



Borges e os Orangotangos Eternos (Literatura Ou Morte)

Luis Fernando Verissimo

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Jorge Luis Borges is the hero of this literary whodunit by one of Brazil's most celebrated writers.

Vogelstein is a loner who has always lived among books. Suddenly, fate grabs hold of his insignificant life and carries him off to Buenos Aires, to a conference on Edgar Allan Poe, the inventor of the modern detective story. There Vogelstein meets his idol, Jorge Luis Borges, and for reasons that a mere passion for literature cannot explain, he finds himself at the center of a murder investigation that involves arcane demons, the mysteries of the Kaballah, the possible destruction of the world, and the Elizabethan magus John Dee's theory of the "Eternal Orangutan," which, given all the time in the world, would end up writing all the known books in the cosmos. Verissimo's small masterpiece is at once a literary tour de force and a brilliant mystery novel.

Borges e os Orangotangos Eternos (Literatura Ou Morte) Details

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Author : Luis Fernando Verissimo

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From Reader Review Borges e os Orangotangos Eternos (Literatura Ou Morte) for online ebook

Jigar Brahmbhatt says

Brilliant in its conception, this is a kind of book I can devour in a single sitting. It is set during the annual meet of the Israfel Society (an organization devoted to the study of Edgar Allan Poe). Among the attendees is the great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. But soon, it is clear that the meeting of Poe affectionados can never be devoid of a murder. Borges, as expected, assumes the role of a detective. Filled with philosophical speculations, this novel is a caricature of the classic murder mystery, but in the end it emerges as a clever mystery in itself. The sole pleasure of the book is in its nudge-nudge-wink-wink narration, which often jumps into meta-fiction, and in the vague hint that the narrator, who reveres Borges, is aware that they are in a story. And it's beautifully handled by Verissimo!

The best pieces in the novel are the conversations between the narrator and Borges as they throw literary references at one another while solving the mystery, most of which are obscure and esoteric. They may not amount to anything, but as Borges wrote in the opening sentence of *The Book Of Imaginary Beings*: "there is great pleasure in out-of-date erudition". Can you think of an orangutan who will end up writing a Shakespearean tale if made to sit in front of a typewriter for eternity? Exactly my point!

Nickolas the Kid says

Καταπληκτικ? αστυνομικ? δι?γημα το οπο?ο περιστρ?φεται γ?ρω απ? τους αγαπημ?νους Μπ?ρχες, Π?ε αλλ? και τον Λ?βικραφτ.

?σοι ε?ναι εξοικειωμ?νοι με τους παραπ?νω συγγραφε?ς θα απολα?σουν το παν?ξυπνο αυτ? δι?γημα λ?γο παραπ?νω...

Ο καθηγητ?ς Φ?γκελστ?ιν καλε?ται να λ?σει το μυστ?ριο μιας δολοφον?ας με την βο?θεια του Μπ?ρχες... Η ιστορ?α ε?ναι κλασικ? δε?γμα μυστηρ?ου "κλειστο? δωματ?ου" με ?ξυπνη πλοκ? και αναπ?ντεχο τ?λος... 3 μαχα?ρια, ?νας καθρ?φης και ?νας Βαλ?ς χωρ?ς μ?τια ε?ναι τα στοιχε?α που θα δ?σουν την λ?ση αλλ? και θα ταξιδ?ψουν τον αναγν?στη στα δαιδαλ?δη μονοπ?τια και τις μυθοπλασ?ες του Μπ?ρχες!!!

Απολαυστικ? καλοκαιριν? αν?γνωσμα και 5/5 αστερ?κια...

Ludmilla says

"Böylelikle tüm ihtimaller gerçe?e dönü?ebilmek için Borges'i bekler." Zekice yaz?lm?? ve çok e?lenceli. Borges'i ya da Poe'yu seviyorsan?z zaten okuyun ama k?sac?k iyi kurmacan?n nas?l oldu?unu görmek istiyorsan?z muhakkak okuyun. :)

Rise says

It's a very funny, entertaining, and refreshing whodunit, with more than passing references to Borges (a major character here), Poe, and Lovecraft. Vogelstein is a 50-year old translator and English teacher who adored Borges with the same fanatical zeal as the narrator of the Borges story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." His first "encounter" with the master was not agreeable: Vogelstein translated one of Borges's stories for a Portuguese magazine but he changed some aspects of the story to fit his own preference for how the story should proceed. Of course, Borges, upon learning of the travesty, was furious. They eventually exchanged letters, which was the start of Vogelstein's literary hero worship.

