



Perforated Heart

Eric Bogosian

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Almost forty years after moving to Manhattan, author Richard Morris has achieved if not stratospheric renown then at least the accomplished career and caliber of fame that he envisioned for himself as a younger man. Now financially comfortable and artistically embittered, Richard is at his home upstate recuperating from heart surgery and nursing resentment toward his publisher and his reading public who have found new, more exciting writers and left his star to wane. In his attic, Richard comes across a stack of notebooks, the journals he began keeping when he arrived in New York in the late '70s. He is alternately fascinated and repelled by the young man he meets in these pages: hilariously naive and egotistically misguided, the younger Richard compulsively absorbs everything around him from art and creativity to sex and drugs. As he reads more about himself, written by himself, Richard discovers that the pivotal moments of self-invention -- and self-realization -- occur far outside the conventional chronology of a lifetime.

"Perforated Heart" explores two wholly different characters -- a young, ambitious artist and his older self, jaded by both success and failure -- and creates an unforgettable portrait of the two men who inhabit the one individual. By turns meditative, deftly observant, and scathingly analytical, Eric Bogosian re-creates the landscape and atmosphere of 1970s New York City with fresh, vivid imagery and reveals a powerful commentary on the dynamic between creativity and commerce in the artistic world. Perforated Heart is his most rewarding and penetrating novel yet, with prose that reflects an equally astonishing range of experience and emotion.

Perforated Heart Details

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Author : Eric Bogosian

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From Reader Review Perforated Heart for online ebook

Erin says

For the first half of the book, I was prepared to give it two stars. I wasn't really enjoying it but the writing was interesting enough and the storyline, contrasting a journal of a writer in the present to his journal thirty years earlier, was holding my interest enough to continue. Around the midway point, though, it just became repetitious and uninteresting. I decided to read this book because it was listed as one of the best book covers of 2009... I guess it's true what they say about not judging a book by its cover :)

Will Johnson says

Eric Bogosian, the terrific playwright and hilarious actor, totally brings it with this novel. The book, much like Bogosian's play Talk Radio, lacks any real heroes, but you are so intoxicated with the journey of our depressed, neurotic, sometimes misogynistic, often drunk narrator, through two different time periods no less, that you don't want to admit the truth.

Bogosian does a great job balancing the Richard (the main character) from 1976-1979 with the Richard of 2006/2007. To say they are two different people is both the truth and a lie. Both are certainly the same voice but with different experiences and worldview. . .but takes until the gripping finale to discover that, whether they know it or not, both 'characters' are one blistering personification of art and the evil it takes to maintain it.

The flow SEEMS abrupt, switching from 1977 and 2006 randomly but even though some events don't concur with each other (like what Richard is doing in '77 has nothing to do with what's going on in '06) it connects on a deeper level. . .almost something psychological. Keep in mind, never has a narrator been so untrustworthy but so charismatic, in any decade, then Richard in Perforated Heart.

The book has a patter, one that aligns with Bogosian's on screen speech patterns in other work so it is hard NOT to think of Bogosian as Richard. But it's fine. as a movie, Bogosian would be perfect for the role, especially as a middle-aged version of Richard in 2006.

While the book appears to be plotless, it's structure is based on the thought process of one man, so it therefor meanders but to realistic effect. In 1977, Richard might be screwing up his body with drugs while in 2006 Richard is torturing himself with doubt.

The book's strength is in it's ability to perfectly capture human emotion, both real and fake. Doubt, fear, courage, hate, love, fake-love, admiration, disgust, success, failure, apathy, and all the thoughts we'd love to speak in situations where it is highly inappropriate to do so.

My only qualms with the book are a)editing errors throughout and b)a 'tiredness' of caring for someone so vile (yet funny) and depressed for so long. The book is only 271 pages but so emotionally intense it can drain you.

Cristian V. Bizau says

I was on a train ride for 17 hours and I can tell you guys, this book fed me horrible-but-good food, served me whisky, gave me a ride through the city night up until the very last minute of the ride (read the book then re-read the parts I enjoyed the most). This book made me smile- a happy and a sad smile-, laugh, cry and most of all it made me want to write. This was also my first book from Bogosian and I can tell you, it was one hell of a introduction.

