says**

NEIGHBORS made me hyperventilate. No other book conjures such a "trapped in the funhouse" feeling, wherein every page makes you feel like you just turned and slammed your face into yet another glass wall or distorted mirror.

The book, in and of itself, is NOT unfilmable, but the botched Belushi-Aykroyd attempt pretty well iced any chance of a proper version ever existing.

Berger is one of my favorite authors, and I'd recommend NEIGHBORS to anyone—but THE FEUD, I'd say, is really the best place to start.

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## **Eric Gilliland says**

I remember the Belushi film as a curiosity of the 1980s, so i decided to check out the novel. Berger makes it readable and fascinating even though the characters are extremely annoying, especially the middle aged drone Earl. Berger works a brutal satire on how most middle aged Americans choose to live: with zero passion or spontaneity. The neighbors Harry and Ramona remain ambiguous all the way to the end, are they angels or demons? Their anarchic lifestyle is either to be applauded or condemned. Berger knew the emptiness of the American soul and this novel is a look at just how banal it is.

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## **Paul G says**

This is a story about 24 hours of psychological warfare between trite, staid middle class suburbanites, and the free-wheeling grifters who move into the house next door.

Quirky and uncomfortable, but also very well-written, funny, and never boring. It's a very quick read, too.

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## **Ron says**

A masterpiece of suburban angst that comes across like a manic, comic version of 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' The film version is one of the most vastly under-rated films of all time, brilliantly casting Ackroyd and Belushi in the roles opposite of what one would have presumed.

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