

Lillian Fishman: Acts Of Service [C1]

Il primo e lodato romanzo di questa giovane scrittrice è stato descritto come un ritratto crudo ma profondo della sessualità in tempi di crisi economica e identitaria. Questo debutto audace è pieno di contraddizioni, sensualità e politica.



Debut novel *Acts of Service* has been described as “a rare masterpiece on sex”, and its twenty-eight-year old author, Lillian Fishman, [hailed](#) as a [distinctly](#) fresh voice of American fiction. Eve, the novel’s protagonist, is a young [barista](#) living in New York with her girlfriend, with whom she has a stable yet [somewhat](#) boring relationship. Monogamy makes her afraid of what she might be [missing out](#) on. Things [take a turn](#) when Eve embarks on an affair with the other two major characters in the book, Olivia and her boyfriend Nathan, which leads Eve to confront multiple contradictions as she discovers aspects of her sexuality and desire which she had not [dared](#) admit to herself before.

CONTRADICTIONS

At a recent press conference, Fishman [highlighted](#) the contradictions she tried to encapsulate in her novel. She [set out](#) on a mission to describe the [directionless](#) reality of today's younger generations, as well as the impossibility of embodying the moral codes desired by certain politicised communities. And sexuality has a lot to do with all of these, as the author explains. **Lillian Fishman** (American accent): The contradiction that Eve is [facing](#) was an important contradiction for me that I had been witnessing and experiencing for years. And it's I think a heterosexual problem or a problem of heterosexuality, but in a way I felt that it could only be explored from a queer perspective: the problem of accepting or understanding your sexuality in a [landscape](#) that has both created it and [rejected](#) it at the same time. For me the book is very much about the possibility of freedom and discovery, even within the culture and the [landscape](#) that we live in. And I don't believe that there has to be a full scale revolution in order for people to find that in their personal lives.

PERSONAL POLITICS

Fishman designed the novel as a descriptive piece of fiction and not a manifesto or a political document. It tells us about an experience of sexuality that is often, in fact, [at odds](#) with what a certain ideology tries to convince us we should embody on a personal level. The novel describes the impossibility of personal politics, says Fishman. **Lillian Fishman**: I hope for a future in which the impact of heterosexual socialisation is less extreme. And I think it's possible that for many young people it already is. But it's difficult for me to imagine, because if you're a person who grows up in a restrictive culture like the way that I've learned to think about radicalism or about freedom or about intimacy, sexuality... all of these things, is [responsive](#) to those obstacles in culture.

AMERICAN CAPITALIST DREAM

Eve feels disappointed by the American dream and exploited under capitalism, which she thinks is connected to the [compulsory](#) heterosexuality that has been imposed on her. [Nevertheless](#), her relationship with Nathan comes to show her how deep the [roots](#) of what she has been taught by the system go: that depth is exactly why she gets profound satisfaction out of this relationship. **Lillian Fishman:** It's my experience that there are young people all over the world who no longer believe in capitalism and the American dream. And Eve certainly is disillusioned with it. She has been [trained](#) to be straight. She's also being told at the same time that that there's a [cowardice](#) or a misogyny or a capitulation to that behaviour or whatever. That problem is a product of capitalism. It's the same thing in her work life, where she believes — like most young people have been taught to believe in some way — that it's moral or noble to work hard and [achieve](#) something, and have a sense of your own merits having produced an [achievement](#). And at the same time her politics and her social [milieu](#) disregards that idea and feels that it's a capitulation or it's a cowardly way to live.

A WEAKENING GUIDANCE

This novel brings forth how the idea of what it means to live a meaningful life has profoundly [weakened](#): [whether](#) through liberal or religious values, there used to be much clearer instructions on how to live a good life, which have dramatically [blurred](#) for the generation the book's protagonist and author belong to. **Lillian Fishman:** There's a real weakening in the secular, moral and ethical [frameworks](#) that people of the couple of generations preceding ours had. You know fifty years ago even in secular [households](#) and families was like a really profound [belief](#) in a linear progression in life. I mean obviously there are plenty of social movements that interrupted this, and there are plenty of exceptions, but there was an ethic of progression, [achievements](#), merit, security... I think there was much more of a solid narrative for what would make a good life, and I think that's very [weakened](#).

CONSENT

As a novel that can be placed in the erotic genre, *Acts of Service* [raises questions](#) about [consent](#), a [topic](#) which is often discussed nowadays, and which the author approaches with [nuance](#). She suggests that while some areas of [consent](#) are clear and should stay well-defined, others are [blurred](#) and offer a wonderful arena for literature to explore. **Lillian Fishman:** I think the reason that this has been so [at issue](#) in the last few years and in the last decades is because it's impossible to identify the line. And one of the pleasures of the book for me is to see Eve [attempt](#) to make that decision or calculation again and again in situations that are [slightly](#) different each time. And I think not always but very frequently the erotic is necessarily transgressive in some way, or dangerous in some way. Something that disturbs us. That's always been so much of what creates eroticism and excitement for people. And so when we go toward that sensation, it's very difficult to determine or even to know for ourselves at what moment that will become truly unwanted, or be too strong. And I think this is an area that literature is really [ripe](#) to explore and it's being explored in really amazing ways.

Glossary

- **dared** = permettersi, osare
- **weakened** = debilitare, indebolire
- **raises questions** = fare domande
- **missing out** = perdersi
- **somewhat** = un po'
- **rejected** = rifiutare
- **roots** = radici
- **trained** = prepararsi, essere portata a
- **achieve** = riuscire, raggiungere
- **belief** = credenza, fede
- **distinctly** = marcatamente
- **nuance** = sfumatura
- **milieu** = ambiente
- **households** = hogares, familias
- **whether** = se
- **at issue** = essere messo in dubbio, essere discusso
- **highlighted** = evidenziare
- **barista** = barista (esperta in caffetteria)
- **facing** = affrontare
- **responsive** = rispecchia
- **ripe** = indicata, perfetta
- **hailed** = acclamato
- **landscape** = ambiente, paesaggio
- **cowardice** = codardia
- **topic** = asunto, tema
- **attempt** = provare
- **slightly** = leggermente
- **take a turn** = cambiare, svoltare
- **directionless** = senza una strada
- **at odds** = contraddire, essere in contrasto
- **compulsory** = obbligatorio
- **Nevertheless** = tuttavia
- **blurred** = rendere incerte, sfumare

- **frameworks** = strutture, sistemi
- **consent** = consenso, permesso
- **set out** = portare avanti