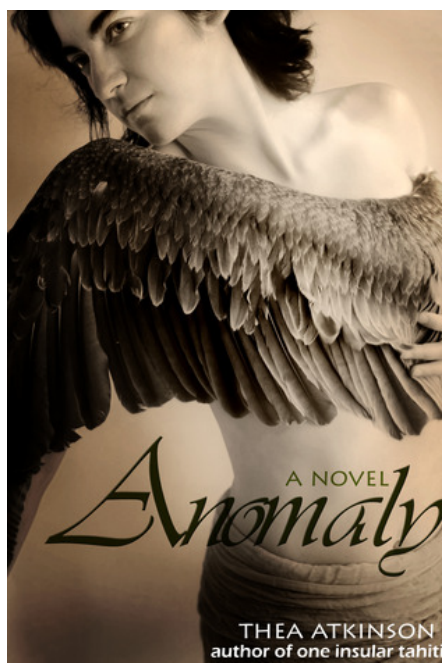




Anomaly

Thea Atkinson

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Relapse can be addicting

J doesn't need rehab. He's well clean of the hard stuff, the soft stuff, and the things in between that helped him bury all the doubts that plague him. That was before the tormented drug addict from next door threatens to set J on a renewed path of self-destruction. It was before his friend Molly runs afoul of the law, and it's before J suffers a beating that brings him ultimately face-to-face with the woman who can help him see the light in the darkness.

A dark and gritty literary tale for those who enjoy their contemporary new adult fiction brooding. Anomaly is set amidst the drama of small town Canada where the seamy world of substance abuse and sexuality is a surprising backdrop for self discovery and a person who is finally coming of age.

When you barely understand yourself, relapse becomes more than just a fight for sobriety.

Anomaly Details

Date : Published December 18th 2010 by Thea Atkinson (first published November 10th 2010)

ISBN :

Author : Thea Atkinson

Format : ebook

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada



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Rusten says

sex, drugs, queer and trans themes - all tragic and beautifully done. J is a heterosexual woman who is read as a 'pretty boy', who is a recovering drug addict and whose best friend is a dyke who has yet to recover. while J is trying to save everyone else from falling into drug induced oblivion for good, without relapsing, she gets the shit kicked out of her regularly while simultaneously battling the temptation to use. She falls in love with a woman, a nurse, who delivers some bad news that carries the book to the end. i loved this book.

Denise MacDonald says

This is a story of a person struggling with the need to label himself to fit into a mainstream society in a small town the shuns him. What bothered me most about the main character is that he didn't see how good of a person he was- continually putting himself out there to help others regardless of how well he knew them and despite the fact that he was putting himself in danger of a relapse. Instead of basing his beliefs on who he was on his actions he based them on gender identity- which I suppose is also a byproduct of society. This was a very thought provoking book, which is why I rated it so high. It left me wanting more. So much was left unresolved but I wasn't left wondering because it was easy to see where it was all heading.

Patricia Lynne says

Loved it, reviewed it on my blog. <http://plbjourney.blogspot.com/2011/0...>

Al says

I'm going to cheat and start with a quote snatched out of the author's own commentary because it describes the heart of this book so well.

When I first began writing this book and realized that my main character was a trans person, I got really nervous. What did I know about transgender? I even remember saying to my daughter, "Why would my muse give me a transgender character to work with?"

The deeper I got into the writing, the more I realized that it was about the human condition. It was about bias and prejudice and the need for society to put labels on things that we don't understand. It just so happened that my character was transgender. The same as if my character just happened to be a man and as an author I'm a woman.

Atkinson succeeded in communicating all of those things. The cliché about walking in someone else's shoes applies as well. Her portrayal of J is both sympathetic and, for those who have ever had someone think less of them because of being different, potentially eye opening. "Anomaly" is not a book I would have been likely to read on my own, despite it coming close to issues that I care about. Yet, I can't help but think I'm a better person for having done so.

"Anomaly" is also an excellent example of why the rise of Indie publishing we're experiencing is a good thing. I find it hard to picture this book attracting a contract with a traditional publisher. Not because the writing or the story isn't good enough, they are. But because of marketing reasons. How would we position it? Who's the audience? Can we sell enough? This book deserves an audience and you owe it to yourself to read it.

****Originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog.****

Katy Walters says

This is a psychological approach that calls out to the reader. J is a flawed hero who searches his mind and soul. It is not for those who are not prepared to read and reflect. I love the psychological, the soul searching. Quite unforgettable. Will look out for more of this writer's work.

Best wishes,
Katy.

