



Neck Deep and Other Predicaments: Essays

Ander Monson

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Neck Deep and Other Predicaments is an innovative and engaging nonfiction debut by “an original new voice” (*Publishers Weekly*) and the winner of the 2006 Graywolf Press Nonfiction Prize

In this sparkling nonfiction debut, Ander Monson uses unexpectedly nonliterary forms—the index, the Harvard Outline, the mathematical proof—to delve into an equally surprising mix of obsessions: disc golf, the history of mining in northern Michigan, car washes, topology, and more. He reflects on his outsider experience at an exclusive Detroit-area boarding school in the form of a criminal history and invents a new form as he meditates on snow.

Neck Deep and Other Predicaments: Essays Details

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From Reader Review Neck Deep and Other Predicaments: Essays for online ebook

Jessica says

Collection of essays/ memoirs that won the Greywolf Nonfiction prize. It was okay, felt a little gimmicky and colloquial at times. INteresting things with form (an essay about snow that looked like this:

.....snow.....

.....

M. Sarki says

<https://msarki.tumblr.com/post/151626...>

A little over half of this book is worth reading. I do not read pieces that have strange and awful layouts. I do not read poems that look like that either, and is definitely the main reason I never became an E.E. Cummings fan, though I suppose he would have qualified to be read under the weirdness quotient.

?

Seven of the twelve total essays were very much worth reading. Those being:

?1. *I Have Been Thinking about Snow?*

2. *Cranbrook Schools: Adventures in Bourgeois Topologies*

?3. *Fragments: On Dentistry?*

4. *Subject to Wave Action: A There and a Back (with Orchestral Accompaniment)?*

5. *The Long Crush?*

6. *After Form and Formlessness: Bodies, Boats, and Bathing?*

7. *Appendix: Parts of the Book You May Additionally Enjoy, Such as an Appendix*

??I not only love these seven collected ordeals of Ander Monson but think they are as good as any essays I have read including my favorite essays of David Foster Wallace, that is except for his *A Supposedly Fun Thing I Will Never Do Again* which is the granddaddy of all essays. The main reason that I like these bits by Ander Monson is that they are simply good and interesting. I am not a golfer of the long white ball nor do I play Frisbee or even have a remote idea of what disc golf would be like playing even after being totally engrossed in Monson's obsessive love of the sport described in his essay *The Long Crush*. I mean I sort of get it, but not really. Not enough to actually be able and take up a disc and play a sandlot game of it. I doubt I could score. ??

I found myself emotionally involved in the *Cranbrook Schools* essay, the forthcoming report of his criminal activity that eventually got Ander expelled from this elite boy's high school just short of his graduation. But he makes me want to visit the campus near downtown Detroit just to walk the walk and see what I can see. It sounds beautiful there and it is evident the campus made an indelible mark on Monson's person even within the context of his bad behavior. I have never been kicked out of anything, and for one reason or another I am kind of envious of him for accomplishing it as smart as he is. I have never attended any institution but a public one and only through high school. At the advanced-age of forty-two years old I did begin three consecutive years of summer stints as a writing student of Gordon Lish which is about as private as it gets I guess. In class I watched as Lish make it hard enough on his other attendees so that he ran the weaker ones

out, but he wasn't getting rid of me, especially since I paid for his class with funds my family could not easily afford to part with. At that time in my life I would have easily qualified for a hardship scholarship if Lish had offered me one. But the main thing about starting out under the tutelage of Lish is paying your hard-earned cash up front and then proving to him you can hold your water every day through a ten hour class with no breaks. It is very hard to survive a Lish writing class if you come unprepared to do so. He thrives on making it hard and an experiential event patterned on a reality based on how difficult it is to become an historical figure of the literary canon. Lish makes a very pronounced impression on any serious and humble student. If you believe you are already a writer of some note you have no place in a Lish class unless he has told you so. Writers he already loves and respects he takes no small measures to recognize in class and goes on to show how serious they are by pointing out their attendance in yet another Lish fiction-writing class. Otherwise, it can get pretty ugly in there. But these are stories for another time.

