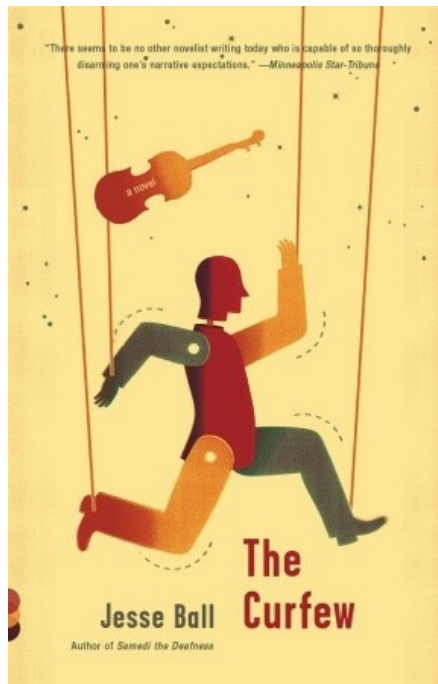




The Curfew

Jesse Ball

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William and Molly lead a life of small pleasures, riddles at the kitchen table, and games of string and orange peels. All around them a city rages with war. When the uprising began, William's wife was taken, leaving him alone with their young daughter. They keep their heads down and try to remain unnoticed as police patrol the streets, enforcing a curfew and arresting citizens. But when an old friend seeks William out, claiming to know what happened to his wife, William must risk everything. He ventures out after dark, and young Molly is left to play, reconstructing his dangerous voyage, his past, and their future. An astounding portrait of fierce love within a world of random violence, *The Curfew* is a mesmerizing feat of literary imagination.

The Curfew Details

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Author : Jesse Ball

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From Reader Review *The Curfew* for online ebook

David says

After reading his other two books, *The Way Through Doors* and *Samedi the Deafness*, a few years ago, I was ready to declare Jesse Ball my favorite living author and eagerly awaited his next book. *The Curfew*, is Ball's third novel and it does not disappoint. This story is set in a dystopian police state and follow a (forcefully) retired violinist turned epitaphorist, William, and his young mute daughter, Molly. William finds out that an old friend may have some information about the disappearance of William's wife and ventures out to meet this friend knowing that it will take him out well after curfew.

One of my favorite things about Ball's writing style is his ability to reveal a great deal about a person or a society through very little actual description. In *The Curfew*, Ball reveals snippets of information about world that William and Molly live in without ever directly addressing the creation or describing in great detail the restraints of the society on its citizens. These snippets are revealed in a way that helps portray the distrust and paranoia that pervade the society in the book.

The best part of the book is the third part. Ball uses one of my favorite literary devices, the *mise-en-abîme*. In *The Curfew*, when William ventures out to find out about his wife, his daughter is left with the elderly couple next door, where she writes and has performed a puppet show. Much of the past and a glimpse of the future are portrayed in this puppet show. Through this private puppet show much of the world is revealed in ways that it couldn't be revealed in public. Once the puppet show starts and you realize that this show is actually the events that have occurred/are occurring in real life it is hard not to rush to the end of the play to find out what happens.

Leslie says

To begin: When the publisher claims at the end of their synopsis that Jesse Ball's "The Curfew is a mesmerizing feat of literary imagination," you may think it an excitable exaggeration. It isn't. Nor is Minneapolis Star-Tribune's observation that "There seems to be no other novelist writing today who is capable of so thoroughly disarming one's narrative expectations." Writers and Readers alike: prepare to be equally intimidated and inspired.

Those who have read Jesse Ball—and adore him, I would recommend you *The Curfew*. It has all the fluid strange mesmerism of *Samedi the Deafness* and *The Way Through Doors* (my favorite), while pushing creative boundaries: for both author and narrative. One sitting would be best for this darkling daydream.

