



McSweeney's #28

Dave Eggers (Editor) , Daniel Alarcón (Contributor) , Sheila Heti (Contributor) , Nathan Englander (Contributor)

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In eight illustrated books, elegantly held together in a single beribboned case, McSweeney's 28 explores the state of the fable—those astute and irreducible allegories one doesn't see so much anymore in our strange new age, when everyone is wild for the latest parable or apologue but can't find time for anything else.

Featuring fable-length work by Daniel Alarcón, Sheila Heti, and Nathan Englander, and different illustrators for each piece, McSweeney's 28 promises to offer many nights' worth of fine reading.

McSweeney's #28 Details

Date : Published September 1st 2008 by McSweeney's

ISBN : 9781934781074

Author : Dave Eggers (Editor) , Daniel Alarcón (Contributor) , Sheila Heti (Contributor) , Nathan Englander (Contributor)

Format : Hardcover 300 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Anthologies

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From Reader Review McSweeney's #28 for online ebook

Sam Quixote says

McSweeney's 28 is made up of 8 small hardbacks contained within a cardboard container. The two sets of 8 books make up two fantastic painted covers, one of which is the one you see as the main cover, of a boy with his ear to the ground while a fire or a tree radiates from him.

The books are very short, about 14 pages each with lots of illustrations, so this is probably the quickest issue of McSweeney's you'll read. That said, some of the stories here are quite brilliant.

Brian Evenson's "The Book and the Girl" is about a girl surviving a terrible event with her trusty book, proving that books are far more practical than previously thought.

Ryan Boudinot's "The Guy Who Kept Meeting Himself" is my favourite of the 8 stories, about a man who at various stages in his life meets a version of himself a few years older who then tells him something about his future that helps (or doesn't) in the present. Fantastically imaginative, great ending, brilliant illustrations.

Daniel Alarcon's "The Thousands" is the story that feels more like a fable than any other here, about a group of people who arrive in a land where the government tries to get rid of them. They construct rudimentary lodgings and stay.

Sheila Heti's "Two Free Men" is about two lost souls finding themselves and peace through acceptance.

Sarah Manguso's "The Box" is about a man who becomes an exalted leader through not telling anyone what's in his box. It's the funniest story here with a great message.

Arthur Bradford's "Virgil Walker" is the battiest of the bunch, about an abandoned octopus who breaks out of a pet shop with a turtle and starts a life of his own after escaping prison.

The stories are all wonderful and great to read but it's over all too quickly. That said, the presentation is enough to buy the issue. The hardbacks are well produced and everything is so well put together that it becomes an object of beauty as well as a collection of excellent short stories. McSweeney's 28 is one of my favourite issues of McSweeney's and is recommended to all book lovers.

Jessica says

This edition of McSweeney's is so cool! It's made up of 8 individually bound miniature stories, each being written by a different author with art provided by a different illustrator. If you lay the books face down in two sets of rectangles, they make up two different murals. Despite liking this idea, sadly I fail to see how the actual artwork of these murals really reflects the content or the overall feeling of the stories. Most of the artwork inside the individual stories is really quirky and matched perfectly, so I just really didn't get the bigger picture (ha, ha)... Anyways, obviously I preferred some stories better than others, but I enjoyed them all in their own weird ways. Most of them had some aspect of magical realism, or were otherwise a tad bizarre. Overall, I'm glad I own this and I really enjoy the concept. I am definitely inclined to check out more of McSweeney's, although unfortunately for me I don't think such gimmicky packaging is a feature of all the issues!

I read the stories alphabetically by the author's surname and the ratings I gave each one are as follows:

'The Thousands' by Daniel Alarcón; illustrations by Jordan Awan 4.5 ★'s

'The Guy Who Kept Meeting Himself' by Ryan Boudinot; illustrated by Genevieve Simms - 4 ★'s

'Virgil Walker' by Arthur Bradford; illustrated by Jon Adams - 3.5 ★'s

'Poor Little Egg-Boy Hatched in a Shul' by Nathan Englander; illustrated by Jordin Isip - 3.5 ★'s

'The Book and the Girl' by Brian Evenson; illustrated by Phillip Fivel Nessen' - 3 ★'s

'Two Free Men' by Sheila Heti; illustrated by Liz Lee' - 4 ★'s

'LaKeisha and the Dirty Girl' by Tayari Jones; illustrated by Morgan Elliott - 3 ★'s

'The Box' by Sarah Manguso; illustrated by Louie Cordero - 3.5 ★'s

Matt says

One of the coolest McSweeney's issues ever! Consists of eight small, thin hardback books--each a modern fable--that combine to make two paintings, one layered on top of the other, all held in place by little elastic bands. Very creative.

It was a quick read, due to each book's short fabled content. But each had illustrations to supplement, most of the stories were excellent, and I really enjoyed the whole issue. Keep it up McSweeney's!

Brian says

Tiny little stories. It'll take you all of 20 minutes to read the entire collection.

Mark says

Some favorite writers here: Brian Evenson, Ryan Boudinot, who wrote the excellent collection *The Littlest Hitler* and Sarah Manguso who wrote one part of the *145 Stories in a Small Box* set. And of course Daniel Alarcón. Still, it's pretty slight. But it is the first volume of McSwy's I've read entirely in quite a while.

