*Audubon’s Sparrow*, by Juditha Dowd rev. by Anika Lotti

Rose Metal Press

*Audubon’s Sparrow* by Juditha Dowdis a biography of the life of Lucy Bakewell as she falls in love with John James Audubon, their joys and their hardships. The book is written in poems, letters, and diary entries in Lucy’s voice interwoven with passages from Audubon’s journal, published pieces and illustrations. Dowd has previously written short fiction and lyric essays as well as a poetry collection, entitled *Mango in the Winter,* three poetry chapbooks, *The Wheathermancer, What Remains,* and *Back Where We Belong.* Her work has been showcased in *Poet Lore, Poetry Daily, The Florida Review, Spillway, Rock & Sling, Kestrel,* and *About Place.* In *Audubon’s Sparrow*, whilethe letters and diary entries offer an unfiltered look into Lucy Bakewell Audubon’s thoughts, Dowd bears Lucy’s soul through her poetry.

The rhythm of each of the poems is slowed by the white space that accounts for much of the punctuation that is not a period, en dash, or quotation marks, with the exception of the letters and diary and journal entries. The poems are reflective and uninhibited in their content; while the letters and entries are open and honest, the poems allow you to slow down and see everything they have to offer. One of the poems that best illustrates this is “Almost Morning,” seen in the tapering off of lines 3 and 4 as they bleed into the next lines:

“Your body as familiar as my own

and yet a mystery…

touch me yes

and here”

The intimate moment that is shared between the two is heightened by the lack of description. Dowd draws out the suggestive and euphoric tone of the piece by allowing them their privacy.

The white space speaks volumes of Lucy’s thoughts and feelings and adds to the overall impact of a given piece. The interwoven nature of “Partial Bill of Sale,” for example, provides the perfect window for Lucy’s attitudes for what is happening around her. Interspersed between a list of items is her take on these things, as well as what is currently going on around her. The glimpses of the scene the reader is given, seen through Lucy’s eyes, greatly illustrates its depth and impact for the narrative.

The use of white space is heavily implemented within her poems in place of punctuation. The spacing between the words leaves way for interpretation, allowing for a much more intimate look into the feelings and thoughts of Lucy Audubon. “Light” reflects her desires for what she wishes John James would do.

“Now as I move through Father’s fields

the wheat divides

weighs against my thighs

like water in a creek

like a hand might

if it brushed me

unintentionally.”

While this is all one sentence the parting of the spacing, much like how the wheat is said to part in the poem, lends a more flirtatious and coquettish tone to the poem. Not only does Dowd reflect the content of the poem through its presentation, she also draws out Lucy’s mood in a way that would be difficult to achieve with punctuation.

Even as someone who isn’t a biggest fan of either biographies or poetry, I was genuinely excited for this book. Dowd beautifully intertwines the text and illustrations of the Audubons’ harmonious marriage. *Audubon’s Sparrow* is like going through the picture reel on your phone, each image vivid and lively, seemingly independent from one another, yet part of a much grander story. Whether you are trying to gain an appreciation for poetry or have a deep passion for them, this book will be far worth the time. Its deep and moving language will touch the hearts of any who pick it up.