Janellyn51 says

I went to hear him read last night....he's a dynamic and interesting guy. I met him on the Red Line one night on my way home from work about 9 or 10 years ago. He was real nice, asked me what I was reading...one of Dennis Lehane's books so I told him a little about Lehane being from Dorchester and what I liked about his writing...pre Mystic River...Anyway, it was cool to hear him talk about his writing and although I knew he was pretty prolific and had his hand in a lot of pies, I don't think I realized he's written as much as he has...so this is as good a place to start as anyway.

Jennifer says

This one took some patience...at first I really thought it was going nowhere, but in the end it turned out to be nicely structured. Man in his 50s finds his diaries from the 1970s and we realize what a completely different person he has become. Nice touches evoking NYC in the 70s.

David Lentz says

Richard Morris is a writer who prides himself deeply in his own personal honesty. Like Hemingway he believes that his job as a writer is to write one true sentence after another. Like Norman Mailer he believes that he must guide himself toward madness, to glimpse into the abyss and then write about what he sees resident there. Unfortunately, Norman Mailer chose to become a social clown existentially acting-up to promote his books and both writers may have been better served to understand Hemingway's engagement more deeply. As a young man Morris devotes his life to becoming immersed into the hippie life of New York City. He catches glimpses of the Andy Warhol crowd of the 70's and chases endlessly after beautiful, young models. He suffers for his art and I give him great credit for this: but every respectable literary novelist pays his or her dues. Morris takes large quantities of alcohol and diverse street drugs in this quest for pure, artistic honesty. But how honest is the writing of someone on drugs and alcohol? We love Fitzgerald's novels despite his alcoholism for the pure, sober, lyric clarity of his work in spite of it. Morris name-drops a card catalogue of novelists: Joyce, Mailer, Hemingway, Dostoyevsky, Gaddis, Roth and TC Boyle. But Morris really doesn't add much value in his narrative about them beyond the names. As an older man in his 50's Morris comes to grip with his mortality after recovering from a heart attack much in the same way as Yambo recovers from a stroke in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* by Umberto Eco. Morris gains wealth and seeks more fame after his latest novel is initially received lukewarmly by critics and the public. Morris performs radically unethical acts, which he writes off cavalierly as honesty. The women of his life are beautiful, but shallow creatures, ultimately fixated like Morris on wealth, fame and epic self-interest.

Essentially, Richard Morris is a narcissist and is the sun in his urban solar system. It's credible to view Morris as the personification of New York City. No narrative voice is so singularly vain as the first-person singular. As a result despite his vast social network and audience, he remains totally alone with far fewer days ahead than behind him and unloved with death physically attacking his heart. The writing here is engaging but could have been better served with closer editing as Bogosian seeks to shock us with the gritty reality of his recognitions and articulated truth. Richard Morris does not yet seem fully to recognize that cruel and brutal honesty often serves no useful purpose except to hurt and alienate other people. Vastly more important than his evangelism of cruel honesty is good faith and real love, which are more central to artistic integrity than the vanity of subjective honesty. Does the successful writer have a duty to a worthy protégé? Richard Morris has no duty to anyone, except himself. I understand that he wants the protégé to suffer for his art as the mature artist has done in his youth within the crucible of urban hardship. Richard Morris is essentially compelled to dwell in the hell of his own self-indulgence. He is incapable of any semblance of humanity, except in the treatment of his family, and betrays every soul whom he befriends. Isn't the real job of great writers to inspire humanity? Morris serves to make the world more harsh, bitter and cruel by having focused his artistic integrity upon the easily discerned ugliness of life in the name of brutal honesty. Let's be honest: why can't Morris discern the real beauty of life? Perhaps, his blindness to real, honest beauty is the greatest tragic flaw of Morris.