[book synopsis]

Ball maintains a tight focus and casual periphery. His cast, their world, is small, often claustrophobic and other times cozy. He creates a randomness that can remain random and yet also gain greater significance as the narrative continues. In *The Curfew*, the violence collects into a pervasive sense of fear. By the time the father must go out after curfew, you are terrified for him. Those stories, those small everyday interactions between characters slip into a deepening pool from which the novel draws emotion. That "fierce love" left me breathless, the ending left my hands trembling.

When those ministers of “show don’t tell” jab you repeatedly with their red pen, few are recommending the level of revelation *The Curfew* attains.

The novel is written in the shifting between 1st and 3rd person, holding present tenses. The 3rd person narrator? Oh, but I’ve been pondering this. I believe it to be a figure such as the one discussed on pages 126-8. And if so...the implications. *The Curfew* is told in three Parts (or Acts). They become increasingly abstract. As the reader becomes more and more attached to the little girl and her father, the movement away from the concrete is for the better—a beautiful coping mechanism.

Ball likes to mind the visual impact with dash (–) introductions to dialog, unexpectedly fluid segues, font shifts. Riddles* make their return, though with a more overt role. His repetition of images, the novels preoccupations (seats, strings, epigraphs, lies, “ideas,” etc). The use of puppetry takes on a more surprising presence than I’d anticipated; not that I figured it would remain as obvious as “people as puppets,” but the use of the puppeteer’s narrative structure (105-6), compounded by Ball’s, is marvelous.

The Curfew is a puzzle. On a primary level, the reader understands what is going on. By that ending—on another level—you are not entirely certain. This should not repel you. The response could very well be my own as I may be denying what I am being told. However, I do believe there are cues to suggest a second or third look, none of which I am going to share before your first reading. The result is an expansion of narrative possibility. *The Curfew* is a complex work that can be read very simply. But why you would leave it there, I’m not entirely sure.

Ball has an elegant hand with the bizarre; which may not resonate with the greater audience. The father was a world-renowned violinist. His new job is for a Mason, consulting with people and writing epigraphs for headstones. The daughter is mute and clever and irrepressible. The mother is perceived differently by the father and the daughter, but haunts both. You learn them through external interactions, dialog, encounters. They are exactly as they seem in an environment where little is certain. Aren’t they?

There is an old-world feel despite the sense that the setting could occur anywhere, anytime. There is a surreality in even the most mundane, in the quiet and sorrowful moments that enthrall the reader. And ultimately, there is an aching familiarity; this is where empathy and fear take hold and linger long after the book closes. What does happen to the father? What happens to the little girl?

There is an ending. But I guarantee it will have you working your way back through to the beginning, after a recovery period. And you won’t hate Jesse Ball for doing that to you, submerging you back into the book. At least, you mightn’t.

recommendation: I understand that I really respond to Jesse Ball’s writing on a level that challenges articulation. Especially with only one reading of the text. While *The Curfew* takes notable departures from previous novels, I would recommend you start with either *Samedi the Deafness* (a suspense thriller) and/or *The Way Through Doors* (a love story) and enter them with an open mind, patient, clear of expectation; this way you can get the style of his writing (voice/form). my reviews for: *The Way Through Doors* and *Samedi the Deafness*.

For fans of Italo Calvino and Jorge Luis Borges. For those who like Poetry, Riddles, Literature, the Absurd. Not to be read in proximity to lengthy dystopian fantasies (for both their sakes).

of note: I was reminded of the film *Children of Men* (2006), as well as the book *The Beauty & The Sorrow* by Peter Englund in that explanations for the current State are intimate and limited to a character's understanding of the events/context and their pertinence.

There are conversations The Curfew broaches regarding Art, the Individual, Oppression, Ideas, etc. that I didn't even touch, partially to keep the "review" relatively spoiler-free. I would love to talk about any of them.

*I am bad with riddles, but I wasn't put off. However, I would like to read this with someone who is good at them.

L @ omphaloskepsis
<http://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/20...>

Cenhner Scott says

A ver.

