



Black Tickets: Stories

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Jayne Anne Phillips's reputation-making debut collection paved the way for a new generation of writers. Raved about by reviewers and embraced by the likes of Raymond Carver, Frank Conroy, Annie Dillard, and Nadine Gordimer, **Black Tickets** now stands as a classic.

With an uncanny ability to depict the lives of men and women who rarely register in American literature, Phillips writes stories that lay bare their suffering and joy. Here are the abused and the abandoned, the violent and the passive, the impoverished and the disenfranchised who populate the small towns and rural byways of the country. A patron of the arts reserves his fondest feeling for the one man who wants it least. A stripper, the daughter of a witch, escapes from poverty into another kind of violence. A young girl during the Depression is caught between the love of her crazy father and the no less powerful love of her sorrowful mother. These are great American stories that have earned a privileged place in modern literature.

Black Tickets: Stories Details

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Author : Jayne Anne Phillips

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From Reader Review Black Tickets: Stories for online ebook

David says

Dirty surrealist? Maybe, sometimes.

Steve Petkus says

This gets raves from others, but I couldn't stand it and quit reading after finishing about a third of it. For a book that's supposed to be a classic, I found it unreadable. I do appreciate writers who privilege voice--George Saunders, for example--but here, Phillips seems to me to privilege the stylized voices of downtrodden and/or nasty characters over making actual narrative sense. The result to me was, for the chunk I read, the intimation of unrelenting awfulness happening somewhere to someone inchoate--hard to grasp what the hell's even going on, much less to care.

Laura Toto says

If anyone is interested where poetry meets prose, this is where it begins. Astonishingly forward and musical. The beat, the hum of her writing, it is like the beating of one's heart.

David says

Ok. another rule-breaker.. read this one AGES ago, but I just added Christie Malry's Own Double entry, because it was one of the few books that made me laugh out loud (and to cry as well), and on that flip side, I add, Jayne Anne Phillips's short story collection, Black Tickets.

As the book-track of my life goes this is a huge milestone. As I recall, I stumbled upon this as a junior in high school, i think I had just gone to a reading by Harlan Ellison (who! a story for another time!), and there was announcement for JAP's reading of this work. I never made it, but it came on the radio, and well I was mesmerized. I can modestly say, that I was a precocious reader (to which i have not always been served well, I read some things much too young, and missed a lot, and I also missed out volumes of material for the younger reader that I never really gave a shot).. but still another day for that.

but this book hit me as a landslide. a landslide like Stevie Nicks's song and a real one. Emotional stories that hit the gut, and hit the gut hard. At the time I was just learning about acting and a character and Stanislavsky and Uta Hagen and never thought fiction could duplicate a real performance or the real itself. I even gave a copy of this to one of my most influential teachers (in memoriam Nancy Donohue), I read and re-read these short stories and really wanted others to get it. so much yearning, loss, need that you are forced to despair and and I hope find others to reach out to... eventually I found Carver, others (let's through Nick Cave in there and some TC Boyle just because i want to) but this was one of the first that really showed me adult feeling and reactions and concepts and i have no idea, but I know no one else who heard of it, and well that is wrong. I had read other deep books, but chiefly from other eras.. (Holocaust books, Zola, Byron, other so-called classics of the human condition) but this one hit me. hard. once again, i give my guarantee. if you buy it and don't like it, I will reimburse your and sign you up for a heart transplant.

Kirsten says

This collection walks a tightrope wire of dense, lyrically visceral prose. As such, it is a bit uneven. Certain stories sing with a meld of memory and present, others seem too unmoored. Many of the stories are so brief that they seem to be portraits: a quick, charcoal sketch, drawn in furious haste. I have mixed feelings on whether or not they are successful.

Still, I give this collection 4 stars because when it works, it really works, and I found myself provoked and challenged, even by the lesser stories.

Teresa says

Ground-breaking, brilliant, masterful.

I'm sure many writers have been inspired by the stories in this collection. Phillips published these stories in the 70's, the style of which now seem to be all over the internet. I have to admit that there were two stories that befuddled me at their ends (as a lot of these short-short stories in general seem to do to me) but I still think that's my lack of perception and not the author's fault.

Two of the stories also seem to have the same female lead character but with different names (and even have the characters relating the same anecdote unless I'm confusing that with Machine Dreams which I read recently) , but that's a very minor quibble; I'm sure these numerous stories were written over a span of many years.

The strength of Phillips' writing is in her amazing way of painting a complete picture with just a few words -- absolutely amazing.

I loved "1934" and "Snow," and the final story left me breathless.

Richard Thomas says

So thrilled to have found JAP. She certainly gives Mary Gaitskill a run for her money. Dark, sexy, surreal stories, this was a real joy to read. Also, this must have been some of the first flash fiction, back in 1975. Great collection, off to read more of her work.

