



Does Your House Have Lions?

Sonia Sanchez

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Nominated for the 1998 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry

Recommended Reading from Emerge

An epic poem on kin estranged, the death of a brother from AIDS, and the possibility of reconciliation and love in the face of loss.

Does Your House Have Lions? Details

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Author : Sonia Sanchez

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From Reader Review Does Your House Have Lions? for online ebook

Emily says

"why won't you stand up
show us how to dare
why won't you stand up
investigate this nightmare
show us how to prepare
your children's eyes stand at attention
your children's eyes itch for resurrection."

Bethany says

This epic poem is absolutely wonderful. Even with the difficult, abstract language, the emotion and tone are so obvious. It is heartbreaking, particularly the last section. I need to read more Sonia Sanchez. Not only does it discuss very beautifully the intersection between being African American and being gay, it also deals with AIDS, which is such a touchy subject. It captures the familial inner conflict when these issues arise, and it captures them through poetry, which in my opinion, is the truest way to capture humanity.

The book was primarily through her brother's perspective, as it was about her brother. I think the language could have been a bit more straightforward, and it would have had a greater emotional impact. However, I am uncomfortable critiquing the style of poetry, because preferences are so relative. This is simply how I feel. I would have been much more touched by the poetry if the experiences of everyone involved had been expressed in a more tangible manner.

Destiny says

While I loved the writing, I couldn't connect with the poems themselves.

Emily says

Sanchez writes here about her brother's death from AIDS. She does so through the voices of her family members, as well as the voices of African American ancestors. The result is rhythmic, haunting, and (as is to be expected) poignant.

Ijeoma says

Ms. Sanchez a poet... transcendent spirituality - vivid talent and aptitude for reawakening the past -

summoning the future and all it's hope for revival.

P.s.

A piece of literature to be re-read and re-read to grasp the allusions, allegory, historical and political references completely.

Tristan says

This is the first work by Sonia Sanchez I have read and I very much enjoyed it. *Does Your House Have Lions?* is a massive book length poem that chronicles family, loss, pain, and illness. It is apparently based on the death of her brother to AIDS, although that is apparent in the book primarily (perhaps entirely) through oblique indications that his illness was unusual and unusually virulent as he dies in the latter portion of the book. Told in the voices of an entire family, the work captures the narrative with its fragments and questions and uncertainty. Sanchez builds a family that feels real with bits like

i checked myself out of the hospital
sister. i'm back at work on a new skyscraper
i'm peiceing together the city in a recital
of steel and windows. no rice paper
walls here to destroy my design. no bootlegger
wires light this expensive east-side dwelling
up here, my limbs sequester themselves in lightning

emerging naturally from the web of feeling that grabs this family, like any family that endures fear and loss. Sanchez's family epic is filled with emotion and the arrival of the "ancestors" in the final section--with their sometimes formalized voice ("do you remember me, huh? / when our teeth were iron, huh? / did you drum about me, hey? / and not babylon, hey?") whips that feeling up to a pitch. I liked the fourth section of the poem best, but it needs the first three to begin the feeling and the story, painting a family that knows what it feels. I here is a passage in the brother's voice to illustrate

how to erect respect in a country of men
where dollars pump their veins?
how to return from exile from swollen
tongues crisscrossing my frail domain?
how to learn to love me amid all the pain?
how to look into his eyes and be reborn
without blood and phlegm and thorn?

Finally, I was very interested in the title of his work. I think it is possible that it shapes the piece by framing the conflict and power of lions, or maybe is helps situate it in a particular urban environment (the kind of neighborhood where there are old houses with lions out front). It also might draw in associations with strength and with the structure of a pride of lions, the first of which is important when one is living such an experience and the second may mirror the dynamics between characters in the text. (I'm not so sure about that one). If people have thoughts on how the title reflects on the poem, I'd really appreciate hearing about them.

Angélique (Angel) says

3 1/2 Stars. This is a poem rooted in Black traditions of epic, ancestral story-telling. This is a poem of loss and disconnect and healing and hope. This is a poem full of living and of dying. This is a poem I look forward to re-reading again and again.

Zaynab Shahar says

I spent the morning reading this in the bath tub while listening to Hex Partner's "Darling, Safe Passage to You". I walked away from it thinking that I want to see this poem performed as if it was a choreopoem, because it has that beautiful potential about it, to come alive on stage and really take on the imagination of the actors as they try to speak to its themes of familial estrangement, death, and reconciliation. I wonder whether she intended to write this to be performed, or embodied on stage in any sort of way. At any rate, while its a short, epic read (depending on your reading speed), this is a book to meditate on, take with you, carry inside of you, especially in these times.

Jamie Z. says

A beautiful, heartbreaking poetry story.

Pia Mogollon says

A wonderful collections of poetry that read like a story in 4 Or 5 voices. I meant to jot down an exerpt but didn't get around to it. Sanchez writes beautifully and lyrically and tantalizes the imagination with her verbal imagery. I was particularly drawn to the 'brother's voice' poems in this book. It is a small compilation, so not a long read.

Chaneli says

beautiful, powerful, and emotional poetry collection that Sonia wrote about the relationship between her brother and father. There's so so much love, loss, estrangement, a son/brother dying of AIDS and each family member dealing and reconciling with his lost. I love the various voices Sanchez chose to write the poems from the sister's voice, to the brother's voice, moving to the father's voice and then familial/ancestor's voices. All of which were very powerful.
one of my favorite poets and always in constant awe and appreciation for every work written by this woman.

Chloe Glynn says

This book changed the way I saw Philadelphia. Strange that so much courage and boldness can be so subtle

until called out by poets' eyes. It's simple, strong, coherent, you can almost hear breaths between the words. True poetry from a true poet.

Marie says

Powerful group of poems about the poet's brother's struggle with AIDS. These poems are told from the perspective of sister, brother, father, mother, and ancestors. The poems speak about being gay in African American families, which is rare to find outside Baldwin and others...

Rogene Carter says

Haunting dark from beginning to end.

Xian Xian says

Borrowed from the Library

Does Your House Have Lions? is a small collection of micro poetry and haiku. The collection is centered on the theme of family and loss. The little snippets are built as minimal as possible. Sonia Sanchez is known for writing in traditional Japanese poetry forms. I don't really have much to say about this collection other than the fact that it's about the self-discovery and loss of an African American family. A father who isn't always present, a son discovering that he's gay and exploring that in the AIDS epidemic, and a sister and mother who are caught in between all of the heaviest conflicts of that time, the racism and the fluctuating changes of a generation. And then there's death and the loss, at the end there's this really poignant scene where the son connects with his ancestors after death. So there's a sort magical realist influence going on here and I honestly wished it was a little longer.

Rating: 5/5

Originally posted on Notes on the Shore
