



The Non-Silence of the LAMB

Berthalia Fonseca-Brown

Luke A. M. Brown

CreateSpace (Aug 11, 2011)

Softcover \$12.95 (294pp)

978-1-4662-1679-2

“Having kids was her survival tool,” writes Luke A. M. Brown and Berthalia Fonseca-Brown of Essie, the main character in their novel about a poor Jamaican woman who uses her physical beauty and cunning sexual wiles to build and care for a family.

After being molested on her first day in the “big city” of Montego Bay, Essie—the naive teenage country girl with the perfect beach body—quickly learns how to make the most of her considerable charms to get what she needs. Essie is no gold digger or home-wrecker; she is a woman with a plan for her future, a plan that involves having a lot of children, most without the benefit of matrimony.

While some may find it scandalous that Essie has eight children by nearly as many fathers, the authors are not so judgmental. On the contrary, they explain what others might see as promiscuous or irresponsible behavior as being quite rational, at least from their heroine’s point of view. As they explain, “Every child she bore represented another chance of achieving her hope, the hope that one day, one of them would make her proud by becoming a doctor, lawyer or a great person in some noticeable manner.”

From its opening pages set in the late 1930s Jamaica to its later pages set in present-day New York City, *The Non-Silence of the LAMB* (the acronym represents Luke Brown’s initials) seeks to not only chronicle but also explain the journey of the poor farm girl who eventually becomes Essie Brown, matriarch of an extended family that grows to include her eight children, twenty-six grandchildren, and twenty-one great-grandchildren. Some of those children evolve into characters rather than just names in the book, but even in chapters that feature Karl, Leonard, Myrtle, Bunny, and others, it is still very much Essie’s story.

Except for a number of tastefully written sex scenes, most of which involve Essie prancing around in lingerie, the Browns’ novel is a rather tame tale meant to explore rather than expose the culture and lifestyle that Essie represents. It is a story of love and family, and it is quite nicely, if not artfully, told. The prose is simple and easy to follow. And while the writing is rarely inspired, it does convey what Essie is doing and feeling.

This is very much a book for and about women. Most of the men, with the exception of a sweet character named Tim, are “no freakin’ good, mon, ya know dat?” This is what Essie tells one of her earlier beaus, a waiter named Stedman, with whom she had two miscarriages and who then cheated on her with her best friend. Men in Essie’s world are after only one thing, and she is glad to give it to them—but only with a little quid pro quo to support her and her growing brood.

The Non-Silence of the LAMB is part of a growing series based on the fictional Brown family. The books appear designed to explore, examine, and explain a culture that may be unfamiliar to most readers. If that is indeed their goal, the Browns have succeeded. At the very least, they have crafted a pleasant, often sweet, and always entertaining novel about an unusual, dynamic woman and the family she built.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (May 16, 2013)

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