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Lacy desperately wants to leave the cemetery and find out how she died, but every soul is obligated to perform a job. Given the task of providing entertainment, Lacy proposes an open mic, which becomes a chance for the cemetery's residents to express themselves. But Lacy is in for another shock when surprising and long-buried truths begin to emerge.

Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery Details

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Author : Mary Amato

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From Reader Review Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery for online ebook

Scottsdale Public Library says

There are so many things I want to say about this book! There are many shiny little gems in here for theatre geeks and book nerds. I can say that as the happy center of that Venn diagram; it made this book a very fun and fast read for me. I must also make an impassioned plea that if you are a teacher you pick this one up. Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery is a “holy grail” book for teachers. It’s a dramatic screen play centered around poetry that is approachable and engaging for teens with contemporary issues and historical context... yes, it has both!!! It breaks the fourth wall so that the narrator can address the reader to explain the literary AND theatrical devices being employed along with quips and snarky asides. Ohhhh, the drama!!! It should be everyone’s April read. If you are participating in NaNoWriMo Screen Frenzy, if you do a unit on Poe, if you do a unit on poetry, if you have to make your students read any moldy old play: please, please, make it up to them with this book. – Alexis S.

Brittany says

I was given an arc of this book by the publishers and net galley in exchange for my review. It is honest and fair.

I’m on the fence about this book.

On the one hand, it’s charming. The main characters are likable and it’s easy to get engaged in the story. It’s creative and different than anything else I’ve read lately. Those are all pluses and make the story, overall, a very enjoyable read.

Some of my complaints are tricky because they’re also what I liked about the book. What I mean is, poetry and song lyrics are a large part of the book. They provide character development and are necessary for the open mic night section. They’re quirky and fun and create an atmosphere for the book. The idea itself is awesome: spirits that reside in a cemetery put on an open mic night where they learn about each other! Very cute. At the same time, the lyrics and poems are awful. They’re very predictable and trite. Full of cliched, overly sentimental easy rhymes. They were very, very cringe to read and during the open mic night when there were just pages of them, it was painful.

Then there’s the ending, which is basically Lost. We’ve spent the whole book getting invested in these characters just to have them cross over in the end and go God knows where in some sort of moral lesson about bravery. Nope. Didn’t work. Ultimately, if it were possible, I’d give this book 2.5 stars because it’s a great idea with some charm that was, nonetheless, poorly executed.

Stephanie says

When Lacy wakes up dead in Westminster Cemetery, final resting place of Edgar Allan Poe, she's confused. It's the job of Sam, a young soldier who died in 1865, to teach her the rules of the afterlife and to warn her

about Suppression--a punishment worse than death.

Lacy desperately wants to leave the cemetery and find out how she died, but every soul is obligated to perform a job. Given the task of providing entertainment, Lacy proposes an open mic, which becomes a chance for the cemetery's residents to express themselves. But Lacy is in for another shock when surprising and long-buried truths begin to emerge.

All I have to say is who knew the dead were so emotional! The afterlife in this book is full of self doubt, cowardice, vindictiveness, sadness, anger, love, you name it they feel it! Lacy is a "modern" buried in an old cemetery full of really old souls. She is the first to join their ranks since 1913. Her appearance is seen as a threat by the rule enforcer Mrs. Steele who follows Lacy looking for any reason to grant her three strikes so Lacy can be suppressed. Until Lacy woke up dead, everything in the cemetery ran on a boring routine. Mrs. Steele's assumptions about the newcomer are correct but will she be able to stop the progressive momentum or be able to silence her forever? Oh my how I loved this book!

Jenny says

I received an advance reader's copy (ARC) of this book, so I will not quote, just comment generally.

Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery by Mary Amato initially intrigued me because of the title, then the description — the lives, or rather deaths, of the occupants of Westminster Cemetery are upended by the arrival of a new resident, a "Modern" girl called Lacy. She decides things here are too boring, too strict, and too sad, and suggests an Open Mic Night to cheer everyone up. Little does she know that this has ramifications far beyond a simple night of fun.

