



Wedlocked: A Memoir

Jay Ponteri

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Jay Ponteri's debut memoir, *Wedlocked* offers readers an intimate, idiosyncratic view of his marriage. Ponteri recalls how his desire for another woman and his writing about his desire all but dissolves their marriage. Mixing memoir, essay, dream, and fabrication, the narrator carefully considers his experience of marital loneliness, of living deep inside his thoughts and dreams while yearning to be known and touched and loved by a woman who is not there. Against the backdrop of his portrait of a marriage, he recalls the lush fantasy life of his childhood and adolescence, gazes back at his insatiable male gaze, gets lost in film, recounts lessons of history, of grammar, and rants against a human institution that so often fails, leaving its inhabitants lonely and adrift. He lays bare not only his inner life but his marriage.

Jay Ponteri earned an MFA from Warren Wilson College and an MA in English from New Mexico State University -- both degrees in fiction writing. He directs the undergraduate creative writing program at Marylhurst University and Show:Tell, The Workshop for Teen Writers & Artists. He is the founding editor of both the online literary magazine *M Review* and *HABIT Books*, a publisher of prose and poetry chapbooks. He has recently published prose in *Puerto Del Sol*, *Salamander*, *Seattle Review*, and *Knee-Jerk Magazine*. He has an interview with David Shields in the summer 2010 issue of *Tin House*. His essay "Listen to This" was mentioned as a "Notable Essay" in the 2010 Best American Essays.

Praise for *Wedlocked: A Memoir*:

Many recent books have been written, of course, about sex, marriage, love, men, and women. Very few if any risk the level of intimacy, candor, and rawness that Jay Ponteri's book does. Very few if any behold the husband (in all his agony) with the depth that this book does. Very few if any expose the male psyche with this book's nerve. None that I can think of is smarter about the uses of fantasy. I hugely admire *Wedlocked*. David Shields, author of *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*

Wedlocked: A Memoir Details

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Author : Jay Ponteri

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From Reader Review Wedlocked: A Memoir for online ebook

Janel Brubaker says

Wonderful!

S. Aeschliman says

I highly recommend this book. It's an incredibly worthwhile read, especially for those who wish to write honestly and openly about their experiences as human beings, and especially about those experiences with which our culture is intensely uncomfortable to the point of deafening silence.

In a nutshell, it's a memoir about a man who suffers from depression and feels a lack of connection both with himself and his wife and ends up having emotional affairs with other women. It's incredibly sad but also incredibly interesting and also, in a way, hopeful. It offers a model for being truly honest with ourselves and others...which perhaps is a bit ironic, since the narrator admits to lying so much.

This book has inspired me to write creative non-fiction again and has encouraged me to be brave about my truth. There is no greater gift.

Shilo says

This is not a book for the faint of heart. You will not find romance here, or even laughter. It is the journey of one brutally honest man through the falling apart, denying, and dissolving of his marriage. This is not a book for people who cannot bare the weight of other's brokenness. If you want something real, raw, painful, and emotional than read this memoir. It is a book of a self in transition, a self discovering self. It is a book filled with the language of sex and desire, love and loss--fear, anxiety, depression, and death. Jay Ponteri's thoughts move fluidly, sometimes frantically through the pages. They are filled with a sense of urgency, unease, and regret. But, and this is a large BUT, there is also, hidden between the pages and the author's ability to understand his own humanness, a resounding note of hope.

Michael says

One could probably stereotype writers as people who have rich internal lives. In his memoir, *Wedlocked*, Portlander Jay Ponteri reveals the marital pitfalls that result from spending too much time inside his own head. This is especially true when, in Jay's case, his head is filled with prolonged and intricate fantasies of other women. Worse still, Ponteri's wife discovers his manuscript, in which he discloses the details of his ongoing flirtations with a particular barista and the imagined world he constructs around this young woman, Frannie. As much as this memoir concerns marriage, it also documents Ponteri's depression: the root cause of his dissatisfaction with reality. Jay explores both his mind and his marriage with great candor and skillful prose, blending narrative, scene, dialogue, and poetic streams-of-consciousness into a potent (and cringe-inducing) excavation of the self.

Sophia says

Disclaimer: I know the author (he is also my favorite person to get book recommendations from).

Challenging, beautifully written prose that flows rhythmically and is intuitive and emotional. I find myself reacting to (how could you be so cruel?!) and also relating to the author throughout the book. We are complicated and it is refreshing to hear brash honesty even if I feel pained at times reading this.

Trevor says

Provocative and painfully-brutal/beautiful in its emotional honesty. More than just a few readers will find themselves nervously nodding along, perhaps for their first, uncomfortable times doing so.

Ashley Bergman Carlin says

I'm confident this is one of the most influential and important books I'll ever read in my life.

