



Well

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Critically acclaimed *Well* marks the astonishing debut of an author with a singular and unflinching voice and vision. Set primarily among the working-class of a Seattle suburb called Federal Way, this highly original novel-told in the form of interlinked short stories- extols the lives of a large cast of characters lost in various modes of darkness and despair. Whether struggling to come together or desperately alone, they grapple with dark compulsions and heart-rending afflictions. As if trapped at the bottom of a well, they search for relief, for a vehicle into the light they know is up and outside.

They search in sex, in drugs and violence, and in visions of Apocalypse and Creation, dreams of angels and killers and local sports championships. Compact, finely wrought, powerfully charged, *Well* ultimately rises toward the light, in a finale which echoes with the exhilarating human capacity for hope. The result is a mesmerizing tour de force that will establish Matthew McIntosh as a bold and progressive new voice of American fiction.

Stories:

BURLESQUE

Snapshots of various troubled couples on the day that the Seattle SuperSonics lose their chance at advancing to the NBA finals. Len and Adda are fighting- Len is in love with Adda (she is "the girl he wanted") but she is torn, and is leaving the next day to spend a week with her fiancée to make sure that breaking up with him is the right thing. Len becomes jealously enraged when he finds out Adda and her fiancée will be sleeping in the same bed, begging her not to touch the man.

Nate and Sammie are also fighting: Sammie insists that a certain girl who is trying to convert Nate stop calling their house. Nate gets tired of Sammie's hysteria and beats her, only to become terrified at what he has done.

A first person narrator recalls his rather pathetic adventures with prostitutes in Thailand, where he made big money at an English language newspaper and lived like a king. He brought a woman over who now resents him for it, and they have a staid marriage while he continues to dream over prostitutes.

Raymond and his wife are at the SuperSonics game and get in a fight when Ray's wife sees he is ogling cheerleaders through his binoculars. He misses it when the team loses at the buzzer.

The SuperSonics janitor comes home to his wife, who is pregnant. He masturbates as he recalls the time he slipped out to watch a burlesque show at the strip joint across the street.

MODERN COLOR / MODERN LOVE

II. Shelly is a Korean 16-year-old boarding school student who likes having sex with strangers in bars and doing crystal meth. She falls asleep and crashes her car through a fence, causing her mother to cry and call her "A Real American Whore" when she picks her up in prison. She meets an older man who takes her in but

finally gets sick of giving her money to drink and sends her home. When her mother isn't home, she goes to the nearest bar.

III. A phone sex patron can't make up his mind what he wants his fantasy to be and the story concludes: "Do you realize what this is costing?"

IV. The story of Davin, a warehouse worker, and Sarah, who are in a band together. Davin is loving and committed to Sarah but Sarah doesn't see a future with him. She gets pregnant and they grow distant. One day Davin gets in a fight with a co-worker and is paralyzed on his left side after being hit in the skull. Sarah takes care of him in the hospital, but when he returns home he begins drinking. One night he picks the 2-year-old up while drunk and Sarah becomes hysterical when the child begins crying. He beats Sarah and is issued a restraining order. Sarah moves out and eventually begins dating a construction worker she does not really love.

CHICKEN

A group of guys gets into a game of chicken with a car containing a guy and a bunch of girls. When the guys cut the girls off suddenly, the driver of the latter car approaches the guys in an insane rage and finally hits the driver in the nose.

Santos and his young partner work at a hotel-they go to Denny's when they should be training an Ethiopian who messes up on his first day. The guys get fired for this and Santos, humiliated, tells the young partner about the time he made a buzzer shot in a college basketball game only to have the game-winning points taken away from him by the refs.

A kid drops some pills at the bus station and gets stuck on the Greyhound listening to a vet recount his experience in Guam, where he dug a whole to save himself from gunfire.

