


Please

Jericho Brown

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Poetry. African American Studies. LGBT Studies. PLEASE explores the points in our lives at which love and violence intersect. Drunk on its own rhythms and full of imaginative and often frightening imagery, PLEASE is the album playing in the background of the history and culture that surround African American/male identity and sexuality. Just as radio favorites like Marvin Gaye, Donny Hathaway, and Pink Floyd characterize loss, loneliness, addiction, and denial with their voices, these poems' chorus of speakers transform moments of intimacy and humor into spontaneous music. In PLEASE, Jericho Brown sings the influence soul culture has on American life with the accuracy of the blues.

Please Details

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Author : Jericho Brown

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From Reader Review Please for online ebook

secondwomn says

a lot to like, a brave book

James Grinwis says

Jericho Brown is going to be a huge, big, voice in American poetry. Some sublime lines throughout the book, and, while I normally don't go for this, the performance oriented boldness of the poems gave it all the right kind of muscle.

Ingrid says

His writing is aggressive and beautiful, and the content of the poems is powerful and personal. Some poems slipped past me but overall a Work of Art. I should reread at a later point in my life.

Favorite poem is for sure "Herman Finley Is Dead."

Heather says

There are three sections of poems in this book, with each section titled after a button on a stereo, though obviously they're also words with resonance: REPEAT, and PAUSE, and POWER. Music, both as trope and as thing, the idea of song and actual songs and musicians, figure heavily. As for the poems themselves, I like how they're smart and conversational, I like their wryness, and I like that they're poems that tell stories. There's casual violence in these poems, a father beating his son with a leather belt, a backhanded slap across the cheek, and racism and dirt and grit and cockroaches teeming in the kitchen, but that isn't to say they're unpleasant to read.

Kent says

What gives most pleasure in this book is its willingness to struggle with identity, and to embrace the fact that struggle consists of actions that bring him closer to understanding. Or maybe a more appropriate way to say it is that the struggle makes him more fully human.

Laura says

The Burning Bush

Lizard's shade turned torch, what thorns I bore
Nomadic shepherds clipped. Still,
I've stood, a soldier listening for the word,
Attack, a prophet praying any ember be spoken
Through me in this desert full of fugitives.
Now, I have a voice. Entered, I am lit.
Remember me for this sprouting fire,
For the lash of flaming tongues that lick
But do not swallow my leaves, my flimsy
Branches. No ash behind, I burn to bloom.
I am not consumed. I am not consumed.

Prince Bush says

The story here could be identified with Naturalism, but that would be the wrong way to interpret it. The men that Jericho Brown meets do not dictate his future, they only control the present. The next poem handles the future, and we see that it can move from men to his mother, father, or to broader comments on the gay black experience. There is so much inhuman strength, as well as restraint in this book. Brown gives us his entire multifaceted self in "Please". All I can say is thank you.

Anne Crow says

This was harder to read than his second book, grittier yet also more veiled. There were lines I shuddered at, from both pain at what he was saying and pleasure in how he could say it. But there is a rhythm to his work that draws me in.

James says

Jericho Brown is a kickass storyteller, which is why I love his poems and this book so much. Look at this short poem "Lunch", which I'll include here without line breaks:

In a fast-food line, one man pulls a penny from another man's hand, grins too wide a grin, and pays the extra change. The boy standing behind the register takes my jealous stare for one of disapproval and shakes his head at me to say, *I hate faggots too*. Carefully shifting my weight onto one skinny leg, I open my appropriate mouth to order.

I can appreciate how tight this story is in prose. It's three sentences, with exposition, tension, character development, a climax, and a sort of resolution. And it's all silent! Everything is conveyed through looks and body language and inference and spot-on details like the penny. I heard the poet read this in Houston a year

or two before the book came out, and I've remembered it vividly since.

And of course, the lineated version is even better; there's a genius line break between *faggots* and *too*, for instance. The craft always seems to be in service to the story.

There are more lyrical poems in the book, and narratives more involved than "Lunch," but it's all really, really good. Read it!

Lucas Sierra says

La experiencia poética parece atada, desde Rimbaud, a aquella imposible paradoja de lectura encapsulada en el "yo es otro". La experiencia de lectura, y toda lectura literaria es, en el fondo, una lectura poética, se atraviesa con ese sentido de la otredad, y debe, entonces, permitir al lector oficiante una expansión de su ser, por vías de olvido y evasión, como ocurre con los narradores realmente entretenidos; o de constante señalamiento y confrontación, como ocurre con los poetas reales, como ocurre con este libro de Jericho Brown.

