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Based on the story of Job, this drama in verse tells the story of a 20th-century American millionaire banker whom God commands be stripped of his family & wealth, but who refuses to turn his back on God. J.B. won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1959 & the Tony Award for best play. More important, the play sparked a national conversation about the nature of God, the meaning of hope & the role of the artist in society.

J.B.: A Play in Verse Details

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From Reader Review J.B.: A Play in Verse for online ebook

Rhonda says

This is a stark and bitter account of an author who feels alienated from a God who could allow the human horror we often witness in man's inhumanity to man. This is a quite good and highly imaginative account of someone who wished to survey a variety of possibilities for God and still find him wanting. I can understand why this play may have been popular but frankly before last month I was unaware of it. A good read for those familiar with the Biblical story and still believe that God and Satan are really playing a game. It reminds me of how Satan at least at first is more likeable a character in Paradise Lost than God, who seems distant and somewhat unconcerned.

Keith says

Overall, this book/play is a hit and miss. I thought the Nickles and Zuss sections were outstanding, but I was less interested in the JB sections, particularly those with his wife. It seemed to me that those sections with Sarah were almost maudlin. The original Job has an impersonal feel that dampens the emotion, but highlights the intellect as it grapples with meaningless misfortune. I think it's this kind of play that Brecht was reacting to when he tried to distance the audience from the characters so that the emotional connection does not interfere with the overall thought of the play.

Again, however, the Zuss/Nickles and God/Devil sections of the play were outstanding. If I were directing the play, I'd drastically shorten the JB sections and put the focus clearly on Zuss and Nickles. Their poetry was more vivid, more original and more memorable.

Resa says

I was pleasantly surprised with how much I enjoyed "J.B."

Based on the biblical story of Job, MacLeish takes that story and turns it into a modern day play. That catch? J.B. doesn't know he's in the play. He doesn't know the actors are playing God and the Devil, or using him to prove how quickly man will turn from God when things go wrong.

This is a refreshing take on the story of Job, and in the play J.B. is not just one man, but all of humanity. Originally published in 1956, the world had already gone through two World Wars and if nothing else was going to shake humanity's faith in God and justice, these wars would. J.B.'s oldest son is killed coming home from the war, his next two children die in a car wreck, and his youngest daughter is found dead in the back of a lumber yard. Of course if you're familiar with the story of Job, things don't stop there. J.B. loses his livelihood, his savings, his house, his health, and his wife. With nothing left the Devil tempts him into committing suicide, the one thing he still has control over. But J.B. chooses instead to repent if God will only tell him why. While the story is one most people have heard before, MacLeish really does something unique with it. The idea of the whole thing being a play, with J.B. the only one who doesn't know, makes it even more heartbreaking as his life falls apart, and borrows from Shakespeare's "the whole world's a stage". It's easy to see how J.B. stands for more than just an individual and brings to light the suffering of more than just

one person.

The play has won both a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony, so there's really no point in me reiterating that it's good, so I'll just say it's a very quick read and if you haven't read it and want to add something a little more "classic" to your reading list, give this a try.

Natalie says

I loved this play! I thought that the retelling of the Book of Job was dynamic and deeply moving. Nickels and Mr Zuss were fascinating to me. The idea of play acting God and Satan as human beings, putting on the masks of divinity and disdain, creator and cast out, added a self-reflective element to how I interpreted the story of Job. Did I relate to Mr Zuss's/God's interpretation of the events or to Nickel's/Satan's? Did i find Job's reaction to his misfortunes inspiring or misguided? These and other questions were important aspects to reading this play, and I appreciated the opportunity to grapple with such complex questions. I also found J.B. to be rather cathartic.

Erik Graff says

I read this play after finishing the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures for Chaplain Dennis Haas' introductory class on the matter at Grinnell College in Iowa. Of the contents of the bible, Job was a favorite and, as an hermeneutic on Job, J.B. is strongly recommended.

The description of the book herein sounds silly, but the play actually works. It even reads well.

Kelly says

For a play that garnered such critical praise in its day, "J.B." seems to get surprisingly little attention these days. It's actually a better play than I thought it would be. I saw a college production over twenty years ago and remember it well. It adheres very tightly to the biblical "Book of Job," while simultaneously allowing significant latitude for performers, directors, and other artists. Like a preacher in a pulpit, MacLeish has embellished on a facet of the original story that appealed to him personally, contextualized the greater narrative around that facet, and managed to tell an old story in an original voice.