Kelly says

I don't typically read nonfiction, but this one I read because I know the author. Reading the synopsis, I almost hesitated to read the book, but couldn't resist. It reminded me of when I was a kid and I stumbled upon my older sister's diary. ("Stumbled upon"? Who am I kidding?) I couldn't put it down, as much for content as for the new picture it was creating in my head of the author. While this book is primarily about what goes on in the head of a married man, one major thing I am taking away from it is a camaraderie with humankind. Man, what a bunch of weirdos we are! One segment in particular cracked me up- He's describing the weird things he does when he's alone; making faces at himself in the mirror, breakdancing, looking other drivers in the eye and saying, "Middle finger." While he definitely makes himself sound like a lunatic, the reason it was so funny is that it made me think of all the crazy things I do when no one is around. Like commencing a walk alone I say, sometimes aloud, "How many alligators are there left?" And then I count my steps from starting point to destination. Or I babytalk to my cat, calling him LoveLove Teriyaki, the name of a dirty teriyaki joint in Salem, Or. Overall this book made me feel like we're all together in our strangeness, for better or for worse. (In sickness and in health, even.)

While refreshingly, and sometimes shockingly honest, I wanted this book to be more hopeful. Instead, it met me in my most hopeless state and corroborated with me in despair.

As I was reading I found myself thinking, *if this man were my husband I would leave him*. And then, *this man WAS my husband*. And also, *I AM this man*. We are all sorts of messed up. Marriage is a realization of that and an acceptance of it. (Which is why I'm not married. But more power to you if you can be. Also, how DO you do that, if you don't mind me asking?)

The writing itself was really great. Worthy of 5 stars. I'm giving 4 stars only because giving it 5 would be admitting too much. I don't want to relate too closely with something that made me this sad.

And as an aside, WOW, men think about sex a lot. I mean, I knew that the way one knows something they cannot experience for themselves, but reading it was exhausting! I could use a postcoital nap.

Wendy Ortiz says

FINALLY. I keep coming back to the word FINALLY because I feel like I've been wanting/waiting for something like this book for years. Phenomenal on so many levels. Yes, I loved it.

Kevin says

I'm not sure if this is a good or bad thing to say but... I think this book is going to be polarizing, and it should be. Ponteri bluntly looks at his own marriage in a style that is both painfully dark and intelligently philosophical (after all, Ponteri is a big fan of folks like David Shields and Maggie Nelson--two self-reflectors of the highest order). It's a style so heady that Ponteri eschews regular paragraph form. Instead, he piles on deep thoughts and fantasies in long blocks of text that sometimes threaten to get away from him and never do, even when it lasts several pages. Although, Ponteri doesn't do his wife any favors, he also doesn't try to justify his cold behavior. Maybe it's a masochistic thought process, but Ponteri feels most connected to his wife when she displays a broken spirit that matches how own. Some critics will probably expect this book to resonate mostly with men, but I don't really see it as anti-wife or anti-marriage. It's a book about being human and about burrowing into our desires and how love can be a force (good or bad) in our lives. Though some may find Ponteri's aversion to commitment an immature quality, *Wedlocked* frames it in honest, unsentimental language that is purely adult. This is an adult speaking to you like an adult. It's rare that a reader is shown this much trust and respect.

PfromJ says

I have no idea how to rate this book, but would prefer to never think about it again.

Rebecca says

Jay Ponteri writes a memoir about how miserable he is in his marriage. He doesn't ever remember loving his wife and wanted to break up with her back when they were first dating, but he chickened out and married her instead. He doesn't see anything redeeming about the institution of marriage in general or his marriage in particular . . . yet he stays. Why? That is the question I kept asking myself as I read through *Wedlocked*.

My armchair analysis (if you wanted to know) is that he is afraid. He got married young, and it doesn't sound like he has much experience with women or relationships. He's depressed, and his wife takes care of him and the household. While he fantasizes about being with other women—he lives mostly inside his head—he doesn't really have the guts to do anything about it.

On the last page (spoiler alert! not really), Ponteri concludes that “Marriage seems to increase loneliness not mitigate it.” He later says, “We fall in and out of love. Marriage cushions, does not cushion its lovers. I want to discuss all of this with you. What do you think? Please tell me. Our shame only breeds silence, denial, and

illusion.” This idea that he’s opening up a national discussion on the subject of marriage pops up throughout the book. It’s interesting, to me, that he seems to feel that everyone is secretly miserable and lonely in their marriages, like we’re all characters in a Richard Yates novel. This might be the thesis of *Wedlocked*: Being miserable and lonely is just a part of the human condition/marriage and maybe if we all talk about it more, we can muddle our way through it until death.

The thing is, no one is going to hand Ponteri a medal for sticking with a loveless marriage forever. This is 21st century America. Get a divorce! His strategy now seems to be to reject his wife over and over, with the passive-aggressive hope that she’ll do the leaving. The daring thing to do would be to set her free. She deserves more than this.

