

TIGER GARTÉ

roman

# BURN OUT

ASCHEHOUC



# Tiger Garté

Tiger Garté (born 1982) is a Norwegian writer, published by Aschehoug.

In 2007 Garté published the novel *Burnout* to great critical acclaim. He was also honoured by best-selling crime writer Jo Nesbø, who chose to share the New Books Club award, with him.

Garté is originally from Surnadal in western Norway, where he lived until he was 19. Surnadal is also where the story in *Burnout* takes place, and a number of the places mentioned in the book exist for real.

Currently living in Trondheim, Garté is studying for his Master's degree in film and TV production. He is a true film aficionado and long time Tarantino fan, and has already made one documentary and several short films.



# BURN OUT

This is a novel about growing up, a story about brutality in a rural community on the western coast of Norway. It is a dark and painful story about victimization—sad, bitter and tragic, but also very clever, absurd and cheeky.

Trym and Robban are best friends until junior high, when everything changes. Robban gets singled out as a victim of bullying, and Trym is incapable of standing up for him. Despite this, the two boys keep hanging out after school, tinkering on cars.

Burnout is the story of brutal youngsters on the edge of panic, doing everything they can to save themselves. At the same time, it's a story about the complete resignation in those who are already on the outside. All of this is told in first person and with a high, verbal intensity and desperate humor.

***First published:***

***2007 by Aschehoug Fiction***

## PRAISE FOR BURNOUT:

”Smashing! ... it occasionally happens that a debut is so flawless, that everything is just right from the very first sentence. This is the case with Tiger Garté’s *Burnout*. His brutal descriptions of village life in Surnadal are impressively carried out both stylistically and thematically ... I have seldom read a literary description of bullying as efficiently hair-raising as this ... Garté succeeds in evoking a tenderness and intensity that leaves me, for one, dumbstruck.”

*Cathrine Krøger, DAGBLADET*

“Garté is a first-time novelist writing with conviction and apparently intimate knowledge of his subject.”

*Audun Vinger, MORGENBLADET*

“Burnout has no intention of being a pleasant book, and it feels like a strong and true story.”

*Maria Årollilja Rø, ADRESSEAVISEN*

“This is a powerful and moving novel about bullying ... What distinguishes this book is the intensity of its narration ... Garté has done a good job, and he has written a book that has moved this reader.”

*Irene Gressli Haugen, FÆDRELANDSVENNEN*

“Garté deserves credit for his language. The descriptions are rich without being overloaded, the choice of words is often unexpected and innovative, without getting overly hip, the sentences are abrupt, without obstructing the flow.”

*Christian Nicolai Bjørke, VÅRT LAND*

”Raw and captivating from first-time novelist ... it is easy to get carried away by a text as thoroughly well written as the one Garté presents with his first novel ... Garté succeeds in grabbing our attention and pulling us along from one page to the next, employing black and burlesque humour, and dramatic, almost unbelievable episodes.”

*Rita Aarnes, TIDENS KRAV*

“With Garté’s future work as a writer in mind, people should take note of his name ... He has a style of writing which has long been lacking in Norway ... I give it my warmest recommendations.”

*Marius Hjeldnes, DRIVA*

3

### Plumber's crack

My sister's 17 and always screwing. Me and Robban have bored a hole through my bedroom wall, so we get most of it. Her guy's 26 and quite ugly. He works at a repair garage. My mother doesn't like him. Because he's always got filthy hands, is 26 years old, has no education and screws the life out of her daughter. Says that to dad, at any rate, who's not particularly interested.

Her name's Mia, by the way, and she's going to be a nurse, even though she refuses to trim grandma's toe-nails, who replies by saying she's a spoilt girl who's only able to take care of her Barbie dolls. But she does health science with some other girls who party at our place from time to time. When Mia says she'll look after her brother and me and not let anyone in. Ten minutes after our parents have left, the cars start honking away outside. Then they stand on the doorstep playing stupid tunes on the chimes, until Mia opens and they rush in like starving dogs. They rattle their carrier bags and ask us to turn off the sound on the bloody TV and put on some cool music instead. Mia waves us off to bed and asks us to forget the din and sleep instead.

I've seen practically everything. One evening when Robban was staying the night, there was a guy pissing out the window who lost his hold on the sill and crashed down from the second floor – he had a crushed bottle of beer in his back pocket and was bleeding like a pig from his arse. They laid him out on the bathroom floor and took off his trousers, the girls stood in the passage and screamed, and a bloke yelled that this guy had a plumber's crack way up past his lower back. Me and Robban sat in the room listening to all the racket.

