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Book Review: Fiction

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Published: May 5, 2009

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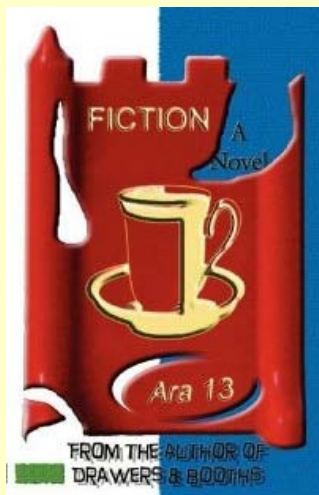
Publication Date: March 9, 2009

Publisher: Ara 13

Author:

· Ara 13

Grade: B-



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Ara 13's *Fiction* is an episemological and theological comedy/drama that switches gears and leads the reader down seemingly stray plot trails at the drop of a hat. On the face of things, it is the story of Father Daniel and his quest to take the gospel to a mythical tribe of cannibals. However, the isolated tribe he does eventually encounter has already developed a surprisingly sophisticated set of morals based on a tome that the natives have treated as sacred.

While Father Daniel and the natives, as one would expect, do not understand one another linguistically at first, Ara 13 hits his greatest strides when telling the story from the perspective of the natives -- particularly from the point of view of two enterprisingly lazy friends, Quan and (yes) MillardFillmore. Their Heckle & Jeckle banter is a delight to follow every time they take over the story, as they frustrate not only Father Daniel but also the tribe bureaucrats who report to the amiable chief. Note the pacing and philosophical counterpoints during a typical discussion between the two as they are once again saddled with taking care of the priest and muse over the message he's brought them about the Virgin Birth:

"Should we have him tell one of his stories?" asked MillardFillmore.

"No. His stories never make any sense. Can you imagine a child born from a woman without a man doing any of the fun? Hardly seems worth bragging about. It's like being given boar meat without the joy of the hunt. Who would brag about that?"

"Maybe his confusion is why he doesn't attempt relations with any of the eligible women," ventured MillardFillmore.

"He's like a child still believing what his mother told him."

"He should know better by now. And his friend is a fool. What husband would fall for such a tale? If my wife told me a story like that, I would not believe her; and I would demand she stopped bewitching my dreams."

"Your wife would have no need for a tale like that," said Quan.

"What do you mean? Are you saying my wife isn't desirable?"

"No. I'm saying she wouldn't sleep with anyone other than... *this* is silly, MillardFillmore. You aren't even married."

"It's a hypothetical. Now take back what you said about my wife's charms or I will be compelled to defend her honor."

"But what if you do end up marrying an ugly wife? It's much too early for me to take back anything I've said about her. I'll have to wait and see," replied Quan.

MillardFillmore considered this. "I suppose you are right," he said.

Quan looked around. "What happened to the visitor?"

"Were we commissioned to watch him again?"

"I wasn't, but, for all I know, you may have been," said Quan.

"Why is it that I may have been?"

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"I will never get real work at this rate."

"How will you support your hypothetical wife?" added Quan.

"She will leave me for sure," said MillardFillmore.

"You should leave her first; there is talk she is cheating on you."

MillardFillmore looked forlorn.

"I am sorry to be the one to have to tell you," said Quan, putting an arm around his comrade. "But we have been friends for so long."

"And you're a good friend," MillardFillmore patted his companion's shoulder. He took a deep, invigorating breath and rose to his feet.

"I am over her. It's as if she never existed," he said.

"You *are* a trouper. I, too, will never speak to her again," said Quan.

"Now, let us prove all that she said during our worst of arguments to be wrong and go and procure another job."

"She never complained about my laziness, as far as I know," said Quan. "Had she?"

"The wounds are too fresh. I'd rather not talk about it."

Contrasting the amusing dialogues are harrowing scenes endured by Father Daniel both before and after his life with the tribe, including a side plot that, until the tale's conclusion, distracts and downright confuses the reader sometimes as to why these events are interrupting the fun.

Father Daniel's intellectual implosion upon learning the source of the native's moral guidance may have been the catalyst for his ejection from the society, but it's hardly his last encounter with Quan and MillardFillmore, who take on a more metaphysical aspect to Daniel later on. However, the notion of making a religion from a book of children's nonsense is something the Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard would have greatly appreciated, and having it presented in this "Thomas Pynchon meets Groucho Marx" literary farce. *Fiction* has a lot to say, and it takes a heady mind to process just what the message is at times; but that doesn't detract from the fact that, a lot of the time, it's just a heck of a lot of fun to read.