

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 2009

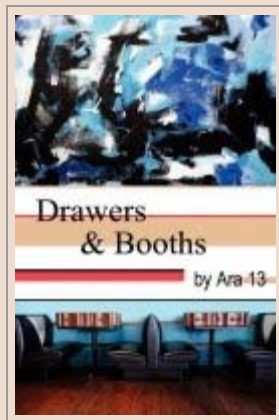
Drawers & Booths (A Review)

Ara 13 is God.

No, I don't mean that as in "ZOMG Ara 13 iz teh awesomeness!!!!11!!1!" (Although I *did* enjoy this particular book.) I

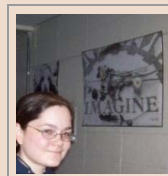
mean it as a sort of conceit. *Drawers & Booths*, his debut novel from Covington Moore Press that won the 2008 IPPY award, is not unlike an article I once read in *The Onion* called "Video-Game Character Wondering Why Heartless God Always Chooses 'Continue'." Or, look at it this way: in his 1923 poem "Anecdote of the Jar," Wallace Stevens attempts to tackle the highly abstract issue of constructing reality, or what may be perceived as reality. Was

the poem's landscape even there before the jar, an artificial object of human creation, was placed on the hillside and the "wilderness rose up to it, / And sprawled around it; no longer wild"? Is it possible for anything - setting, object, event - to simply *be* without some sort of human input? Are you confused yet? Good!



Drawers & Booths (that title is pure nonsense, BTW) is the single most mind-bending book I have ever read. I'm going to borrow from an [Amazon review](#) and describe it as one of those unpredictable funhouses full of weird mirrors and surprises around every corner. Case in point: it actually starts out as a (very boring) military novel about a group of American soldiers stationed on an island nation. But then the narrator (whose name is actually Hattie Shore) detaches

ABOUT ME



E. L. FAY

Not much to say. Recent college grad. Myriad variegated interests.

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If you are an author or publisher who would like me to review a book, you may contact me at [elfay123\(at\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:elfay123(at)gmail(dot)com). I accept ARC's and look forward to discovering new reads!

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himself from his omniscient storyteller role and things fall apart (kind of like at the end of Mario Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* when all the different radio soaps start chaotically melting into each other and the characters all get killed). An unexpected sojourn to Auschwitz reveals that Hattie Shore is also a police detective on the trail of a hard-to-grasp extra-dimensional criminal who has been carelessly wreaking havoc on the cosmos ever since . . . He created the cosmos.

Here's the file - on my desk. You're welcome to it. It's a who's who of history. More accurately, it's a where's where. Rwanda, Normandy, Gettysburg, Leningrad. Then there are places you may not even have heard about. Small villages, small towns, small people. Knock yourself out. Read them all you want. After awhile, they run into each other, tales of carnage: dead, dead, tortured, dead, raped, dead. And *he* was there.

I mean, Ara's unconventional narrative has the *strangest* effect: it was like my mind was dizzy even though my body wasn't. And it got even crazier during the courtroom drama.

Drawers & Booths definitely has some surface similarities to Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* in that both novels deal with the cognitive effects of spiritual faith. (Actually, I think I expected *American Gods* to be more like *Drawers & Booths* than the fantasy adventure tale it is.) Humans invented divinity and then fell victim to their own creation as religion **began to shape how they perceived the world**. In other words, human behavior and beliefs *generate* reality, and it is this *Matrix*-like worldview that fits so beautifully with Ara 13's use of a **metafictional** framework that makes the artificiality of his art glaringly obvious. It is Ara's world, and Shore, Kick, Franklin, Marcus, Laughton, the Corporal, and God just "live" in it.

"To argue inside any theistic construct is likely a futile effort, and perhaps unnecessary. Ayn Rand is right in declaring existence axiomatic. We must acknowledge existence as revealed by our senses to construct proofs. . . We can academically challenge the credence of reality - claim we are in a dream state and will wake instead of dying - but in the end, we likely come down from our scholastic theorizing and eat and not play in traffic. We assume reality in order to function in this existence; that is what sensible means, after all - as verified by the senses. Hence to act contrary to a common acknowledgement or common sense is nonsense."

God, like Ara, is essentially human. He only exists as the result of the collective human mind (God, that is, not Ara).

My only criticism would be the number of typos I found, although that is not Ara's fault. Overall, *Drawers & Booths* is not only a roundabout exercise of the intellect, but a humorous and wholly unpredictable story that continuously builds upon itself. At only 215 pages, it is also very short. At the same time, however, it is

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definitely not for the casual reader seeking a conventional story with a linear flow and identifiable plot. Not suprisingly, Ara 13 himself is a highly unique character, despite his background in the conformist milieu that is the US Marine Corps, where he first honed his writing skills while serving as a military correspondent. 13 is his actual last name - he had it legally changed. So I think it's pretty safe to say that we can expect more fun and original books from him in the future.



POSTED BY E. L. FAY AT 12:06 AM
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