El argumento es más o menos este: en la ciudad C hay toque de queda y quien lo viola es asesinado. No hay mucha más explicación que esa, ni para lector ni para los habitantes de C. Hay un hombre cuya mujer desapareció hace un tiempo y ahora cría él sólo a su hija muda. Un día le dicen que alguien tiene información sobre el paradero de su mujer, pero tiene que violar el toque de queda para encontrarse con ese alguien. Esa noche deja a su hija a cuidado de unos vecinos y va a buscar esa información.

Y entonces el libro se convierte en una película de Michel Gondry con guión de Charlie Kaufman.

Es un libro muy bien escrito. Hay frases filosas, ideas afiladas que te dejan rebotando la vista en el renglón varias veces mientras pensás lo que leíste. "No habrá nada de magia. La magia es una necesidad nacida de la pobreza, o bien es una fantasía suntuosa".

Frases así, a montones.

Muy bello.

Pero la mejor línea, una frase tan simple que sólo puede explicarse con un arrebató de pura inspiración, es el título de la sección final (la parte que parece una película de Gondry):

"UNA ESCALERA DE LLUVIA Y UN TECHO EN LAS NUBES".

Qué buena frase.

No sé en qué falla el libro. No sé qué le falta para que lo haya cerrado y haya querido contarle a todos sobre este libro (como sí me pasó con el de Pinedo que leí el otro día, por ejemplo. Quizás sea que uno intuya desde el comienzo el final. No lo sé. Quizás deba releerlo en el futuro, y quizás lo distinga, o también puede que cambie de opinión.

Drew says

5+ out of 5.

This one is meant for a warm cup of something nice by a window on a crisp, clear autumn Sunday. I know I say that about a lot of things, but believe me on this one: there's just something in the prose, in the feeling of the story, that makes me think that that's a perfect way to read it. This is, on its surface, a simple story - totalitarian, a historical European feel, a father and daughter struggling in the face of unknowable entities larger than they... but with Jesse Ball, nothing is ever so simple as it seems. Or, perhaps, it's that even the simple things are imbued with a dash of narrative daring and dexterity. One thing is for sure, no matter how you come to grok it, this is a truly beautiful novel from one of the most brilliant authors working today.

More soon at RB: <http://ragingbiblioholism.com/2016/09...>

David Yoon says

The Curfew is a quick read, I finished it in a single sitting.

Jesse Ball is a poet. His work of prose is filled with empty spaces and Ball manages to evoke a great deal of feeling with sparse lines. The puppet show is beautifully realized and satisfyingly resolved. Maybe it's the brevity of the work, the concentration of so much in such a thin volume, but I find that I can't help but keep thinking about the story. It would make a great book club read as it invites so much in the interpretation.

Nanu says

Leí este libro hace un par de meses y decidí no calificarlo hasta terminar de procesar lo que me dejó su lectura.

La historia de *Toque de queda* transcurre en la ciudad C. en una realidad distópica, podríamos decir. El gobierno es totalitario; los ministerios y la policía, invisibles. Nadie sabe con certeza quiénes están al mando. Dentro de este clima "kafkiano" están William y Molly. Él es un violinista retirado que se dedica a escribir epitafios porque, desde que existe el toque de queda, está prohibida la música. Ella es una nena muda de 8 años y es su hija.

La trama desarrolla la vida de estos personajes, y el conflicto ocurre cuando William viola el toque de queda para conseguir información sobre su esposa, que es asesinada al asumir el nuevo gobierno. Mientras tanto, Molly escribe una obra de teatro para títeres que se va mezclando con la realidad.

El libro me dejó una sensación de ternura y a la vez melancolía. Me encantaron los pequeños detalles: la aparente simplicidad que en el fondo dice mucho, la poesía de los epitafios, la relación padre e hija, el recurso de la ficción dentro de la ficción.

Además me resultó un libro muy visual: el autor juega con la distribución de las palabras dentro de las páginas y el tamaño de la tipografía. En fin, es un libro distinto y me gustaría leer más de Jesse Ball.

Gastón says

La primera pregunta que me surge es: ¿cómo leer a un autor extranjero que impreca de cierta manera la

historia de nosotros como argentinos?

