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Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric



Synopsis

In this powerful sequence of TV images and essay, Claudia Rankine explores the personal and political unrest of our volatile new century. I forget things too. It makes me sad. Or it makes me the saddest. The sadness is not really about George W. or our American optimism; the sadness lives in the recognition that a life cannot matter. The award-winning poet Claudia Rankine, well known for her experimental multigenre writing, fuses the lyric, the essay, and the visual in this politically and morally fierce examination of solitude in the rapacious and media-driven assault on selfhood that is contemporary America. With wit and intelligence, Rankine strives toward an unprecedented clarity-of thought, imagination, and sentence-making-while arguing that recognition of others is the only salvation for ourselves, our art, and our government. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is an important new confrontation with our culture, with a voice at its heart bewildered by its inadequacy in the face of race riots, terrorist attacks, medicated depression, and the antagonism of the television that won't leave us alone.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Image and word shape a unique poetry collection that only Rankine can deliver. The shape of this book initially drew my attention. However, I was not necessarily attracted to the book's front cover. Nevertheless, the selected photographs throughout the collection fit perfectly with the political nature of some of the poems. The book itself has no index, thus making the entire structure of the book unconventional, a word describing Rankine's vision of America in all its "darkness." I would like to believe that the author intended for readers to read all of the poems as one (considering that there is no index), thus making a linear reading mandatory. However, I read pieces of some of the

poems, especially the lists, without specific care. The photographs grabbed me by the throat. For example, the photograph accompanying the poem on page 117 shocked me. Nelson Mandela wears an "HIV Positive" shirt. The image made me think about the labels used in reference to HIV/AIDS. His smile and the two words, printed on his shirt, spoke loud. I would like to believe that each of the poems reshapes the way we see paragraph form. The use of illustrations and lists disrupt the linear or "organized" way in reading these prose poems. As reader, I find myself conflicted by reading these poems. I am lost in a sense and I want that completion to be there in my whole/complete/unified reading. The poems on page 99 and 100, for example, create that tension. Thus, the use of dialogue, lines, prose pieces and images create a cross-flow of interventions, which I read as subversive. I love this poetry collection because it has given me the courage to experiment more with my prose poetry. I also love it because it uses images to radically critique and, perhaps, heal. What I find most interesting is the theme that image marks memory. Almost all of our senses are called to the surface here. I am drawn to the way in which the poems make me think about many issues buried in the psyche. For example, the poem about Princess Diana made me think about scratching the surface of (an apparent) "universal" mourning and sense of loss. The poem on page 83 made a difference in terms of the law/Law and who protects us from terror/crime. Plus, it made me think about the who in that "us" equation. In sum, Rankine speaks from a range of mediums that speak her poetry. They speak her voice. They shape her vision. Thus, is the brilliance of this poetry collection. This collection is ideal for courses in Women's Studies, Feminist Studies, Ethnic Studies, Literary Studies, especially Graduate Studies in Poetry.

I read this book for a poetry workshop I had joined on a whim (I'm not a poet, nor am I really all that familiar with the works of modern poets), and it completely changed the way I thought of poetry. Rankine's book is beautiful, accessible and a chilling portrait of what it's like to be an American in a post-9/11 world. It's hard to describe, really, what kind of book this is -- but poetry, memoir, documentary, whatever, it's fantastic.

It is apropos that Rankine would follow her book about giving birth (Plot) with this book about life. And what I mean here is life as that very complicated fact and concept that is always churning inside us. What does it mean that the liver is filtering out impurities, even as we sit on a couch watching television? In more well-worn terms, do we define life by our consciousness or our biology? Rankine chooses both for her answer. And I think I started really seeing the consequences of a choice like that when she offered up life as an alternative to death. In my mind, Rankine's choice of the prose

form, perhaps we could call it the mini-essay (what are you supposed to call those little stories by Lydia Davis?), fits with the intentions behind the book. The prose lets her knead away at this truth she's telling about life. There should be no doubt that form is important to Rankine. Just look at the formal choices she has made in her other books, especially *Plot*. How prose can affect a reader, and give access to some unspoken truth, should be fully considered by people who like this book. To me, this is what opens the book to more thorough reads in the future.

I just got this book on a friend's recommendation and thought that I would glance through it before going to sleep but I couldn't put it down. I ended up reading the whole thing in one sitting and can't wait to go through it again. It is so beautifully written and complex and moving. It is not like a typical poetry book in that it is structured more like essays but the essays blend together and fold into one another. It is like poetry in that the choice of words and phrases makes the work very emotionally charged and, well, I know this is a corny word, but I would say profound. It really is a work of art.

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