VITALITY

SPACEMAN: Charlie is a lonely gay bartender who has started to feel old and fat. Although he loves bartending and meeting people, etc., he loses his job because he has kept drinking on the job after repeated warnings. He laments that he has never been in love. On the night he loses his job he goes home to try to clean his filthy house but ends up vomiting into the toilet, longing for company.

DAMAGE: A young man enters a peep bbbbooth with his friends and is struck by his ugly reflection as he looks at the beautiful dancer. When his friends begin teasing the dancer by sticking their tongue out, the bouncers approach them and a brawl ensues. The young man "pounds the Living Holy Fuck" out of the bouncers.

ACHE:

A man begins experience atrocious cyclical spells of pain, incoherence, and anxiety after he dives into a swimming pool one day and hits his head on the bottom. His parents take him to all variety of specialists who prescribe drugs, etc. and eventually he becomes dependent on them, and a drunk. He moves to London to get away from it all and meets a girl who wants to marry him but eventually assaults her in a fit of hysteria. He moves back home and lives a quiet life. When the pain is gone, he discovers that he misses it.

THEY ALL WAIT FOR YOU:

A man finds out that he will die of cancer and spends his day at the Trolley bar, getting hammered and thinking about the pointlessness of it all.

ONE MORE

A man walks into a pharmacy with a fake prescription. The pharmacist dials 911 but before the police come he shoots himself.

GUNMAN

The gruesome last days of two gunmen-one who killed his family before racing through the city on a killing spree as he fled from the cops, the other a man who shot a city bus driver- are recreated in a frank, reportorial manner.

FISHBOY

The narrator, a somewhat pathetic naïf whose father wrecked the home by cheating on his catatonic mother, develops a crush on a girl who works at a fish restaurant. He goes on a date with her but is rejected when he attempts to grope her at her front door. Gradually he becomes obsessed with her, writing her love letters and visiting her even though she doesn't want to see him again. After he threatens to jump off her roof, her father tries to set him straight, eventually punching him in the face. He is offered admission at a fisheries school in Nebraska and goes there to get away from Seattle, but finds it isn't what he bargained for, and becomes bored. He lies by the highway and in a somewhat magical-realism passage two guys stop their car and begin taking his body apart until he has turned into a fish, gasping for air on the highwayside. It starts to rain and he finds himself "there, somewhere, in-between."

GRACE

A Jesus-loving woman develops a mysterious degenerative illness and is forced to spend the rest of her days in a home, putting up a front of hope but knowing that she is on her way out.

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR OWN

The narrator remembers his first love, a girl without a mother and an abusive father. It is an innocent relationship-the narrator is plagued by sexual hang-ups and the girl cries after intercourse. When the narrator accidentally gets her pregnant, the girl's father storm into his house and almost chokes him to death. Thinking about his mentally retarded brother that his parents institutionalized and about the beatings his girlfriend has taken from her father, the narrator breaks up with the girl because he feels guilty that he can't take care of his own.

Well Details

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Author : Matthew McIntosh

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Sam Gittins says

Quick Review

The writing is mostly solid and the dedication to creating a host of believable, struggling working-class characters is commendable. However, the attempts at formal experimentation largely feel like tired postmodern cliches (with some exceptions), and the novel's end-of-history fatalism feels outdated in the political climate of 2018. Naturally some of the individual vignettes are more memorable than others. 3/5

Erica "ET" Barton says

This book is by E.T. Barton of the BookReviewersClub. E.T. says this book is aboutA young Adult Novel. The author wrote this book back in the 70's. She likes the writers voice. A story about a boy named ender. He lives in a world that is being attacked by aliens. Earth is in pretty panic and they created this program where they implant a monitor in the back of children's head. They monitor their thoughts, the monitor their lives and the ones they find qualified for their program they then take the child to a battle school in space. Ender is specifically made and he is governmentally approved because the earth needs a hero. They had a hero 7 years earlier and now looking for a new one. they kind of put all their hopes in Ender. He's a third child, he's a genius. He went to battle school in space and ends up being the best they have ever seen. They are taught how to fight and how to win. What she liked about the book was she felt like it was written today. The description of the book seems better than of star wars and she believed this book was written before star wars! The description he puts on the book is so powerful. Its a modern day story and its fast paced which she really likes. What she didn't like about the book was she was basically confuse at the beginning what the buggers are. All in all, she gave the book 5 stars because she highly recommends it and definitely gonna read it sometime and she's definitely seeing the movie.

