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## Boundary Breaking

February 26, 2009 by [Jacqueline Flaggiello](#)  
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Encapsulate the terrifying feeling of waiting for HIV results, ride shotgun in a taxi as it drifts in and out of traffic on Kenya's dangerous city streets and then helplessly watch a loved one fall slowly into the inescapable madness of Alzheimer's disease; no uncomfortable topic seems off limits for this eccentric writer. Vancouver-based author Jim Oaten, allows us to follow him as he continually dips back and forth into this nostalgic labyrinth of life altering situations. This rollercoaster ride pushes the reader to wonder as to where the foundations of narration start and daydreams of memory end, as they become completely blurred and almost impossible to distinguish as the book continues to evolve. *Accelerated Paces (Travels across borders and other imaginary boundaries)* is Oaten's first attempt at storybook recognition, and with an eclectic piece like this, it is bound to receive some literary acknowledgment.

This utterly random collection of fourteen short stories consistently incorporated factual historical events and dates to remind one that there is some type of chronological time line. It began with a very short captured moment of his apparent childhood, then transitioned into his mothers slip into Alzheimer's disease, his resilience after months in a mental ward and then on to many ambiguous adventures from Italy to Las Vegas. It all seemed to make logical sense, until this statement, "Like politicians were all unreliable narrators. All of us creative artists subject to time, bias and wishful thinking regarding our personal pasts," after this, it all became one big enigma. Oaten seemed to play with the readers as we are ignorant to which accounts are real experiences, which ones are purely facetious, and which are a little bit of both. This novel almost seemed like an autobiography of arbitrary memorable events that had little to no interconnection, yet each of the stories unpredictable tendencies created a riveting trance, causing the reader and their imagination to crave more.

Oatens use of memorable personal experience and fiction flow nicely together as most of these adrenaline filled misadventures truly satisfy the reader. One of the more memorably controversial and political pieces entitled “Allahua Akbar, Do you read?” is a flashback piece where Oaten captures the truth of locations, events and situations through the vibrancy and vitality of his language. He described how Mombasa, Kenya’s war-torn environment, continued to corrupt and create an organized and desperate state of chaos and fear in the lives of many. He consciously allowed his own cynical and skeptical views on Muslim religion to shine through as well, stating lines such as “...it all ends up with Allah; that if it’s been willed, it’s not your fault...” With *Inshallah* there is some a kind of extended coverage, an eliminated liability, which not only negated personal responsibility but created unlimited potential.” Then there are the times when stories seemed much too out of place and Oaten’s attempts to be unpredictable and “avant-garde,” fell short. “Hello Kitty, Goodbye wallet,” which has no correlation with any other story, talked about the monopolizing tendencies of corporate conglomerates, such as Sanrio, which utilizes the Hello kitty image and brand to instigate obsessive consumption practices all over the world. He ranted about how this trend is an “insidious as insect infestation, spreading the consumerist virus to children unequipped to realize that their “special” purchases aren’t more than mass-produced, mass marketed tat.”

Although it was mildly fascinating, it seemed more like a journalistic investigation and did not mould well with the rest of his work.

One story which I had to read a total of three times to understand what the plot or purpose was, is “Ghosts,” which flipped back and forth through various times, thoughts, characters and ideas. Yes, it reeked of attempted far-out style narration, yet his salvation was the last piece in his collection with the long winded title, “CNN and the heat Death of the Universe.” Each story seemed to have a theme and this one was the most satisfyingly and fascinating. It discussed our advanced era of information and our fascination with messages relayed through the media. Oaten does not believe we live in an era where the “the mediums is the message” nor is it one of information, instead it is one saturated with rumours and these “rumours” are unfortunately how many continue to create inaccurate ideological meanings of our world; he then somehow naturally ties in a metaphor relating to The Doors, allowing Jim Morrison fans to finish the book with a smile on their faces.

However arbitrary *Accelerated Paces* may be, it is an interesting short escape for those who temporarily would enjoy being placed in someone else’s position, good, bad or horrifying, just to get away from their own mundane reality. This compilation of short vivid recollections is the ideal bedside story read, right before your mind takes that nightly trip to dream land.



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