This novel tells an entertaining story in the form of a two-act play, which I found an interesting choice. It works, to an extent. I feel that while the form allows for some quick, convenient jumping from one character's mind to another's, it also allows Amato to be rather... not lazy, exactly, but perhaps lax in following the writing adage "show, don't tell." Amato tells us a lot, rather than letting us glean for ourselves. Many of the "stage directions" are asides in which Amato speaks directly to us, commenting on what we are seeing. This can be amusing, but — and I never thought I would say this — it seems like she breaks the fourth wall too much. As far as I can tell, much of this telling-not-showing, fourth-wall-breaking is just Amato's narrative voice, which is certainly competent. It just doesn't entirely work for me. I honestly kind of felt Amato is talking down to the audience, which is a sensation I often have in young adult literature. So that is a shame.

The cast of characters is decent and eclectic. Each person is different, though not given much depth. However, there is a nice layer of realism with the appearance of several real-life people: Edgar Allan Poe (whose grave has made this particular cemetery famous), his wife Virginia, and his mother-in-law Maria. Their characterizations seem mostly accurate, though for me, Poe verges on being a bit of a caricature of himself.

I quite liked Lacy, a bright, bold girl just trying to make her existence (and everyone else's in the cemetery) a little brighter. She is spunky and smart, and her interactions with Sam — my other favorite — are cute and frustrating all at once. Other stand-out characters are Poe (despite my issues with his portrayal, I have to like him at least a bit!), Mrs. Steele (who, given more depth, could have been a great take on a mean Minerva McGonagall or something), Virginia (I enjoyed the commentary on "mean girls" and the complex bond she

and Lacy had), and Raven (a great touch). I just wish they had more dimensions, and that the love triangle — such as it is — was left out. (But my love triangle rant will have to wait for another post.)

The best parts of this story are actually when the subplot, not the main plot, is given the spotlight. Lacy initially appears in the cemetery without having any idea how she died, and her desire to remember, not matter how tragic, gives us the most compelling emotional moments of the book. The visits from her still-living sister Olivia — significantly nicknamed Liv — are genuinely touching. We see the realistic ramifications of Lacy's sudden death and how her loss has impacted her family. The book here offers some pretty mature material: mild family discord, grief, guilt, addiction, and depression. As the details of Lacy's death are slowly revealed to us, we see that this thus-far rather lighthearted take on an afterlife can also handle the darker, sadder aspects of death. For these reasons, this book will not be for everyone, just more mature high-schoolers and older readers. (There is also some swearing that might put off younger readers — or at least their parents.)

In the end, *Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery* is an earnest effort to write a quirky, dark-humored Poe-inspired tale. The characters are decent, the writing passable, the love story charming. The plot and subplot kept my attention throughout. While this isn't the greatest book ever, many high-schoolers will certainly enjoy this, particularly if they enjoy Poe stories or other spooky tales.

Caitlin says

Actual rating: 3.5 stars

I received an ARC from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Review originally posted on my blog, Turning Pages.

When I first stumbled upon this book, I knew I wanted to read it. A book set in a cemetery, told via play format? Um, yes. It's the perfect Autumnal read, and fans of Edgar Allan Poe will especially appreciate it.

I haven't read a book in play format in years, but it was fun. It made the book quick read. As someone who loves seeing plays, I enjoyed it. The book celebrates the arts, particularly writing, music, and the performance of them. All artists would appreciate that. Sometimes I did wonder if the story would work better as a traditional prose novel.

The reason why it might've worked better as a prose novel is because the author - or narrator - interjects a lot over the course of the play. We're given back story, thoughts, and more through these addresses to the reader. Sometimes they were quite lengthy and didn't add anything to the plot. It also took me out of the story a bit sometimes.