"Virgil Walker" by Arthur Bradford was by far my favorite of the bunch. And despite the book description above, it's not 300 pages- not even close.

Stephen Theaker says

This isn't one of the issues of McSweeney's that you buy for a substantial read - if it takes anyone more than an hour to read it all I'd be surprised. It's been a while since I finished a book on the same day it was delivered.

But it's a book of fables, and the power of a fable isn't in the reading, it's in the retelling, and I could see a few of these fables having a life beyond the pages of these perfectly produced little books. It's easy to imagine a headmaster using one as the basis for a school assembly.

You wouldn't want to pay twenty pounds for it, though - anyone in the UK tempted to buy McSweeney's from a bookshop should note that (at the time of writing) if you subscribe directly you can get the whole year's issues for only about fifty quid, thanks to the current exchange rate.

Joseph says

If you could judge books by their covers, McSweeney's Quarterlies would always get 5 stars. Unfortunately, this newest installment offers very little in terms of an exploration and revision of the fable, which is the theme. There are a couple of contributors that I may check on in the future; however, there was only one story - out of eight - that I thought was memorable (and that's just because I love octopi).

brain says

It's nice to look at, a good idea, and took about forty minutes to read in its entirety. This probably means I'm missing the point of returning to the idea of the fable or something, but guys like me, who order McSwy's because they like to read stuff, generally hope for more than an hour's use out of a book they paid \$20 for, or whatever a quarter of the annual subscription rate is.

Kerri says

McSweeney's is meant to be a literary org, but what drew them to me in the first place was the design, and that still what keeps me loyal. This set of eight little books, cleverly packaged almost like a puzzle, was a Xmas gift from Heather (thank you, Heather!). They were such a joy to read because they were pretty. And there were a couple perfect little tales in the lot of eight. Several, though, just left me empty. A fable should be neat; beginning, middle, end, all tied up with all the answers. When you enlist some very creative, avant gardes to write fables, they break the rules, of course. But then they aren't really fables any more. Still, owning this collection and seeing it on my shelf is like looking at a little treasure.

Scott says

1. "The Box" by Sarah Manguso
2. "The Thousands" by Daniel Alarcón
3. "Two Free Men" by Sheila Heti
4. "LaKeisha and the Dirty Girl" by Tayari Jones
5. "The Guy Who Kept Meeting Himself" by Ryan Boudinot
6. "Virgil Walker" by Arthur Bradford
7. "The Book and the Girl" by Brian Evenson
8. "Poor Little Egg-Boy Hatched in a Shul" by Nathan Englander

You might rank them differently.

Brian says

I like McSweeney's, and I love the packaging of this issue, and in theory the idea of it is terrific—that is to "resurrect and reinvent the art of the fable."

I think the reality is that the eight stories are moderately entertaining, but I feel slightly unsatisfied. As if I were only just getting started yet had already reached the end. I feel like the issue is missing having at least one slightly more substantial story in the mix.

Holly says

This is art and fable, a collection of eight individual books that fit together like a puzzle with two layers, one of miners and one of a boy in a forest. In these eight individual books are fables, by definition a story that teaches a lesson; they are often short. These eight authors created tales that range in subject from an egg boy who eats himself and then stands by when his sister is blamed to a story of a boy who repeatedly meets an older version of himself who is able to tell him about the future, resulting in disappointment. Each is a work of art unto itself, w/ unique illustrations. These little gems are like fairy tales for adults.

Corey Vilhauer says

Excerpt from What I've Been Reading, August 2008

"McSweeney's tackles the subject with gusto, asking eight writers to come up with their own version of the fable, binding them in small, attractive mini-books and arranging them to create a beautiful and artful package of literary wonder. It's what McSweeney's does best – find a theme, create beautiful book design, accomplish what's becoming more and more impossible: a book worth keeping based on look alone, a book worth treasuring because of great content.

The best of these stories are simple, yet surprising. Arthur Bradford's "Virgil Walker" follows an orphan octopus on his travels through a pet store and beyond, and Sarah Manguso's "The Box" touches on a person's ability to harness power through a simple secret. My favorite was Brian Evenson's "The Book and the Girl," the love affair between, naturally, a book and a girl, with the book's need to be loved changing to fit the needs of a terror-stricken little girl.

I finished the entire set in 30 minutes."

Margaret says

Beautifully designed, but I found the fables to be underwhelming. I recommend checking out Kate Bernheimer's Horse, Flower, Bird for a more interesting take on the terse, simplistic style of fables, that still captures their abstract and often disturbing nature.

Elizabeth Metzger says

My review of *Created in Darkness* by Troubled Americans would probably suffice here, as well. Wow this is pretty. Wow this cleverly designed. Not to mention perfect design for this issue's theme, fables. But the stories, i don't know. Maybe I just don't like fables. There are a few good ones in here, don't get me wrong. But they are still just good. And the others... Isn't McSweeney's in a position to pick what they will? Don't they have better options? I mean, the *Believer* kicks ass. But the quarterly concern? Guys, you're letting me down. I can only be tricked by your flashy covers so many times.

And that brings up another question I've been thinking about: What value or position does a literary review hold when it's full of mediocre stories, but made with the smartest and most intelligent (and playful!) design around? Those values are not unimportant to me. Should I just start calling this a great book design review? Whatever I'm done. This has to stop occupying brain space. Right. Now.
