
and south. We are, however, subsequently regaled with thirty-six wonderful colored and b/w illustrations of such automata as they were depicted in medieval manuscripts.

The last chapter is dedicated to the rise of massive clockworks since the late Middle Ages, which measured not only earthly, but also the lunar and solar time. Truitt refers to an early design in the Spanish *Libros del Saber de Astronomía* from ca. 1276, compiled upon the request of King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon, to a discussion of such a clockwork in the work of Jean Froissart (ca. 1337-1405), and especially to the clockwork in the cathedral of Strasbourg, but again she shies away from other major examples in Germany or Bohemia (Prague), for example.

The book comes abruptly to an end; there is no conclusion or epilogue. But there is the extensive apparatus, the bibliography, and a most welcome index. Oddly, acknowledgments round off this book, though they should have been in the front. Altogether, Truitt achieves several important goals: she brings to light the true extent of robots and other mechanical devices as they were created already in the early Middle Ages and particularly in the late Middle Ages. She indicates that automata were in place much earlier in the Islamic world, and she observes how much European engineers apparently learned from those models. And she nicely combines historical with literary-historical evidence. However, the focus often rests too much on England and France to the disadvantage of the other parts of medieval Europe. Considering that Nuremberg was a major center of craftsmanship and machinery already in the pre-modern era, the author has missed a great opportunity in that regard. Nevertheless, on the basis of this excellent study we can expect more investigations of medieval robots to come forth, since they were not the products of the modern world alone.

Maria Venegas. *Bulletproof Vest: The Ballad of an Outlaw and His Daughter*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. 305p.

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I stared down the barrel of the gun without flinching. I knew he wouldn't pull the trigger. Not that night, or any of the other nights that he had tested my nerves. I knew that no matter how much he had had to drink, he must remember that I was his daughter. I shot him a smile and he exploded with pride.

In her gripping first novel, Maria Venegas spares nothing as she recounts what life was like as the daughter of an outlaw. With the skill of a practiced author, she orchestrates the details of her father's life with her own and pays homage to the critical role of parents—even outlaws—in composing the ballad of our lives.

Bulletproof Vest opens with Jose Venegas speeding down a dusty trail in Mexico when a sudden shower of bullets shoot through his truck and send him off the road. Assuming the job was finished, his attackers leave him for dead. Somehow Jose manages to crawl to help, escaping death once again. Thousands of miles away in New York City, his daughter, Maria, hears the news and pauses only briefly to ask if he is dead before returning to her lunch.

In Mexico, *a corrido* (or ballad) is sung to glorify legendary heroes, outlaws, and bandits. Like

the notes that make up a ballad, life is also made up of notes—or experiences—that shape who we are and who we become. The experiences that compose Jose’s life seem to come straight from a Hollywood movie: gunfights, kidnappings, romances, murders, and revenge. He is the quintessential outlaw—thick mustache, cowboy boots, and a .45 pistol in his leather holster.

For his children, however, life is not so glamorous. Venegas relates being left in her grandmother’s care for two years while her parents worked to bring her across the border; the nights her father would drink too much and keep the family awake shooting his pistol in the air; and how her father deserted the family when she was still a girl. Being raised in such an environment fashions in each sibling a sense of self-assertiveness. Strong-willed and determined, Maria learns to stand up for herself and never back down from a fight, skills that serve her well.

Desperately trying to escape her father and her past, Maria goes to college, travels, and lands a successful career in New York. At first she feels a part of the city, a place with nameless faces and untraceable origins, but eventually she does not belong. Torn between her race and her new identity, she realizes the only hope for her future is to reconcile her past. She travels to Mexico and as she spends time with her father, she realizes that he is as much a product of his environment as she is of hers. In a country where the law is kill or be killed, Jose has learned how to survive, yet he is forever haunted by his choices. Maria sees him for what he is—not an outlaw, but a man with common concerns and fears.

Fate is an active character in the novel. Today the word has almost a romantic appeal, conjuring images of winding roads and serendipitous meetings, but anciently the notion was terrifying. It meant being thrown around by the winds of chance, governed by a completely uncontrollable force propelling life forward at an unstoppable rate. Like Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* or Fitzgerald’s Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, Jose is as much a victim of fate as he is a perpetrator of destiny. He often alludes to the idea that our actions are not our own. He feels watched over—either by Diosito, or Little God as he calls him, or the Other One—and seems forever a plaything of circumstance.

The novel is entitled *Bulletproof Vest* because Maria’s father wears a bulletproof vest for protection. The vest comes to act as a powerful symbol of Jose: an impenetrable metal shield. For her own defense, Maria forms a bulletproof heart, a guard to protect from all the hurts of her past. As Maria comes to know her father, her heart softens, and she understands that her past does not need to dictate her future. She can be the composer of her own ballad.

Venegas writes with an honesty that is refreshing and relatable. Although we may not know what it is like to have an outlaw as a father, we do know what it is like to feel abandoned, lonely, and disappointed. Filled with twists and turns, her writing style reads like a film and leaves the reader wanting more. She puts before us her soul, offering it as a testament that there is hope to overcome even the most difficult of circumstances. In this book she has taken off her bulletproof vest, and has triumphed. We can as well.