



Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry

Essex Hemphill , Charles I. Nero (Introduction)

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Ceremonies offers provocative commentary on highly charged topics such as Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of African-American men, feminism among men, and AIDS in the black community.

Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry Details

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Author : Essex Hemphill , Charles I. Nero (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry for online ebook

Matthew says

These are the poems I love for- pointed, private, piercing. This collection captures a rare and raw voice.

Marcelle says

Really powerful poetry and short essays by a black, gay author who died of AIDS in the 90's. Confronts issues of race, sexuality, love, lust, public policy, discrimination activism, and oodles more. A particularly touching story about him coming out to his grandmother is included. His work addresses the works of others, including a (rightfully) critical essay about Mapplethorpe's jungle fever.

Paloma Etienne says

Certain, special, lucid

To Essex Hemphill

I am reading you and I am wondering
What the verse does and when and how
You don't betray me with your words
They are piercing
And just a little uncomfortable
(It's your non pacified rage that surmounts everything)

You wear the essence of frustration up your sleeve
It reminds me so much of James Baldwin
That ambition to reach over and win.

You win and take home trophies and amorphous,
gigantic bunches of gift flowers
And overwhelmed by emotion, by other people's searches and falls, you collapse and rest by the side of the bed
which always awaits in return

The ambition for success, that which burns our insides
The quiet success that pacifies our spirits
that drives the mileage of cacophonies away
that works the soil and breaks away starchy weeds
and allows new seeds to grow in the ploughed and rendering soil ...

Elizabeth says

Since I'm reading this as part of my New Year's Resolution to by-God read more books that are explicitly about race, I am specially noticing the parts I don't understand here. This is opaque to me; Hemphill's experience is so foreign that I am struggling to understand the emotional landscape here. Which is my flaw and not Hemphill's.

That said, I can judge the introduction: it's not very good. It's rambling, unorganized, and too long; it didn't add anything to my experience of reading the actual text, I think.

The combination of prose and poetry in the same volume was a struggle for me, although Hemphill can certainly write both. I liked the essays better than the poetry, by and large, but that is probably because I couldn't enter into the poems with the confidence I could the essays. "Voices" is a fabulous piece, the essay criticizing Mapplethorpe rocks, and "Ceremonies" is chilling in its description of the sexual culture in which Hemphill came to adulthood.

Catherine says

Was just recommending this to someone last week. Excellent, insightful, thought-provoking collection.

Remy says

<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/29/obi...>
<http://newsreel.org/video/MARLON-RIGG...>
<https://www.kanopystreaming.com/produ...>

Juliana says

Fearless.

Sara says

I recently found out about Essex Hemphill while I was frontlisting up-coming titles. In case you also didn't know, he was a black, gay poet and activist in the 80s and 90s who died from AIDS in the mid 90s. I found out that one of his most well known works was *Ceremonies* and of course, it's out of print. But my library has it WHAT UP.

It definitely took me forever to read this book because I have book ADD and because of all the essays dispersed through out the collection. I enjoyed most of the essays, but some were harder to slog through. But really, it made it a more interesting way to read the poetry because I'd read all these poems about crazy powerful shit like being black and gay in the U.S. in the 80s and 90s, plus other heavy subjects such as the black nurse who worked with the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (go ahead, look it up) and a woman who

chopped up her son to save him from demons. Hemphill's poetry is full of the raw imagery of sexual acts and violence, yet he always seems to add beauty or a sense of urgency. I don't know what I'm saying. All I'm saying is there were so many poems that I just had to look up from my book and nod and think, "well, *fuck*." Ya know?

Anyway. So many intersections in Hemphill's work — race & sexuality, obviously, but also gender and class. Not to mention the violence against and within the black community and the violence against and AIDS epidemic within the queer community. He really hits on so many important issues.

I really wish this book weren't out of print because it should be taught in queer studies classes and a new biography of Hemphill (*Hold Tight Gently*) just came out a few years ago. So much of his work is still relevant and fucking important today. We're still dealing with most of these issues 20 years later.

Nina says

Yes, read this.

Mark Estes says

Essex Hemphill's *Ceremonies* is an experience every black gay male from various walks of life and ages should endure. The prose and poetry between this under 200 pager is concrete evidence that what black gay men and black people in general are currently experiencing in 2018 is nothing new. In fact, it's quite sad that the trails blazed by Hemphill, Joseph Beam, Assotto Saint, Marlon Riggs, and others 'grew cold' in recent years in some areas, but that we're still facing resistance to the revolutionary act of black men loving black men as well. Hemphill is/was a godsend and *Ceremonies* has truly changed my life for the better.