Marsha says

Richard Morris has just had recent heart surgery. It was very mild but it has led him on an introspective journey about his life as a writer. Digging through his attic, he comes across diaries that he wrote as a young man. While the diaries show a pretentious naïveté that makes him cringe, they are very much indicative of the man he will become. Urgent, incisive, brutally almost painfully honest and yet aching with desperate loneliness, this latest work by Eric Bogosian shows the author and playwright at the height of his powers. At once brimming with youthful, manic energy and mature weariness, Perforated Heart is a worthy addition to any shelf housing his earlier works. The path set by writings like *subUrbia*, *Talk Radio* and *Wasted Beauty* has led him to this current epistolary novel about a man caught on the rack of his own indifference, self-pity and yearning for fame.

Kay says

This was a delightful read. Bogosian's voice was strong. He displayed a true craftsmanship with both language choice and structure. The composition was as deliberate as what one expects to see in a favorite painting or photograph. True New York City immersion experience.

Philip says

This book struck very close to home. It made me uncomfortable. The format of journaling. Being one and separate by time. Ambition and self loathing. Death and indulgence. These things make me me and Bogosian helped me accept a lot of that

Anjuli Enthoven says

I wanted to give this book a 3.5, but goodreads doesn't allow that. Super sexist, self-involved protagonist that I had a difficult time liking and/or relating to. He raped a woman and barely cares at all. Occasionally interesting character descriptions but not a page turner where you can't stop reading at all.

Glenn says

A well crafted book. An aging successful writer retreats to his CT summer home to recuperate from heart surgery and brings his 30 year old journals to read. The rest of the book is alternating journal entries from the young and old writer, as he wrestles with his craft, fame, women, and mortality. It's the same Bogosian character from his monologues--the hard drinking New York street intellectual, but here you see the guy looking back at himself with amazement wondering how could have ever been like that. And yet the reader hears the same mix of arrogance and laziness in the older version of the character as well.

Bandit says

I've seen Bogosian as an actor, read subUrbia and watched its cinematic adaptation, for all of that this novel might be the best example and/or use of his talent. Behold a portrait of an artist as a young man and as his older self. Former struggling through the dirtily glamorous dangerous urban wilderness NYC used to be in the 70s, latter as an accomplished wealthy famous author in a much more polished, much more expensive version of the same city. And through it all he manages to remain a thoroughly arrogant, self absorbed, compellingly repulsive (or repulsively compelling) prick. Somewhere along the way he has convinced himself that it is better to be honest than nice, which subsequently doomed any possibility of relationships with any degree of meaning, killing off any semblance of empathy. It's easier to observe his character change in the early years, with age come the riches and accolades that offer a numbing sort of comfort. When a brush with his own mortality makes Richard Morris reexamine his life and revisit his past, there isn't much to like. It makes for an interesting read and quite possibly a certain degree of misanthropy and emotional unavailability creates better authors, examining human condition through the safety glass of the distance of one's ultimate truth/version of authenticity. It certainly doesn't make for a better person, but hey, you're reading about a guy, not dating him. If morally questionable protagonists don't put you off, this is a pretty good behind the scenes look into making of literature and the makers of literature. It's certainly entertaining. Recommended.

Spencer says

Reminded me a lot of the works of Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney in that the lead protagonist is largely unsympathetic as a result of being a self-centered, egotistical, former drug and booze addled writer who burns through friends like there's no tomorrow. At times he comes off sympathetic, but ultimately he's self-serving. Despite this (or in spite of this), he's a mesmerizing individual and I found myself often reading several chapters ahead of where I was because I got so wrapped up in what was happening. It's also an interesting meditation on fame, the writing process, and growing old, not to mention the accruelement and depletion of friends/friendships, as well as how every story has at least two sides and every friendship, lost or

enduring, has different perspectives.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted here illegally.)

As regular readers know, I'm a particularly big fan of a type of literary trope I call the "anti-villain," which like it sounds means nearly the opposite of the more well-known term "anti-hero;" that is, instead of the main character being someone who seems fairly despicable at first but who we come to root for more and more, an anti-villain is someone who seems pretty decent at first, but who we come to realize more and more is actually an assh-le. But such a thing begs a big question -- where do anti-villains come from, and what makes them be that way in the first place? That's a fascinating question, because it taps into basic philosophical issues that are universal to us all -- of whether humans are born inherently good or inherently bad, of whether it's our environment that most influences our behavior or our conscious choices, or perhaps something uncontrollable like our DNA. Are charming sociopaths destined from a young age to be charming sociopaths, or is it possible for such a person to recognize these tendencies in themselves, and purposely put a stop to them? And perhaps most importantly to readers of this website, is it that anti-villains are just naturally attracted to the arts, which is why it seems that so many artists are such complete d-ckheads? Or is it something about the arts that focuses and enhances the latent assh-lic tendencies of anyone who gets involved, like a bug being slowly burnt to a crisp under a magnifying glass on a sunny day?