The essay, *Subject to Wave Action*, brought me back to my earlier years as a kid of eighteen to when I took the same car ferry across Lake Michigan in the middle of the night. The reasons that brought me to the boat were different than Monson's and certainly more desperate. Having been bitten by a spider on my way back home to Michigan from the receding waters of the 1972 destructive Rapid City flood my arm had swelled to a revolting Popeye size. And if it weren't for a quick trip to an emergency room I wouldn't have even made it home. I was tired of the flood, the bugs, and stories of rushing mud and horrific deaths. I wanted to be back in my Huron National Forest. The car ferry was hoped to be the shortest route to get me there alive. I have no memory of what it was like above deck, nor any idea that there was a *Premier Class* section of the boat as Monson describes. There probably was and Monson's grandfather was probably still maneuvering these ships back then well before little Ander made his entrance into the world. But I do remember it took a very long time to cross that body of water and a person who has not seen a Great Lake has no idea what Ander or I are even talking about. These Great Lakes are humongous and not unlike an ocean at first glance. In storms, these lakes eat big ships. Monson talks about the iron ore carrier the Edmund Fitzgerald sinking in Lake Superior November 10, 1975 and I was there stuck on the Mighty Michilimackinac, or Mighty Mac, as they like to call the Mackinac Bridge that spans the Straits of Mackinac between the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan. The very day the Edmund Fitzgerald went down the winds were so bad they had to close the bridge to traffic for the first time in its history since being completed in 1957. An empty semi trailer box truck had flipped on its side and was blocking all lanes but the northbound edge of the bridge. I was traveling south that day, holding my little truck as few feet behind that semi's tail as possible as I didn't trust that truck would stay upright. Several times it went up on its side and righted itself by rocking back down to the pavement, but finally it went too far and came crashing down and sliding its long mass, blocking both southbound lanes and one northbound. It was obvious I was screwed for the time being. The bridge authorities arrived on the scene, and to get traffic moving again they instructed me to motor my little orange Datsun pickup with an over-sized camper on the back of it around the semi truck, hugging the east and northbound side of the bridge that would never maintain my hold safely on it as the wind was blowing from the west at ninety miles per hour. There would be nothing to stop me and my truck from flipping over the side. I refused and told them they were crazy. So they shut down the bridge and had me back my pickup into the wind and wait.

I had a young German Shepherd pup they wanted me to leave in the camper but I insisted my dog come with me. Through the magnificently violent winds all of us stranded on the bridge crawled back north on our hands and knees to waiting vehicles that could take us back to where we had come from, the northern side of the Straits of Mackinac, to wait out the storm. For six hours we waited for the winds to die down enough to make our way across the bridge to Lower Michigan. Finally, in sixty mile per hour winds I bravely led the caravan across the bridge. Through the remainder of my construction years up north it was amazing to me how many people said they actually saw me on the bridge that day, and if not me, my little orange Datsun pickup. It was one of the most frightening experiences of my life. And one I will never forget. Monson made

me relive it again in his essay on the waves. ??

I reluctantly read the essay on snow titled *I Have Been Thinking About Snow*. The layout was terrible and Cummings-like, but I read it anyway as I am a sucker for Michigan snow stories. My older brother and I as kids shoveled plenty of snow in order to clear the driveway for our dad, and if it wasn't Dad coming out and telling us we had to go wider than we were, which meant hours of more shoveling, then it was the city plows throwing all the white stuff back from where we had spent the last few hours removing it. Add to that the wind and the drifts and the biting frozen crystals stinging your skin and making you look like you just had a very good cry. It is possible at times that we were. Ice hurts. The winters could be brutal back then in northern Michigan, and with global warming now, it might be easier for young ones to live through winter with the little bit of snow they get these days. The great snow storms can come in any season now, but if the snow doesn't come in winter the piles are not likely to stay on the ground too long. Back in our day there were never any gas-powered snow-blowers in our father's house. Monson provides me with fodder for my winter memories, and I even unluckily recalled two people I knew who went through the ice of Lake Huron on a snowmobile, drowning drunk on their way back and forth to and from the bars. ??

There is plenty of good stuff to read in Monson's first collection of essays. The bit on dentists, *Fragments: On Dentistry*, was good and again he took me back in time to when our little Michigan town had a dentist who would later remind me of the dentist in the remake of the scary film *Little Shop Of Horrors*. In that film Steve Martin plays the sadistic dentist in a scene which includes Bill Murray as his masochistic patient who desires a slow root canal. My three bothers and I had to get our cavities filled by this tall, lean and creepy, lunatic dentist who had a little office he kept in our town on Lake Huron with a population of about two thousand people. Dr. Klenow had a very strange and awful smell, a body odor I have never recovered from to this day, and all of us believe he meant to hurt us in one way or another. We all have differing stories on his torturous methods. Our parents still believe to this day that he was good and that as parents they provided for us the best they could. Ander Monson again served up a memory I have been for years trying to relieve with whatever medications are available to me. It is apparent I will never succeed in freeing myself from the horrors of Doctor Klenow, but I do know it was not I who had to deliver his daily morning paper to his home two blocks away and on the other side of Newman Street. My wife reminds me the dentist had an outdoor swimming pool and he lived next door to her grandmother whom she would visit in the summers when my wife's family came north from Kentucky every year. My wife's dad told Dr. Klenow that his daughter was a very talented swimmer, so graceful and elegant in the water, and she was, and she was pretty too with a stunning young body, so the good doctor let her swim in his pool. My wife remembers how creepy both the dentist and his wife were, and she only swam in his pool once because of it. ??

