



The Activist

Renee Gladman

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Fiction. African American Studies. Straddling fiction and poetry, Renee Gladman's writing operates on the level of the sentence, constructing surprise and oblique meanings at every turn, and somehow managing the supremely difficult trick of both engaging and pushing the reader. "THE ACTIVIST begins in the middle of a revolution....There is a bridge that may or may not have been bombed. People speak in nonsense and cannot stop themselves. In the mids of all this, the language of news reports mixes with the language of confession. The art of this beautifully written book is in how it touchingly illustrates that relations between humans and cities are linked in a more complex interface than most realize"--Juliana Spahr.

The Activist Details

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Author : Renee Gladman

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From Reader Review *The Activist* for online ebook

k says

I got all excited, because it was prose poetry and a professor I used to had seemed to like the author. But, blah. BORINGTOWN: POPULATION-THIS BOOK.

Xander says

The *Activist* is damn near perfect: it's disorienting, compelling, harrowing, and frequently hilarious. I think Kafka would have loved this book.

Mattilda says

A mutating map with disappearing streets, an Existential satire, and an oblique investigation -- is it the terror of action, the terror in action, or the terror of inaction? I loved this mystery madness until the end when it became more bounded by references to 9/11 and then suddenly I wasn't sure -- I wanted to stay with:

“Detritus in the streets, my legs so heavy; I see by instinct. I'm lying in the park, hidden in the uncut grass, imagining a city grid. A map of summer colors and geometry. A circumference that's doing something, the inner life of a line. All day I pretend I understand.”

J.I. says

Like other Gladman I've read, I just don't get it. There are times in which she pushes against boundaries, about the ideas of writing and language (here, the language of the newspapers, of the press, of PR and activists, etc.), but mostly it feels mealymouthed and underdeveloped. At its heart this is a story about a bridge that was bombed, or which never existed, or which is perfectly fine (and no one can figure out which) and activists and then it's also about 9/11 and the impossibility of being an activist in the face of such a travesty. Except it's just barely not a joke. It presents a kind of post-modern reality where nothing is known, but it fails to explore the concept. It plays against activism, but accidentally makes them completely ridiculous. It uses language to mess with reality, but ends up simply not really dealing with it. It's a book that wants to be things, but also wants to be only 15,000 words, and so can't really be bothered to be things. It is fine, I suppose, but after this, and *Toaf*, I am happy to be done with Gladman forever.

Nicole says

It's always nice and refreshing to read a poetry that reads as a prose. Gladman breaks it down into 10 different sections, each one having its own perspective, characters, setting that all centrals around one theme.

Sometimes, within certain sections, it can be a bit confusing as to which character is speaking, but even in those instances what becomes important is more so what the speaker is saying. It isn't for everyone, because of the themes of war, being active, inactive, etc. But I think if poetry or prose about war, politics, or how those abstract ideas take effect in one's mind then *The Activist* is a book to read, because the insight of the characters is relatable, funny, serious, and profound. Not profound in the sense that wow you've said something that I didn't know, but more so in the sense that you have something that we, as a people or as a human being, think but do not say, or rather would not like to talk about or acknowledge it even to ourselves.

Perhaps I'm romanticizing this, as I tend to do to most things, but it is merely my interpretation of the thing.

Samantha says

"But...I don't know. Reality is not static--its properties are in constant flux, so perhaps we are as much in the world as we can ever be, and that's the problem."

This book almost broke my heart over and over again, but then did something jarring that shifted my focus elsewhere, thereby demonstrating why my emotions were all culled forth in the first place. This book is written in gray and white mental fuzz and suddenly there will be bread loaves hanging from the ceiling, and then there are no colors again.

Reality is questioned in a sort of *The Matrix*-y dream-vs.-awake (or drugs-vs.-nodrugs) way as well as in an everyone-has-different-perceptions way AND in a purposeful-creation-of-reality way. But there are never overt questions and everything is stark and spare and exact. By the end, the only thing that seems fully real is a profound inability to connect--to share the same reality with anyone.

Formally amazing. Not because it's trying to experiment with form, but because the form is completely necessary to creating this landscape and telling this story.

I am kind of bowled over that someone could do so much with perception, reality, media, war, dreams, desire, and interpersonal relationships in so few words.

I will read this more times.

Jaredjosephjaredjoseph harveyharvey says

"This is truly embarrassing for the administration," a specialist on perception theory and war, who asked to remain anonymous, confided. "What we have is an extreme form of civil disobedience. Something our public has never seen before. This is the situation we're facing: a shockingly high number of witnesses claim that the bridge is in perform form, the President of our nation is convinced that the bridge has been exploded, another group asserts that the bridge has collapsed, not exploded, and a handful of others contests that there ever was a bridge. Now imagine how this sounds to people in other countries, or just on the other coast."

Matty B says

I remember this book as an experiment and a critique of political reality as distorted by newspaper prose or something like that. There are lots of cool imitations of news stories describing a confusing dispute of the factual record regarding a terrorist attack that may or may not have ever happened. Administrative awkwardness is epically conveyed at the expense of those that want to use tragedy for their own political gain. And there are cool fictional clandestine revolutionary types lurking in these pages...hiding out from the cops! I checked this book out on account of old writing teacher Rob Halpern used to teach Renee Gladman writings that were always experimental but down to earth and that is exactly how I would describe everything I've read on Krupskaya Press besides Taylor Brady...

Gary McDowell says

Prose poems!?

Bryn says

This is one of my favorite books of all time. I've read it at least 4 or 5 times and never have the same experience of it.

Zack says

i really loved this book. it went down easy but i keep thinking about it. like a delicious meal and then you burp after the delicious meal and you keep tasting your burps. i usually don't like narrative poetry but this is totally an exception to my rule (there are a few). sometimes i think narrative poetry tends to be weird for weirdness sake. in *The Activist*, all the weirdness seems symbolic and meaningful. a very good weird.