Chad says

An modern adaptation of the Biblical story of Job. Thoughts:

- I was expecting the "modern" feel of the story to come through elements of the plot (ex: updating the way Job's children suffer), but the most modern aspect of this ancient story is the modern mindset of the characters, which is best seen through the Satan character.
- There's an interesting meta-narrative (?) running throughout the play about all the characters acting/not

acting according to their traditional Biblical roles. For example, the God/Satan characters will often say things like, "why isn't he acting like he should?" This feature was an interesting way to explore how the average human acts (or doesn't act) according to the model of Job.

- I was surprised by what the playwright chose as the focus of the play. While the majority of the Biblical book primarily explores the dialogue between Job and his so-called friends, this only gets a few pages in this rendition. Instead, the play focuses much more on conversations between God/Satan and J.B./Sarah.

- There's some great poetry in the text, especially by Satan (who ends up, in my opinion, as the most heroic/noble character in this rendition), but I really wish the characters had more room for their ideas to "breathe." Of course, I understand why the playwright would want more intertwined dialogue since it tends to be more realistic than extended monologues, but it doesn't feel like any of the characters (and the poet) get a chance to ever get any momentum behind their ideas. Perhaps a live performance would resolve this issue.

- I understand the writer's intention behind quoting God's lines directly from the King James version (and condensing them), but choosing to not update the language and full work through God's speech really felt like a disservice to the original story.

William Demaree says

Since I am teaching the Book of Job in my lit class, I re-read MacLeish's wonderful play based on the biblical text. Actually, the play is not so much based on the Bible story; it's more like the play argues with it, questioning many of the themes that the Hebrew text seems to take as axiomatic. I love the play, having seen it performed once years ago; the final scene between Job and Sarah will have you tearing up, for sure. Modern plays in verse can become a little pretentious at times, and this is no exception. On the whole, however, this is a must-read/see for anyone fascinated by the story of Job, for my money the most extraordinary story in the OT.

Julia says

I've directed this play three times and read it about 10. MacLeish's poetry is phenomenal, and this modern take on the Biblical story of Job is fascinating. In the end, J.B. denies both God (Zues) and Satan (Nickles), turning to human love as the only solace for human suffering. Even the staging--a circus ring--is unique. When Job's "comforters" are replaced by a Marxist, a priest, and a psychologist, MacLeish is devastating in his criticism of such shallow attempts to explain human suffering. It's quite simply the best and most unique play I've ever read/directed.

Kiki says

Our drama teacher SO wanted us to do this play. But Job's a hard sell for high school kids so we rebelled and did *The Taming of the Shrew* instead. In all fairness, though, this was a good play.

Crystal says

Because I needed more reason to identify as agnostic...

Definitely requires a re-read, but I'm going to let it percolate.

Victor says

I'm not a huge fan of plays, but I do think this will cause some interesting class discussions once the new semester starts.

Paul Dinger says

I would love to see this staged. Two clowns put on the masks of god and the devil and act out the book of Job. What is fascinating is how commentary and text are combined. What is more fascinating is the notion of faith in the play as something blind and trusting. Rather than make fun of the Biblical story, this play attempts to understand it. I am sure it would be a triumph onstage.

Alan says

JB is described as a poetic drama. I got into the rhythm of it and began to appreciate the accomplishment of describing people's suffering in life and the debate over man's guilt vs. innocence. The play ends with these key lines:

"Blow on the coal of the heart.
The candles in churches are out.
The lights have gone out in the sky."

I got the feeling that MacLeish was an atheist and reflected with amazement that we read this radical message in high school in 1968.

John says

JB is a 20th century version of JOB, the most referred to book in the Bible. This modern masterpiece has all the drama and poignancy of its Old Testament counterpart and it has somewhat a better ending and answers to the question about why bad things happen to good folks.

JB's blinding trust in a God, who rewards the good and punished the sinful, survives all that happens to him or his family.

The devil has more compassion for him than God and his wife even more. She first leaves him for his maniacal faith only to return with her answer:--love.

The play raises the most troublesome question of faith and like the book Job has no faith sustaining answers except (1) the ways of God are mysterious (an answer unworthy of the question and those whose circumstances most need to know) and (2) your answer is the afterlife's rewarding heaven or fire-consuming hell.

There is no answer as God is silent and exists in the regions of one's faith and choice that stems from the free choice God gave us as a consequence of sin. Could He just have decided at the Garden to kick us out with a

"good riddance?"

If you want to explore this question from a different and more thought out viewpoint, read the ever-wise Rabbi Kushner's When Bad Things Happen to Good People.