Getout Ofmybookcorner says

I couldn't work out whether to give this book a 3 or a 4. But then I thought, if this book was in my shoes it would give itself a self deprecating 3 - so a 3 it is.

Whilst it was almost captivating that a book could feel so hopeless and bleak, I kept feeling as if round the next corner, there would be some sort of redemption or glimpse of contentment...

This book will leave you clawing at the walls of your own well, and I hope you make it out, because you're on your own.

Sarah says

This is not a book about like-able characters, and McIntosh forces the reader into their minds. Much of the

book is written in a particular style of first-person that is unusual, but sometimes creepy - the characters are either talking directly to you, the reader, or you are part of their thoughts. These characters deal with fear, pain, and addiction - not always in the best ways or ways they can even express. The connections between stories, when I found them, were thrilling, but I'm not sure if I was meant to find more. McIntosh does "stark" well but I don't think I found the hope in the middle of it all that the book jacket promised.

Kate says

Often I feel forced to keep up this guise of being happy all the time. I'm generally a happy person, but when I'm not, I don't feel empowered to share that. In books, on television, in the movies - people experience bad luck and bad times but in the end they almost always conquer all. But real life isn't books, TV or the movies. We don't always get the Hollywood ending.

In *Well*, Matthew McIntosh writes about human experiences that aren't glamorous and they aren't always happy. Instead, McIntosh grabs onto the little sparks in people's lives that help them keep going on.

It's fascinating to me when an author can write a book with characters in it that I wholly relate to, regardless of whether they are like me. When I was younger it happened frequently, but when I was younger all I needed was a character that liked to read, collected mundane things or worried about school and friends. *Well* struck a nerve in me that has been left untouched since childhood. McIntosh writes of the mundane happenings in life, the ugly little things that most people never mention but which we all know happen, and because of that, he has created a wonderful collection of stories.

McIntosh certainly isn't the first author to write about everyday life. While what he does isn't new, it does cover new territory. *Well* reads like a book of short stories. There are small segments dedicated to different people's lives, woven together with fine threads that are only visible on close inspection. The people's lives are in many respects hopeless, but they persevere. McIntosh never offers a succinct reason for why they continue trying, but he does suggest one image - that of a well.

What McIntosh seems to suggest is that everyone has a hole that they are trying to fill. If everyone has that same hole, regardless of whether it is spoken of, we share something in common. In that is the empowerment to share the negative aspects of life, the solace in knowing that others are experiencing what you are - what I am.

Well is an easy-to-read book. Each vignette lasts only a few pages and then you are on to the next person, the next life. Despite this brevity, characters are very real and their experiences stick with you. While no one scene may remain with you, the idea that people all share the common experience of bad times and the desire to find better ones will marinate in your head long after you put the book down.

Alan says

I've put 'novel' and 'short stories' down as they are really connected stories (in the manner of Winesburg, Ohio)...

review later

was a bit annoyed by it really, all the capitals, columns, silly titles (to my mind, here's one of the 'chapter'

titles - THOUGH OCCASIONALLY GLARING OR VIOLENT , MODERN COLOR IS ON THE WHOLE EMINENTLY SOMBER. Is it though, as Catherine Tate's Lauren* would say?). And it purports to be a novel when in fact it is a collection of stories, albeit sometimes linked. And it doesn't vary enough in tone. However, I did really enjoy it all, once past those obstacles. In fact I read 'Fishboy' on a plane to Amsterdam and wanted the flight to go on longer so I could finish the story -in fact I just managed as it bumped down. (Strangely the same thing happened on the way back with a story in '10 Stories About Smoking'). Fucking great story. About a mad adolescent boy who obsesses about a girl and does all sorts of weird things. OK , nothing new, but the story bumped along like the plane and then soared, passages such as the following:

The door exploded. A white light filled the room, then a yellow light, then a red light, and a sonic boom, folowed by a series of high pitched screeching sounds. From the opening in the doorway, a long red flame burst in and split the room in half. A tall man walked in. Dressed in a black bodysuit and a gold fireman's mask. He held a shiny gold flamethrower. He walked round my apartment and, slowly, methodically, began to light everything on fire. He opened the refrigerator and stepped back. He pulled the trigger and with a roar the inside went up in flames. He walked into the bathroom, there was a whooshing sound, I saw a glow. Then he came back in, walked across the carpet, and stood in front of me. He spoke words, deep and thunderous but uintelligible behind the fireman's mask. Then he turned back to the rest of the apartment and fired again. The drapes went up and the walls and then the floor, and the fire raged to the ceiling.... I watched, petrified, as the man in black walked over to my fishtank and sprayed it with flame - the water boiled and my fish burst their seams. the water turned red.

The fish are a good touch, especially in context. The stories are all pretty good, most - all - downbeat, drugs, (I like downbeat, drugs) tight, and also funny as when a bloke rings a sex line but keeps changing his mind about what he wants -

He wanted to know if she liked to be with men and women at the same time. She loved it. She'd been with lots of women - she loved women and men - and she'd been waiting for - No, he didn't like that. OK, she'd #never# been with a woman but she'd always wanted to try. In fact, there was another woman with her right now... a young coed with long blonde hair, and they were both in their panties - ... She was with a young #brunette# coed and she was an #older# woman - a friend of his mother's from when he was a teenager - Rebecca White was her name.. her husband was obese and she didn't love her husband and what she'd always wanted was #him#. No, what she #really# wanted was to be with a young coed and a teenage boy...

And so on.

So thanks whichever goodreader recommended.

*Catherine Tate had a (British) TV comedy show which featured a schoolgirl who had phrases like 'Am I bovvered?'and 'Is it though?'..

Kilean says

Dark, memorable -- busted places and people. Young writer with a bunker full of talent. The stories are subtly connected, at least by place, and a lot of them don't follow any kind of standard structure, which is refreshing, as is his voice. Hard to triangulate but I can't forget these characters. Reminds me of Hubert

Selby Jr.'s style.

Lauren Blake says

I'm not really sure what happened in this book but that didn't stop me from completing the thing in a matter of days. Weirdly wonderful.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Get "Well" Soon

Initially, this book evoked Denis Johnson's "Jesus' Son" and Raymond Carver's short stories, but it soon became apparent that McIntosh's characters came from a similar milieu to those in William T. Vollmann's "The Rainbow Stories" and "The Royal Family" (only Seattle's Federal Way versus San Francisco's Tenderloin).

The major difference between McIntosh and Vollmann is that the former is more interested in the people, whereas the latter self-consciously prioritises their transgressiveness (because it is actually his own - his fiction is, unsurprisingly, made in his own image).

The characters in "Well" cross the border, and step over boundaries, but they do so as a result of personal, social and economic pressures. They're hurt, pained, embarrassed, sorrowful, damaged, depressed, distraught, devastated. They want to be well, they don't want to be unwell. Yet they find themselves at the bottom of a metaphorical well. In contrast, Vollmann promotes the unwell as some sort of 21st century hero. McIntosh recognises that the only act of heroism is to survive each day and to hope for (and try to achieve) a better alternative. There is no heroism in his characters' lifestyle or their transgression. Vollmann's moral calculus is skew-whiff. It's made for reading about in a moral vacuum, not for living.

McIntosh's fiction is superior to that of Vollmann, because it doesn't come with a spurious conceited anarcho-libertarian vision attached to it. It features real people rather than romanticised cartoon characters.

