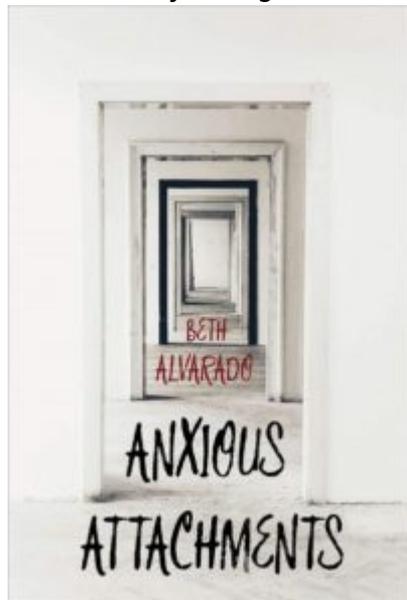


# [Review: Anxious Attachments by Beth Alvarado](#)

written by Brigitte Lewis | May 16, 2019



*Anxious Attachments* by Beth Alvarado

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168 pages / [Amazon](#)

*Anxious Attachments* by Beth Alvarado contains fourteen essays that, no matter where they take place—Arizona, Oregon, Prague, Mexico—are deeply rooted in a distinct sense of surroundings and the people dearest to the author. Many of the essays reside at junctures of living and dying. Many of the essays show the body and the land shape shifting into situations sometimes downright hostile to survival. Many are akin to coming-of-age stories in that they are coming-to-different-ages stories, and describe what it is like to both experience and witness others growing up, growing older, and taking care of those we call family.

An ode to familial love, *Anxious Attachments* documents relationships with care and vulnerability and with a constant apprehension of what is at stake: when you love, you have something to lose. At one point the author writes,

The neighborhood was called Flowing Wells, but we came to call it Seeping Sewers because, when the wind shifted, we could smell the fumes from the ponds at the sewage treatment plant. In the middle of the night, we could hear the trains and, maybe because we had small children, I would wake up worrying about derailments and toxic spills. I was not religious, but I had an apocalyptic imagination. I grew a garden in the backyard because I wanted to be

able to feed my family when civilization ended.

Spanning a breadth of time—from age 19 to her early sixties—Alvarado’s essays compile a picture of life lived in relationship to other people. Dealing with subject matter such as heroin addiction, premature birth, and caregiving at the end of life alongside topics such as the rise in forest fires, environmental pollution, and the prison-industrial complex, the collection offers a personal-political reading experience. Alvarado zooms in close to her own experiences. Just as the circles of a rock thrown into a pond grow ever-widening, these essays broaden to illuminate the connections between an individual life and the implications of one’s individual decisions within a larger context: place, family, society-at-large.

In turn, the larger contexts inform the self. In the first essay “In a Town Ringed by Missiles,” the author writes, “I saw myself as someone who was a risk-taker. I wasn’t afraid of anything. But then I got pregnant. Suddenly, I was someone who would poison her own child, someone who was not powerful but powerless, even over her own impulses.” Calling on Piaget’s theory of cognitive dissonance, the author intones that she was forced to reckon with her self-identity. Nineteen, addicted to heroin, and pregnant, Alvarado chose relationships, family, the rocky path toward becoming powerful. She chose motherhood, marriage, writing.

And it is apparent throughout the collection—through craft and content—that Alvarado’s reckoning continues through the very act of writing. In the essay “Notes From Prague,” she writes, “I don’t know if life has a shape or if I write to give it shape. I want to take things I’ve felt deeply and make of them moments the reader can enter. Memory as a place...” It is evident that the essays were written over a handful of years, tied as they are to events that unfold over the course of as many years. Over time, Alvarado remains deeply connected to the act of writing as sense making. She wrests life into meaningful narrative, it would seem, for both herself and for her readers.

Speaking about what some might call superstition in the home of her in-laws (two egg yolks meant twins, a dropped fork means company is coming), Alvarado realized at a young age that something ineffable lies beneath the everyday. “This was when I began to see that there was another world beneath this one...” she writes, “...a world where you made sense of the disparate pieces of reality by weaving them together into a story...” Perhaps, it was that Alvarado had the eyes to see the story that lies beneath. Perhaps, she held an inherent willingness to manifest everyday experiences into extraordinary experiences through the structure of a narrative arc. In other words, to the author, events *mean* something. Events are not isolated nor are they isolating. In Alvarado’s world, events such as the birth of her twin grandchildren during the 2016 election, for example, are experientially, metaphorically, and temporally connected. Again, the personal extends to the political as the writer makes sense of the chaos both of said births and of the last presidential election.

In “Days of the Dead,” Alvarado writes, “If I believe in your words, I believe in your reality, and it will become a part of mine, the cells in my

brain imprinted, physically changed by what I've heard." This belief—that we are changed by words—is the nervous system that runs through the collection. It is not enough to simply record what has happened. It is not enough to simply read the experiences of one woman going through the ordinary devotions of raising children, caring for the sick and aging, and burying the dead. If we readers let ourselves, we will be changed by the words we have read, words that—through their mere attention—make sacred the mundane. If we readers let ourselves be, we will be changed for the better.