*Anxious Attachments*, by Beth Alvarado rev. by Teyah Guerrero

Autumn House Press

*Anxious Attachments*, written by Beth Alvarado and published by Autumn House Press, is a collection of personal essays that are honest about various difficult topics such as grief and addiction. Alvarado and her husband, Fernando, go through an arduous journey to recover and work through their relationship and pasts. Alvarado has also written *Anthropologies: A Family Memoir* and *Not a Matter of Love and other stories.* She lives in Bend, Oregon, where she teaches prose at the OSU-Cascades Low Residency MFA Program. She earned her MFA from the University of Arizona and an MA in Literature from Stanford University.

This collection of essays shares a variety of raw and honest truths. Each consequential essay unfolds a new truth about what Alvarado dealt with and opens the door to difficult and uncomfortable conversations society tends to gloss over. The description about her beginning to overcome addiction during her pregnancy at twenty years old only begins to dive into the life changing thoughts she had:

“I was moving out of darkness into light. My senses and feelings had begun to wake up. Being pregnant made me realize my body was important. Addicts tend to think of their bodies as “other” in a strange way. The body is not who they are. It is nothing, then, to stick a needle into it… Addiction disconnected me, not only from my own body, but also from those around me.” (6)

This short description tells us what we need to know about the background of the author and how she had to change her mind-set about what life meant, and how relationships with herself and others could become more healthy. The book is filled with sections such as this that go through Alvarado’s process and interpretation of her situation. One example is when she’s taking care of her mother when her mother falls ill with pneumonia. Alvarado here spends a lot of time reflecting and humbling herself to be more comfortable in a distressing situation. Her honesty is what allows readers to realize what is occurring in their own life, and to have a chance to see where they can improve themselves. Alvarado’s essays encourage growth even after feeling desolate, unlovable, and detached due to her experiences. Doing drugs with friends at a young age caused her feelings of detachment later in life towards society and her family.

After Alvarado’s husband dies forty years into their marriage, she vividly expresses her grief and pain through her memories of him. It takes a very long time for her to accept his death and allow herself to reflect on the marriage and how they were together in life. Eventually she views the death and her husband in a different light:

“In life, there was always a space between us, but now he moved inside. The encroachment was complete. Death had not parted us.” (84)

Alvarado’s use of her train of thoughts during grief and acceptance in each essay reflect her exceptional storytelling and add to the book’s intimate details. The story promises difficulties in every area of her life and dives into each trial. The anticipation of how she will overcome each emotion and situation kept me hooked to her stories. Her disconnect in relationships to her own children after they were born, and how hard she worked to feel closer to them was unstable and suspenseful. Her emotions of fear and detachment toward her own grandchildren as well were intense to read about. There is a good mix of tension and relief in each essay that makes them feel very real, emotional, and personal to the reader.

*Anxious Attachments* inspires a raw style of writing where honesty meets self-determination and love. The book goes through the majority of her life, from her late teens into her early sixties. Most of the essays have a sad and reflective tone, but the bits of humor she throws in add to the overall honesty of the book. Alvarado’s essays leave a lasting impact on readers and cause them to do their own self-reflection. Overall, *Anxious Attachments* is a good book,well worth the read.