The man next door agreed to drive him to the outpatients' and keep quiet about it if they stopped pissing on his garage door and gave him a wad of money. His name's Rolf.

19

### Schoolmarm

We do food in a subject called Domestic Science. In Domestic Science lessons you have to go around in a self-made apron, which looks utterly ridiculous. And you have to spend half the day learning about fruit, vegetables and baking in a school kitchen that smells of a someone's forgotten PE bag. Domestic Science is a real shitty subject that only girls from the country like.

The teacher's a crabby bitch who spends her time eating our food. She's got rules for everything. The implements used when preparing food have to be placed on a plate when you're not using them. Everything has its own place in the cupboards, and must always be put there. You're not allowed to talk to the other groups when preparing the food. For then bacteria would fly around like midges in the mountains on summer nights. Cutlery has to be laid out in one particular order – everything else is wrong, wrong, wrong.

Even so, lots of strange things happen. If the schoolmarm goes out for a moment, you get a bun ready for the oven binged at your forehead. 'Smack!' Once Brynjar tipped salt into the redcurrants we were going to freeze. Several kilos of redcurrants that all the pupils had picked as their homework. Brynjar likes to ruin the food we make so she can't enjoy eating it. That same lesson, Conny poured Harpic into the milk in the fridge. Mmm, the next class is in for some tasty rolls.

We also spent half a day learning how to wash our hands. First we saw a film. Like that, yes, that's how to do it. Then we stood in a line in front of the schoolmarm and washed. One by one. Wash, wash, soap, massage it into the whole hand, rinse, rinse, dry thoroughly. Nice and clean. And not too late!

At the last test we've got to do a dinner and dessert. The dessert is strawberry Swiss roll. Stein Arvid's starts to burn in the oven. Flames everywhere. The schoolmarm screams. Get rid of it, rid of it. The cake's thrown out. Lands on the floor and starts singeing the flooring. Stein Arvid has to go to the headteacher's office. He claims that Brynjar and Stian from my group stopped him from getting it out. Me and a fourth person, Geirmund, are called in as witnesses and have to explain what happened. We don't say a bloody thing, of course. We're not that stupid.

When we get back to the kitchen, Brynjar and Stian look at us suspiciously, with narrowed eyes. We shake our heads, and put on a smile. The two of them just nod.

In the background, we can hear the schoolmarm say that Stein Arvid will have to pull his socks up.

## Battle

Confirmation marks the real beginning. ‘Money, lots of lovely money, tits just like a Playboy Bunny’ it says on the card from grandpa. One envelope after the other with tenners. And some with even more. And belts, pocket books and useless knives. It’s worth it all. To stand for a day in a white dress in the church, sit at home at the table with the leaves out and listen to parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents talk about burping up food, bed-wetting and pubic hair.

And on 16 May everything’s let loose. Anyone who’s not been drunk before absolutely has to get plastered now. That’s an unwritten rule. So I heave Robban out of his garage and we sit in my room drinking sour wine and shots of moonshine. A great mixture for getting pissed. Taken from the bar cabinet and wine bag in boxes. Tastes bloody awful, but if you gotta go, you gotta go. Robban almost look just as shit-faced; he’s shooting away from me with his filthy hands. I can almost see it sloshing up in his eyes.

Afterwards, we cycle erratically to the Community Centre, and out onto the heavy football pitch. It’s just been mown, the weather’s cleared up, and everything’s ready for an entertaining battle. Even though Robban disappears immediately.

The youngest ones are stumbling around or lying down on the dry grass. The experienced guy sets his sights on those just confirmed. Drunk girls are easy to carry home with you.

Drinks are poured out from bottles, cups, cans and jugs. We must learn how to drink. Then throw up. Then drink some more. To avoid a hangover, don’t stop drinking. Drink till you can’t lift the bottle any more. Can’t see the bottle. Someone’s sure to help you lift the bottle so you can get a bit more down you.

Gradually, more and more people are lying like slaughtered cattle on the pitch. Waiting for someone to come along and cart them off. But no one comes. Only a few are carried off. Those who need a stomach pump.

The guys stand around arguing. Back and forth. The words are like gobs of spit flying around. Feelings running higher all the time. Then, a small shove, and fists start whirring. Noses are flattened, eyes blackened, red blood starts flowing. The day before the Big Day. And when the two of them are lying beaten up on the ground, an old man with a high-visibility vest with ‘Guard’ written on it with a magic marker comes along – pissed as newt as well – and has to clear it all up.

