



Her Blue Body Everything We Know

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An educated reader may be a little skeptical toward poetry produced by renowned writers of fiction. Perhaps there is a sense that since fiction writers are celebrated for their more lucrative novels and stories, they are unable to throw themselves body and soul into the volcano of an impoverished poetic sainthood. Missing from the novelist's poems are hard-earned pyrotechnic bursts and a steady hand for subtleties of structure. A fiction writer's poems are, when worst fears are realized, merely flat, uninteresting prose broken into lines and stanzas.

Picking up Alice Walker's massive volume of verse, a reader's palate may start to dry. Yet venturing into the collection, what a pleasant surprise. Here is a novelist who is displaying her true self in poetry. Picking a few representative lines from so many pages proves difficult; but in all her poems, the delicately adorned style is a delight to behold, and her mastery of free verse is similar to that of a consummate poetic master, Denise Levertov.

While Walker is not a poet's poet, there is a quiet honesty and accessibility throughout HER BLUE BODY EVERYTHING WE KNOW that could convert poetry haters into enthusiasts. Imagine that this poem was composed after Walker finished an arduous, life-consuming novel: "Now that the book is finished,/ now that I know my character/ will live,/ I can love my child again./ She need sit no longer/ at the back of my mind,/ the lonely sucking of her thumb/ a giant stopper in my throat."

This poem is quiet and true and something that anyone who has a career and a family can latch onto. In this way Walker sings the songs for those who do not have the ability. Her approach is charted by the heart first, and language second, and her themes range from the dearly personal to events and circumstances that involve all of us: the abuse of the environment, the women's movement and the ongoing struggle for civil rights, even our identification with celebrities.

So it is to the person who feels that poetry is too difficult, a complex code decipherable only by an alien nervous system, that Alice Walker's HER BLUE BODY EVERYTHING WE KNOW is recommended.

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