

Book Review

Title: *First Person Plural*

Author: Andrew W.M. Beierle

Publisher: New York: Kensington, 2007

Paperback, ISBN: 0-7582-1970-9, 322 pages

Cost: \$15.00 USD

Reviewer: Patricia Wood

First Person Plural is a novel about conjoined twins Owen and Porter. Told from the perspective of Owen, it describes in a fantastical way their navigation through life, socially and sexually. The crux of the story is Owen is gay and Porter straight. Both wish to pursue their respective identities -- but how do you do that and stay true to what you believe? How do you compromise in this -- the most intimate and compelling part of being human? Porter, the dominant twin, appears to persevere in spite of Owen's reluctance and preference. But do not be misled into thinking this book is only about sexuality or exploiting a disability that at once fascinates and repels. This story is a captivating study of what makes us different and how we grapple with the duality present in all of us. It entertains the questions: What is normal? How do we comply and fit in? What strategies do we human's employ to find love?

It was difficult at first for me to fully identify and have sympathy for either twin. There was an element of distance that made caring about each character difficult, even with the first person point of view utilized. This was not due to the author, whose prose was flowing and remarkably tender and insightful. Difficulty with creating this sympathy lay rather in the realm of the reader, whose closely held and hidden prejudices needed to be taken out and examined before a part could be found that had commonality with Owen or Porter.

The book causes one to reflect upon personal choices and feelings and it is in this area where the book clearly shines. Is a person's perceived preferred sexuality more profound than a perceived disaster of birth? Do we all struggle in some way with this duality?

This novel is utterly thought provoking. I recommend *First Person Plural* to readers who wish to challenge their closely held beliefs about what constitutes either a disability or normal sexuality. It would be an excellent book for a classroom discussion both in high school and college.

With respect to accessibility, there is at this time neither an audio book nor a large print edition available.

When I finished this book, I was bereft and discomfited. Not with the story, but with myself. I discovered something in me lacking. It was as if I gazed into a funhouse mirror that showed Owen Porter, a spectacular beautiful vision, and me standing alongside--the one distorted.

Patricia Wood is a PhD student in education and disability studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She is a teacher and writer. Her debut novel, *Lottery*, was published by Putnam in August, 2007.