Their second encounter was face to face, in a conference about Edgar Allan Poe held in Buenos Aires. But even before the conference was to start, a murder of one of the speakers took place. The murder victim was found, in true Borgesian fashion, in front of a mirror – his body's position was such that it formed a letter from the alphabet, a clue that could point to the solution of the crime. Borges and Vogelstein were enlisted to help uncover the identity of the killer. The ensuing investigation was a riot of literary speculations, invoking the mystery stories of Poe, the Kabbalah, *Necronomicon* book of the dead, et cetera. This novel was criminally funny. I'm sure there were some in-jokes (Borgian, Poe-ic, Lovecrafty) that went past me, but it was altogether a solid detective work, if a bit too neat the way it all tied up, in a postmodern postmortem, in the end. Verissimo was nonetheless guilty of leading the reader into a maze of intertextual pleasures. There's a chance that a fan of Borges or Poe or Lovecraft will revel in the games and gimmickry of the Brazilian writer Luis Fernando Verissimo.

The short novel was translated by Margaret Jull Costa who was probably in top form the way she came up with words to describe the murder weapon:

You mentioned that Palermo, the part of Buenos Aires where you were brought up, had been a violent place full of bohemians and bandits. There they had two names for the knife, "the blade" and "the slicer". The two names described the same object, but "the blade" was the thing itself, and "the slicer" its function. "The blade" could fit in the hand even of a sickly child shut up in his father's library, "the blade" could be any of the superannuated daggers and swords belonging to his warrior grandfather or great-grandfather and displayed on the walls of his house, but "the slicer", the knife in the hand slicing back and forth, in and out, existed only in his imagination, in a fascinating world of rapid settling of accounts and duels over honour, an insult or a woman, in dark streets where you never went, where no writer went, except in the literature he wrote.

Whether it's "the knife" (instrument) or "the blade" (form) or "the slicer" (function), the essence of light and dark comedy here cuts through like any sharp object.

First posted in my blog.

Tyler Jones says

An absolutely fatastic, multi-faceted gem of a story.

When Vogelstein, an obscure translator and would be writer, decides to attend a Poe society convention in Buenos Aires it marks a departure from his reclusive world of words. On his first night he meets his literary idol, Jorge Luis Borges, and is enmeshed in a murder as gruesome and puzzling as any found in the works of Poe. Soon he finds he finds himself a guest in the library of Borges as the two of them, along with the criminologist Cuervo, try to decode the clues and solve the mystery.

A pitch-perfect (mirror-image, if you like) story of the type that Borges himself was famous for- full of symbolism, doppelgangers, iconography and powerful secret societies. Above all it is about the ultimate power of words; a power that can create and possibly destroy the universe.

A charming hommage to Borges that could stand alongside the works of the master himself.

Panagiotis says

Ε?ναι απ? αυτ? τα βιβλ?α που αν δεν γνωρ?ζεις τα υπ?λοιπα βιβλ?α στα οπ?α αναφ?ρεται, μ?λλον θα θεωρ?σεις πως δι?βασες μια μπαρο?φα. Ωστ?σο, ?σο περισσ?τερες λογοτεχνικ?ς π?σες πι?νει κανε?ς, τ?σο το κ?φι ανεβα?νει. Γρ?φοι, αναφορ?ς σε λογοτεχνικ? και μη προβλ?ματα και μυστ?ρια, σ?μβολα - ?λα επιστρατε?ονται για να δοθε? λ?ση σε ?να μυστ?ριο του ε?δους κλειστο? δωματ?ου, ?πως λ?νε.

Καλ? αν? γνωσμα. Καλοκαιριν? και διασκεδαστικ?, με ποι? τητα ψυχαγωγικ? και λογοτεχνικ?.

