

Splendid Anatomies, by Allison Wyss
Veliz Books

rev. by Mia Aguilera

Allison Wyss creates a multitude of sensual oddities that display in one way or another an appreciation for the human body in her fiction short story collection, *Splendid Anatomies*. Her work also appears in many other journals such as *Cincinnati Review*, *Moon City Review*, *Lunch Ticket Review*, *Yemassee*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Jellyfish Review*. She also works as an instructor at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, which includes writing about fiction in a column titled *Reading Like A Writer*. Allison Wyss also is the co-founder of the Minneapolis Storytelling Workshop. In her most current work of fiction, *Splendid Anatomies*, her stories range from focusing on a tattoo artist creating a work of her own all the way to a grandmother telling her grandchild a bedtime story of a gruesome interaction with a seamstress and a talking spider that “slurped her brain like noodle soup.” This wide range of atmosphere and unusual storytelling succeeds in matching a story for every kind of reader.

Splendid Anatomies is a fitting name for this short story collection as this work as a whole has a focus on anatomical aspects, such as the ink spreading throughout each crease in our skin from “Only Real Art Last Forever” and relying on the perfection of your nose working for a doctor that specializes in plastic surgery in “You’re Perfect As You Are.” Each story refers back to Wyss’s theme of physicality. “Only Real Art Lasts Forever” is very clear and precise with its bodily language, for example the protagonist describes “holding [her] breath from color to color, from shape to shape, from feeling to feeling.” Through this, the readers can feel the movement of the ink pen from the perspective of a tattoo artist, and how her body reacts to this work of art. In “You’re Perfect The Way You

Are,” the protagonist is trained to be highly aware of her and other people’s physical attributes as she comes to the conclusion, “What parts of anybody’s body are real anyway? Nothing is original. All cells replaced, year after year after year. Wax off eyebrows, pencil in new ones. Yank the hair out by its soft and wiggly roots.” Both stories see the beauty of our bodies on the outside and reflect on the damage that can be created on the inside.

One of the more abstract flash fictions in *Splendid Anatomies* is “Garden” for example, this passage from the story: “I cradle seedlings with soft earth, feed them water and sun and rotting vegetables until they are grown, and then, just like children, I chop off their heads and eat them.” This story contains such an unexpected outcome with contrasting tones such as “cradle” and “soft” versus “rotting” and “chop” that it makes aspects of the collection humorous and engages the reader, especially since these out of place and extreme phrases occur sporadically without warning. Wyss continues to incorporate humor through the strangeness in her character’s introspective and deeply personal thoughts. The events that happen in the story aren’t always usual either, making magical realism another personality to this set of short stories.

Wyss’s short stories each stand on their own with their bizarre titles such as “Nutsacks in Space” and “Curse the Toad.” The titles of the stories capture the essence of Wyss’s in-depth style of writing. These stories’ strength lies in word choice and vivid and sensory detail that Wyss utilizes to emerge the readers into a different reality. In “From The Multiverse Chronicles,” she explores a different world in which two individuals are completely consumed by yogurt. Wyss writes with such an overwhelming focus of how yogurt becomes the two people and even oozes out of them. The story doesn’t give readers much to think about, except for the constant focus of “... plain yogurt, and nothing else, nothing at all.” Of course, the story also follows through with the recurring theme of bodies as Wyss writes, “Against the nothing was just our bodies, and there was the way her body came to seem to like my body, too.”

Throughout the collection, there is a blend of different genres including science fiction, drama, elements of fantasy, and even horror. “The Vortex” contains elements of science fiction as the protagonist contemplates a portal and goes through a different

dimension; this is significantly different thematically compared to the more contemplative and solemn stories such as “Roar” and “You’re Perfect As You Are.” Not only does Allison Wyss use a variety of genres and atmosphere, but the short story collection also experiments with nontraditional forms. For one of the stories that fit more into the horror genre, the story of tracking ghosts is written out as journal entries from Dr. Francis Longfellow Hendrix. The story interacts with the readers encouraging them to “Think about an emotion that can overcome intense pain-you’ll see it’s usually rage and thus why most ghosts are angry.” This story focuses more on the internal aspects and emotions of ourselves. Also, “The Mole,” which focuses on a very normal, universal experience of noticing a small change in our appearance, is told through a second person point of view, encouraging the reader to imagine something bigger and more extremely vivid. Wyss writes, “The only strange thing is you are smaller. But that makes sense. A part of you has been cut off, so you should be smaller.”

Splendid Anatomies provides the reader with a diverse set of genres, unexpected descriptions that make you laugh and leave you in wonder, complex themes and character interactions, and a different perspective on our own bodies and what makes us human.