



Slapboxing with Jesus (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Victor LaValle

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Twelve original and interconnected stories in the traditions of Junot Díaz and Sherman Alexie. Victor D. LaValle's astonishing, violent, and funny debut offers harrowing glimpses at the vulnerable lives of young people who struggle not only to come of age, but to survive the city streets.

In "ancient history," two best friends graduating from high school fight to be the one to leave first for a better world; each one wants to be the fortunate son. In "pops," an African-American boy meets his father, a white cop from Connecticut, and tries not to care. And in "kids on colden street," a boy is momentarily uplifted by the arrival of a younger sister only to discover that brutality leads only to brutality in the natural order of things.

Written with raw candor, grit, and a cautious heart, **slapboxing with jesus** introduces an exciting and bold new craftsman of contemporary fiction. LaValle's voices echo long after their stories are told.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Victor D. LaValle grew up in Queens, New York, an African American male in a city and a country where guys who look like him are made to feel like interlopers. His debut collection, *Slapboxing with Jesus*, is hard-edged, violent, poetic. As in Junot Diaz's *Drown*, the prose is a series of choppy, precise sentences, like jabs ("The NYU banners flapped with the wind, loud enough to sound like teeth cracking in your head"), and the stories take place in small stuffy apartments where walls are inadequate shields against the loud and inescapable neighborhood.

Like Diaz, LaValle is pretty merciless when it comes to the subject of women. As the title suggests, this is a macho book. The opening sentence of the first story begins, "The next morning I was still scratching my nuts." Readers without nuts might be a little put off. The love that occurs in these pages is between brothers, between guys who have known each other since they were kids and who have tried to bail each other out, set each other up, find a whore they can both share. In the powerful three-page story "Chuckie," even boyhood bonds break apart in the face of a violent Italian gang. When the title character is beat up, the narrator realizes that he can only protect himself: "The blood started coming. I didn't know a face had so much. Helping was still an option for the others, but not me..."

The highlight of the book is "Ghost Story." Like Denis Johnson's famous "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," it renders paranoid delusions from the first person--and bit by bit the prose collapses as the narrator's medication wears off. Here he recalls a stint in a mental hospital:

Just the hours that were eons sitting on a couch, a row of ten of you, ten or twenty, no books, magazines too simple for the mildly retarded and your active mind leaps further and further over an empty cosmos, as lonely as the satellites sent to find life in the universe. But in there, at least, was when I'd realized how they waged their war, my enemies: through sockets and plugs, through a current.

Such passages establish LaValle as a writer to be reckoned with, one capable of transporting the reader to a strange and terrible interior. --*Emily White*

From Publishers Weekly

"These days, the most revolutionary thing you can be is articulate," a teacher tells one of the characters in LaValle's debut collection, which *Aby that standardAis* more than revolutionary: it's radiant. These 12 stories mostly concern boys *Ablack, white, Latino, AsianA* coming of age in Queens during the 1980s, and their strategies for surviving street life on the one hand and, just as harrowing, adolescence on the other. All bluster on the surface, LaValle's characters are disarmingly vulnerable underneath, and this book is as warm and funny as it is tough. The one thing these hard-shelled boys from the hood crave most is to be held tenderly. Unfortunately, they get in their own way more often than not. In "raw daddy," Sean spends his days dreaming of ways to save humanity, but can't resist cheating on his girlfriend. In "getting ugly," the "big eyes and funny skin" narrator won't admit he's falling in love with beautiful Deidre; even as he watches a sentimental sunset with her, he insists he's just "out for ass." And in "class trip," 15-year-old Anthony makes arrangements with his friends to visit a crackhead prostitute behind his girlfriend's back. When they're not dreaming of love, LaValle's characters are dreaming of escape: Ahab joins the Marines, his best friend Horse moves to the suburbs and Anthony plots to get into trouble so he'll be sent to an aunt in Trinidad as punishment. The stories are stunningly crafted *Aespecially* the last seven, which all feature Anthony *Aand* the

writing is sharp and jazzy: parakeets are "not quite green... only half ripe"; goats have the faces of "Evil Professors"; and memories come "as easy as a cookie with your tea." If LaValle's characters make tragic, disastrous choices at times, they are nevertheless redeemed through the power of their narratives. "Minor Herodotus I will be, in remembering it all," LaValle writes; "our lives, to me, are important artifacts." This is an impressive, accomplished debut. Agent, Gloria Loomis. (Oct.) FYI: LaValle has been chosen for the Barnes & Noble Discover New Writers program.

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From Kirkus Reviews

A superb first collection of 12 partially interrelated tales about ethnic minorities struggling for survival in contemporary New York City and environs, reminiscent of and at their best equal to Puerto Rican American Junot Daz's seminal *Drown* (1996). LaValle's penchant for narrative and typographical quirks stories begun in initially baffling mediae res, titles that eschew capital letters, a wide space between paragraphs followed by the sentence ``Thats how long she paused, watching me" belie the blunt realism of his taut stories, which are grouped under the rubrics ``the autobiography of new york today" and ``one boy's beginnings." The opening section focuses on urban layabouts loosely promising themselves they'll channel their violence into military careers ("ancient history") or engaging in dangerously unsafe sex ("raw daddy") and, in two notably vivid pieces, recording a lonely computer programmer's hesitant romance with a hooker unfazed by his looks (getting ugly"), and a teenaged bisexual prostitute's fatalistic lifestyle ("slave," a horrific vignette capped by a stunning final sentence). The volume's second section features multiracial teenaged Anthony, in ``trinidad" (where he's exiled, in hopes he'll ``outgrow" his incipient homosexuality), and growing up in and around Flushing, where he devises strategies to sidestep neighborhood brutality (in ``chuckie" and ``kids on colden street" the latter another whose steel-trap ending pulls you right up out of your chair), hesitantly bonds with an absentee father ("pops"), ruefully observes his mother's grandiose wish-dreaming ("how i lost my inheritance"), and erratically negotiates the pitfalls of ethnic conflict and emergent sexuality (who did we worship"). Throughout, LaValle maintains pitch-perfect tension between his stories' bleak contents and the willed detachment nourished by their composite protagonist-narrator, who continually reminds himself that ``A civilization has been lost. Minor herodotus I will be, remembering it all." A debut of impressive originality and subtly understated emotional force. We may be hearing here one of the most eloquent new voices of the approaching century. -- *Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Troy Riley:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim or goal; it means that book has different type. Some people really feel enjoy to spend their time for you to read a book. They are reading whatever they consider because their hobby is reading a book. What about the person who don't like examining a book? Sometime, man feel need book if they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will need this *Slapboxing with Jesus* (Vintage Contemporaries).

James Matter:

This *Slapboxing with Jesus* (Vintage Contemporaries) are reliable for you who want to be considered a successful person, why. The reason of this *Slapboxing with Jesus* (Vintage Contemporaries) can be one of many great books you must have is actually giving you more than just simple reading through food but feed

an individual with information that possibly will shock your preceding knowledge. This book is definitely handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed versions. Beside that this Slapboxing with Jesus (Vintage Contemporaries) forcing you to have an enormous of experience such as rich vocabulary, giving you trial run of critical thinking that we realize it useful in your day activity. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

Donna Nichols:

This book untitled Slapboxing with Jesus (Vintage Contemporaries) to be one of several books that will best seller in this year, this is because when you read this reserve you can get a lot of benefit into it. You will easily to buy this particular book in the book retail store or you can order it via online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more easily to read this book, as you can read this book in your Mobile phone. So there is no reason for your requirements to past this reserve from your list.

Vickie Flores:

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