

was released you may remember we had people who discovered they had been short-changed at the gas station dismissing the incident by saying "hey, nonny nonny." or "Oh, that police car caught me passing another car on the right. Oh, well. Hey, nonny nonny." Of course, eventually the good feeling of the film wore off and people went back to the ever-popular "oh, shit." I mean, how do you decide if a quotation is familiar right now? Bartlett's gets out of date faster than a World Atlas. [-mrl]

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF EVERYTHING by Nick Mamatas (copyright 2018, Tachyon Publications, Print ISBN: 978-1-61696-300-2, Digital ISBN: 978-1-61696-301-9) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF EVERYTHING is a collection of primarily short fiction--with one heck of a novella thrown in at the end--by writer Nick Mamatas. Not a new writer, by any stretch of the imagination, but once again, a new writer to me. I've been aware of his presence in the field (what field is *that*? I hear you ask, so I'll get to that in a bit), but I've never read anything by him up until now. It's not that I've had opinions about him and his writing one way or another; I just didn't know of him and his writing, and thus I wasn't particularly motivated to pick up anything of his.

I find it difficult to classify Mamatas's writing after reading this collection. So yeah, what field is *that*? The closest I can come is that he writes speculative fiction, which is really a copout term because when you think about it, *all* fiction is speculative. What I'm really trying to say is that he writes stories that land in any number of genres: science fiction, fantasy, horror, steampunk, and probably others if I think about it hard enough. One thing I will say is that the reader will never be bored with the variety of types of stories in this collection. Mamatas is all over the map, and I mean that in a good way.

I also get the feeling that there is more underneath these stories than meets the eye. I'm not trained in literature by any means, nor am I trained in creative writing. However, there seems to be something going on here that is more ... deep-seated. That's probably not the right term, but I think the clues to what I'm really trying to say may be found in the author commentary that follows every story. I thoroughly enjoyed this aspect of the collection; to me, knowing what was going on inside the author's head when he (or she) wrote a story provides an interesting look into where the story came from and possibly how the story got to where it ended up being.

The collection starts off with an odd but highly entertaining story called "Walking with a Ghost", a combination of AI and Lovecraft, but not in the way you might think. Lovecraft himself has been recreated within an AI, based on research of his notes and journals, etc. The story begins with a presentation of the Lovecraftian AI, and in attendance are a whole bunch of Lovecraft enthusiasts. Lovecraft is brought out to be presented to the audience, and partway into the presentation he simply gets up and leaves. He is found months later, and the resolution to the issue is quite interesting.

"The Spook School" is a story that really wasn't doing that much for me until the end. A couple, Melissa and Gordon, go to Scotland--Glasgow, to be precise--to see artwork from four people deemed "The Four", or, "The Spook School". Melissa is particularly enamored of a picture called "The Wassail", from which a rose winks at her. And then things take a turn that is completely unexpected. For the first time in a long time, my jaw actually dropped when I realized what was happening. The story turns from mostly mundane (other than that rose) to a horror tale to ... I don't know, something else, all in the span of a few pages. The ending made that story.

"Arbeitskraft" is another story of an AI that isn't just an AI. It's a steampunk story about the creation of an AI of Karl Marx. In this case, however, the AI hasn't been completed, and there is a race to have the creation stopped. I mention it here because I'd read it somewhere before, in the anthology *Steampunk III: Steampunk Revolution*, a 2012 book edited by Ann Vandermeer. It's an interesting read, and clearly one that stuck with me since I remembered from a book I read five or six years ago. It was definitely worth the re-read.

"The Glottal Stop" is a frightening story that in many ways can mirror what happens in today's society. Beatriz Almonte was just looking for a date--that's all. An offhand comment that she had made on Twitter a couple of years before the story takes place turned the nastiest of the nasty on social media against her. She'd essentially gone into hiding, fearing that bad things would happen to her. She now felt that after a lengthy period of time, it would be okay to come out of hiding. She was wrong. The story was written for this collection, and it's clear that it's influenced by current day society and social media. It's scary stuff.

"Dreamer of the Day" has an interesting premise. The titular dreamer of the day will do something for you, as long as you do something that seems relatively easy; pay a bill, for example. Lil is a small time actress who wants her husband dead because he's cheating on her; ironically, she's cheating on him with Paul, the guy she's with when she sees the dreamer. Without giving too much away, this story is a case of "be careful what you wish for", the kind of story we see a lot where the genie grants the wish, but not the way it was intended. It's an intense story that ends up where the reader doesn't expect.

My favorite is the collection-ending novella "Under My Roof". Daniel Weinberg, just a bit on the odd side, decides that, in a world where the United States is involved in some 40 wars with 40 different countries, he is going to build a homemade nuclear bomb and secede from the United States. He calls his new country Weinbergia. His son Herbert, the central character and narrator of the story, becomes something of a celebrity. It is a frightening story that posits a United States that seems like it could be what ours turns into if the current path doesn't change.

