
David Reiter subtitles his latest book ‘a fictive memoire’, which is an essentially contradictory term and at the same time complementary. If ‘fictive’ is make-believe and ‘memoire’ is autobiography, where do the two come together?

In *My Planets* Reiter weaves memories of his own upbringing as a white Jewish boy in an American inner-city, with present-day musings of a fifty year-old American Australian who has just found his birth mother after his adoptive parents have died. These stories, presumably, are true. He also gives a third-person account of his birth mother’s and father’s memories. These, presumably, are not. And I’m not saying that they are false, it’s just that one cannot write about one’s conception from the points of view of the lovers without using a bit of imagination. After Reiter’s father recounts his nightmares of fighting Nazi soldiers in the war, he writes:

> The real moon came out from behind a cloud just then, and he looked so pale to her, like an abandoned child. She eased down, covered him with her body. (26)

This has to be imagined. And it is beautifully imagined. These were my favourite passages in the book.

The book is divided into nine parts, each given the title of a planet. This works as a structural link to the psyche of Reiter who, as a child, always felt he didn’t quite belong and must have come from outer space and who, as an adult, lives on the other side of the world from where he was born, seeing a whole new set of stars. Each first chapter of each part is told in the voice of the specific planet so each planet, too, has a story to tell. This suggests that stories are both ancient and endless, and no particular story carries any more weight than the next. I love the writing of the planets and think them a clever strand for Reiter to work with, but conceptually I think it has been taken too far: the book’s title, its cover, the black and white photographs of the solar system throughout the book. Too much ‘planets’.

Alongside crossing over from fiction to memoire, from first person to third person narration and from human to inanimate narrator, Reiter also plays with form. He weaves poetry into prose, and some memories bear both of those titles. This seems a very natural way for a poet/novelist to write and Reiter seems to do it organically. Yet with all of these juxtaposing styles it is no surprise that the chronology of the telling is all over the place: back and forth, and sometimes repetitive. But this is the way memory works. When we think of a person from our past, we don’t create a timeline of images. We remember in a much more fluid way. Though this doesn’t make for gripping storytelling, it does experiment with memory and art, and so the story is told uniquely. I think the patchwork craft of the book works well for Reiter, placing it in the overall literary genre. But with it comes some confusion as to where all of the names fit into the family, and into which family they fit (we are, after all, talking about two mothers, two fathers, both of their mothers and fathers, several siblings, aunts and uncles and children). A family tree at the beginning of the book would have helped this confusion but, given that the crux of the book lies in its disjointed telling, a little confusion doesn’t hurt.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 5 no. 1, November 2012.

ARCHIVED AT FLINDERS UNIVERSITY: DSPACE.FLINDERS.EDU.AU
Reiter is the founding publisher for IP, which is an interactive press publishing poetry and fiction in print, e-books and multimedia. A ‘Reunion Page’, as an accompaniment for the book, is soon to be published on IP’s website, but for now you can visit it on http://www.facebook.com/MyPlanetsReunionMemoir.

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