



Trompe l'Oeil

Nancy Reisman

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During a vacation in Rome, the Murphy family experiences a life-altering tragedy. In the immediate aftermath, James, Nora, and their children find solace in their Massachusetts coast home, but as the years pass the weight of the loss disintegrates the increasingly fragile marriage and leaves its mark on each family member. *Trompe l'Oeil* seamlessly alternates among several characters' points of view, capturing the details of their daily lives as well as their longing for connection and fear of abandonment. Through the turbulence of marriage, the challenges of parenthood, job upheavals, and calamities large and small, *Trompe l'Oeil* examines family legacies, the ways those legacies persist, and the ways they might be transcended. Nancy Reisman is a master of psychological acuity, creating characters who are wholly unique and yet express our own longings and anxieties. *Trompe l'Oeil* haunts not only with its story but also with the beauty of its insight into hopes, desires, and fears.

Trompe l'Oeil Details

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Author : Nancy Reisman

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From Reader Review Trompe l'Oeil for online ebook

Terri says

This book was so different from anything I've read. I took a look at some of the other reader reviews and agree that (1) it was very sad (2) it could have been tightened up a bit and (3) it hovered between good and great. The Murphy's are a young family enjoying the American Dream when it all is tragically altered during a trip to Italy. What was unexpected and fascinating was the way the author examines the continuing echoes of the tragedy in the lives of the Murphy's. The author has great insight into the intimate ways each of the main characters felt about loss, betrayal, and all the what ifs of life.

FYI Trompe-l'œil (French for "deceive the eye", pronounced [tʁɔ̃p lœj]) is an art technique that uses realistic imagery to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions.

Kelly says

I know I connect with a book when my thoughts start to mirror the narrative style - and that is just what happened here. An incredibly sad, but beautifully told story simply of a family in the wake of tragedy and beyond, there is not much dramatic beyond that initial tragedy that happens, yet I could not put it down as I fell in love with Nora and in and out of love with the various other flawed but human characters. The end came on a bit quickly, time seeming to speed up, but I suppose such is real life, right?

Tenli says

Trompe L'Oeil hovers between good and great. Great in its lyrical prose and indelible descriptions. I thought it was a bit too long for the subject matter, and at a certain point I felt I'd gotten the point and was slogging to the end. That being said, the story is well told and I cared very much about the characters. And I loved the interludes about various paintings of women, mostly of the Magdalen. I would certainly recommend this book but I don't know that I would recommend it to everyone.

Donna Wetzel says

Thank you Goodreads for the book, Trompe l'Oeil by Nancy Reisman. I really debated between giving this 3 stars and 4 stars. The book was very well written. I love the language; the sentence structure. The only reason I couldn't give it 4 stars is because it was so depressing. I know the author was trying to convey sorrow and at that she does a wonderful job. It was just difficult to continue to read about such profound sadness.

Dianne says

This is a bit over-long, I think. A very detailed exploration of a family shifting apart, after the tragic accident that kills one family member on a holiday trip overseas.

The years pass, the other children grow up, new ones are born, but the family unit is forever altered in ways that are sad and difficult. Well written, mostly very interesting and introspective, but I think it could have been tightened up a bit.

Lisa says

The storytelling is fine and the plot kept me interested as the Murphy kids aged from 10 and 7 and the newborns into their own careers and parenthood 30 years later. But as the little one stayed 4 years old forever it was just not credible that nobody sought professional grief counseling. The marriage was doomed from the start but the remaining in the past, even for the two kids not born at the time of the trauma, was not reasonable. I get that the mother was into art, and the sections describing art pieces were written well, but they were distracting and didn't hold the narrative together. Still, it's worth reading.

Barbara Rhine says

As a tale from upper middle class life without a single reference to events apart from the family involved, this is not the type of book I usually like. But there was something about it ... the consistent dreamy quality, perhaps, infused by an author musing on what family life means when there is the loss of a child, the addition of more children, various ascents to adulthood, and (perhaps) the fulfillment of the mother, in the manner of disappearing back into her old/new self after all is said and done, and and the marriage is had and the children grown. The interspersing of art in the form of particular paintings that form a kind of Greek chorus is intriguing. Best of all are the characters themselves, who sustain interest just because their lives are portrayed from such an internal, yet simply-put, perspective.

Diane says

A profoundly sad foundation: young family vacations in Rome, 4-year old Molly lets go of her sister's hand, darts into the street, and is killed. We follow the stories of parents Nora and James, already-born siblings Theo and Katy, not-yet-born sisters Sara and Delia. We see how the loss and ever-present threat of loss define each character. I especially appreciated mother Nora's development. She is neither heroic, nor lost. She fashions a life not completely defined by marriage or children, or the loss thereof. A favorite passage:

"Late middle age. Perhaps her mother too had felt herself becoming more singular, marriage or no marriage--she must have, but at what point did she recognize her inherent separateness, its existential certainty? ... Nora's own life now seemed distinct from her children--and more completely hers--in ways both stark and unforeseen. She felt, if anything, condensed, possessed of a clean practicality untempered by marriage or youth."

I love the words "singular" and "condensed" to describe Nora. Feels celestial--as if Nora is a star, poised between shining and exploding. I will stop quoting and encourage you to read and find parts that speak to you. Not a 5-star rating because at times it felt like Reisman was trying a little too hard, but a solid 4 for me.

Stacey says

We meet the Murphys of New England prior to the horrific tragedy that befalls their family. We witness and live through the accident and we share their grief with them. But it's the aftermath of the tragedy when we really get to know this family intimately; and for some of them, that's saying a lot.

