



Pâté dé Foie Gras: A Book of the Absurd and Poignant

Lisa Malone

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Absurd entries may appeal to those looking for zany entertainment while concrete details convey deeply human emotional experiences.

Despite its title, retired technical writer Lisa Malone's new book is not a cookbook. In *Pâté dé Foie Gras: A Book of the Absurd and Poignant*, the author serves up a smattering of childhood and adulthood memories with her wild, heady prose. Her efforts produce plenty of absurdity in the form of amusingly raw and grotesque imagery.

The fifteen entries in *Pâté dé Fois Gras*, along with the prologue, could be characterized as vignettes in that they are short literary sketches. Several are memoir-like reminiscences of Malone's childhood in the 1960s and onward. Others serve as records of dream experiences and hallucinations she experienced later in life after undergoing brain surgery. Select poems are interspersed throughout the short book, as well as some personal notes and explications of the poems.

Malone reveals raw storytelling talent whenever recounting memorable characters from her childhood in Colorado. In one episode, her schizophrenic neighbor, Madame Fluke, attacks her philandering husband with an executioner's ax: "Mr. Fluke and his soon-to-be ex-girlfriend stuffed themselves into his Citroen and peeled out seconds after Madame Fluke slammed her axe through the rear window, perhaps ripping into the back seat's brittle, cracked, and plastic upholstery." This passage and others like it showcase Malone's flair for the dramatic and bizarre, which keeps the stories moving along.

Although Malone warms up well with such colorful language, she too often ends her sketches abruptly, creating choppy and uneven impressions. In one entry, she recalls a cat-and-squirrel fight that transpired on a neighbor's porch. She then jumps to a 1965 flood that brought "an armada of rattlesnakes" attacking the rodents under said porch while everything was being swept away. Her initial descriptions are vivid, but the imagery doesn't add up to more than a passing diversion.

In the beginning of *Pâté dé Fois Gras*, Malone states that as a writer, she is happy to live inside her head, preferring "imaginative concrete details" to "abstract, superficial reality." The problem with living and writing inside one's head is that the obscure and idiosyncratic rule the day, offering little, if any, emotional connection. Malone transcends her own head when she uses concrete detail to convey deeply human emotional experiences, such as when she poignantly describes her childhood move from Michigan to Colorado.

Her more absurd entries, on the other hand, may appeal to those looking for zany entertainment.

SCOTT NEUFFER (February 25, 2016)

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