Laura says

I got this off some essential reading list from either WSJ or 'New York' Magazine. . .it completely blew me away. Her writing is just amazing - very descriptive, almost poetic but very dark at the same time.

These are thematically linked short stories and vignettes; a look into the lives of those going through some (generally dark or less pleasant) transformation. Yet most of them are hopeful, and she's a really great

storyteller.

This is a really great read; I'd say it should be on college reading lists (at least for English majors) but some of the stories could offend. This is compelling, great writing that's sort of like staring at the sun - it hurts, it sears your brain, but you can't look away.

Patrice says

Hard, hard short stories written by a native West Virginian. They speak to the lives of our most disenfranchised and they are disturbing. I will probably re-read at some point because I could sense an arc to the stories that may merit further exploration.

Owen says

Great collection of short stories that exhibit impressive economy. Sparse punctuation, no quotes, plenty of fragments. Often stories lasted no more than a three paragraphs over two pages. A must-read for any one interested in the art of conveying more with less.

Bridget says

Books don't just consist of words on a page, every reader brings their own life stories, perceptions and context to every book they read. That may be why I did not enjoy "Black Tickets". I was reading these short stories in various doctors offices, E.R.s and hospital rooms. I don't recommend this as hospital reading. It's dark. Even I could see that the author does a good job with parent/grown child relationships, and certain stories were strong, but the rest felt like swimming in mud.

Tara Lynn says

I'm embarrassed to say I had not read the complete book before, just the shorter stories in various anthologies. While I had always enjoyed her brief ones, I was blown away by the longer ones. I can only imagine why this book is not taught more in Lit classes, perhaps because of the very gritty content, but it should be. It's a real lesson on what can be done with the English language and with narrative voice. I was less entranced by the title story than by some of the others, such as Country. Simply brilliant.

Metaxy99 says

If someone asked me to describe Flannery O'Connor as music, I'd refer them to classic blues and hard-edged folk like Son House and Leadbelly and early Dylan.

If someone asked me to describe Jayne Anne Phillips' Black Tickets as music, I'd sit her down with a playlist that included a narrow band of blues/post-blues tunes infused with rock and punk, like Peter Green's

Fleetwood Mac doing *I Loved Another Woman* , Catpower singing Robert Johnson's *Come on in My Kitchen* , PJ Harvey doing Dylan's *Highway 61*, Catpower again doing Tom Waits' *Yesterday is Here* , Lightning Hopkins doing *Katie May* and *Frisco Blues*, Rickie Lee Jones doing the Hendrix tune *Up From the Skies*, Patti Smith doing *This Dead City*.

Hard tunes, substantial and sad, close to the bone and tingling the flesh, mainly sung by women who have a way of making the substance occur as deceptively ethereal.

You could call it edgy, but it wouldn't capture the meditative, dream quality of these stories - it's as if Tarkovsky parachuted onto the set of an early Scorsese film. Highly condensed tales of dislocation and yearning and glimmers of transcendence, crafted as well as anything from the poets, it's fucking magic. It hurts.

a sample that doesn't give anything away, just a little glimpse of the ground Phillips covers here:

The sewing woman lived across the tracks, down past Arey's feed store. Row of skinny houses on a mud alley. Her rooms smelled of salted grease and old newspaper. Behind the ironing board she was thin, scooping up papers that shuffled open in her hands. Her eyebrows were arched sharp and painted on...

Ryan Werner says

Aside from "1934" and "El Paso" (which I add begrudgingly, as it did almost the same thing as "1934" except poorly), *Black Tickets* is a series of eye-rolling, "look at me using the word 'cunt' in the 70's" imagery stacked up on top of itself for no apparent reason. When Phillips can avoid talking about licking someone's thighs or wafting in the stars or grinding inside another being, she's not a bad writer. However, even when those moments come about, she more often than not ends up falling into the self-made trap that lots of amateur minimalists make, and her sparsity ends up saying less than it intends to.

The second half of the book is lighter on the single page (and, even worse, twenty page) stories about orgasms and vaginas and other "edgy" topics, but it's too little, too late. Or, to be more accurate in describing JAP's sensory-overload, plot-less (and this coming from a Carver fanatic), sex-crazed style, it may have been too much too soon.

Robert says

This is her first collection. With early stories, there's a sense of adventurousness--but there can also be pretense and self-indulgence. Some of the stories are so oblique and almost intentionally confusing that I found myself wishing a given story would end. The technique is hit and miss. Phillips often writes about sex--the dirtier and sleazier the better. There are no cotillions or country clubs in these stories; they're all set in the worst parts of the worst towns. I like that.

What I don't like is relying purely on style, atmosphere and setting. The details are good--poetic even--but most of these stories are just vignettes. It's useful to consider that approach as a writer, when revising or expanding scenes, for example. But when I have to re-read a section five times just to figure out what the hell is going on--I get frustrated.

