

Misfits, Mystics, Love & Life

Raminder Bajwa

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Raminder Bajwa's emotional and patriotic collection of over two hundred poems is *Misfits, Mystics, Love & Life*. From the American invasion of Afghanistan to abstract contemplations of humanity, the poems cover a broad range of topics.

The collection is divided into six uneven sections related to America, love, friendship, divine figures, life, and mysticism, each musing on various topics and events. The American section comments on 9/11 and ISIS, as well as the civilian deaths that resulted from a flood in Texas. The selection of love poems is personal and intimate, describing intense longing, passion, and angst. Although some follow trite themes and phrases, others include gorgeous lines of fresh, surprising imagery. For example, "A Confession" opens with "The night is out collecting dreams." Elsewhere, a lover longs to be covered in the blanket of his darling's hair.

The poems are rhymed but abstract. Their titles do most of the heavy lifting, identifying each piece's subject. Poems focused on mysticism and spiritual subjects are even more conceptual, and the complex role of humans in the universe is a recurring theme.

Straightforward language is used to address deep philosophical issues, including violence, the afterlife, and love. The tone and narrative voice are consistent, but the work lacks dimension as a result, becoming a running, general commentary on life that, though its scope is ambitious, does not enlarge on any of its subjects. Poems on current affairs include reported details, but don't link to larger themes or speculate on the causes or conditions of the events described.

At its best when it focuses on personal experiences without generalizing about universal values, the book's strongest poems hint at an inner world and the private spaces that the narrator inhabits, with concrete details about relationships, places, and experiences. They appeal to the senses instead of relying on intellectual observations. One poem asks a lover to "use me, abuse me, even enslave, / Or maybe just free me and wave." Poems that link physical details to philosophical thought also stand out. However, the book's consistent abab rhyme schemes and iambic meter become repetitive. The book leans heavily on this form and avoids variety.

The book is organized and easy to follow, with page numbers and a full table of contents. Its direct language and ambitious themes result in a strong collection overall, though the sheer volume of similarly formatted pieces in the collection is off-putting.

Misfits, Mystics, Love & Life is a hefty poetry collection that touches on many themes and topics without interrogating any, grappling with classical topics like love and grief.

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Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

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