



And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos

John Berger

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Booker Prize-winning author John Berger reveals the ties between love and absence, the ways poetry endows language with the assurance of prayer, and the tensions between the forward movement of sexuality and the steady backward tug of time. He recreates the mysterious forces at work in a Rembrandt painting, transcribes the sensorial experience of viewing lilacs at dusk, and explores the meaning of home to early man and to the hundreds of thousands of displaced people in our cities today. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* is a seamless fusion of the political and personal.

And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos Details

Date : Published January 8th 1992 by Vintage (first published 1982)

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Author : John Berger

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Leif says

Incandescent. What is a world without John Berger? I can't imagine a world in which he hadn't existed.

Before almost anything else, and in almost alarmingly cute retro phrasing, this book informs its reader that it has two parts: "Part One is about Time. Part Two is about Space." And it's true enough, given that what follows is an extended meditation on questions of love, home, death, and humanity, split into the fractured modern conflict between quantified and experiential heuristics of time and the alienation from home that displacement, emigration, and distance impose on people today. It's also, and I think this is the most important bit, an earnest and intimate meditation on the space and time spent apart from his love, which inflects every observation. Nothing is abstract beyond reach; nothing is ponderous and inflated.

Altogether, this is beautiful in the way that only Berger could write. See, for instance, his receipt of a letter from his absent lover:

Perhaps it did not have to travel far; the distance between your voice and my ear was infinitesimal. But reality should never be confused with scale, it is only scale that has degrees.

Or see his meditations on emigration, which are heavy with truth:

Emigration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing water, living among strangers, but, also, undoing the very meaning of the world and – at its most extreme – abandoning oneself to the unreal which is the absurd.

Emigration, when it is not enforced at gunpoint, may of course be prompted by hope as well as desperation. [...] The poverty of the village may appear more absurd than the crimes of the metropolis. To live and die amongst foreigners may seem less absurd than to live persecuted by one's fellow countrymen. All this can be true. But to emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.

Simple, clear, and movingly compassionate.

There are also, of course, memories of Vincent van Gogh and Caravaggio, other friends and poets, and much more than what I can replicate here. But I think that what this book shows so well, like *A Seventh Man* did before it, is the way that Berger was always thinking of the most precarious of contemporary lives: those who are displaced, who emigrate, who move for work or safety and who find themselves adrift in the rubble of late capitalism. Much more than a critic of art, a novelist, or a theorist, Berger was attuned to humanity.

Rachel says

Weaving between prose and poetry, John Berger manages to get to the heart of love, distance, and loss. An amazing read. At least monthly, I pick it up to reread my favorite parts.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4 - Book of the Week:

Simon McBurney - a close friend of the late art critic and writer who died in January - reads John Berger's most personal book: part essay, part poetry collection, part memoir & love letter. McBurney also shares memories of Berger and the house and landscape that inspired the book in the early 1980s. Harriet Walter reads Berger's poetry.

Today we meet Berger in his beloved Haute-Savoie mountains, as he crosses the frontier into Italy and begins a rumination on human conceptions of time, memory, poetry and art, specifically the paintings of Rembrandt.

Abridged and produced by Simon Richardson.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08kttjw>

Margaret Adams says

I had to fight with this book at first: whole swaths of it I found opaque, evocative but not clear. Then it just opened up for me, catching me totally off-guard. It turned from an intellectual undertaking into a love-letter that had me reading with my hand over my mouth in the middle of a cafe.

I understood this book more on the expressive plane where I know exactly how it made me feel, but I don't have a solid grasp of all of the underlying technical elements. I most enjoyed the meditations on consciousness, on the construction of time, on language, Van Gogh, emigration and displacement, and love. I finished it and thought, *I should re-read this*. But Berger has written so much that perhaps I should just keep going with his other work instead.

Orsodimondo says

C'ERA UNA VOLTA IL TEMPO E LO SPAZIO

Bello a partire dal titolo.

Berger si conferma un *critico della cultura contemporanea con cui ha ingaggiato un confronto serrato, frontale ma non polemico, complesso ma anche sottile.*

Sotto forma di lettere alla propria amata, diventa presto un messaggio diretto al mondo intero, universale ma ancor più sociale.