La intimidad consignada en *Please* consigue crear un espejo en el lector. La experiencia del poeta, condensada en las cuatro partes del libro, se estructura en forma de melodía (de ahí que las cuatro partes sean "Power", "Pause", "Stop", "Repeat"), para incitar, por medio del canto, el abandono de los límites entre éste y quien lee. La música como espacio de comunión es, deliberadamente, uno de los centros temáticos de los poemas. El jazz, el R&B, la desgarradura del blues; pistas de interpretación sobre los mecanismos emulados por el poeta.

En general, *Please* es un libro sobre el amor y el dolor, ninguno de los dos teñido con ecos del romanticismo. No, aquí no hay un genio infuso en elucubraciones platónicas ni en consternaciones metafísicas. Hay un cuerpo, negro y homosexual, enfrentado a la soledad al rechazo tanto como a la violencia doméstica, a las relaciones tóxicas, al sexo inmensamente ligado a la agresividad y la ternura.

La familia, la pobreza, el desamor, la muerte, la esfinge de la figura paterna. Los temas permiten cercanía, generan un temblor sustentado, afortunadamente, en un lenguaje potente. La traducción de Andrea Cote se esmera en la literalidad del mensaje, a costa, claro, de cierta musicalidad. Por fortuna, el libro incluye los originales en inglés, y puede hacerse, entonces, una lectura-relectura afortunada en ambos idiomas, comprobando, en cada caso, la exigencia oral en la escritura de Brown. La partición de los versos, la entonación en los yambos, todo aparece propicio para la lectura en voz alta. Ni siquiera mi terrible acento de antioqueño hablando en inglés consiguió arruinarlos, y eso es decir mucho.

Les dejo este *Family portrait*, para que se animen a leer a Brown:

FAMILY PORTRAIT

My breath is also released
As I shiver onto my boyfriend's back
Then open my eyes to the faces
Of my children, faintly

Sketched in white swirls

On brown skin-the only place
He can carry them. Out of my body,
They look less like me

Than like my mother and father
Who will die when I do. Their mouths
Poised to blame, I wipe them away
Before they can speak. (120)

Y la traducción de Andrea Cote:

RETRATO DE FAMILIA

Mi respiración también descansa
Mientras me estremezco sobre la espalda de mi novio,
Entonces, abro los ojos a los rostros
De mis hijos, débilmente

Esbozados en remolinos blancos
Sobre piel marrón-el único lugar donde
Él puede cargarlos. Fuera de mi cuerpo
Se parecen menos a mí

Que a mi madre y a mi padre
Que morirán conmigo. Sus bocas
Ya preparadas para culpar. Las borro
Antes de que puedan hablar. (121)

Mia Tryst says

Dear God, **Please** will hurt you - in a good way. It's a very physical and lyrical book of poetry that just goes right through you with one seamless poem followed by another. Think of an extended metaphor, music as the medium, in which we are allowed to experience the speaker's pain in bass; joy, with its fierce undying love, ("Sean"; "Betty Jo Jackson"; "Like Father") sung in soprano until you are spent; and, throw in nothing less than a beautiful voice laced with male eroticism, its bluesy, smoky undertones and you'll end up with poetry so fine it rises to operatic heights. Lastly, let's not forget the title, **Please**, with its loaded innuendos and you've got a compelling book that begs to be read.

What is the most interesting part of reading this book is the voice, how intimate it is with the self: i.e., I get the feeling the speaker is speaking mostly to himself rather than intimating to a perceived audience. Think of the word, "intimate" as a verb rather than as an adjective. These poems speak to some deeper core of existence - where the "you" becomes the "I" and the distance becomes negligible. Also, the poems' strengths lie in their immediacy - we cut to the chase with not a lot of build up, or false starts and bookend

conclusions; immediacy is, in essence, what makes the poems strong and instantaneously rewarding - that "aha yes!" moment. In fairness, the weakest two poems are "Autobiography" and "Tin Man." These two poems read too much like lists. Aside from those two experimental poems the rest are tight and well executed. Pick up a copy of PLEASE and please read it so you can dispel the notion that most of today's poetry is dreck. You just have to find the good poetry and finding takes some searching - a little work on the part of the reader. I have done some of the work for you with **Please**.