These are all subjects addressed by veteran underground artist Eric Bogosian in his brilliant new novel, *Perforated Heart*; and he does it in a brilliant way too, by examining one of these anti-villains both at middle-age and in his earnest early twenties simultaneously, looking at where it all went right and where it all went wrong in this particular monster's case. And not only this, but Bogosian filters this story through a brilliant timeframe on top of everything else, a timeframe that has recently been begging for a great story; our particular anti-villain happened to have come of age in the proto-punk scene of lower Manhattan in the late 1970s, the New York of CBGB's and Max's Kansas City, a pre-gentrified Soho and an abandoned, squatter-filled Williamsburg. It's not exactly an autobiographical tale, but rather what Bogosian has called in interviews an "alternate universe" one -- a story where he examines how his own life *might have* turned out, if only a few important events from his past had transpired differently than they did -- which is the key to the book being so great; because a true anti-villain author wouldn't be able to write a novel like this, despite the main character being an anti-villain author, in that an author that clueless himself wouldn't be able to so gently layer in a whole series of hard realizations like Bogosian does, through the behavior not of the main character but rather all the "normals" surrounding him, wouldn't be able to so smartly get across what makes this sociopath tick without the sociopath himself having even a clue. It's a masterful feat of subtle storytelling, one that could never be pulled off by a writer like this one examining their own actual life, but rather by a writer like Bogosian who applies a laser-precise look at the *potentials* of an edgy life, a future that could've been but ultimately never was.

Because make no mistake, it's impossible to read *Perforated Heart* and think of anyone else but Bogosian himself; because for those who don't know, Bogosian actually was one of this wave of "performance artists" who were running around lower Manhattan at the same time as all the punk musicians in the late '70s, people like Karen Finley and Lydia Lunch who were creating back then a kind of "theatre that isn't theatre," the forerunner not only of such modern monologuists as Eve Ensler but such tourist-friendly spectacles as Blue Man Group, not to mention the entire phenomenon known as "slam poetry." Bogosian first made a name for

himself by creating a series of on-stage character sketches regarding the people surrounding their group at that time in history -- the prostitutes and junkies of pre-'80s lower Manhattan, that is, the losers and criminals who besides the punks were the only ones to inhabit back then the New York south of Houston -- and it was the growing success of such one-man shows that transitioned Bogosian into a more traditional writing career, artistically culminating (one could argue) with his unforgettable Pulitzer-nominated play *Talk Radio*, eventually made into a popular movie starring Bogosian himself. And that led Bogosian into more and more of a mainstream career, and more and more traditional acting roles (you may remember him as the cackling heavy in the dreadful action pic *Under Siege 2: Dark Territory*); and thus it is that Bogosian is now in his mid-fifties, fairly rich and fairly successful, happily married for decades now, not exactly a household name but certainly a writer who has sold untold thousands of books by now, and whose work is regularly studied and staged worldwide.

