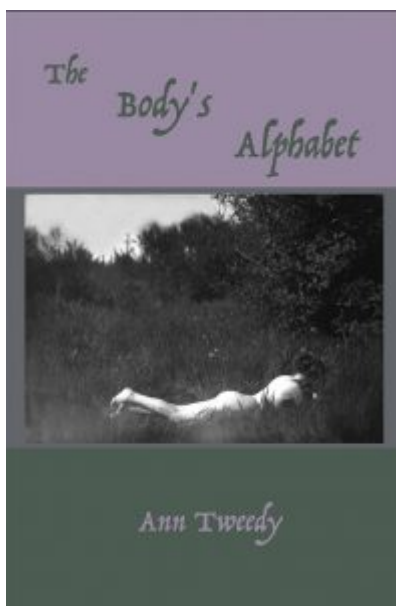




drizzle review

book reviews to get your feet wet

Local Forecast: The Body's Alphabet by Ann Tweedy



THE BODY'S ALPHABET BY ANN TWEEDY (HEADMISTRESS PRESS, 2016)

Reviewed by Rebecca Valley

For more in our Local Forecast series on authors of the Pacific Northwest, [click here](#).

Ann Tweedy's collection *The Body's Alphabet* is a book of in-betweens – in-between homes, in-between loves, in-between sexualities. It is a book about motherhood and memory, and the space we keep for

our childhood long after we have grown up around it. Though Tweedy begins *The Body's Alphabet* with the lines “I tread through / the world mindful that upsets / follow unguarded movement” (1), over the course of the collection she finds strength in those quiet and delicate moments, and in doing so steps out from her own carefully crafted betweenness to affirm her presence in the work.

Even Tweedy's headings live in a world in-between. Each section is prefaced by names like “thresholds,” “between planets,” and “dirt-blurred,” so that by the time I dove into these poems I could already feel the narrator standing in the doorway between two rooms, watching quietly while the world unfolded around her. You feel her as a spectator in the poem “Small Town Vignettes” where she writes about her mother getting arrested on the steps of her church, and then later reflects on “the insinuating dss woman” who says:

*Your mother
never answered the door but we could hear
footsteps inside and I wondered how
that was a crime but in her language –
in front of a judge –
it meant *hiding something hiding something* (19)*

There is a bond and a distance between mother and daughter throughout these poems. Tweedy is often the quiet spectator of her mother's pain and suffering, but they are attached by blood, by understanding, and by the way that both of them are hiding – the mother from the world outside, the daughter from anything that causes too much of a stir. In this way, you feel the narrator stuck between her mother's world and her own, and the way she navigates adulthood while reliving and remembering childhood. This is complicated further when the narrator becomes a mother herself, writing about the experience: “to some, I'm all body / exactly what I never wanted to be.” (25)

This book flips between the past and the present, childhood and adulthood – Tweedy is always moving forward with her head turned back, catching in peripheral flashes the memories of her childhood home. The most striking moment in this collection for me was the return of an image of roses – early in the collection in her poem “Pale Pink,” Tweedy describes the untrimmed flowers of her childhood home:

*only the roses in their ballet splendor
seemed out of place among that chaotic, undernourished flora.
They grew for a few feet
along rotting poles and rails. Nobody did anything
for them. (8)*

Later, in a moment of stunning continuity, Tweedy writes in “life without descartes:”

*if you could rejoice in the unruly
fusion of fat, muscle, and bone
every day those water-gorged roses
shine out of the skin and the eyes (42)*

This moment, in which the roses from childhood return as proof of an affirmation of the body, is exactly the strength that makes Tweedy’s book so stunning, and so unique. From the weak and untouched roses of a driveway garden bed come the “water-gorged” roses of adulthood – fuller, stronger, more present.

Though near the end of the collection Tweedy’s poems begin to trend toward more traditional, natural themes that don’t hold the same weight as earlier pieces, *The Body’s Alphabet* builds a narrative about power and weakness that is unique and often startling. The poems are confessions, but as they are spoken they seem to be released from the body, returned to the world in a kind of quieter, more cautious primal scream therapy. This is “the alphabet only the body can interpret” – a freedom from trauma, from prescribed sexuality. Tweedy’s poems live inside this in-between language, which can only be understood through touch and release, like the kneading of muscles to relieve pain. It is in this space that Tweedy has found a home for herself and for her words; she writes:

*do you think I could write myself back into
the hewn dimension of any single space? Home is the structure
you build when nowhere else will have you (35)*

Buy this book: [Headmistress Press](#) // [Indiebound](#)