Tracy Riva says

Anomaly

By Thea Atkinson

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ASIN B004C0542S, ISBN NOOKbook 2940011157271,

Anomaly by Thea Atkinson is a thought provoking look into the life of J, a transgender person struggling to find an identity to cling to while trapped in a male body that doesn't normally feel as though it is his own. J's life will undergo more changes than he thought possible in the space of one short week. Not only will his identity go from masculine to femme in that time, but he'll find someone he could care for, maybe. Go through hell to help a next door neighbor he just meets. And try to help out his dearest friend, only to discover that in the end, he's the one with the real problems.

J is a rich and multi-faceted character. He comes across so well on the page. Kind, infinitely human, with just enough smart ass thrown in to cause him trouble. He's flawed. He's put himself through all kinds of torment, but in the end he's a decent person you can really like. I feel as though I should be alternating pronouns between "he" and "she" as I describe J because ultimately J is both masculine and feminine. As a man J describes himself as a "pretty boy," as a woman J feels ugly and incomplete without her makeup on, just like most other women I know. J's character just feels 'real'.

I recommend *Anomaly* by Thea Atkinson. It puts a name, face and personality on an individual's struggle to be recognized for who he or she is regardless of the gender presented. It brings light to where we as a society fail transgendered people.

Alicia Brereton says

Amazing storyline

I love how real this book felt as I was reading it. Excellent writing style, very convincing storyline. Loved it.

Jenna Scribbles says

Once I've finished a Thea Atkinson book I can't help but feel sorry for the next title on my list - it will always pale in comparison.

Anomaly is a great example of character driven fiction. I enjoyed Ms. Atkinson's portrayal of J., Molly, Stephanie, and Sherona. They were vivid and wonderfully written.

This is not a neat and tidy storyline. We are left in the dark regarding J's past, how he and Molly came to be friends, why they're still friends, what will happen next with so many things - it's all just left wide open. I didn't care. I felt this was a fantastic read.

The reader finds out J is bi-gendered. We also know that there are many drug abuse demons lurking. I'm not sure which element was stronger in this story... they went hand in hand. Thea Atkinson hits on a very key issue regarding transgender individuals. Why not just pick one, just go with it and live your life? What does it matter? Anomaly shows us it is the only thing that matters.

Two complaints. One - this should be available in paperback. I believe it would come in around 220 pages. Second - the title blurb: "a psychological thriller". I entered the story expecting chases, murders, heart pounding mind games. Nope. Not sure why this subtitle is there.

Thea Atkinson is one of my favorite authors of all time. That is a lofty thing to say considering I've only finished two of her books. But I mean it. She's that good.

Celia says

Storyline: Thea Atkinson brings to us a true Anomaly: a serious topic with a seriously great story that grabs hold of the reader and pulls through the twists, turns and, at times, amusing life of a person.

J is a man in the sense that he was born with all the ingredients necessary to categorize him as a man; only, J does not feel like a man. J relates more to a woman emotionally and mentally. J recently moved back to his/her hometown, is a recovering addict and has a best friend with a huge problem. The story follows J through a very eventful week and nearly past the point of no return.

Grammar/Spelling: I noticed some minor issues with punctuation and formatting.

Character Development: J's character is incredible. The depth and breadth of him/her is astounding. As I said before, physically, J is a man. But, mentally, J is neither purely male nor female but a surprising mixture of both. J is evasive, but straight to the point. J is harsh, yet quite soft. J has a dark, moody sense of humor and a sort of strange confidence in who he/she is in this world. Even if the world does not recognize J for who he/she is.

I usually try to relate to at least one of the characters in the stories I read (even if the story is a light “bubble gum” story) and, after reading the blurb, I wasn’t convinced that I would be able to recognize anything in J that I would “get.”

I was wrong.

J’s full gamut of emotions – from masculine to feminine – is almost all too familiar. I think I was able to relate so easily to him/her is due to my duality as well. I am a through and through Gemini. Though, I don’t believe someone must be born under the sign of The Twins in order to understand, even to some minor extent, the pain and joy of J.

Writing Style: The writing style is both intense and engaging. Ms. Atkinson’s portrayal of “gender confusion” is outstandingly realistic. I think I’ll even coin a new (if it’s not new to you, it’s at least new to me!) phrase: “emotionally descriptive.”

It has quite a bit of adult language, drugs and sex. Though sadly, it has very little rock and roll.

Continuity: No problems with continuity.

Overall Rating: 5+

I must be honest and say that this is not a story for everyone and at first glance, I wasn’t convinced that this was for me either. Though, as I read more, I became hooked and had to know and to understand what Anomaly was. Ms. Atkinson did a phenomenal job portraying someone who walks the line between man and woman and someone who fights labels even as the world demands that they have one.

Kris says

I received Anomaly, by Thea Atkinson, as a review copy submitted to “Red Adept Reviews” by the author.

Overall: 3 3/4 Stars

Plot/Storyline: 3 1/2 Stars

Though the cover art [at the time of this review] evokes paranormal romance and the title rings of science fiction, this book is all about sex and drugs and gender-switching, oh my!