So like I said, it's no surprise that in *Perforated Heart*, our main character Richard Morris has led a nearly identical life, only with a few important differences -- for example, instead of ending up with the legitimately good-for-him failed-painter character Katie (clearly a stand-in for Bogosian's real wife), he coldly dumps her for a crazed, dysfunctional marriage with a Sigourney-Weaver-type famous brainy actress from the period, a terrible relationship that sputters along for years and eventually ends in disaster. And it's this plus other factors I'll let remain a surprise that leads Richard to the place in 2006 where we find him at the beginning of the book -- a dumpy-looking has-been whose glory years are long behind him, angrily pissing on the world from the safety of his upper-class converted farmhouse in rural Connecticut, still constantly in and out of a whole series of empty sexual relationships with good-looking girls in their twenties (only now with them thinking of him as a daddy figure to be "tended to" rather than desired), alienated from nearly every single person who used to be part of his life, reduced to curse-filled rants against the "godd-mned litbloggers who just don't get" his latest forgettable navel-gazing crap, a widely derided book called *A Gentle Death* which weeks after its release has still only sold a few hundred copies nationwide. And thus it is that in the midst of such a milieu, Richard ends up having emergency heart surgery, which keeps him laid up for weeks in his isolated Martha Stewart fortress with no diversions; and thus it is that on a lark, Richard digs out of the attic all his old journals from his artistic start in New York in the late '70s, entries from which make up every other chapter of the novel you and I are reading about it all.

It's a simple yet effective framing device, and Bogosian makes great use of it here; because as we read more and more of the novel, it comes to appear that "Twenties Richard" and "Fifties Richard" are in fact two completely different people, and one of the main pleasures of the book is in examining both the told and untold history that makes these two personas seem so fractured in the first place. That seems to be one of Bogosian's main points, in fact, that the actual behavior of Richard doesn't actually change that much from his twenties to his fifties, but rather the way that the people around him react to this behavior; because let's face it, the young Richard as portrayed in this novel is actually quite a charmer, despite being just as clueless and dicklike as he is later in life, because in his youth these things are balanced by his optimism and naivety about the world, his eagerness to embrace life as fully as he can. As anyone's who's spent time with a dicklike 25-year-old artist (or has actually been a dicklike 25-year-old artist) can tell you, it's these very traits that can many times make these people irresistible, these traits that help such artists become big successes in the first place; because when such traits are tempered by youth and humor and good looks, such arrogance and narcissism can often come across as smart and sexy, and is often what attracts that artist's first big audience to begin with (along with that artist's first set of lovers, first set of patrons, etc).

But as any middle-ager can tell you, this rosy optimism of youth never lasts; as our thirties progress into our forties and then fifties, we experience the kind of truly traumatic pain we can only guess at in our twenties, divorces and deaths and profound betrayals, a growing complexity over our understanding of the world and the evil that exists within it, and what a true miracle it is that we humans have anything even approaching a

"civilized society" in the first place. And as Bogosian so wonderfully shows us through the fates of all the other characters in the book (who Richard ends up hunting down one by one as the manuscript continues), most grown-ups learn how to successfully enfold this kind of darkness into their adult day-to-day lives, learn how to balance the failed dreams and crushed optimism of youth with the kinds of deeper, more profound, more satisfying successes that come with age and maturity -- children, love, a better understanding of what makes them truly happy, a better understanding of what they were truly meant to do with their life (just to cite one excellent example, how the aforementioned failed painter Katie ends up by her own fifties becoming not only a happy wife and mom but an award-winning "outdoor lighting sculptor," now hired on a regular basis for such high-profile commissions as corporate headquarters and sports stadiums).

It's not so much that we *change* our fundamental personality as we get older, Bogosian seems to be arguing, but rather that most of us learn to *understand* it better, learn to channel its real-world manifestations more and more into activities that are ultimately good for us, learn to drop more and more of the things that we come to understand are bad for us. And this is the ultimate curse that Richard is saddled with, a fatal combination of two very basic problems -- of never coming to these understandings himself, combined with the riches and fame he received as a youth precisely for this infant-terrible behavior. Since he never bothered creating long-lasting friendships or a more meaningful life when younger, he now has nothing to fall back on in his fifties besides his usual misogynistic six-week relationships and abyss-teetering self-absorption; and since it was these precise things that used to net him bestselling novels and Oscar-winning girlfriends, he now has the perfect justification for continuing this behavior ("This is what an artist *does*; an artist is *supposed* to be an uncomfortably truthful agent of chaos"), and to easily avoid even the tiniest bit of honest self-reflection over what a trainwreck his life has actually become. And in the meanwhile, as mentioned, no analysis of *Perforated Heart* is complete without a look at the pitch-perfect, instantly nostalgic setting Bogosian uses for these youthful reminiscences; because the fact is that Bogosian *utterly transports us* here to punk-era New York within these old journal entries (apparently based on his actual journals from this period, again according to interviews he's given), and utterly makes us understand why all these formerly suburban white kids would want to hang out in the post-apocalyptic wasteland of '70s lower Manhattan in the first place, amidst all the pimps and pushers and post-traumatic Vietnam vets that used to populate the area.