Un percorso tra immagini e canzoni, riflessioni frammenti poesie.

Tra spazio e tempo, tra disegno e scrittura, tra parole e rappresentazioni, tra generi e stili.

È un libro che parla di molte cose, di pensieri, ma anche d'intensità emotive. È un diario, un libro sulle concezioni del tempo, sulla pittura (Caravaggio, Rembrandt), sulla sessualità, una riflessione sul vedere, ma anche sul tema dell'emigrazione.

Composto di poesie e di prose che si mescolano e si succedono senza un ordine prestabilito. Se Berger vuole parlare di alcune cose che gli stanno particolarmente a cuore, passa dalla prosa alla poesia, senza stacco e senza avvertire. Ma accade anche l'opposto, dai versi al saggio. La poesia si dimostra più immediata della prosa, più diretta, ma anche meno comprensibile, più misteriosa, più criptica, come sempre è l'espressione in versi.

E' come non avere mai visto Van Gogh o Caravaggio prima di aver letto queste smilze cento pagine, refrattarie a qualsiasi genere letterario: ma dopo, è come conoscere Van Gogh o Caravaggio in un altro modo, più profondo e indimenticabile, aver acceso una nuova luce sulle loro opere.

John Berger a 36 anni, nel 1962

Berger, uomo che ha abitato i confini, sa illuminare di luce nuova e profonda un filare di alberi, una finestra, un quadro, una fotografia, una frase di Pascal - le cose 'alte' e quelle 'basse'.

La prosa è molto più fiduciosa della poesia: la poesia parla alla ferita aperta

Un ringraziamento speciale a Maria Nadotti, ottima traduttrice e curatrice.

Bettie? says

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08kttjw>

Description: *Simon McBurney - a close friend of the late art critic and writer who died in January - reads John Berger's most personal book: part essay, part poetry collection, part memoir & love letter. McBurney also shares memories of Berger and the house and landscape that inspired the book in the early 1980s. Harriet Walter reads Berger's poetry.*

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Berger meditates on art, love and mortality - specifically how paintings depict time and how we understand the physical landscape around us, illustrated by sketches from the islands of Scotland and Berger's beloved Haute-Savoie mountains.

Berger explores the psychic impact of mass migration and how, once lost, the sense of a true home can rarely be regained.

Berger considered the twentieth century "the century of banishment" and today he continues his exploration on the psychic impact of mass migration where for migrants home is no longer a dwelling place but the untold story of a life being lived.

Berger explores the work of his favourite painter, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

5* Ways of Seeing

5* And Our Faces

P says

I'll read pages and pages of Berger thinking, what utter madness - what is this man on about at all.

And then, all of a sudden and at once, I'll find something not perception shifting, but perception giving: I see something, not differently, but new.

Apart from A Fortunate Man - which is to my mind an masterpiece - that is why I go back to him again and again: not because I enjoy his books from cover to cover, but because inevitably somewhere between those covers I'll find something utterly profound.

Kenneth says

"with you i can imagine a place where to be phosphate of calcium is enough."

Kasey Jueds says

It's so hard to categorize this book, which is one of the many things I love about it. It's part poetry and part prose, is about poetry and art and art-making and being awake in the world. And it is perfectly beautiful, both at the level of sentences and words and because of the ideas it contains and points toward. It's really impossible to summarize (yet another thing I loved). It's the first John Berger book I've read, and it's just right to start with, for all of the above reasons, plus the fact that it's brief - it feels in length much like a collection of poems: profound and resonant but compressed.

sofia says

Non perché la genialità di quei dipinti mi inibisca, ma perché l'esperienza da cui nascono e che esprimono - un desiderio che si scopre antico come il mondo conosciuto, una tenerezza che si riconosce come la fine del mondo, la riscoperta incessante e sempre nuova da parte degli occhi del proprio amore per un corpo noto - tutto questo viene prima delle parole e le oltrepassa.

Jeff Jackson says

Each pine at dusk

Lodges the bird
of its voice
perpendicular and still
the forest
indifferent to history
tearless as stone
repeats
in tremulous excitement
the ancient story
of the sun going down

Stirring combination of personal essay, art criticism, and poetry that examines and undermines received ideas about time, space, love, migration, nature, class, painting, and much more. Berger's poetry here is the biggest revelation - distilled, lyrical, haunted. This short book defies categorization, leaping between subjects with intuitive ease, recounting its stories in a tone both serious and tender.