Anomaly was consistent on its engaging themes, but while several subplots were tied up satisfactorily, the main plot read more like a “day in the life” story. J’s POV was a marvelously different take on the world, and very engaging, but I wouldn’t go anywhere near “psychological thriller.”

The pacing was great; it only lagged once, when a new character was introduced during a tense scene, and some of the tension leaked out as they spent several pages shooting the breeze.

Despite all the drugs and the addicts who crave them in this story, it’s not a tale of freewheeling partying. J is a recovering addict who manages to get two other characters into rehab. It was fascinating to see how this affected the plot: J has to take over another character’s problem for her, eventually leading to a twist at the conclusion.

J's actions to bring on the book's conclusion had no explanation. His sudden choice feels random and suicidal. Suicidal tendencies have a place in the novel—they're an issue he's struggled with before, and one that becomes particularly topical after a surprise medical diagnosis—but his deliberate choice to attract harm felt out of character and confused the stated reason for J's scar collection.

The book's ending was anti-climactic for me. Considering how the book opened, I assumed from the start that J had always believed what he only seemed to discover at the end.

Character Development: 5 Stars

J was well-crafted. Through his eyes, I truly grasped the difference between sex and gender, the pain that not being able to conform to society's one-gender expectations can bring, and how easily such pain can drive those on the fringes of "normalcy" to seek chemical happiness or oblivion.

Reading about Molly was a hoot. She seemed full of contradictions and uncaring that she sometimes didn't make any sense. Her compassionate nature warred companionably with her mission to prove that all women were secret lesbians.

Sherona was very believable as she went from offended to compassionate to loving. Stephanie's dedication to her baby's health and happiness made a beautiful contrast to her crippling addiction. Even J's mother brought excellent tension to every one of her scenes through her hopes for her son's happiness and the censorious ways she expressed them.

Writing Style: 4 Stars

Written in first person, Ms. Atkinson's novel takes its sweet time with description in all the right places, enhancing everything from the pain of J's injuries to the way his body reacts with need for the drugs he used to take as they show up in his life again. The level of detail makes it impossible not to identify with J at least on a physical level, as a human being, and that in itself goes a long way toward making his perspectives and experiences ring true, even to someone who's only ever had one gender.

It was distracting to me that the author included so many product names in this novel; it's got more product placement than *The Truman Show*. Misspelling "Pepto Bismal" probably won't land that sponsorship deal, though.

I did notice a handful of small inaccuracies, like calling the muscle on the back of the upper arm a bicep instead of the triceps, and cheekbones having flesh instead of marrow.

Editing: 2 Stars

Oh, dear. Such a crystal sea of good storytelling, obscured by massive algae mats of typos and punctuation errors. There's a dearth of proper comma usage, especially in dialogue, which gave me the sensation that the robotic Kindle TTS voice was beaming the story straight into my head. Hyphens were also a large issue in this story—or rather, their absence was, leaving me curious about the difference between plain and fancy "ass business cards", and myriad less-amusing issues. Homophone switching and simple typos appeared regularly as well.

For a book that contained a purposeful Christian-religion theme, I found too many related or derived words with incorrect capitalization (bible, beJesus, hell). The word "OK" was capitalized—or not—three different ways. One of them is the right way (OK), but you can't hedge your bets on spelling.

Robert Duperre says

Rating: 4.7 out of 5

When I received *Anomaly* by Thea Atkinson as a review copy, I set it aside, pretty much uninterested. I accepted it because the sample was well written, but I was deep into a new fascination with fantasy and other genre fiction at that time, and thought to myself, I don't really like literary fiction, so this one can wait a while...let me enjoy myself first.

Well, recently I glanced at my to-be-read pile, saw that book still sitting there, and decided it had waited long enough. And when I started reading, all I could think was that I should've gotten around to it sooner. It surprised me in so many ways.

Anomaly is the story of J, a ne'er-do-well transgender/recovering drug addict living in rural Nova Scotia. This book doesn't have so much of a plot in the traditional sense; it's more an exploration of what it means to be J, taking place during a few tough, stressful, and let's face it, downright depressing days out of his/her life. No, existence is not easy for our J, who has a big mouth and a bit of a masochistic streak. J's struggles with his/her sexual identity create a character who's constantly on the edge of darkness, questioning what it means to be man, to be woman, to be both, or to be nothing at all.

While recovering from a particularly brutal beating, J begins to worry about his/her neighbor, whose colicky baby has suddenly stopped crying. In a feat of humanity uncommon for J (and most addicts, really), he/she strikes up a protective relationship with said neighbor,, a young woman and fellow addict who (hard as it is to believe) is actually more pathetic than J.

