



The Book of Questions: Volume I [I. The Book of Questions, II. The Book of Yukel, III. Return to the Book]

Edmond Jabès, Rosmarie Waldrop (Translator)

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I. The Book of Questions

II. The Book of Yukel

III. Return to the Book

The Book of Questions: Volume I [I. The Book of Questions, II. The Book of Yukel, III. Return to the Book] Details

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From Reader Review The Book of Questions: Volume I [I. The Book of Questions, II. The Book of Yukel, III. Return to the Book] for online ebook

stephen says

brilliant.

Eric Phetteplace says

A phenomenal and rather unclassifiable book. The Book of Questions merges quotations, prose, poetry, and aphorism into one labyrinthine masterpiece. I seek out writing that tries to do something new with style, tries to expand the bounds of expression and Jabes succeeds to a rare degree here. While there's certainly a logic to the book's flow, there isn't any plot to speak of and the topic is roughly "how can one write anything after the Holocaust." The book is very Jewish and very much concerned with writing, God, and lofty concepts. While I'm so entirely sick of writing about writing (seriously writers, no one else cares...can we get back to the real world), Jabes language is so enigmatic and evocative that this book could be about anything and it would still be amazing. Highly recommend to people who like prose poetry and can stand wandering around lost in a forest of phrases.

Jeff says

There's always something interesting about Deconstructive post-modern literature, particularly how it reveals the disjointed realities of the contemporary day. This text, which seems to itself suffer from the horrors of the 20th Century (particularly, the Holocaust), replicates what Joyce did slightly better in creating a prose/poem series in seemingly random quotes from Rabbis and non-linear distracted prose snippets.

There's a lot of great one-liners throughout and one really gets the lost and persecuted tone of the text, but I found the incomprehensibility of the majority of this off-putting. I am wary to say it, but perhaps I simply cannot grasp much of the genius that is going on here; perhaps it is my lacking knowledge of Judaism and Kabbalistic mythology, or perhaps I'm just dense with this one.

At any rate, at times I was appreciating what I was reading and at others I may have read over lines while absorbing nothing. Like God. Like how I, myself, am here, in the words.

Reb Jeff says, "The seed that is the sky opens the ground where Yukel got confused by the water which ripples, which proves God. Which is nothing."

NhaThuyen says

why do i feel that i am getting in the mood to (re)read something? it's not for feelings of loneliness but for the loneliness is a great comfort to me? it's also like the feeling of falling in love but don't need to know exactly whom you are in love with or rather, you can feel that love is enough by itself, and you don't need to demand any response? no, it's a big lie. i am lying. but how i can tell the truth without lying?

"so truth is, in time, the absurd and fertile quest of lies, which we pay with tears and blood.", he said.

in a lightened moment, and with a deep inspiration, i know that i love and at the same time i know i have to learn how to love the loves. it's so challenging to love someone(s) as if love is the only thing i can but also i know that love is impossible. i love you and it's impossible to love.

"our ties to beings and things are so fragile they often break without us noticing", it's not He who said in the book but the silent passion for life said to me.

why do i feel that i am getting in the mood to (re)read something? it's time i know that the books are leaving me, the loves are leaving me and i have to learn how to just see them leaving me even without breathing for being afraid of that breath will make them/the loves/my being trembled.

but maybe more simply, i have to let them leave me for my own freedom.

and one of the most helpful thing i get from The Book OF QUESTION is, as many other books i love, i can use it to tell fortune.

and also it's a book not only for man of questions but for anyone who is hungry for questions.

Adam says

Weird and fabulous. A meditation on language and its meaning for the Jewish people.

“Words stick to my flesh as to blotting paper. The world is illegible on the skin.”

Nati Korn says

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Alex Obrigewitsch says

What can I say of this wound in the book, of the book?

Fiction? Only as all we all could be called so.

What is this work that moves at the margins of definition, the margins of the book? It is a wound, a desert, of the darkness of the day and the bright light of the night.

Do not seek to fix it, pin it down. Follow it, in and out of the book. Experience it, and yourself, in and as this wound.

