ForeWord Reviews
**Clarion Review**

SHORT STORIES

**Rape and Killing: Stories from a Strange Mind**
Russell A. Mebane
Lulu
978-1-257-02406-3
Two Stars (out of Five)

Russell A. Mebane's hope for *Rape & Killing: Stories from a Strange Mind* is that it will stay in readers' minds "for all eternity." He's come close. This collection of short stories and essays is filled, as the title suggests, with bizarre and disturbing characters who not just senselessly and brutally kill, but who literally screw women to death.

"Stories from a *Sadistic* Mind" would probably have been a better title for the book, which Mebane, a teacher, dedicates to his wife, a woman, he says, who has "brought me closer to my Lord Jesus Christ and accepted my love of violent entertainment." Written over a twelve-year period, the book represents both a "spiritual" and "literary" journey, according to the author. Where his journey took him is a bit unclear.

Fictional stories like "Smackey's God"—in which God appears as a broke, hungry, and unemployed man who, after listening to Satan, uses a TEC-9 semiautomatic handgun to blow away a fast-food restaurant full of his "chilluns"—are nestled between Mebane's beliefs about God, Batman, and Biblical characters. Mebane blames Adam, rather than Eve, for original sin, and believes that all priests and prostitutes are going to hell.

He admits throughout the book that his stories may not be for everyone. Following a story written from the perspective of a psychic African-American serial killer who is a bartender at a gentleman's club, Mebane includes a short essay, "Karmic Backlash," in which he writes that, "I'm happy to see you're still reading this book. I'm sure that last story was probably a little weird for you."

The reality, as Mebane repeatedly reminds the reader, is that all of the stories in Rape & Killing are weird, not to mention dark, stomach-turning, and disturbing. But in literature, weird and disturbing can be acceptable. In literature, in fact, the absolute worst deeds—and even the worst characters—can be forgiven if the reader can in some way feel, understand, or otherwise empathize with who they are. But that doesn't happen in *Rape & Killing*.

Mebane's fictional stories, like his characters, are shallow. Without a doubt, they're

unique and creative, but, like the accompanying essays, they lack the depth and detail that bring a successful piece of writing to life. The reader feels neither a connection to nor a real understanding of any of the happenings, characters, or Mebane himself.

Others with a “strange mind” may enjoy *Rape & Killing*. But for those looking to lose themselves in a story, or to read a book feeling like they’ve gained some kind of genuine understanding of the author’s beliefs, will more than likely be disappointed. Perhaps Mebane’s next book will provide a different experience.

*Cindy Wolfe Boynton*