Ander Monson might become one of our best essayists, if he wants to. It is obvious he thrives at anything he sets his mind to whether it be criminal, adventurous, athletic, or one of the numerous multiple choices available to him.

Elizabeth says

Monson has a very creative and interesting way of writing using the formatting and layout of the page to express his ideas as much as the words themselves. I enjoyed most of the essays much to my surprise as I usually don't enjoy reading compilations of essays.

Linda says

this book is terribly witty, particularly the first half. it kept me laughing audibly on the brown line. the latter essays are a bit uneven, particularly the ones in which he explains his writing style -- don't ruin the mystery! Ander is a poet, a geek, and a prankster. He should be also writing for major magazines like Wired. He is a bridge between geekdom and art and makes me very envious.

M Warren says

This writer has a bad habit of "borrowing" ideas from others and calling them his own.

Jil says

The true moments of innovation and originality are, unfortunately, sandwiched between self-indulgent essays on--among other subjects--disc golf and high-school hacking. Monson's strength is form, but his constant reflection on form (meta-nonfiction, yikes) and insistence on his own voice can get to be a bit too much.

Shhhthevie St. Evie says

Ander's ability to play with form never ceases to amaze me.

Jason Dutton says

The essay is supposed to allow for the wandering exploration of an idea, and it can take many different forms, and I know I'm typically biased toward the conventional. Having said all of this, I felt largely as if the various forms of Monson's essays allowed for wandering without arriving at much. He's articulate, definitely, and intelligent. He just doesn't rein himself in very much.

Anna says

He's my new favorite Midwestern writer--oh so postmodern but without the usual pretentiousness. Extremely clever and funny and resonant.

Angie says

Obsession with form, with order, with technology, new and obsolete. Obsession with control, especially control over technology, form, weather, human emotions and interactions. Connections. Or is it an obsession

about how all of the above control slash connect us? Do we strive for order out of chaos or do we want to create chaos out of order? In my humble opinion, this is the overriding theme throughout this wonderful book of essays.

Dana says

I very much wanted to like this collection, but Monson does not write the kind of essay that I'm into -- or perhaps I just found his voice to be more cloy and self-aware than my ideal style of writing would have them be. I loved the disc golf essay; the rest only reminded me of Montaigne in their mundane focal points (except that Monson didn't save them from their banality like Montaigne could), or else they seemed to be indulgently introspective and experimental-for-no-reason.

Austin Rory says

Half 5 stars and half 3 stars. Monson's essay collection is an insightful tour through his own daily thoughts and experiences. While touching sometimes on his past, he mainly walks you through his quotidian adventures in essays about frisbee golf and car washes. He experiments interestingly with form, but some of those experimental essays were the 3 star ones as I feel he shirked on substance. He is at his best in "The Long Crush," "The Big and Sometimes Colored Foam," and "Afterword: Elegy for Telegram and Starflight." Those ones were easily 5 stars.

If you ever happen to pick up this book in a store, just read the appendix. It's wonderful and gives you a good idea of what he's doing.

Lucas Miller says

These five stars feel very personal. The tendency towards formal experiment and overwrought titles probably turns off a lot more people now than it did when first published. Monson feels like a kindred spirit. He is able to do that amazing thing good personal essays can do, which is to not really be about what they are about. While the level of detail and attention paid to dentistry, car washes, boarding school, failure, and the other sundry topics is impressive the themes are very striking. Obsession and collecting, the body, form, language, the past and memory, exterior and interior.

The Midwestness of this collection really stick out to me. I've lived my entire life in the south, rarely travelled outside of it for longer than a few days. This book made me want to go somewhere cold and stay there for a season. I'm not sure how I'm going to find a reason to be in the UP of Michigan any fall/winter coming up, but it is good to have goals.

The formal experiments in this collection also happen to be thoughtful, interesting, and well written personal essays. I will reread this book. You should pick it up.

Davin says

On the whole quite good. The essays range from amazing to pretty good. There's a lot of experimenting with form here which for the most part works well. Even when it doesn't quite do more than just be an interesting experiment, well.. at least it is an interesting experiment. He also seems to have a knack knowing when to wrap up a clever idea before it overwhelms the piece.

Nicola says

innovative, geeky, adorable.

check out Monson's website, for a feel of his work:
www.otherelectricities.com
