



Mysterious Acts by My People

Valerie Wetlaufer

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Mysterious Acts by My People, winner of the Lambda Literary Award, is a fearless exploration of love, grief, violence, and humor. Wetlaufer documents the search for comfort and deliverance in language rich with materiality and great pleasure. The lyrical vivacity of these poems reveals a world where bodies are capable of miracles and deterioration, tremendous loss, and grace.

Mark Wunderlich, author of *The Earth Avails* says of the book: "The mysterious acts in Valerie Wetlaufer's striking debut are many, and those acts are magnified by her keen attention to the ruptures and illusions of human longing. Love and Eros are threaded through her taut lines, her finely crafted stanzas. Perhaps most startling are the poems in which Wetlaufer takes her readers back into a reconstructed and imagined past in which a 19th century Midwestern woman's psyche and passion, her madness and her revenges and loves are made manifest, imagined, shaped and voiced. History here is harrowed, made new, made strange by being brought into language, into the light. *Mysterious Acts by My People* marks the arrival of a poet who possess great gifts of imagination, spirit, music and heart."

"Oh, to be Valerie Wetlaufer and write poems perfectly. *Mysterious Acts by My People* will make you think: this is love—no, this is violence; this is violence—no, this is love; this is comfort—no, this is harm; this is harm—no, this is comfort. The stories she shares and the secrets she imparts are harrowing and vivid, frighteningly beautiful in their metaphorical renderings. There is no other way to say what these poems say: Valerie got it hauntingly right. Her images strike so hard and so true and will stay with you forever."
—Jenny Boully, author of *The Body*, *The Book of Beginnings and Endings*, and more

Mysterious Acts by My People Details

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From Reader Review *Mysterious Acts by My People* for online ebook

Tasha says

Loved this book. So many terrific lines: "think of the codes we memorized but never used" and "what does it mean that my mind has given you wings" are just two examples. I look forward to reading more of her work!

willowdog says

Creative images in two of three sections of work dealing with death, illness, love, relationships always with a background of nature. Hated section two.

Joseph says

Mysterious Acts by My People written by Valerie Wetlaufer is a collection of nine years of work. Wetlaufer holds a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Utah. Her MFA is from Florida State University. Wetlaufer also holds degrees from Bennington College -- a BA in French and an MA in teaching. She is also the author of three chapbooks.

Wetlaufer has an impressive educational resume, and things like that sometimes intimidate me as a reviewer with a small college resume and an MA in political science. I have no educational background in poetry, and only in the last year developed an interest poetry beyond a few well known names. Poetry has since become my favorite reading, and I only use Goodreads Giveaways for poetry. Going through the list of offerings I came across: "*Mysterious Acts by My People* is a fearless exploration of love, grief, violence, and humor." So I entered and won. The book arrived promptly. It was signed and included a bookmark and the author's business card. The note in the book said I hope you enjoy the poems. I thought this is nice; it should be right up my alley.

However, I found myself in that "outside your comfort zone" place in reading. There is violence, and humor. The love is something that hit me as a very surprised, "Wow." The grief is soul wrenching. The poem "Twins" and the "The Fourth Miscarriage" will rip your heart out. "City of Salt" and "Your Body will Haunt Mine" are powerful and very moving poems of the loss of a loved one. "Anger Endures" continues the sense of extreme loss.

There is humor in the collection too. One line is burned into my brain is from "Instruction Piece": "I live in the belly of a wail, swimming the ocean." The play on words is near perfection.

The violence and sex are graphic, perhaps a bit more than I expected. I had read poetry from the LGBT community before and enjoyed it. Feelings are the same no matter who you love. Wetlaufer, however, left me feeling a bit different, not offended, but maybe a bit embarrassed reading it. But that too is not quite correct. At times, I would get caught up in the poetry and come back and think, "Did she really say what I think she said?" Other times I caught what she said, but the words softened the bluntness. There is power in what is being written, immense power, enough to knock you over, but Wetlaufer's use of words makes

everything seem as it should. She made this former Marine blush, yet at the same time see the raw beauty in her words.

I will admit I was not fully prepared for the subject matter in this collection. Perhaps the elk on the cover distracted me. Perhaps, only reading the opening lines of the introduction made me think of something else. Contemporary poetry is, in my experience, a few hits and many misses. *Mysterious Acts by My People* is a hit. After reading this collection, despite most of it being outside my personal experience, my first thoughts were, "My God, this woman can write." The poems in this book will stay in my mind for some time to come. Wetlaufer does something that is both difficult and rare. She is able to take someone with completely different experiences and have them feel like they are part of her experiences. She has the ability not just to tell you what she felt, but to have you experience what she felt. Absolutely amazing collection.

Luisa says

I came across this book randomly, and am so glad that I did. What a strange and wonderful--indeed MYSTERIOUS volume of poetry!

There is everything I could want in this collection. Sexy, scary, sad, political, intelligent, funny, historical, and landscape. I wonder how much this lovely writer was influenced by the places she has lived.

This is a difficult book. Some poems deal with hard topics like infertility and hate crimes, and heart break, but I like that the poet doesn't shy away from such things. A very beautiful, lyrical book. I was never thinking I wish I hadn't read a poem even when it made me sad or upset.

One of my favorite poems is from the end of the book. "Menace." Here are some lines:

"I have no weapon, no lance against danger, just memory."

The memories in this book are dangerous, but by remembering, by sharing and telling them (of course I don't know if all these poems are true or stories; it doesn't matter), the speaker in the poems can keep them at bay.

I can't stop rereading certain poems and thinking about them. I love this book. It's so different from anything I've read before.

Tyler says

Valerie Wetlaufer's "Mysterious Acts By My People," juggles love and violence--showing glimpses of both, intertwined, in their most truthful, most vulnerable forms. The poems range from modern memories of personal attraction, to harmful passion of humans, to tales of a oppression for a 19th century woman. The descriptions are frighteningly beautiful. Her careful love for imagery and articulation is tastefully exquisite. Most of all, "Mysterious Acts By My People" is passionate and mysterious. It is evident that Valerie has poured her entire being into the pages, and shared it with the world. For an aspiring poet, the dedication to showing human nature in its most difficult, most emotionally charged form, is absolutely inspirational.*

*this review/rating is based off of a re-read of this collection

Melissa says

An extremely visceral collection. Emotions - positive and negative - are rendered physical through the body or objects. "Love poem in 3 parts" and "Insomnia with Solomon" are outstanding. The center section is a set of linked poems, Scent of Shatter, based on a real woman, Mary Sweeney, from 19th century Wisconsin.

If you are looking for feminist poetry, you need this.

(Disclaimer: I'm a friend of Valerie's but that doesn't make a difference bc these are DAMN good poems)

Barbara says

Clever, bold, delightfully raunchy in places, lyrical, and self-aware.

Molly says

Beautiful. Review forthcoming.

Valerie says

I wrote this book over the course of 9 years. I am very proud of it. Thanks for taking the time to read it.

Mii says

This book is a great read!
