

Jericho Brown, *The Tradition* (2019)

Things to Consider

- Brown working within tradition of African American writers who use and subvert traditional poetic forms associated with white canonical literature
- Primarily focused on engaging with and subverting lyric poetry and lyric form
 - Lyric Poetry has a long history dating back to antiquity; expresses personal emotions/feelings, often short and intense, typically spoken in first person, and traditionally accompanied by music.
 - In 20th Century and contemporary contexts, closely linked to confessional poetry but with looser use of meter and rhyme
- Brown also reinvents poetic tradition through his creation of the “duplex” (the collection contains five of these poems on pp. 18, 27, 49, 68, and 72)
 - Brown’s “Duplex” poems combine the sonnet, villanelle, blues, and the ghazal
 - Ghazal: an Arabic tradition of amatory poems or odes, expressing the pain of loss or separation and the beauty of love in spite of pain, and usually structured through 5 to 15 couplets
 - “Duplex” poems are ordered through a series of couplets that play with a series of repetitions and juxtapositions
 - In the last “Duplex” (p. 72), Brown further builds upon the form to include a cento, which is a poem made up out of lines from previous poems

General Themes/Explorations

- The body and poetic form both struggling to break free of the private and public forces that attempt to “ensnare and erase it”
- Entanglements of myth and history; tensions between personal and public history; national injustice alongside private pain
 - Slavery, imperialism, capitalism, police brutality, anti-blackness, sexual violence
 - Problems of Black masculinity interwoven through violence and desire; physical aggression as form of touch/intimacy between men
 - Interrogation of whiteness and its privileges, violence, and erasures
 - Language of myth and flowers linked to histories of the body—specifically, Black, queer bodies entangled in both familial/romantic relationships of power, violence, sex, and love

General Structure

1. Personal history of family and coming-of-age alongside public history of violence and systemic racism/anti-blackness
2. History of American violence against Black men and women; erasures enacted by whiteness and racism; toxic masculinity and sexual violence
3. The possibilities of Black queer love, survival, and healing