The bulk of the story takes place in J's apartment and a local bar, and we get to meet his/her friend Molly, a boisterous lesbian who, herself, has far-too-long-ignored substance-abuse issues. There is also a kind nurse who is a welcomed voice of reason to the rest of the characters' insanity, who forms a quite beautiful bond with J and ends up being a lynchpin for suggested further growth, development, healing, and self-discovery.

It might seem like I'm making fun of this book and what lies inside, but I'm truly not. When I call the characters pathetic, it's because that's the way Atkinson created them – and purposefully so. Having known quite a few addicts throughout my life, I found their portrayal both accurate and heartbreaking, though not without a sliver of hope. But what I appreciated most of all were the reasons for this addiction, for J in particular. I have no idea what it's like to not know my gender, to one day know I'm a man and the next know, just as strongly, that I'm a woman. But I can imagine how much pressure that must place on an individual, socially as well as emotionally. Like it or not, we have some pretty strict public codes of conduct in this world when it comes to gender roles, and for those who choose (or have no choice in the matter) to buck them end up paying a high mental and physical cost.

This novel is told in first-person, from J's viewpoint, and we the reader get to hear his/her thoughts on so many subjects – from the nature of religious icons to the contradictory messages of the LGBT community to how pitiable the life of an addict really is. He/she's a very reliable source of information, for no matter how screwed up J might be, he/she still has his/her head on straight...mostly. So when J latches onto a single phrase, one used to describe the reasons her neighbor's baby was taken away, those words gain that much more importance and a new, particularly foreboding meaning.

Failure to thrive.

That phrase is repeated over and over again, and really, that's what *Anomaly* is all about. It's the story of how incomplete we are as people – all of us – and how our standard definitions, though they might help keep

things tucked neatly in little boxes, often times hurt us more than anything. It's about the malfunction of the concept of love and how often we don't know what that word means. It's about caring for others more than ourselves, and realizing that when doing so we completely disregard the fact we must care for ourselves, lest every action we make means nothing.

But most of all, it's the story of life, of the struggle to survive in a world that really has no one's best interest in mind, a world that, in effect, makes it difficult for anyone to thrive. In that way *Anomaly* is a difficult and occasionally stomach-churning read. But it's a learning experience, and very much worth the investment of time.

I'm glad I invested mine.

Plot - 9

Characters - 10

Voice - 10

Execution - 9

Personal Enjoyment – 9

Overall – 47/50 (4.7/5)

Grace Krispy says

J isn't your typical guy, uh, girl, uh... J is ever-changing; with J, you don't always quite know who- or what- you're going to get. With an identity that changes weekly, a bit of a self-destructive streak that promises trouble time and time again, a good friend who's trying hard to stay above water herself, and a neighbor who may need more help than J can give, life is never boring. Sometimes identity is not clearly defined by labels. And sometimes, just sometimes, it takes an objective bystander and a life-changing revelation to give the push needed to redefine an identity... perhaps by not defining it at all.

In this work of literary fiction, Thea Atkinson takes on the frequently misunderstood and often confusing world of transgenderism. J was born with genitalia that just doesn't always seem to match who he feels he is inside. "*Anomaly*" explores J's struggle to define himself to others, and, more importantly, to define himself to himself. Struggling to make others understand him, yet not even completely understanding himself, J is doomed to forever be an outsider in his own body. The author does a good job in helping to open up the door to explore what it may feel like to be given a body that just doesn't seem to fit who you are.

J's story may not be completely relatable to many people, but his/her struggle with identity was riveting no matter what your experience. Although the tumultuous struggle J had with his own relationship to himself was clearly defined, at times I felt it still lacked a bit of depth. It was well-described, and I was drawn in, but I didn't quite get all the way to actually feeling what he was experiencing. I felt like I was exploring an interesting case study...one that certainly did pluck at my heart strings, but I was still the outsider to his experience. The characters were generally richly developed and interesting. We are made to understand the closeness of J's relationship with Molly, but I wanted just that touch more. We know how they met, but how did their relationship become a little less of a friendship and a little more symbiotic? How did they become more than "just friends?" I think the ending could be easily expanded a bit as well. J experiences several intense events in a short time span, and I wanted to see a little more about how those events collided in J's brain, and his mental processing as a result. I thought the story was really well-done, overall, but I think a little more fleshing out in those areas would have made it exceptional.

This is another book that could use that final editing pass to wipe out those last few errors (your and you're were interchanged several times, for example), but that was definitely secondary to the compelling prose that was used to tell J's tale. Very readable and thought-provoking, this book delves into an area not often approached in literature, and does it very nicely. As J comes to terms with himself, the reader may also find that identity cannot always be neatly labeled and packaged. Sometimes, a man isn't just a man. A recommended read.

@ MotherLode blog