However, the poems within are fantastic and flow so well. THIS is the kind of poetry I enjoy. That was a joy to read, and I could easily imagine the characters performing them at the open mic night. The subject of the poems were emotional, and a lot of the topics were also relevant and important, which made it all the more special. The poems were definitely a high point in the book.

The book is also surprisingly funny, with more obvious humour, and some more subtle sarcasm or nods to the reader that the characters aren't in the loop for. I did find the romance to be a bit rushed and insta-love,

but it was sweet nevertheless.

The ending was surprisingly emotional. To see the growth due to the open mic night, to see Lacy's journey, was lovely. I got a little teary eyed at the end. Without spoiling anything, I'll just say the ending was moving and balanced out the rather dark and humorous scenes. The book is dark humour anyway, since the cast of characters are mainly ghosts. But the ending hits you in the feels.

Open Mic Night At Westminster Cemetery was a surprising gem. It's a unique story, that's funny, dark, and emotional. I think it might have worked better as a prose novel, or with less interjections from the author to the readers, but overall the story really hit me. I also found the romance to be a little weakly written. Overall, this book left me smiling, and that's a good feeling.

Jackie says

I really have no idea why this was rated so poorly and my only guess is someone didn't actually read it because wow it was so much more than I could have ever imagined!

“Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery” tells the story of the dead who spend their night stuck in a routine guarded by strict rules when a young woman wakes and finds herself the newest member of their community. Already plagued as the outcast since she is considered a “modern” for dying after 1913 she struggles to find her place amongst the group and when the opportunity arises to host an open mic night she jumps at the chance to share her frustrations, pain, grief and truth with the others and encourages them to do the same with the hope that they can all finally find peace.

The first part of this reads like something Tim Burton would have a lot of fun directing as we have a group of people from olden times haunting the cemetery in which they are buried and the ways they go about interacting with Lacy, our lead heroine, is hysterical as it's all done in a way that won't anger the main antagonist who runs the place with an iron grip. Each character has such a strong personality that it's easy to love them and once we get to the second half it really blows wide open as they each come into their own and share parts of themselves they've kept hidden for so long and each one was so powerful and heartbreakingly offered up a new layer to their current and past actions while also allowing for a chance at forgiveness and healing.

The ending really sticks with me and once we get the ball rolling I couldn't read fast enough, the way they had these characters strip themselves bare and reveal the innermost workings of their soul while also dealing with the complicated emotions surrounding Lacy's death and the presence of her grieving family sitting on the sidelines unaware of the ghostly presence was incredible and it really helped solidify this group and what it means to move forward in both life and death.

If you're looking for something creepy and in tune with some of Poe's work this probably won't be for you but if you want something that I hope one day Burton and Lin-Manuel Miranda team up to make a film out of then this will be perfect.

special thanks to the publishers and netgalley for providing an arc in exchange for a fair and honest review!

Rendz says

This was super weird...and yet not. I liked it. RTC

Dahlia says

This was extremely odd and that definitely contributed to why I liked it so much. With as much YA as I read, it's getting really hard to find books that don't read like ten I've already read, and this was definitely that. It takes chances in both premise and form and it was a lot of fun.

Victoria says

I'd say "Oh this is just a book I'm too old to enjoy now," but you know? Even at age twelve with my noes in a massive copy of 'Collected Works of Poe' I would have rolled my eyes so far back in secondhand embarrassment by that I could have seen my brain.

There's a raven that beat-boxes. I was already over the entire book by page 40-ish, but that was it, and with pages and pages to go after that I had to sit down and go through it all then or I'd have never finished it.

Just /once/ I'd love to see Virginia Clemm written as...a good, adult person? Every time I see her in fiction she's written as a perpetual tween (hello she was almost 26 at the time of her death). Here, while there's a few mentions that she didn't stay a kid forever, she's compared to a Mean Girl.

