Animal Bodies: On Death, Desire, and Other Difficulties

Suzanne Roberts
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Death and desire take many forms in Suzanne Roberts's essay collection *Animal Bodies*.

Across three sections, two concepts rise to the fore: grief and discovery. In the immediate sense, the first section is about death, specifically the deaths of Roberts's father and best friend, dealt with together in "The Grief Scale," but also in separate pieces. These essays pose difficult questions about the nature of grief and about being left to come to closure, despite what's left unsaid and unexplored. In them, the articulated questions are just as cathartic as their potential answers, as though opening the door to the possibility and complexity of a solution is enough.

Also in grief: there is desire. Desire to be reckless, desire to feel the body (more than a desire for sex). There is also desire for control, as in "The Hungry Bride," about wanting to upend previous notions of one's self and become different, though knowing that transformation won't happen, as illustrated in "Winter Travel." And then, beyond accounts of traveling and self-discovery, there is another family death. New difficulties arise—at first seemingly unrelated ones, as the third section shifts its focus between animals, environmental concerns, and medical diagnoses. But the book's major themes of grief, discovery, and control continue to assert themselves.

The act of self-reflection is present in all of the book's essays; it grows sharper through loving criticisms, as during the decline of a beloved pet in "The Last Goodbye," and through resurfacing memories, of an assault in "The Disappearing Act." By mining the depths of her personal grief and desires, Roberts's collection offers wide solace.

Personal and heartwrenching, the essays of *Animal Bodies* concern control and surrender.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (March / April 2022)

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