SOUNDTRACK:

(view spoiler)

Simon Fay says

There's a Hubert Selby Jr. quote on the cover:

'A book that still resonates in my heart.'

I can see why they sent him a copy. A large portion of the early stories in the book read like somebody affectionately imitating *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. They're not bad, just a bit bland in comparison. Even the time period, written some two or three decades after Selby's book, is oddly undeveloped. The down and outs, strippers and alcoholics that populate the stories would be just at home in 1970's New York as they are in whatever city they occupy here.

There are highlights worth reading though. In particular, there are a couple of angsty teen stories that offer up some compelling portraits of family woes and mental illness. I wouldn't recommend you rush out to buy a copy, but if you ran into me on the street, I'd happily lend you my copy and point out what stories to skip to.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Matthew McIntosh's fantastic(ly brutal) *themystery.doc* was recently published. This is his first novel (2003). What he does in this one is pretty much what he does in the second one. But he does it *better* today. So much better. So so so much better. I mean, *Well* starts out almost in cliche land re: the sadness and brutal life of the depraved and society's most bottom dreck. Both books get blurbed by Selby Jr ; but it's the first that fits in his world ; the second is pretty much beyond him. Nice of him to greet it so well though ; "A book that still resonates in my heart". (ah hell, that was a blurb for *Well* not *themystery.doc* (one must always read small print and contextual clues)). Just know, should you choose to pick up *Well* one day ; that it gets better in its bathos later in the book rising above the sex and drugs and abuse simplicity. But really as that kind of exercise you really should read *Well* after *themystery.doc* because you don't often get that kind of quick perspective of what it means to grow up as an artist.

I got a signed 1st/1st so when he eventually wins the Nobel I'll have something to retire on. Maybe about six bucks.

Lisa says

Le livre du malaise.

J'ai passé la première moitié du livre à me dire que quelque chose de bien doit arriver dans la vie d'au moins un des personnages. Eh bien non, que dalle, ça continue aussi mal que ça a commencé. Pour la deuxième moitié, j'étais lancée, mais chaque session de lecture m'a laissé un drôle de goût dans la bouche.

Karen Germain says

This past weekend I was in Silverlake and I stopped into Skylight Books, a very cool new bookstore discovery! I found "Well" on the staff recommendation table. Apparently, it had been one of the stores top ten best selling novels for the past several years. I had never heard of it, but it looked promising, so I bought it.

I finished it in one day. It's one of those books that I kept wanting to read just one more chapter and couldn't put it down. The book is hard to describe. It's a sort of a series of vignettes, parts seem poetic or even theatrical. Some parts of the book read like traditional short stories, but much of the book is not told in a linear fashion. The narration is all over the place. I don't know how to explain it, other than I found it to be a very compelling book. McIntosh's writing is both gritty and beautiful. I look forward to reading more from this author.

Scott says

Fantastic, very reminiscent of Bret Easton Ellis without the explicitness. The novel has no main characters, rather vignettes about people dealing with some kind of loss or despair. Some experience it to a greater degree than others, and how they cope is what makes this book work. It's not a downer despite some of the depressing subject matter, but exhilarating in its scope and potent in its power. Highly recommended.

Sara Comuzzo says

VA TUTTO BENE è una raccolta di racconti. dei quadri di vite di disadattati. situazioni e fotografie di rapporti d'amore malati, di violenza, di sentimenti ambivalenti ma sicuramente universali. l'autore riesce ad attaccare storie senza un senso ben preciso. a tratti certe sembrano pagine di diari, confessioni, sfoghi. a tratti risulta un po' difficile coglierne le diverse prospettive ma è un libro innovativo. lo stile è preciso, serrato e molto emotivo. si capisce tante cose da queste pagine, il ritratto di una società ritardata nell'atto stesso in cui cerca di progredire. di certo, non lascia indifferenti.