Maurizio Manco says

"Chi è meno solo del solitario? Da lui partono tutte le strade e il suo cuore è la loro stella.
Ma da una stella a una stella c'è l'insondabile rifiuto del silenzio." (p. 79)

Mary says

Very simply, I am always reading this book. Here's why: It eludes, informs, and gives hope.

Sean says

This is probably the most important book I've read so far this year. It's sublime and I hope to write a proper review of it someday. Jabès redefined what poetry could be and how it can be presented. There is so much in here to reflect on-- even taking three months to read it felt like I was rushing. An infinitely expanding parade of quotable rabbis, the story of Sarah and Yukel, ruminations on exile, on ambivalence toward God, on words, on the power of the Book.

As long as we are not chased from our words we have nothing to fear. As long as our utterances keep their sound we have a voice. As long as our words keep their sense we have a soul.

Carrie says

"A writer's life takes its sense through what he says, what he writes, what can be handed down from generation to generation."

"What is remembered is sometimes only one phrase, one line."

"There is the truth."

"But what truth?"

"If a phase or line survives the work, it is not the author who gave it this special change (at the expense of others): it is the reader."

"There is the lie."

"The writer steps aside for the work, and the work depends on the reader."

"So truth is, in time, the absurd and fertile quest of lies, which we pay with tears and blood."

Michal Schwartz says

The poetic essence of Jewish thought and history; a whole universe in a tear...

Jac says

Oh Jabes, my hero. This book immediately made it into the top ten, even before I've finished the second volume. It is one of the most challenging, comforting, exciting books I have ever read.

metaphor says

I am the breath of my books like wind engulfed by the sea. Every wave a suspension of foam and water; any color, the one the sky takes. But raising the waves, inventing their forms and fringes, the wind too is reborn and runs with them through the ocean until exhausted. Its power comes from elsewhere, but its will is its own.

Nathan says

Edmond Jabès's *The Book of Questions* lingers at the edges of fiction, revealing itself as if by the intermittent sweep of a lighthouse torch. It darts around the story of Sarah and Yukel, a young couple, possibly living, possibly already dead, who have been separated in the concentration camps of World War II, but whose plight surprisingly feels secondary compared to their attempts – and the attempts of innumerable ancient rabbis – to make sense of the world around them on a much greater scale. Thousands of years have shaped these two, to the point that the future seems to loop around behind them, melding with the past, reducing the present to nothing more than the time in which the next question is asked – a question that is merely a restatement of all the questions that have preceded it, and a refraction of questions as yet unasked.

It is common for a work of literature to meet the reader partway – revealing itself in a manner that encourages the reader by engaging in familiar conventions, following customary structures, using established concepts. The idea of the author meets the interpretation of the reader on the page, each doing its share of the work. Of course there are exceptions – *Finnegans Wake* achieves the immediacy of thought, practically blinding the reader. Beckett uses logic to destroy logic, stranding the reader without a compass. With *The Book of Questions*, Jabès engages in mysticism that is at once both so mundane and so impenetrable that the reader has the impression of wandering through an Escher landscape, where dimensions shift and realign without warning, multiple times on every page.

This mysticism is grounded in Semitism, though from my limited understanding, it is not necessarily Kabbalistic. But it is expansive, finally enveloping the gentile world, too. Jabès frames the endless heartbreak of the Hebrew people with real poetry: "The Jews have taken shelter behind the stones thrown at them." "The Israelite has his eyes turned toward Jerusalem in the way the grown child looks at his mother's womb: the cause of his misfortunes." The ancient/modern experience of the Jewish people becomes the ancient/modern experience of the world that engendered the Jews, trampled them, and now pulses with their culture so thoroughly, so unknowingly, the fabric cannot be unwoven.

One is left with the impression of a culture that has grown weary even of its own weariness, and is as surprised by its own endurance as by its brilliance. Western civilization and Jewish culture entered into a symbiotic relationship that reached a new level of dysfunction in the twentieth century, but the message of *The Book of Questions* is that the concentration camp experiences of Sarah and Yukel – the collective scream that is the Holocaust – is, like everything else, a question whose answer is a Möbius loop of life and

death, good and evil, body and spirit, ephemeral and ineluctable.
