*The Book of Transparencies,* by Jefferson Navicky reviewed by Cassidy Adams

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Jefferson Navicky is the author of three previous books, including *The Paper Coast* and *Map of the Second Person.* His writing has also appeared in a variety of literary journals. He currently resides in Maine, where he teaches English at Southern Maine Community College. In *The Book of Transparencies*, Navicky takes his reader through a complex and twisting tale of discovery and loss. The narrator becomes obsessed with a book he finds at the community college where he works, and is soon thrown into an adventure of discovering the aspects of the story and to see where it all ended. This approach allows the reader to become detectives, as we have to piece together the past and present, along with the lovers of the found book’s author, William Bolzebados. The narrator finds himself in between both worlds, as he follows Bolzebados’s path in an attempt understand what happened: “I traced Bolzebados’s peripatetic wanderings from country to country, from mountain to asylum, from object to achieve.”

As the tensions of the story grow, the structure comes to life. *The Book of Transparencies* not only moves from past to present and character to character, but also adds different forms of commentary. For example, we learn some of the most important clues of the story from letters added in. These letters are from the past, but bring light to the present. The narrator even adds his own commentary through sections deemed to be unpublished sections of the book he has been working on. Through this we gain a better understanding of our narrator and the way he is impacted and changed by his discoveries. This heightens the impact for the reader, because we fall upon the same conclusions as the narrator and begin to ask similar questions.

The narrator’s commentary is added via footnotes, and as the story dives further into the unpublished work, more and more of the footnotes pop up. At first, they seem almost like notes from Navicky, but instead they come from the previously unnamed narrator, questioning himself:

“William, what happens if your book is a failure? What if no one will publish it? If no one sees its beauty? Wants more from it, expects it to be something other than what it is? But I think you knew all the answers to these questions. You didn’t care if you failed to finish the book; in fact you didn’t even want to finish it…Have I failed you now in my efforts to edit this book, in my efforts to publish what I though you wanted? Actually, now, I see you may not have ever cared.”

This commentary helps bring the reader into the story by supplying a guiding aspect to keep the story clear. Another aspect of the structure making this book so unique is the spaces among the words. The narrator explains that the author did it to create the transparency in the work, but the narrator adds it to his own form, as this story is like his own book and journal in one. It brings the reader full circle, as the narrator gives a replication of the book he’s read for the reader. The many layers of the structure along with the many layers to the story creates a greater impact and leaves the reader questioning what they’ve just experienced.

Navicky draws the reader even closer with a mystery in the *Book of Transparencies*, as it’s described as “written in a thinly veiled autobiographical voice that — there is no other way to say this— finished my thoughts so completely and in a voice so close to mine that I began to wonder if I had written the book in some forgotten past.” This weaves through the form as well, as the story switches in point of view from the narrator in a first person to a third person point of view of what is happening in the book, letters, and the past. Together, they flow seamlessly. The structure goes hand in hand with the point of view shifts as they move back and forth throughout the story, similar to how the narrator and Bolzebados’ worlds become tangled together, making their lives fall into parallel. With characters so similar, it makes it easy to learn about Bolzebados through the narrator. They mimic each other, making it at times hard to notice when the shifts between actually happen.

Throughout, the reader gets a chance to learn about the narrator’s obsession and how that theme shows through his writing. The narrator is well aware of his obsession, as he recounts being told, “The possess never know they are possessed, she said. You are haunted and you will remain haunted until you exorcise your demons.” This obsession truly begins to haunt the narrator, making its to his normal life, as well. At one point, he can’t find a book he remembers, asking all of the people around him what has happened to it until finally he comes to the conclusion that it will be up to him to bring it to life: “I couldn’t find any trace of the book…I shuddered slightly at this discovery, but surprisingly it was not out of fear that I did this, but rather at the acknowledgment of my fate that this too would be a book I would have to write, not now, but sometime in my lifetime of accumulated tasks and responsibilities.” This obsession mimics Bolzebados’s own obsession, and time and time again the narrator, through his interest in a book, sees his entire life changed.

*The Book of Transparencies* is a metafictional journey of discovery and authorhood: “Upon hearing of Cleo’s book of transparencies, its physicality and assemblage, she said, this will become a book. You must take the responsibility to record it. You must write it.” The novel is confusing, but its unique structure and dream-like mystery make *The Book of Transparencies* an utterly unique adventure and mystery.