Still, there's much to admire here and a few things to emulate.

tee says

I live to find books like this. I don't know what I want to do with my life other than find those books that make you vibrate with excitement - this was one of those books. Sometimes it feels like I'll never find another book that hits me hard, ever again and then I do and my faith is restored. The only reason I want to live to be old, old, old is so that I might find every good book in the world and experience what I felt with reading this, it was amazing.

Some of the stories lost me but I think that had more to do with my lack of focus than anything else but there were several stories that pained me because they were so good. I don't dog ear pages in my novels but this one has quite a few. There's nothing I can say to convey how much I loved this book. I can't even write a proper review because I'm still flushed and dumb struck with awe.

Daniel says

This collection of stories have a common theme: they're either very dark or very raw (and sometimes both). Phillips' imagery is vivid and her stories are engaging, but many will make you work to discern their meaning. I enjoyed most of these stories, though a few left me feeling like I missed something. Perhaps this collection caught me at a time when I'm feeling too lazy to do the requisite analysis.

Scott says

I feel a little bad about giving this book only three stars, but it suffers from something which almost all single-author collections of short stories suffer from: reading so many stories consecutively by the same author saturates the ear and causes the authorial voice to become repetitive.

Jane Anne Phillips loves certain descriptive formulations: [body part] under [cloth type]; something that has nothing to do with sex called sexual; the sun is something else (moon, a ring, bees); light does something un-lightlike such as bend, wave, or warp; a detailed description of skin which is pale or translucent and has burst veins.

But rather than focus on the negative, let me highly recommend to you these three stories from this collection which, rated by themselves are five stars:

1. Black Tickets
2. Snow
3. Country

The rest are a mixed bag. There are plenty that are good enough, but the ear saturation makes them hard to handle consecutively. Thus, rated as a whole, the book is three stars. But if you don't mind picking and choosing, coming and going, go ahead and grab this book because it's got some outstanding moments.

Garima says

...the girl half dazed on sidewalk falls over, lays down like she's home.

Black Tickets is a book of startling confessions, refuted sins and daring apathy. It's beautiful, unsettling and reckless. It's an acerbic masterpiece which recoils at the thought of refinement and perfection. It belongs to a different world- a world of cheap motels and flickering neon lights, of broken homes and failed road trips, of stifling love and unfathomable desire. It's like a foreign movie that seeks stories in closed bars and communicates the stench of empty bottles. Like the person with a new address every day, it indulges in unabashed wanderlust.

She drove fast the first few hours. The sun looked like the moon, dim, layered over.

It's like those solitary travelling in the early hours of morning when night and day dissolves into indifference. It's a cul de sac that ends up in ambiguity. These are the heavy thoughts that tread on transparent, thin ice. In the garb of rational persona, the wavering minds are directing their own rebellious scenes here. There is a sickening irresolution about life but commendable conviction about all those bad ideas. Here the strangling seems a lesser evil than giving birth. The vocabulary that defines the lives of these people is completely different from mine. The words mostly rhyme with filth, madness and longing. There is beauty but that of a morning glory. It's enough.

Them stars are just holes in the sky after all. And while I'm sleeping in that hot bed everything I ever thought of having falls into em.

It's like a musical riddle with teasing directions. I felt myself receding into an unfamiliar territory of impersonal and mysterious kind. Maybe this is as real as real gets but it's one frightening reality. The words are embedded within small space while leaving generous margins but that hardly warrants understanding of these stories. The characters mostly remain in a fugue state and those who are conscious are deliberately driving towards the maelstrom of false emotions that urge them to carve up a dreamy fairy tale. If only there was a prince charming in waiting.

Surrounded by the blur of her own movements, the thought of making him happy was very dear to her. She moved it from place to place, a surprise she never opened. She slept alone at night, soul of a naked priest in her sweet body.

Jayne Anne Phillips is a sexy Flannery O'Connor, a blunt Carson McCullers and the ever poetic and powerful, Adrienne Rich. And you haven't read her yet? :-)

Lynne Favreau says

Jayne Anne Phillip's collection of short stories Black Tickets were touted as "original" and "the best since Eudora Welty" and "early genius" upon first publication in 1979.

In 2008, I didn't find them to be all that compelling or original, but that may be a sign of the times. I just don't believe that if these were published today for the first time they'd inspire the same accolades. And isn't that the test of a classic, standing the test of time?

The use of shock and rawness as a literary device used in some of these stories was valid and useful when written but have lost their effectiveness.

Phillips characters fall either to the side of immorality and their victims: the drug dealers, sluts, loners, raped, abused, confused, or they are the sweeter narratives of relationships between parents, children and siblings. Where she was more successful at engaging me was with the straight forward story telling of familial relationships. These classic family dramas were worthy of the accolades *Snow* and *Souvenir*.
