

Like other feminist writers, Morrigan affirms an active female embodiment and frees herself from so many sexist projections: “yes i am a slut. because my pussy is beautiful and insatiable. because i love my body. . . .because my body belongs to me no matter how many times i’ve been violated and none of it was my fault ever” (58).

There is too little literature that explores the social mistreatment and stigmatization of survivors of child sexual abuse, including their exploitation by professionals, and this reader appreciates Morrigan’s succinct exploration of this taboo issue in “spillllll over”:

i don’t want people telling me how damaged i am and that i need professional help. i am full of professional help, the good and the bad. i don’t want to be ... a thesis statement or the proof of someone’s else’s point ... and no, you can’t cite my sexual partners in your footnotes and no, you can’t define these experiences for me ... i am not ... [a] sad story about what happens when children are sexually abused. my promiscuity is linked to my trauma and guess what, so were my long, codependent monogamous relationships, but i don’t ever hear “you were sexually abused as a child, are you sure you’re not just using romance to cope?” ... it’s too easy to say “oh you were sexually abused as a child so that’s why you are promiscuous.” it is too easy and it’s also just plain mean. you sound just like my abusive ex.... (63-64)

*Rupture* asserts the right of women to self-determination and shows how difficult it is to achieve. The volume will appeal to women readers who seek to challenge sexist conditioning and social norms.

## **An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain**

Diane Ackerman.  
New York: Scribner, 2004.

### **Reviewed by Csilla Toldy**

Essayist and poet Diane Ackerman celebrates the human mind and brain in *An Alchemy of Mind*. As America’s best-known female naturalist she connects

science with art in an emotional and conversational way, so that her book reads like a memoir.

Bridging genres is not new to Ackerman. Her very successful book, *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), used a similar same style, cleverly melding science and art, non-fiction and a plethora of references to literature.

While each chapter begins with a quote from world literature, ranging from Shakespeare to Henry James, from Rilke to Mark Twain and Emily Dickinson, Ackerman's use of science is thorough and carefully researched. Her subject is vast, but she breaks it down logically, discussing evolution, anatomy, memory, the self, emotions, language, and the world we share. Her chapter headings are evocative and poetic: "The Beautiful Captive," "Metaphors Be with You," "Remember, I Dream." Her language is also lyrical, but is rich in scientific jargon.

Ackerman takes readers on a journey from the tangible to transcendence, from the physical evolution of the brain to a study of consciousness and personality, on a roller coaster ride from neuroscience to philosophy. Her eclectic style is characterized by philosophical questioning and anecdotal ease. In a few notably thrilling paragraphs, for example, Einstein's brain is analyzed to reveal a defect that became an advantage. In another bungee jump, Ackerman ascribes the human need for religion to our tendency to feel awe. She bases this observation on scientific research, showing that the neuron is always open for excitement. Similarly, the author discusses the theories that define human consciousness and mobilizes the building blocks of emotion, nature, and nurture to study personality.

In a chapter about creativity and memory, Ackerman writes about her own mind, her artistic genes, and her scientific education which enable her to create metaphors and synesthesia—the capacity to combine unrelated things. Synesthesia occurs seven times more often in the brains of artists than in those of non-artists. This core idea, imported from *A Natural History of the Senses*, resonates in this book's title to suggest that in an alchemical process we create something ever changeable—the mind.

An appendix includes valuable notes and addendum, as well as a helpful up-to-date illustration of the brain which labels all the lobes referred to in the book. Also included is a list of alchemical symbols. The reader is invited to gaze at the page and make her own alchemical connections, to bridge the left and right hemispheres of the brain—ultimately, to create ideas from matter.

For Ackerman, the human brain is much more than a mere sum of its parts. As she claims in this personal, life-affirming book, "creative ideas are forged in an alchemy of mind."