This is a good book for a Bible class provided that they are open to see evil, in all forms, as coming from suffering and damaged human beings, accidents and the unconscious. Our church group could not handle this a resorted to the work of the devil.

Sandra says

J.B.

By Archibald MacLeish

Pulitzer Prize winning Play

The world sucks. I could say worse but right now that is all I have strength for – the world sucks.

However – two ways to look at that world – however. However there is a silver lining or however damn it there is a silver lining.

I wrote a poem in January of 2012 – “My Job Days,” it was well received in my writers group. Rod – really great guy, brought me the play J.B. the next writers group meeting and told me to read it.

Brilliant – a brilliant play and just as frustrating as the book of Job itself.

We all have our causes – poverty, worker’s rights, anti-slavery, anti sex trafficking – so many harms in this world, so many disasters. It is hard to take when personal tragedy is answered by a question.

As a matter of fact it is mind bending.

I’ve finished J.B., and it has nearly finished me.

Nearly.

Of course it ended in a humanistic flare – he repented of nothing –he accepted that he is not God – but that was not what redeemed - the love of human for human redeemed.

And it is funny now, that has been my biggest sin – love of man, the desire to be loved by a creature that does not know me. How can he? Did man create me – make me move away from death, instill in me self-preservation? Oh damn – another question.

But the answer is no – no, he, he, he, he, he, he, nor will he ever replace HE.

You know, maybe man wasn’t meant to be saved at all – but the second, the warrior who struck back verbally at the serpent, maybe it was she who was meant to be saved – and he, he, he, he, is saved by default.

And it is mostly men reading this, scoffing at the word, “saved,” well you would, wouldn’t you – you don’t need to be saved from this world – she does. And blindly she, she, she, she, she, comes back, just like Sarah to J.B. She comes back to be human rather than seek her own whirl wind. And why wouldn’t she, built as she is – the lure of sex, the contentment and afterglow of orgasms, the feeling of partnership after God has dealt His tremendous blows. Ah deception, deception works in wonderful, wonderful ways – and the result – she would rather be a slave than be alone.

J.B. is brilliant – yeah I said that already – but it is true – it is brilliant.

Manuel Sanchez says

This production won both the 1959 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 1959 Tony Awards for Best Play and

Best Direction. I read this in High School almost 40 years ago and still had the original book. It is a modern retelling of the biblical story of JOB, and one where a faithful JOB, while remaining faithful through his trials, holds fast to his innocence and struggles with the arbitrary injustice of suffering, and God's rule as witness and protagonist to that suffering. This is a story that still has much to teach while honoring our free will and honesty in questioning, Why?

David says

A play presented in verse is a very ancient art form and not one, frankly, that many today would gravitate toward. Add to this, that this play takes as its template a book from the Old Testament of the Bible and it can sound more than a bit off-putting to the modern reader. This is unfortunate, however, because this work (and its biblical precedent, the Book of Job) engage questions that not only interest the faithful, but indeed, bear directly on the very experience of being human. For example, if suffering is an unavoidable and integral part of the human experience (and all belief systems and philosophical systems acknowledge that it is), then how do we assign meaning to it, or should we attempt to do that at all? This is much more than a conceptual argument, because suffering is much more than a concept - it is a personal experience that is inevitably encountered and hopefully endured. But, being human, we tend to do more than just seek to endure it. We also are inclined to contemplate it and ask Why? This contemplation occurs not only when we ourselves experience suffering, but also when we observe it occurring in the lives of others. At the very least, it affects our life experience and, in doing so, contributes to our aggregate worldview. In this sense, I found this play to be a masterful treatment of the abiding questions associated with suffering. And one need not be a person of faith to draw useful lessons from this modern work, any more than one needed to believe in the Greek gods to draw lessons from the plays they presented in verse many centuries ago.

Alexis mask says

i loved doing this play

my drama club just finished this play it was amazingly fun and very emotional (also we made alternet in the uil compitition)

its pretty much a more modern version of the book of job from the bible
although you can be very creative with it

the setting is supposed to be at a circus with 2 workers putting on a show

one playing the devil and the other playing god
as they watch j.b. to see if he will lose faith in god
after losing all his childern money and his wfe walking out on him

i would recommend watching, reading or even putting on your own show

♥~Alexis

Briana Grenert says

The characters were awesome. The way that MacLeish wove the acting with the reality was beautiful.

The writing was wonderful and powerful. It is what really made this play epic.

The premise was creative.

The philosophy was stimulating.

I could see this play in my mind; it was epic! I would love to go to the mainland and see it. That would be awesome.

Ahhh, Job.

It was unsettling an marvelous.