These are the stories that impacted me most, but really all the stories are interesting, entertaining, and thought provoking. The only story that I couldn't follow and didn't care for at all was "North Shore Friday". In Mamatas' story notes, he says that "I have always been a sucker for typographic trickery. Any book or story that features a disruption of layout immediately attracts my interest." While that's fair, of course, because it's his story and his book, it does nothing for me, and in fact causes me to lose interest. I valiantly tried to follow what was going on, but I failed. Maybe that's a shortcoming of me as a reader, but while I don't mind challenging stories that exercise my brain, stories like "North Shore Friday", with its unusual type-setting and, well, typographic trickery, are a turn off. Still, some people will like that kind of thing, and who am I to judge?

All in all, this collection is an interesting and worthwhile introduction to the writing of Nick Mamatas. While not all of it is necessarily my cup of tea, enough of it is that I enjoyed. You may as well. [-jak]

FARADAY, MAXWELL AND THE ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD by Nancy Forbes and Basil Mahon (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This book covers the life, discoveries and research efforts of Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell. Faraday came from a humble background and had very little education. He worked as a bookbinder and read every book about science he could get his hands on in his job. After seeing a lecture by Humphrey Davy, a leading scientist at the time, Faraday was able to get a job as a bottle washer for Davy after the previous washer was fired. This set Faraday on his course to become a major force in experimental studies concerning electricity and magnetism. Though, Faraday lacked a mathematical education he became extremely good as an experimenter and had a prodigious scientific imagination. Faraday discovered that electricity and magnetism were the same force. An electric current can generate a magnetic field and a magnetic field can create an electric current. Faraday believed but could not prove mathematically that magnetism and electricity produce fields. In the early 1800's most scientists were so heavily influenced by Newton that they assumed electricity and magnetism would act instantaneously across a distance and in a straight line. This is how Newton and others after him assumed gravity would act. But Newton thought that one day someone would find a better idea. Among Faraday's inventions, he created the first electric motor and induction coil. But Faraday could not widely publicize his ideas about fields since he could not reinforce it with a math-based theory.

Many years later, in the mid 1800s when Faraday was an old man, Maxwell who was just finishing college was getting more interested in electricity and magnetism. And Maxwell found out that Faraday had done much work in the experimental arena concerning these effects. Faraday kept meticulous notes and even published many of them.

Maxwell was highly regarded as one of the most brilliant mathematical physicists of the age. He was constantly questioning the current thinking in science and had a good mathematics background. Maxwell read the published experimental findings of Faraday and eventually, he used 3-dimensional Vector Calculus to describe the fields that Faraday could only imagine, thus creating field theory. This unified framework of electricity, magnetism and light became the basis for much of later, 20th-century physics. Maxwell was also a very good experimental scientist too.

Faraday and Maxwell's work lead to the discovery of the existence of the electromagnetic field and created a radically new theory which overturned the strictly mechanical view of the world that had prevailed since Newton's time. This is a well-written and in-depth account about how we learned about electromagnetism. [-gf]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I just saw a production of ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL by William Shakespeare (ISBN 978-0-743-48497-8) done by the Hudson River Shakespeare Company. This is often described as one of Shakespeare's "problem plays." The problem is not whether he wrote it (as some might suppose), but the ambiguity of its morality. W. W. Lawrence (1931) claims there is no such ambiguity--the resolution is consistent with Elizabethan notion of the "Clever Wench fulfilling her seemingly impossible tasks" (as described by Ernest Schanzer in THE PROBLEM PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE (ISBN 978-0- 805-20110-9), and indeed Schanzer omits it from his discussion. L. C. Knights defines a "problem play" as one in which we frequently find ourselves in doubt as to our moral bearings." The problem, of course, is that while *we* may find ourselves in doubt as to our moral bearings in THE MERCHANT OF VENICE (for example), it is not clear that Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience would have. And so what seems a "problem play" to us might not have been intended or perceived that way when it was written.

Not surprisingly, Elizabethan plays that leave the audience in a state of moral confusion at the end are unlikely to be very popular or performed very often today. Theater companies stick with the Old Reliabilities (e.g., ROMEO AND JULIET, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, MACBETH) and the unavoidable classics (e.g., HAMLET, KING LEAR). Who needs trouble? (Similarly, opera companies tend to perform either Puccini's MADAME BUTTERFLY or LA BOHEME rather than LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST or EDGAR.)

My problem is not with the supposed moral problems of the heroine. (Even Schanzer says that she has no moral problem, only difficulties to be overcome.) It is that she loves someone who does not love her, traps him into marriage, and then tricks him into sleeping with her so that an oath he made will tie him to her irrevocably. Why she thinks this will make her happy is a total mystery to me. His seeming conversion to loving her is played sometimes seriously, sometimes clearly as a concession to the King's command. The former is improbable, and the latter bodes ill for the future of the marriage. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity
in which we are permitted to remain children all our
lives.

---Albert Einstein

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