

### A Response to "Philip Marchand: What about Love?"

*Love Enough* by Dionne Brand is an exploration of love expressed through the narrative of a diverse cast of characters. As their individual stories unfold and weave together over the course of the novel, the reader is invited to consider the many dimensions of love and loving. The breadth of human experience that Brand explores within this theme is impressively wide - From passion and intimacy, to friendship and the love between a parent and child. Overlaying it all is a contemplation of "enough love": Is there such a thing as love enough? This is the crux of the novel. It is the question that each character grapples with in his, or her, own way. In order to advance such a complex and ambitious storyline, Brand employs an array of literary tools. First person narration is offered by multiple voices. Time is often non-linear. For the reader expecting a traditional plot, where conflicts are laid bare and resolved through action, Brand's narrative delivery may be uncomfortable, and perhaps jarring. The author herself reveals that she intentionally makes an effort in her novel writing to diverge from the conventional "narrative exposition, dialogue, action, and resolution" (Olbey 88) and seeks to pack "meaning into the sentences so that the lines in it (are) as potent as a line of poetry" (Olbey 88). Some may argue, such as Philip Marchand, literary critic for *The National Post*, that Brand's poetic style of writing in *Love Enough* limits her ability to tell the story. In a 2014 article, he writes: "*Love Enough* is familiar terrain for Brand's readers...its plotless, non-linear fashion, its distribution of points of view among different characters, its lack of resolution of any conflicts. This is a formula...starkly limited as an approach to storytelling" (par. 4). It is agreed that Brand's literary choices in *Love Enough* make it a challenging read. However, contrary to Marchand's assessment, the author's use of multiple perspectives, nonlinear

timelines and subtle resolution of conflict ultimately results in a thoughtful exploration of her theme, a deeper sense of realism and empathy for the characters, and a memorable story.

*Love Enough's* narrative moves smoothly from past to present and even into an imagined future. As a technique, "straying from the natural order of events", or "anachrony", can be a powerful tool in storytelling (Bode and Vigus 87). In the novel, time shifting is effectively used as a device for both character development and advancing the story's theme. For example, through "reversion" or "flashback" (Bode and Vigus 87), June's recollections of her past give the reader an opportunity to better understand the current struggle she has with "love" and "loving" her partner, Sydney. Knowledge of June's history of engagement in the social justice movement and the wounds she has suffered over impermanent loves and past disappointments provides context to why she might believe herself to be jaded in life and love. As a consequence, she holds back in the relationship to protect what she perceives to be Sydney's innocence: "She didn't want to spoil Sydney. Spoil all that zest for life" (Brand 135). Through memories, the reader can also witness a change in June's understanding of what is "love enough", evolving from the passionate and urgent desires of her younger self (59), to her request as a mature woman to be embraced once a day and shown a kindness once a week (137).

Altering narrative time in the novel also helps to portray character maturity or, in the case of Bedri and Ghost, their youth. Compared to the more mature June, who spends a significant amount of time reminiscing, these two young men narrate almost exclusively in the present. This narrative style captures their energy and the real life tendency of teens to live in

the moment. They feel, react and live in the present, where their choices and actions are made spontaneously – joyriding, jumping out of cars, or taking off to a totally different city with no particular plan other than “Let’s go” (Brand 127). Brand uses another interesting shift in narrative time at the end of the novel that further underlines Bedri and Ghost’s youth. In their last moments as narrators, flying down the highway in their stolen car that “shone like a new skin” (157), they are not thinking about their past and ruminating. Instead, their narration switches to a futuristic imagined world – a world where “it is perfect” (156). Consistent with the magical thinking of youth, the boys create their own future, “however impossible” (165) that might seem to be in their present circumstance.

Contrary to Marchand’s criticism that the use of multiple narrators does not work in storytelling, having characters share their experience, in their own voice, enhances realism and allows Brand to expand on her theme - highlighting diversity and the multidimensional nature of love in human relationships. This is what makes the story so interesting, suggests the author – studying all these different kinds of relationships and how the individuals in those relationships navigate them (Brand, Guest Lecturer). *Love Enough* takes place at a time when the lives of the story’s main characters intersect. Like a braid, Brand’s narrators originate as individual strands, eventually wrap around each other over the time of the novel, and diverge once more as the story closes. Each of these individuals arrives at the intersection with different histories and perceptions of “love”. Nineteen year old Lia’s story, for example, highlights the power of parent-child relationships in forming perceptions of love. In her experience, love is “exhausting”, “burning”, and “frenzied” (Brand 50). As a consequence, she has learned to “survive” people (48) and to keep their “noise” out of her (51). It is also through

Lia's narrative that the idea of "near love" (19) is explored; a relationship that might have been love, if only Lia had been able to "trust this idea" (26). June, too, has experienced love as exhausting, as if "needing some sort of rare blood to recover" (115). However, unlike Lia who strives to keep people at a distance, June chooses to enter into relationships with "dramatic lovers" who "absorb" her (117) for a time, until love "wears off" (115). In using this "insightful collection of souls" (Hughes par. 6) as narrators, Dionne Brand invites the reader to see love and relationships through their eyes in a way that would not be possible otherwise.

Finally, in his critique of *Love Enough*, Philip Marchand questions the validity of a story without conflict resolution. This may be a legitimate assessment in the traditional sense - *Love Enough* does not reach a singular resolution. However, as Lesley Hughes suggests in her review of the novel, *Love Enough* is not a traditional novel that follows a conventional plot: "Dramatic tension arises between characters, to be sure, but it's often emotional, travelling back and forth in time, and finding sudden but subtle resolution" (Hughes par. 8). Even more important than resolution is "revelation", though, explains the novel's author (Brand, Guest Lecturer). Through revelation the character comes to a deeper understanding of him/herself and is changed fundamentally by that knowledge. An excellent example of this is shared by the character June as she muses "It is possible to be in the same place and not the same place" (Brand 177). In other words, June has been at a similar place in her past relationships (a crisis point where they have eventually worn off and ended), and now realizes that there are other possible outcomes - something can be different this time. With revelation, possibilities open up and perspectives evolve. Resolution, on the other hand, is only an ending.

*Love Enough* takes the reader on a journey into the relationships and minds of its narrators. In order to address the breadth of her theme, Dionne Brand employs an ensemble of narrative techniques and devices, including nonlinear timelines, multiple narrators, and subtle conflict resolution. Her literary choices may create discomfort for those, such as Philip Marchand, who are expecting a conventional approach to storytelling. However, it is through these choices that Brand delivers a realistic story about the many dimensions of love and loving that is both thoughtful and memorable.

Works Cited

Bode, Christoph, and James Vigus. *The Novel: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Brand, Dionne. "Guest Lecturer: Love Enough." English 103, 21 Mar. 2018, MacEwan University, Edmonton. Class Discussion.

---. *Love Enough*. Vintage Canada, 2015.

Hughes, Lesley. "Lyrical Journey through Love Shines." *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 Oct. 2014, [winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/books/lyrical-journey-through-love-shines-280398832.html](http://winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/books/lyrical-journey-through-love-shines-280398832.html).

Marchand, Philip. "Philip Marchand: What about Love." *National Post*, 19 Nov. 2014, [nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/philip-marchand-what-about-love/](http://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/philip-marchand-what-about-love/).

Olbey, Christian. "Dionne Brand in conversation." *ARIEL*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2002, pp. 87-102.

*Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly*,

<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A136653924/CPI?u=edmo88243&sid=CPI&xid=b5e797e6>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2018.