Ultimately I can give this novel no higher a compliment than this: that reading it made me understand my own life better, and helped me come to a resolution regarding elements of my own past as a former ass-holic artist who has paid a certain price for that in middle age. This is the entire point of professional storytelling, after all, is to help us as readers understand the world a little better than we did before, to help us navigate the infinitely complex thing we call a human life; and anytime an artist can do this successfully, especially in the nuanced way Bogosian does here, that's another reason to celebrate. It's not what Richard himself says in *Perforated Heart* that makes the book so revelatory, but rather what all the people around him say, and more importantly what they often don't say, a hard thing for a writer to pull off without making the main character under examination seem either too clueless or too falsely self-aware; it's what makes this novel in my opinion the first true masterpiece of Bogosian's career*, even more noteworthy when you consider that he already has a handful of bestsellers and a Pulitzer nomination under his belt, and is now at an age when most artists start either coasting on their laurels or retiring from new work altogether. It's one of the best strictly character-oriented dramas I've read in years, and it comes today highly recommended to all parts of CCLaP's audience, whether or not you're a middle-aged sociopathic ass-holic yourself.

Out of 10: **9.3**

*And to make it clear, I've been a close follower of Bogosian's career since the '80s myself, and have read nearly everything he's ever written (including, yes, his notoriously awful middle-aged-crisis play *subUrbia*, itself made into a notorious Hollywood flop), which is why I'm comfortable judging this particular title

against the rest of his oeuvre. In fact, it was such "performance artists" of the '80s that mainly inspired me to get involved with the arts myself, as an undergraduate in Missouri in those same years; and it was the fact that they all used to perform at the infamous "Club Lower Links" in Chicago back then that helped convince me to move here myself in the early '90s, and to get involved with the poetry slam back then too. Ah, Sweet Dumb Youth, how I adore your glorious stench when sniffed from a safe distance!

mark says

PERFORATED HEART (2009) by Eric Bogosian is a fascinating study in obsession for pussy, money, and fame. In this instance that obsession revolves around the life of a middle-aged, successful, American Jew writer in New York who reflects back on his path via his journal from the mid 70's, as he struggles in the present (2006-7) to reclaim his place atop the literary field. This is an intensely honest story and I could identify with it completely. I agree with most all of the positions the main character, Richard Morris, takes on the human condition and what it takes to succeed. I can relate to his methodology, and the relationship problems that ensue from it. He is single-minded, selfish, and driven completely by his obsessions. He attempts to defend them as unchangeable facets of his genetic make-up, or "fate," as he calls it. He posits that he is an artist and must be faithful only to his craft/art – a seeker, recorder, actor, and teller of truth -- and damn the consequences. Is his self-image accurate? Others disagree—friends and lovers. (eg. pgs. 204-212. Was it consensual sex or rape?) There is scene after scene that Bogosian writes about that I found myself saying, "damn – perfect! I've been there." Be those scenes back in the 70's or present day. "Big John?" I know him, and in fact just tried to find him. "Zim?" Know him, too, and in fact had just that same confrontation (pg. 214-217) last month. "Elizabeth?" Yep. And so on through all the characters and their interactions. Eerie. Probably, that's because (apparently) the author and I are the same age. But, we are not the same person. We have our different "fates," locales, and traits; i.e. personalities and interactions. The character, Richard Morris, has a fixation on beauty, female beauty; and was born on March 6, 1950, "The Day Of The Beauty Lovers" (according to "The Secret language of Birthdays.") Eerie. I am going to purchase this book for my library, and maybe a few more for some "friends." Is this book autobiographical? I don't know, don't know the author. But, I know it's good, very good, and honest and true. I can't, however, give it five stars because of the ending. Endings in novels are so hard ...