But that's a personal issue, one that the author on the copyright page makes a point of saying "don't get your knickers in a twist" (QUOTED) if you're a biographer and didn't like their characterizations.

If not a couple sexual references (vague ones), a few drops of "f**k," and Lacy's sister's not-so-healthy coping mechanisms, I'd think I was reading a book written for children. It read like something written for children. Every single character was submissive at best and cowardly at worst, save for Lacy, who is SO magically special and perfect and talented that her poetry wakes Poe from the grave when his own family members couldn't.

Okay.

Nothing in the book made any kind of logical sense, and while the idea of it being written in play format was interesting, it wasn't well done. It wasn't structured like a play OR a novel, every single character's name could have been something else and the premise would be untouched. It was just so...bad. Oh yes, and there's instant-love-at-first-site that serves ZERO PURPOSE to the entire plot. Not even a subplot? It's just....there.

Milana M (acouplereads) says

Wow! I loved this!

Ryley (Ryley Reads) says

I knew that this book sounded interesting to me... and then I realized it was in a play format and I was immediately in love!

Thanks so much to Thomas Allen for sending me an ARC of this book for an honest review, as always, all opinions are my own.

This book follows a cast of Dead characters, including the newly deceased Lacy, who has no memory of how she died and struggles to comprehend the cemetery that is to be her new 'home.' She first meets Sam, a shy Civil War soldier who died not long after he was forced to enlist by his mother, Mrs. Steele, who is the unofficial authority figure of the cemetery. Sam tries to help Lacy navigate this new stage in her life while dealing with his own insecurities, and Lacy has to come to terms with her death and its circumstances.

First of all, there is just something about an afterworld-type story that gets me every time. I love the idea of these historical figures 'coming alive' at night and 'living' their new lives. Amato includes a bunch of really interesting historical characters in the book, not just the famous Edgar Allan Poe and family, but also women who felt restricted in their social norms, men who couldn't accept their gender but had to because of the time period. It was a really fun way to learn a little about history without weighing down the story.

I absolutely loved how this story was written as a play. I love reading plays and this aspect made me love this book even more. It was slightly differently structured than what I am used to with reading other plays, but that may just have been a writer's choice than a formatting issue. Some of the stage directions were more of aside commentary from the omniscient narrator/playwright and less actual stage directions but I didn't really mind.

One of the things I love about theatre and plays, in general, is that they are so brilliantly able to portray real life. While this was not a realistic play in the sense that it was about dead people, it was realistic in the sense that it was able to address real-life issues. Each of the characters has something to get off their chest, some regret from life that they are holding onto and in a really cathartic scene, Lacy helps them release this burden.

There wasn't as much Poe in this as one would expect in a book set in the cemetery where he is buried, so if you are here for Poe and Poe alone, you might be disappointed. But there is some non-Poe poetry and the Raven is a regular character so that should satisfy any passing yearnings for the poet.

Overall, I don't think that this book will necessarily be for everyone because it has its quirks, but for me, it was just what I didn't know I was looking for!

Dana Fontaine says

I didn't really care for this one that much. It was in a weird style and it seemed not very developed. Not my cup of tea.

Joelie says

I really enjoyed this. Not what I thought the story was going to be like at all. It was better, the characters were amazing and quite well developed in a small amount of time. 3.75 stars :)

Lauren Stoolfire says

I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery by Mary Amato is a YA paranormal fantasy story told in the format of a two-act stage play. If you like a good ghost story, you're going to have to try this tale because there is so much to like about it. It's a darkly humorous and quirky, features a fantastic variety of characters (including Edgar Allan Poe himself), and it asks intriguing questions about life and death. It did leave me wanting a little more, especially about the wider ghostly world though as this is set entirely in one cemetery. The story is very visual and could be fun to actually see as a stage play (or a movie), but I think I would have preferred this to be in regular novel format. I didn't know it wasn't a regular novel before I started reading actually. Personally, I think I was expecting a little bit more *Beetlejuice*, but overall it would certainly fit in with Tim Burton's oeuvre.

