



# Bash

*Neil LaBute*

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## **Bash** Neil LaBute

bash—a collection of three stunning one-act plays that mark LaBute’s return to the New York stage after ten years—forms a trio of unforgettable personal accounts: in *Medea Redux*, a woman tells of her complex and ultimately tragic relationship with her grade school English teacher; in *Iphigenia in Orem*, a Utah businessman confides in a stranger in a Las Vegas hotel room, confessing a most chilling crime; and in *A Gaggle of Saints*, a young Mormon couple separately recounts the violent events of an anniversary weekend in New York City. All three are unblinking portraits of the complexities of evil in everyday life, exhibiting LaBute’s signature raw lyrical intensity.

## **Bash Details**

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# From Reader Review Bash for online ebook

## Steve says

\*SPOILERS BELOW\*

Bash is a collection of one-act plays written by Neil LaBute. I enjoy LaBute's writting (loved Fat Pig) and I wish to read more of his works but Bash comes across as trying too hard. Starting with every sentence in lowercase letters, Bash tells three different stories of "unblinking portraits of the complexities of evil in everyday life, exhibiting LaBute's signature raw lyrical intensity." Intense and raw? Yes. Complexities of evil? Eh, not so.

Like the decision to stray from his Shift key, Bash seems to be an edgy teenager, flicking it's dark hair as it tells you how evil and crazy it is. The first, iphigenia in orem, is a man confessing in a hotel about how he murdered his infant to reap the pitying benefits and keep his job. LaBute is at his best with natural dialogue and this particular piece is the highlight.

The second, a gaggle of saints, is the low-point. There is too much time spent on a young couple describing their relationship and weekend to get down to where a guy and his friends probably murdered a gay man. The tension builds but you're always wondering when LaBute will get to the main crux. These characters are uninteresting.

The third, medea redux, tells of a woman describing her relationship with her high-school teacher when she was thirteen. Pregnant and suddenly abandoned, the woman has the child and decides to murder it fourteen years later. Why? Because fuck you, that's why.

a gaggle of saints and medea redux (isn't it annoying how I didn't capitalize the 'a'? Welcome to Bash) seem to have the 'evil' come out of nowhere but the only thing that is 'coming out' is the desperation to be thrilling and unpredictable. medea redux has the advantage with making its character sympathetic and likable.

I think LaBute has great ideas with these but they are vapid in the short burst that they are presented. I think all three could be improved with a longer story attached (except a gaggle of saints because those characters are fucking annoying).

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## Sabrina D'Andrea says

I love Neil LaBute and this collection of one acts blew my mind. I was reading the last piece on the airplane and I broke into silent uncontrollable sobs of horror and pain that could not be controlled even by the weird sideways looks I received from the person sitting next to me. I loved these three pieces and I think it was absolutely brilliant to have them all staged together as it raises many questions about the connections between the characters in each piece. In short I loved it!

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## B says

Seems like lots of people are producing LaBute these days. I do enjoy him in many ways. Although this is pretty much a monologue play and I stand by the belief that monologue plays are just the easy route to take for playwrights. It's much harder to figure out how to tell the story through, you know, action, instead of just...telling the story. That being said, these stories are really deliciously dark and interesting to hear unfold. I want to be cast in it. Badly. For the roles are really challenging and let's face it. Sitting down and just telling a story is challenging, to keep that interesting for an audience.

I read Bash on a Saturday afternoon and then immediately took a nap. I had the most horrible dreams. I like plays that can get in your head that way. Oof, the story about the man who killed his baby in order to keep his job? Yeah. I think that's fairly, horrifyingly current as far as that fear goes. What would you do in order to keep your job? Although, the one about the homophobic Christians beating up people in New York is, thankfully, a little dated. Still. It's a nasty little collection of plays and I want to participate in the nastiness. Bring it!

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### **Jillyn says**

Yet another play I had to read for my theater class that just wasn't up my alley. It's really a shame, I love the theater. But the works for this course this year, in my opinion, have just been mediocre. I'm sure other people disagree, and that's fine.

I found Bash a bit hard to force myself through, and I won't be reading it again. It's a set of three different stories: one about a murder, one about a relationship, and one about a violent weekend outing. They're a realistic, gritty look into modern life.