David Schaafsma says

A first read of a great book that I think on subsequent readings will get even more important for me. A letter to a lover, a meditation in the way of Spinoza or other non-Rationalist philosophers, on art, love, language, poetry, photography, politics, art.... with sections on favorite artists like Carvaggio, and interspersed through it are poems, pretty wonderful poems. I'll keep this one by my bedside and add to this review as I read and reread and reflect. Much of what i appreciate about the book is its multi-genre approach, to weave philosophical reflections with stories with poetry. Why not?

Marc Nash says

Included in video review <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1131F...>

Francisca Pageo says

Ya son varias las reseñas y artículos que en Détour hemos dedicado a John Berger y siempre que vemos un libro nuevo editado suyo no queremos, ni debemos, dejarlo escapar. Aunque Y nuestros rostros, mi vida, breves como fotos, ya se editó anteriormente, Nórdica no ha querido dejarlo pasar y ha sacado una edición preciosa e ilustrada, gracias a Leticia Ruifernández, que nos acerca la obra del autor como si quisiéramos darle de comer migas de pan a los pájaros mientras estamos en el parque.

Como dice Manuel Rivas en el prólogo, toda la obra de John Beger es un laborioso avance por la incerterza, merodeando, sin pisar, y eso le permite ver lo imprevisible. De este modo, Berger siempre deja una entrada al misterio, a pesar de mirar y explicar la realidad. En este libro encontramos rastros de poesía y de ideas, de evocaciones y pensamientos. Todo ello de manera tenue, calma y breve. Breve como las fotos, como dice el libro y como son los instantes y momentos.

El mundo doméstico y cotidiano se ve aquí reflejado. Vemos otro aspecto de Berger en las letras, aunque no ande muy lejos de sus ensayos o sus dibujos. Sus cuentos son imaginación y son semillas de pequeños

mundos sumergidos bajo lo cotidiano, entre el tiempo y la conciencia. Entre el día a día y la paciencia. «Lo que nos asombra / no puede ser el vestigio / de lo que ha sido. / El mañana aún ciego / avanza lentamente. / La luz y la visión / corren a encontrarse / y de su abrazo / nace el día / con los ojos abiertos, / alto como un potro.»

Fragmentos lúcidos y perennes que tienen cobijo en el corazón y que son elocuentes. Es destacable la lucidez que atraviesa el libro, como si de un rayo de luz a través de una cortina que se mueve entrara en nuestra habitación que es nuestra mente.

Berger recoge la realidad con las manos. La mirada y el tacto aquí lo son todo, aunque las ideas estén sobre las cosas. «Lo visible siempre ha sido y sigue siendo la principal fuente humana de información sobre el mundo. Uno se orienta a través de lo visible.» El autor además ahonda en la muerte y la bordea sin llegar al abismo. Corre y camina, camina y corre por los senderos dolorosos que la muerte tiene.

El libro es un tratado emocional sobre el tiempo y el lugar, el cual se divide en estas dos partes y ofrece al lector un pequeño acondicionamiento para que observemos desde la mirada de Berger. Este utiliza la poesía como búsqueda. Búsqueda del amor y de lo que es ser humano. E incluso utiliza la naturaleza para hallarse a sí mismo. Al igual que la pintura, de la cual expone sus preferencias, dedicando una gran parte a Caravaggio, su pintor favorito.

De este modo, estamos ante un libro poético y narrativo, ilustrado y bellissimo, sobre la forma de ver de John Berger. Un libro que no puede faltar en nuestra biblioteca si estamos interesados en su pensamiento, su poesía y su dialéctica.

Jude says

this was my first book of Berger's and still the one i love the most. his passions illuminate my own, or open me up to new ones.

it is a combination of poetry and prose that mirrors those elements in everyday experience, everyday willingness to experience as fully as possible.

in my own day to day i wander in and out of the past, the lines of reference and connection sometimes so demanding and yet so ephemeral i wonder if everyone lives this way and how do we bear it?

berger articulates the music of time, space, objects, people and the chords we are part of.

i could not be more grateful
