

**Visceral Debut Broadens Readers Boundaries:
The Other Room by Kim Triedman**
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review by Teisha Twomey

I first became acquainted with Kim Triedman as a poet at a recent reading of her work in Cambridge. It was with that background that I was looking forward to reading Kim Triedman's novel.

The Other Room is a novel about a marriage between two grieving parents, Claudia and Josef, three years after the sudden death of their one-year-old daughter Lily. Their individual sorrow plays out in unique ways. In the aftermath of the death, they each reach outside of the life they once built together, attempting to find comfort. The consequences correspond well to their individual personalities. Claudia and Josef both withdraw from one another and turn toward other individuals who seem able to fulfill the needs that not being met in their own union. They develop separate lives that exist outside the guilt and resentment lingering between them in hopes of filling the void left in the wake of Lily's death.

The loss of a child not only haunts Claudia and Josef, but has extensive and wide-ranging influence on their loved ones. Those who once felt they knew this couple intimately are at a loss over how to respond to this tragedy. As Claudia and Josef adapt to life without their daughter, the gradual recognition that they have lost the ability to comfort one another only intensifies the bitterness souring their relationship.

Triedman is adept at conveying character's conflicts and sorrows in a way that is immediate and persuasive. Her experience as a poet resonates in her prose; her language is lyrical and inventive. The most striking feature of this novel is the strength of Triedman's imagery and the way in which she skillfully employs the subtlest of details in the most profound ways.

This novel also reveals Claudia's meditations in the wake of her daughter's death through a series of journal entries. Recorded in Claudia's "Blue Notebook" they offer much insight into Claudia's perceptions and her grief even as she begins the healing process.

Claudia describes them as, "One way to broaden the boundaries of an otherwise stunted life." Through these stolen glances, the reader is able to piece together the interactions between the story's characters and their observations of one another, finding in them clues to the mystery behind the tragedy of Lily's death.

Triedman gives size and shape to Claudia and Josef's grief using insightful techniques. In one "Blue notebook" entry, Claudia recalls her daughter's funeral. She writes, "That day it felt like there was nothing between me and the sky, as though the blueness of the December morning had weight to it, and density, like a septic lung. It pressed down on all so us, spreading itself thickly, displacing our bodies and our souls in different ways." What is striking and about Triedman's portrayal of grief is the

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way she gives motion and weight to the the emotional response. Triedman's use of the concrete qualities of space, movement, time and sound become the intermediaries to the character's feeling. This way, she effectively communicates a loss too senseless and painful for the trite platitudes of commonplace condolences. By evading banality, Triedman steers her reader into the focused epicenter of bereavement using signals that are visceral to readers.

The reader is required to experience the impact of this family's grief as if it were their own. Triedman captures how emotional sentiment is innate, rendered through the quantified space of the expanding distances occurring between two bodies, the endless expanse of a dining room table, for example, or through a character's posture, tone or gait. She breathes life into the emotions felt after loss, recreating their sense of frozen stillness, breathless reticence and cagey shuddering. The use of objects such as frayed satin blankets and fingers raking back and forth across swollen lips convey fathomless regret and bewilderment in a way that penetrate readers completely. These features animate the narrative and connect the interweaving storylines.

Often the unsaid is more moving in this novel than the spoken word. The most compelling moments occur during the breaks in communication where the reader is truly made to feel what it is like to clutch desperately at the smallest threads of understanding. We learn more in what is appropriately unspeakable, in the interlude of stifled dialogue and in the shock of regret when what is said is said in the wrong way. The narrator moves from room to room as this perception of stillness and silence contracts and expands around and inside them, as if someone has hit the mute button on their realities. The reader is made to feel the words forming at the base of Claudia's throat, the tightening in her jaw, the ear-splitting silence of a room with no windows, a mouth dropped open without sound coming out. Also present are moments of hope as the reader becomes urgently aware of the small comforts of memory and forgiveness seeping in. There is significant compassion to be considered. We see these moments of pardon, much in the way Josef experiences them: his wife's smiling eyes bring a persistent bit of optimism suggesting that each of us is capable of forgiveness and understanding.

Triedman paints each character with such specificity that we grow to understand them. Gradually, through the careful peeling away of layers, the reader is able to comprehend Claudia and Josef's actions. This tender and precise revelation is one of the details that makes *The Other Room* so successful. Self-forgiveness unfolds in a without relying on conclusions that are over-simplified or one-dimensional. Ultimately, the reader trusts in the multi-faceted nature of the characters' rebirth.

I would recommend this novel to any reader who enjoys highly descriptive and emotionally charged prose. The inventive lyricism and striking fervency of the narrative is enormously effective. The visceral language and imagery that Kim Triedman has employed in order to transmit the emotional state of her characters will likely entrench any reader willing to commit to the thoughtful and measured meditation of this ardent poet and novelist