The police come round, but when they see everything they ought to do something about, they shut their eyes and drive home to the missus and eat tacos.

And the evening’s still young. There’s still some life visible in the trenches. And there’s no hope as long as the body farts. Some are trying to screw in the bushes. Others spewing next to them. Girls are grinning. Cars are burning out in the parking lot.

Time passes, the battle’s gone to sleep. All the energy and effort gone out of it. Those taking part just want the whole thing to be over. Time drags. Some still have a little strength left and can stay upright.

The guards have gone home for the night. The clammy air smells of piss. Some people are chasing sheep out in a field. Grabbing them by their wool and throwing them around. Shouting. Screaming. Those who are still alive.

On the pitch, all the players are blotto. The evening’s had the final whistle. The public have all gone home. It’s quiet.

The sky’s rotten, and the rain starts to lash down on the small bodies that are sinking into the mire.

## Dreamer

The second year at secondary school is an important year when the terms are laid down. During the first year most pupils were head of cattle herded together who had to work out how things operated, and when the electric fences gave a clear indication of your desired presence. But during the second year we can run part of the show ourselves. And even though we're not daring young men on the flying trapeze yet, we can at least see who's got a place on the safety net underneath. Demands must be made, and some people will have to stand at the door and do the filtering.

One of the most important conditions is that we have to wear Levis. Up till then, you've had various types of stitching and colours, all of them just as special. But then a week arrives – a perfectly random ordinary week – when irreversible decisions are taken. Mothers have to hurry off to the only shop around that sells Levis. After a couple of days, of course, they've sold out, so mothers have to drive to the nearest towns and, with tears in their eyes, see their savings be used on an over-priced, ordinary pair of jeans with a name and number on the backside.

Not all mothers can afford it. And certainly not all of them are convinced that the brand is sacred. So some of them fall by the wayside immediately. Others are already out of the running from earlier, perhaps because of the way they look. So that doesn't make any special difference. But there's new stuff. The girls are starting to go around lifting their sweaters and shirts for each other, to see if the others are with it.

So simple and OK. We buy a ticket and are allowed to come in. See the world inside the tent. We have to offer something to get something. Fair enough.

Stein Arvid never gets any Levis, of course. Well, what the hell would you think? That his sack of an old mum would drive to the shop and buy these shiny jeans – buy, well, steal more like, of course.

Ann Beate doesn't get any either. But her mother gets hold of a Levis label that she carefully sews over some Chinese name. In her opinion, that must be just as good.

On that day, Anne restlessly goes up and down, with scared eyes. Goes close to the really cool chicks – which is completely unnatural, of course. We see the lady twist and turn like an earthworm on a hook. Starts to realise what she is letting herself in for. The gazelle slinks down alone to the shallow river, while the lions stand ridge-backed drinking on the far side. Takes some cautious sips.

In the lunch break, Beate takes over. Shouts to the other.

'Here, just take a look! Someone's ripped her cunt off and sewn it on her arse! Just look!'

The others arrive. Bente lifts Ann's sweater almost over her head. Then she grabs hold of the label and tries to tear it off. It only half works, and the label hangs like a bit of rag over her backside. Instead, she twists one of Ann's nipples as hard as she can. The other girls scream with laughter.

On the bus home she's not on the front seat. We drive past her just after the pipe factory. She's walking along the dry road, her eyes empty.

Probably dreaming of clambering out of the endless abyss of childhood.

## First come

Ann Beate must sooner or later realise that she's never going to be accepted by the girls in her class. Not by the other girls at the school, either. The girls in her class have got their own friends and contacts in the other classes, so that door is shut.

But Ann is something the other girls aren't. Something that gets a number of the boys of the same age to notice her. She is quiet and has no self-confidence at all. So they don't feel afraid of her in the same way as with the rest of the girls their age, who have grown up too much.

Ann Beate will be an easy victim.

For insecure and randy male teenagers who want to screw a girl. Ann won't say no. And she doesn't look down on them as being immature. The lady will probably accept all the attention that's offered. Half a loaf's better than no bread.

She's allowed to come to parties she shouldn't really have been at. It's strange to sit there and see she's in contact with nearly all the guys. They want to treat her to drinks. When she's about to crash, it's buffet time. First come, first served.

There can be one, two, three, four guys groping her at the same time. One petting. One kneading her breasts. One fiddling with her pussy. One with a finger up her rear end. This is sexual instruction the science subjects teacher never gave. Shall we change places in a bit?