Memoir is strange in that the main character is the author, and the other characters are also real people. In that sense, it is a brave act to reveal so much, to show the reader the inside of something so intimate and private. Ponteri knows that writing this memoir will hurt his wife, but he is compelled to do it. He stays in his marriage for the material, in a way. He writes about it for the conversation. This puts me in an uncomfortable position as a reader. I appreciate the book, the conversation, but I can’t help feeling terrible for the “characters” in the story.

Gary Forbes says

I've decided my ratings are going to basically be determined by two factors: 1) how frequently i pick up a book after starting/how quickly i get through the book, and 2) how often I stop while reading the book to think about what i've just read. And while this wasn't at the top of my list of in either category, it was close; close enough for 4-stars. Definitely some thought-provoking craziness in here. One of the first books i've read for fun on my kindle, and my first foray into highlighting (started looking for things about half way through), and these are the three passages I found worthy of remembering:

1. I don't like the idea I have an effect on others. I secret away any conflicting and potentially hurtful feelings as if out in the world, outside of my consciousness, those feelings can only cause pain to others and I cannot cause pain to others. (Of course I can.) Seeing another person suffering because of something I said or did forces me to confront the core of what I believe about myself.

2. Just because I share feelings of love with another person doesn't mean I know how to navigate a relationship with her, doesn't mean I know how to love or be loved. My hunger signals the need to eat, to reach out for food yet doesn't tell me what or how to maintain a healthy diet.

-- I definitely identify with this one. and i love the analogy.

3. What we desire is bore out of strangeness, but our comfort with habit and order lead us away from the stranger possibilities.

-- just a really interesting thought.

It's really interesting diving into the author's thoughts in this book. I don't remember reading another one that was so candid. He and I are quite different, it seems (perhaps because I'm not, nor have ever been married), but it's fun rolling around in someone else's brain, especially when it's expressed so articulately. Good book overall, intense read, but thought-provoking enough to recommend to others.

and that's all.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

One of the podcasts I listen to, Dear Sugar Radio, brought in Jay Ponteri, the author of *Wedlocked* as a guest for their 2016 Valentines Day episode: Forbidden Crushes. The discussion of his book, and one of the host's memories of reading it during a rocky time in his marriage, made me want to go looking for it right away. My library had it as an eBook so I blew through it in a few hours.

"What happens inside of marriage remains unseen. A marriage's daily mechanics, its habits and rituals, its meaningful and deleterious expressions, its omissions, its caverns, its rooftop views, how it reaches up to the light and lies in dreamy shadow at night, all remains hidden from view and what others do see is an illusion of a surface made of their own distorted projections of what their marriage should or shouldn't be... What will we do with our lives? Where is this bus taking us?"

Jay Ponteri was writing about his marriage as it was starting to unravel, and when he went looking, could not find many people writing honestly about marriage. He decided to pull together his writings into a manuscript, and throughout the book are sections called "Manuscript" - these are the parts about his writing, and his wife reading his writing, and how their marriage was effected. There are other standalone chapters that are different styles of creative non-fiction, one memorable one for me was a three-page musing on what would happen to Miranda July's body if she had physical manifestations of his emotions, should he have a crush on her. (I point this out because I've had a weird chain of books that includes Miranda July... Carrie Brownstein mentioned her in *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* and so did Maggie Nelson in *The Argonauts* and here she is again!)

For an example of how lyric the writing can be in parts:

*"...But this silence about marriage in our culture is hurting so many of us (spouses, children, parents, pets, friends), leaving us alone and blame-filled. We are not so good at marriage, America. Let's flip the rickety table on its side, let's kneel down and rub ourselves in the syrup of each other's flaws and fears.
Let's speak from our hearts, then let's fuck.
Let's pick through the remains and find evidence of our lives.
Let's make a single map of our varied hearts."*

As someone who has been married almost 16 years, I found it interesting to peek into a very honest rendering of a marriage. (I do mean honest! And since marriage is obviously a sexual relationship, prudes should stay away.) There were some resonances there, but also some connections that he clearly only made in hindsight, in therapy, in the relationship ending. I wonder if he knew *then* what he knows *now* if the end result would have been the same. Really it points to the question - do you expect your marriage to provide everything you need? Is your spouse supposed to be all of it? And if not, what do you do? This is something we aren't primed to ask before marriage, but I think it is a pretty important one. I think his marriage was damaged in the wake of his realization of this conundrum.

ETA: This book was discussed on Episode 054 of the Reading Envy Podcast.

Natalie Serber says

Jay Ponteri fearlessly exposes his own beating heart in this exploration of loneliness, marriage, and fatherhood. In his refusal to turn away from the dark corners of his thoughts and his marriage, he shines light on all of our dark corners. Sad, true and often funny this memoir will stay with you long after you have completed its complicated and beautiful pages.