Namera [The Literary Invertebrate] says

ARC received in exchange for an honest review - thank you!

I don't want to come right out and say that the title is the best part of the whole book. It wasn't really a bad enough book for me to justify saying that. But the title is pretty damn awesome, and was basically 98% of the reason I requested this ARC. Sadly the actual book struggled somewhat to live up to it.

PLOT

Yes, there is The Raven

Westminster Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland, is the final resting place of one Edgar Allan Poe, his wife, mother-in-law, and a few hundred other people. Nobody new has been buried in centuries - until **Lacy Brink** wakes up there and discovers she's been cremated at the tender age of sixteen, having died on her way to an open mic night.

It turns out that ghosts have a surprising number (261, to be exact) of rules: no swearing, no yelling, no intimate contact, no being in another person's grave, etc etc. Breaking any of these rules thrice results in **Suppression** - meaning you can't ever rise from your grave again and have to stay lying underground,

forbidden even the few hours of above-ground time permitted to ghosts at midnight.

(Incidentally, I read some of this book while on a trip to Paris. Visiting the catacombs helped me gain a newfound sympathy for the Suppressed and how horrible being squeezed into a tiny underground space must be.)

Anyway! Lacy, being a modern girl dumped into a cemetery of Victorians, quickly runs afoul of the Rules. While she makes a couple of friends, including a sensitive Civil War veteran named **Sam**, the strict Mrs Steele who oversees the cemetery is determined to see Lacy Suppressed. Our intrepid heroine proceeds to navigate through friendships and romance in the afterlife while also dealing with the question of how she died and the effect this has had on her grieving family. It all culminates in - you guessed it - the decision to hold an open mic night at Westminster Cemetery, attended by none other than its resident celebrity, Mr Poe.

So far, so good. But...

CHARACTERS

...Here is where the book majorly breaks down.

This book had the biggest and most shameless case of **instalove** I've ever seen. Sam, a tortured soul who's spent the two hundred years since his death trying to write poetry, falls in love with Lacy at first sight - literally because she's the first teenage girl he's seen in all that time. The crowning touch that cements his love is the deep and meaningful fact that... *they both write poetry*. It was clearly meant to be.

The gaze from Lacy is like a drink of ambrosia

The above thought on Sam's part occurs precisely 12% in. True and undying (sorry) love is being declared two pages later. What makes this even more painful is the fact that when it wasn't trying to be romantic, the book's discussion of character/family dynamics and the backstories of the ghosts was actually pretty good. The attempt to have a romantic element was just an unnecessary distraction.

The other ghosts were pretty well-fleshed-out, no complaints there. I wasn't a huge fan of Virginia Poe being characterised as the bitchy mean girl, but a lot of time is lavished on her backstory so it seems more understandable. She's no 2D villain. In fact, nobody is; not even Mrs Steele. Poe fell a bit flat for me, perhaps because I like to picture him as wilder, more insane, yet Amato dispelled a lot of the unearthly allure he's picked up from poems like *Annabel Lee*. He also has very few appearances - don't read this book hoping for a Poe homage. It's not.

WRITING

The format was pretty interesting. It's written as a play, with frequent authorial interjections on such matters as staging and acting with live/dead audiences. Unfortunately, the first half of the book suffered a fair bit from the **showing, not telling** problem. Exhibit A:

She's guarded, but vulnerable at the same time.

That's quite an amazing insight from Sam, considering he'd met Lacy all of ten seconds ago when he has this Sherlockian view into her psyche. Lacy also has this problem: she makes incredible character deductions instantaneously upon meeting them (e.g. 'Cumberland, you're a coward!'), deductions I'd probably hesitate to make after months of knowing someone, let alone seconds. This issue did get significantly better as the book progressed though.

SUMMARY: Good characters, terrible attempt at romance, shortage of Poe.

[Blog]