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### **david says**

A play with three distinct settings, unrelated in cast and set, but correlated by the sadness we witness or cause to occur in ourselves and others.

'Medea Redux' concerns a young girl and her relationship with an older male teacher.

'Iphigenia in Orem' concerns a business man's hidden secrets conveyed to an unconscious drunk in a bar.

'Gaggle of Saints' portrays anti-gay sentiment when a group of college kids head into NYC for the weekend.

The complexities of evil are served for our consideration.

A totemic for inappropriate actions and words, creating harsh consequences, is the second dish we contemplate.

Our inactions, our indecencies, our need to demonize something good, the manner in which a lapse in comport, even for a second, even as a joke, can disrupt a lifetime for so many, are also on display.

Our accreted sufferance for the absurdities of life is exposed.

This is the second play I have read from this author.

Recommended. (3.5)

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### **Sadik says**

its nice story

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### **Danielle says**

Having performed the last play (medea redux), I have a special link with this collection. Each play has roots in the Greek Tragedies of Euripides. (\*\*spoiler alert\*\*) The opening play is a monologue in which a businessman confesses to the murder of his infant daughter. It is a passive act of violence and makes for a chilling monologue to witness. The center play is a two person affair, with actors delivering monologues next to each other. They recite the story of their relationship, culminating in a night in New York that neither of them can forget. During their visit, the man steals off with some of his friends and commits a horrific gay bashing. It is another heavy, chilling piece, that can be tweaked in performance to deliver great chills. The final play, the one so near and dear to my heart, is a monologue delivered by a young mother. The circumstances of where she is delivering it are not clear, but rather suggested--she is in some kind of an institution. She recalls the story of how she was seduced by her teacher at the age of thirteen, how she became pregnant by him and was left by him to raise the child alone. As the child ages, she facilitates a relationship through the mail between the father and the child. For the child's fourteenth birthday, she arranges a meeting. After father and son have, and the father leaves, she murders her own son to enact revenge on the father. It's a brutal play to perform, but incredibly gratifying as an actor--the character is so detailed and crushingly beautiful in her tragedy. It's superbly written, as are all of the plays in this collection, and highly worth reading to anyone with an interest in drama in theatre and character development.

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### **Karen says**

Reviewing this trilogy of three act plays proves challenging. LaBute presents characters who first appear to be perfectly mundane, ho-hum middle Americans. Then we discover that each has committed a horrible act against another person, an unforgiveable act. Nevertheless, we observe the logic that led them to their horrible actions and how they justified themselves after the fact.

So do I like these plays? Do I give them high reviews? Do I want to read more? Do I tell my friends to read them?

I don't know. They are disturbing. But I believe that is the point.

1. Iphegenia in Orem: a middle manager turns out not to be so average. Or at least we hope and pray he's an anomaly.
2. A Gaggle of Saints" a group of good church kids get into trouble during a visit to the big city. What does this say about their character?

3. Medea Redux: a young girl gets entangled with one of her teachers. A complex power dynamic unfolds.

I actually saw Medea Redux performed at a Sunstone conference in Chicago, mid/late 90s, probably a year or two before the play was published / produced in NYC. It was mesmerizing, chilling, provocative. I relived that experience again and again, using it to examine power dynamics in other (often real) relationships. LaBute's work got under my skin!

But why does LaBute hold up the horrors for us to consider? Are they cautionary tales? Are we all capable of such crimes? Are they invitations to offer compassion to people who have walked down the wrong path -- a path that we might all wander down if unlucky, unchecked, unchaperoned?

I'm not sure.

But look at me asking these questions about good, evil, and human nature. I believe that is LaBute's genius. He crafts something and puts it out there -- and then we complete the piece of art by mulling over its implications....which also includes these questions: what is the role of art? to present the ideal? to be realistic? to dramatize the possible to grotesque proportions so that we can examine it more closely?

Read LaBute and join the debate. Or don't.

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### **Neil Schleifer says**

Three one acts which are each extended monologues exploring the human potential for violence.