Reisman gives us a complex, sensitive portrait of the family members, as each deals with the death of a child in their own way, making sense of their place in the world. Some family members lived through it; others came later. For starters, for parents Nora and James it causes an irreparable rift in their marriage; daughter Katy can never trust, nor feel her parents' love quite enough. And son Theo moves far, far away.

This is a sad tale, but it's also a cohesive and gripping family saga. Dates are largely omitted, so you kind of have to figure out how many years have passed as the novel unfolds. Oddly enough, I really did not find it over-the-top depressing. In fact, one enjoyable feature is that the author intersperses the novel with chapters discussing various works of art exhibited in Rome by such masters as Bernini, van der Weyden and Vuillard. Since I read this in e-book format, I happily googled each piece of art so I could view the work and easily follow along with the description.

Most of the writing I found enjoyable, with the exception of one or two clunky sentences dropped here or there. Also, the word *cerulean* was waaayyy overused! And while the artwork chapters are a nice diversion, I don't get the point. Mom Nora was a college art student who virtually left it behind -- and Reisman never really brings her back to it. Still and all, this was a good read as family dramas (and art history) go. Love the title and the cover artwork, too.

Shannon says

There are so many interiors in one life and even more in one family. This book excels at illustrating these interiors as if they were paintings on a wall coming to life. There are very few things "happening" in terms of action/plot, and yet, lives are unfolding and beginning and ending and folding into one another and diverting again and again that you can't help but feel as if it's all swirling around you just the way it does every day without you noticing. This book notices everything and echoes it back to you. The prose is stunning and sad but somehow it had a calming effect on me, like the sea might.

Barbara says

I read this book after it was featured in the NY Times Book Review. I read it because I was fascinated by the premise: A family of 5, a happy couple with an older boy and two younger girls go to Rome. The smallest girl runs into the street and is hit by a truck and is killed. How does it affect the family dynamics? How does it affect the middle girl, who let go of her hand

Well, I thought it was an existential nightmare. It's somewhat interesting to watch as the wife has, not one, but two more girls.

All of them grow up as the husband walks away. No one can separate their own identity from the girl who

died, as the two younger girls each feel like a replacement for her - one, because she was the replacement, and one because she resembles her most. The one who let go of her hand, as we might imagine, can stand to be in a room by herself, can't stand silence or having to think on her own.

A messy story with everyone taking the blame and none of them communicating to the others.

I come from a messy family, and there's always a "hero" child. Not here; I think that's unrealistic. Everybody in the story is a "lost child" and if the family could survive like that then it would be happening all over. A family cannot survive without a "golden child", a "scapegoat" and a "mascot" if there are 4 children as there are here.

I don't recommend and I don't think it's realistic.

Robin says

This wasn't a favorite for a few reasons. I didn't like the short chapters and the sections about the artwork in Rome took away from the story for me. The other reason I wasn't feeling positive is that by page 36 we learn that the 4 year old in the family is killed when she runs out in front of a truck. I was reading this as I babysat for 2 granddaughters, one of whom turns 4 this week.

Duncan says

Impressionistic story about a child's death and how it affects the family left behind. There's relatively little plot, and such plot developments as there are tend to happen offscreen, as it were; the main focus is on how the absence of the child changes how the surviving family members think of themselves and their house. Children born after Molly's death are sometimes viewed as "not-Molly," and the parents come to see their present selves as alternative versions of the selves that would have existed had their daughter lived. Affecting in parts, but it doesn't exactly add up to a story, as such--there's not much in the way of a narrative arc; it's more that a bunch of things happen, and the characters reflect on them, and the daughter's death often weaves into their reflections.

What makes this more interesting is the role of art in the story; interwoven through the events of the novel are descriptions of paintings (usually Italian paintings, and it's suggested though never stated that the family saw the paintings on its trip to Rome during which Molly died). Virtually every scene in the book has a painterly description, often with a focus on the character of the light. Furthermore, the descriptions of the paintings often focus on how the artist captured just a moment in the lives of the subjects, just a facet of them--mirroring the characters' reflections about their memories of Molly can only preserve a portion of her, and about how her death splintered her family members between how they are and would have been.

Nancy Newcomer says

This is a very well written book. The first novel by an author who has received many awards for her short stories. At first I wondered if this should have been a short story or novella but now that I've finished I see why she needed that much space. She really immerses the reader in this families' environment so you almost feel you have been to the house on the coast just before the Cape. It seems a simple enough family saga but there is much going on beneath the surface. There are just some beautiful passages dealing with life's issues and puzzles. This is not intricately plotted or fast moving. I recommend it to those with the patience to savor

it.

Farahjoan says

This is, in my opinion, a cautionary tale to living in the past and not moving on or enjoying the present. Yes, a horribly sad event takes place in this book, which catapults the remaining characters into stagnant character and life development. I understand that these things are life shattering, and have known many people who have experienced horrible events like this. What is astounding is that, instead of seeking help, these characters wallow in their misery and choose not to communicate but to proliferate the sadness. The women choose to have children to deal with their bad relationships, a common trope. The men are selfish...arguably, so are the women. Why the mother decides to have two more kids in such a state instead of seeking help or getting a job is beyond me, but maybe I am harsh. The father is vilified, though it seems he carries the financial burden for this irrationality ever-growing family. While the women in the book are often described in settings built up with lemonade, sweaters, and sundaes, the men have powerful jobs in the financial district, and do move on with physical and romantic relationships. The women struggle and can't make up their mind about much of anything.

In the end, nobody is really happy, as they chose to take one death to take over their life.

<>grumpy review by Farah<>