Sample Poem:

Track 1: Lush Life

The woman with the microphone sings to hurt you,
To see you shake your head. The mic may as well
Be a leather belt. You drive to the center of town
To be whipped by a woman's voice. You can't tell
The difference between a leather belt and a lover's
Tongue. A lover's tongue might call you bitch,
A term of endearment where you come from, a kind
Of compliment preceded by the word sing
In certain nightclubs. A lush little tongue
You have: you can yell, Sing bitch, and, I love you,
With a shot of Patrón at the end of each phrase
From the same barstool every Saturday night, but you can't
Remember your father's leather belt without shaking
Your head. That's what satisfies her, the woman
With the microphone. She does not mean to entertain
You, and neither do I. Speak to me in a lover's tongue—
Call me your bitch, and I'll sing the whole night long.

alex says

jericho brown is absolutely incredible, especially when he reads his poetry live.

Frank Karioris says

Rereading. Heard him speak in Michigan in April. Sometimes you just need some poetic beauty - and pain - in your life. Still hearing his voice.

Saeed Jones says

I love this book because Jericho put some much love into it. Drawing from his personal experiences as well as his love of R&B, he's created quite a collection.

leynes says

This poetry collection overwhelmed me. I can sense that there is something in there. Something. In there. I am confused. So instead of trying to give you a sense of what Jericho's poems are about, I will let the text on the back cover speak for itself:

Please explores the points in our lives at which love and violence intersect. Drunk on its own rhythms and full of imaginative and often frightening imagery, *Please* is the album playing in the background of the history and culture that surround African American/male identity and sexuality. Just as radio favorites like Marvin Gaye, Donny Hathaway, and Pink Floyd characterize loss, loneliness, addiction, and denial with their voices, these poems' chorus of speakers transform moments of intimacy and humor into spontaneous music.

So, this book really wasn't written for me. I'm not African American. I am not male. I am not gay. I wasn't raised in a strongly religious southern environment. However, the themes of loss and loneliness are so universal, that I couldn't help but connect with most of what Jericho had to say. And even though I didn't have to suffer through the things he has suffered through, even though I didn't have to witness my dad beating my mum senseless, I felt like I was there with him. And it wasn't a pleasant feeling. Some of his words will punch in the face, claw at you, and not release you until you give blood.

I am honestly amazed that this is Jericho Brown's debut collection, I mean, it doesn't get much more badass than that. *Please* plays like a mix tape of old standards, R&B, and a little rock 'n' roll. Every poem is a track on that disc that provides the background music to your life. It has a unique rhythm. It flows. It hurts. In a 2009 interview with Open Source's Christopher Lydon, Jericho said, "I wanted to hit other people on the back with a belt, and make them like it, too." Well, that he achieved.

Track 1: Lush Life

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In certain nightclubs. A lush little tongue
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You, and neither do I. Speak to me in a lover's tongue—
Call me your bitch, and I'll sing the whole night long.

I don't know what it is about his poetry, but on the one hand I feel like I don't understand what he's trying to

communicate, and on the other hand I know exactly what he's talking about. It is terrifying, but also somewhat comforting?

The tension of the subject matter is mirrored in the tension of the beat. There is a constant tease of iambic rhythm in the lines mixed up with frequent stressed syllables to create a kind of syncopation like a snare drumbeat in the background of Jericho's song. The heavy beat is underscored by his use of pauses. Every line except the first and last is enjambed. This, combined with full stops in the middle of the lines, creates a breathiness to the work, like a singer performing a slow tune in a dark nightclub.

The collection is organized in four sections, Repeat, Pause, Power, and Stop. I picture not a fancy digital CD machine but an old tape player, buttons worn from constant use, tape looping and looping as the poems in *Please* loop and often come full circle.

Repeat is filled with reflections from childhood and with the inevitable imprint childhood leaves on the present. With the constant interweaving of childhood and the present, Brown seems to be saying that we are condemned to repeat the patterns of our childhood in our present relationships.

In *Pause*, the poems deal with relationships, with failed and lost love. They speak of anger, love, and lust with brutal honesty. Brown said in his Open Source interview that he was interested in, "the music that was playing in the background while history is being made." But his poems do not stay in the background. They jump out from the page. They burn skin.

Whereas in *Pause*, many of the poems feel like laments written from a place of powerlessness, the love poems in *Power* are often playfully wicked and vengeful. Clearly, he is no longer the man standing barefoot in a field of glass splinters, watching in silence as his man leaves. Here, Brown has the power; he is breaking the glass.

From divas to crickets to his parents' snores, everything sings in Jericho's lines, and each of his poems opens a door into this world of music. The final section of the book is called *Stop*, the "liner notes" for the songs in this mix tape. These notes speak of the tumultuous and tragic stories of the singers Brown has chosen to write about as well as the tumultuous times in which the songs were born. But as brutal as his work is, he does not leave the reader on the floor, grasping for breath. He gives something back. Something that is in there. In this collection. I am overwhelmed.