While fascinating (and terrifying) these pieces are cold. It is awfully hard to read a piece where, while you may feel pity or even a strange sense of understanding for the characters, you ultimately find them unsavory.

LaBute revels in the unsavory, and if you are familiar with his other work you know that he almost delights in humiliation and degradation. Again, this is fascinating in small doses. It is most definitely NOT something a sustained reader could grow a fondness for -- unless they tend toward the sado-masochistic. No judgements. Just being honest.

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### **Lady Day says**

I did not read Bash. I saw the play because my friend and singing partner acted within this rendition.

Four stars: Acting

Three stars: Author's credit - good work. Not for me!

### **Theater Review**

Bash by Neil LaBute is emotionally heavy. It clearly reveals evil has a face. Clean-cut, handsome or cute, morally decent-looking but underneath darkness resides. There are three stories center on power and primal urges to control. Although I have never seen any of LaBute movies; I have read he portrays the notion of 'human will' as a weapon, capable of inflicting destruction.

This play employed two actors. The monologue starts with simple language that hooks you and as it continues you begin to see the ugliness.

Enjoyed the actors for the character development but I can't say I enjoyed the theme.

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### **Cori says**

Three short plays. Two of which are monologues. One is a two person play. All plays are spoken to someone off-stage. All are tragic and horrifying. Yet they're all good reads. Tough to decide between three and four stars.

(TBG)

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### **J.M. says**

Ah, Neil LaBute. My favorite former Mormon. These are three short plays, similar but distinct, all dealing closely with his usual banality-of-evil theme. As depicted here, evil appears in our lives not as a separate entity, easy to distinguish, but rather as something coded into our very nature. It can rise out of seemingly rational, everyday decisions. In all of these plays, Mormons do pretty unspeakable things. These represent more, uncomfortable-thought-provoking drama in that vein. I enjoyed them, though I felt a typical sort of cognitive-dissonance at work. There are some traces of sexism, and frank homophobia here and there. If LaBute had done more critical thinking, though, would he really have joined the LDS in the first place? He's less virulent than Orson Scott Card, and more tolerable than David Mamet, as playwright and person, but still. I can't help but hold LaBute's incredibly silly religion against him-- more importantly, I think it negatively affects his work. Charged, caustic, witty as they might be... the plays collected in this volume consistently feel not-quite-there, or almost-brilliant. Is this review over-hyphenated? Why, yes. C'est-la-guerre! Although, this was published in 1999, and LaBute later left the church, so maybe his stuff has since improved.

I didn't really buy his 'redux' of Medea, but this still made for a quick, compelling read. Who knew Calista Flockhart did so much stage work?

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### **Renee Alberts says**

Neil Labute's characters are straightforward, normal folks, like salesmen and college students who do unspeakable things—and they're not even sorry. Labute, who penned the films *In the Company of Men* and the play *The Shape of Things*, writes dialogue without capitalization, which lends itself well to the characters' informal and familiar tone as they deliver the play in monologues. The most horrifying aspect of these plays is not so much the crimes these people commit, but the way they assimilate it seamlessly into their average lives.

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## Tom Beaver says

Meh.

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## Lizzie says

I bought this at the first BC/EFA Broadway Flea Market I went to, in 2000. The play was new then, so I bought it with a bunch of other books for a dollar, but never read it. Or any LaBute, for that matter. Probably because I was pretty sure I wouldn't like it. Perhaps because I was worried I would?

Well, no worries, nothing exciting here. The first scene was ok, though kind of elementary. I could deal with the Iphigenia metaphor. The second scene totally lost me. It was like being stuck making excruciating small talk with totally horrible rich people for half an hour. And are they talking together or separately? It goes back and forth. Does she really need to be there? Any chance they'll kick *themselves* in the face? Oh sorry, SPOILERS. The third is all oblique rambling. And that is about it.

I don't get why all the "characters" are LDS, for no apparent reason or connection. To say what exactly? Only one of these stories is about institutionally-condoned bigotry, so as a whole it's not really about a church's warped value system. And the other two are more about their Greek allegories. So who knows. LaBute clearly thinks he is writing the edgiest junk in the world, and he wants to make you feel like you are super cool for participating. I don't find those kinds of authorial favors very interesting.

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