William es un escritor de epitafios que tiene como hija a Molly, una niña muda e inteligente. Viven en una sociedad gobernada por un sistema totalitario y expandido al punto de no saber diferenciarlo de otras cosas. Nunca sabemos como lectores, menos como personajes, quiénes son agentes del gobierno y quiénes no. Hay personas que mueren con disparos sin saber quiénes lo hicieron y otras que desaparecen al estar bajo la mira del gobierno. Así está Louisa, madre de Molly y esposa de William, que sobrevuela la historia desde su no integridad física. Videla justificaría esto con un "Ni muerta, ni viva. Está desaparecida".

Dentro de ese no saber constante se instala una relación íntima padre e hija que bordea la ternura y lo lúdico. La historia vista a través de un prisma, en este caso una obra de títeres, para recomponer el pasado y el presente.

Toque de queda sirve para continuar pensando cómo la apropiación de lecturas ayuda a seguir entendiendonos desde una historia ajena.

Zach says

I think I've been hesitant to include Jesse Ball near the top of the list of my favorite authors only because he's so young. Part of it is definitely the fact that, so far, we have only a limited library to choose from. But with *The Curfew*, his third novel, I can finally cave and claim Ball as a favorite. *The Way Through Doors*, novel #2, is one of the best books I've ever read, and with *The Curfew* as a follow up, Ball has proven himself to be a mind apart, crafting beautiful, bizarre, and thoughtful books that defy narrative norms. "Defiance" may not be a goal unto itself; that's my word, and it's probably better to look at Ball's writing as trusting its own formal logic so much that it doesn't need to rely traditional modes of storytelling.

The Curfew is set in a country that reads like a fascist fairy tale, possessing a feel both oppressive and fantastical. It concerns a man and his daughter and the way the larger world invades their own, and how that world is encapsulated at the same time on a smaller scale, completely within their control. There is an embedded, postmodern quality to the resolution, one that, in its impossible, Escher-esque construction, reveals something of the human condition that a realist rendering could not have. I think that's the real power of Ball's work - his ability to craft an absurdist lens that, even as it distorts reality, reveals parts of reality that would be missed when viewed head on.

Jesse Ball is one of the smartest, most inventive people writing today, and I'm happy to finally and publically refer to him as one of my favorite authors.

Jonathan says

holy fucking shit the goddamn asshole

Gala says

3.5/5

Toque de queda es una novela distópica, pero distinta. Sí es cierto que toma muchos elementos clásicos del género (más que nada, el tema del gobierno totalitario, que controla todo pero los ciudadanos no saben quiénes son los policías y quiénes no; todo es confuso), pero lo interesante del trabajo de Jesse Ball es la *manera* en que logra plasmar esa historia en la novela.

La trama gira en torno a la vida de William y su hija Molly. William es violinista, pero ha tenido que dejar de tocar porque en C. (la ciudad en la que viven), la música está prohibida. Es, a su vez, escritor de epitafios. Molly tiene ocho años, es muda y muy inteligente. La novela, entonces, muestra el día a día de los dos. No es una historia plagada de acción, sino que creo que lo mejor de *Toque de queda* está en los detalles. No solo argumentales, sino también gráficos. Por un lado, la relación entre padre e hija, los diálogos, las reuniones de William con sus clientes, la figura de Louisa (esposa de William y madre de Molly, asesinada por el gobierno), y demás cuestiones que hacen de esta novela una más profunda, más completa. Por otro lado, *Toque de queda* se convierte en una historia poética no solo por los temas que toca y, más que nada, la forma en que lo hace, sino por el trabajo que realiza el autor en la parte visual del libro. La novela tiene poco más de 200 páginas, pero en realidad podríamos considerarla una *nouvelle*. La cantidad de hojas que contiene aumenta porque Ball juega con la ubicación de las palabras, el tamaño de la fuente y los capítulos cortos, además de que hay espacios bastante grandes entre los saltos de párrafos. En ese sentido también *Toque de queda* es un libro distinto.