Ann, of course, gets called a whore by the other girls. But she's sure to have been called that before, too. Most of the guys are also quite nice to her. They don't speak to her at school, of course, but at parties they can do nice things with her. Kiss her on the cheek. Stroke her hair. Say she's nice.

Ann's common property, but she knows that. She probably thinks that at least she's property.

Some of the guys can take it a bit far from time to time. Normally it seems to turn out OK. But the lady tries to twist away from getting the hard stuff in her mouth. And occasionally she's spewed afterwards. One evening, a guy shoves the handle of a broomstick up her. Lots of people stand round laughing.

But the lady probably forgets most of it pretty quick.

## Burn Baby Burn

In the evening, it's the big parking lot outside the Domus supermarket that fills up. The first cars start to roll in around 7pm. Until then, people have been driving around like nomads without having any place to go. Now, though, cars swing in from both Skei and Green Street. I hang out with Sveinung when I get the chance, lie in the sunken back seat and try to look fairly cool.

Small clusters of 2-3 max. 4 cars start to form, alongside each other with the windows down. There's a colourful inferno of motley vehicles pumping out bass music beneath the tall street lamps. From time to time, one of the cars does a burnout on the dry, cracked asphalt. The driver pours a little oil under the spool tyres and holds up the e-brake. Revvs up the engine till it's roaring away under the bonnet. Lets out the clutch and allows the thin-worn tyres to spin against the glistening, slippery oil. It screams and crackles and tongues of flame spurt from the exhaust. Dark clouds of acrid-smelling rubber descend on the area. This is a kick no one can take away from them.

Finally, the driver lowers the e-brake and cruises into Green Street while everyone else laughs in delight.

There is a magnet under the Domus parking lot that pulls us towards it. If a car disappears, a new one turns up immediately. Cars constantly trickle in, while those that can't find a space slowly drive up and down Green Street. Up and down in small circuits. It's musical chairs – only with cars.

Some of them live on the parking lot. They eat here. Meet their friends. Get drunk. Read car magazines. The girls put on their make-up on the back seats.

It's never quiet here. Always teeming with life.

Occasionally, we drive down to the Industrial Quay. This is where we have brake-skid competitions and drag-racing. Well-attended contests that are worth being in on. Brake-skidding is mainly done during the winter. The rules are simple. Get up speed, put on the brake, throw the car into the meanest skid possible. The public awards marks and the winner gets all the glory.

Drag-racing is for the summer and mostly in the middle of the night, for police reasons. First person to get from the end of the quay to the finishing line, which is the main road. In other words, it's not a good idea for cars to be coming when the competitors thunder across to the pipe factory's parking lot on the other side. And winning these races gives you loads of prestige. People mess around with their cars for months before turning up with the finished result. And the noise can be heard well up the valley when the cars set off and the tyres scream and there are crackling roars from the unsealed exhausts.

Industrial Quay is the local Monza track.

## Washy, washy

Cars are important. More than most things. This is imprinted in the skull of each and every guy at the parking lot. A car's something we take care of. If you drive past the Esso station right next to the hotel sometimes, you'll notice that the 'Wash-it-yourself' carwash hall's always being used. Always. From 6am to 2am at night the water's constantly spurting out of those high-pressure sprinklers it's got. It steams away all year round. People drive in the cleanest cars imaginable and then start scrubbing and rubbing away.

If a little oil and dirt's got onto the lightweight rims, it's absolutely vital to make it as fast as possible to the 'Wash-it-yourself' machine. Scrub, scrub, rub, hose down, rub, dry. If someone's chucked some chewing gum onto the bonnet, the driver gets withdrawal symptoms – his nose twitches, sweat breaks out. Then burn out of the driveway, screech round the bends and scrub, scrub, scrape, dry off sweat, soap in, rub, rinse, hose down, dry.

Some people wash their cars more often than they take a shower. It's almost as if the metallic finish has to have Spenol moisturising cream massaged into it.

The women sit at home moping while the guys coddle their manhood. But when they've finished, they'll soon be thundering over the pot-holes in the gravel of the front yard. For then they've come home to show off the gleaming marvel, and won't give up till the girl's come with a fine compliment.

The cars shine like the finest Mediterranean yachts. We can mirror ourselves in the metal when we pass by. We feel the warmth that spreads out into the air.

And think that this is love.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS AUTHOR,  
PLEASE CONTACT EVA KULØY AT ASCHEHOUG AGENCY

[eva.kuloy@aschehougagency.no](mailto:eva.kuloy@aschehougagency.no)