La primera parte, en mi opinión, es la mejor. La segunda mantiene más o menos el nivel, y en la tercera decae un poco. La idea de esta última parte me pareció interesante (mezclar la realidad con la obra de títeres), pero quizás no la encontré realizada de la mejor manera. Aunque es probable que esa haya sido la intención del autor, por momentos se vuelve bastante confusa, y difícil de seguir. No por la prosa del autor, que de hecho es clara y precisa (y tiene algunas frases muy lindas), pero sí por cómo va desarrollando esta tercera parte, en ese ir y venir entre la realidad (que en realidad es ficción) dentro de la ficción (la obra de títeres). Algo así como una ficción dentro de otra.

Toque de queda es un libro interesante, que parte de una premisa poco original, que está en la mayoría de las distopías no solo clásicas sino también contemporáneas. Sin embargo, el autor le concede un estilo personal en la medida en que decide trabajar sobre la parte visual y la relación entre los dos protagonistas.

Adriana says

Lindo librito, quizás no demasiado memorable. Es una distopía escrita de forma poética. La temática en sí se me hizo medio anticuada: gobierno totalitario, estado de sitio, nadie sabe quién es policía y quién no. Quizás sólo porque pienso en los clásicos que leí de adolescente, 1984, Un mundo feliz, etc y la verdad no sé si es un género que se sigue escribiendo y de qué forma, pero en fin, me queda la sensación de que quiere dar con la problemática del presente y no lo logra. Aunque quizás lo que quiera es sólo hablar de cómo vivir en un tiempo adverso o de cómo "endurecerse sin perder la ternura" como dirían mis ex compañeros de Fsoc. La gracia del libro, igual, está en la tercera parte, que es la representación de una obra de títeres escrita y protagonizada por una de las protagonistas de la novela. La obra en sí es muy linda y está muy bueno cómo se va mezclando con la historia y terminan contando el final los títeres. El dibujo de la tapa, que lo hizo el autor, no es Maus, es el títere que representa y maneja como a un títere a la nenita protagonista.

Lobstergirl says

[but it won't from me (hide spoiler)]

Paul says

Minimalist, poetic, Kafkaesque, pretentious. A short novel, not really even a novella, but in its brevity it tells a large story. Jesse Ball gives you the outline, images, ideas, and tools from which you flesh out the story with your own experiences and reading, a pretty neat trick. Two elements of *The Curfew* made a strong impression on me: William's secondary occupation (which he took up after society became a police state and the curfew was imposed -- he had been a concert violinist before music was banned), epitaphorist, a man who helps the bereaved compose epitaphs for tombstones; the informal resistance movement's "idea" or "concept," which boils down to killing agents of the police state whenever and wherever possible. The magical puppet show of the second half of the book was too arty and Pan's Labyrinth-ish for me. I will say, though, that the book got under my skin. I won't forget it.

Alison says

Dreamy, minimalist totalitarian state lit. Sometimes has the scent of Paul Auster around the edges but with a more self-conscious attachment to formal experiment. It's told in fragments, which generally works for me, but I found some of the novel's individual shards and pieces greater than the sum of its parts.

Stuart says

I'm being a bit tough on this book with only three stars, but I think that's a solid rating. Problem is I kept comparing this in my head to Herta Müller's masterpiece, *The Land of Green Plums*. Both books are minimalist, with short sections. Both books take place in police states, where paranoia is a way of life. And there's even a similarity in the tone.

But Müller's novel is work of poetic genius, while Ball's spare approach veers a bit more towards postmodernism. I cared deeply about Müller's characters, who were multi-dimensional, and I cared about Ball's, but found them more predictable, so my emotional involvement was less intense.

Ball really had me for about the first half of the book, and then I became increasingly aware of devices: repetitions; naive phrasings; typographical hyperbole.

Gosh, I do sound harsh, don't I? Well, I'm glad I read this book, and I'd read more by the same author. Because this is a book by a writer with a lot of promise.