Zuberino says

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Stacia says

A complete & utter delight of a book. A Borges style mystery with some Poe, Lovecraft, infinite monkeys, & surrealism thrown in. Verissimo (meaning 'true' in Portuguese) leads you through a labyrinth of mirrors, philosophy, surrealist reasoning, ancient history, & good old-fashioned noir while spinning this marvelous mystery as you search for the truth of the matter. Excellent.

Yiannis says

Μπ?ρχες, Λ?βικραφτ και Π?ε παρελα?νουν. Λογοτεχνικ? απ?λαυση.

Nathanimal says

One of the most purely entertaining books I've ever read. Honestly, when I finished, I held it to my chest with a purr.

I was a bit nervous at the start. I mean, was this just going to be some guy capitalizing on the fact that Borges never wrote a novel? Saying to all the Borgesians who are a bit glum over the fact: "Hey everybody over here! I got your Borges novel! Your Borges stamped key chains! Borges coffee cozies! Going fast!"

Well the book was an homage, definitely, almost a piece of fan fiction, but an extremely respectful and astute one. The guy obviously knows Borges down to his fluids and neurons. At the end he crafts this letter written from Borges to the narrator, and the rhythms and diction are so spot on I had to go look at the publishing date to make SURE Borges hadn't participated somehow. No, he was dead by the time this book was written, and admits as much in the letter. The book was full of little touches and nods like that. This book distills and collects so much of what I love about Borges.

Okay, how's this for super clever? Borges stars as the sleuth in a very Borgesian detective story (it relies heavily on a mirror), set appropriately enough in Buenos Aires at a literary conference on Edgar Allan Poe, who a) invented the detective story and b) was a primary if not THE primary influence on Borges and c) was also the primary influence of H.P. Lovecraft, another Borges favorite. The puzzles in this book quickly move from forensics to philology, as you'd expect.

While Poe and Lovecraft definitely have their qualities, I'll admit they can be a little too pulpy for me. I think I like them best as busts in the library of Jorge Luis Borges. Herein lies one of the main pleasures of this book for me: examining those two writers through Borgesian eyes (excuse the irony there), through his love of semiotics, of misdirection, and of obscure and fantastic scholarship. The letter, mentioned above, was only one of the many ways that Verissimo exploited the meta-fictional "Is this this real or not?" possibilities of the story. The last word of the book is "verisimilitude" a word which I think, in its connotations toward both truth and the simulation of truth, captures the spirit of this book; and it makes me wonder if the universe is really so kind to have honestly named this author Verissimo.

George K. says

?να μικρ?, συμπαθητικ? και ευχ?ριστο μυθιστ?ρημα που διαβ?ζεται μονοκοπανι? σε δυο-τρεις ?ρες το πολ?. Η ?λη ιστορ?α διαδραματ?ζεται κατ? την δι?ρκεια του ετ?σιου συνεδρ?ου της Israfel Society, στο οπ?ο μαζ?ε?ονται δι?φοροι ειδικο? για τον συγγραφ?α? ?ντγκαρ ?λων Π?ε και αναλ?ουν και συζητ?ν το μεγ?λο του ?ργο. Αυτ? τη φορ?, προς ?κπληξη ?λων, το συν?δριο θα διοργανωθε? στο Μπου?νος ?ιρες, και ?τσι, ο αφηγητ?ς της ιστορ?ας, ο μοναχικ?ς μεσ?λικας Φολγκεστ?ιν, θα ταξιδ?ψει απ? το Π?ρτο Αλ?γκρε για να συμμετ?σχει στο συν?δριο. Εκε? θα ?χει την ευκαιρ?α να

συναντηθε? απ? κοντ? με τον μεγ?λο και τραν? Χ?ρχε Λου?ς Μπ?ρχες, με τον οπο?ο ?χει ?να παρελθ?ν λ?γω κ?ποιας ανταλλαγ?ς γραμμ?των. ?μως ?νας φ?νος, αντ?ς του αντιπαθητικο? Γερμανο? Ρ?τκοπφ, θα αλλ?ξει τα πλ?να των διοργανωτ?v. Ο Φολγκεστ?ιν θα ε?ναι ο πρ?τος που θα βρεθε? στον τ?πο του εγκλ?ματος, στον οπο?ο θα ανακαλ?ψει κ?ποια κρυφ? μην?ματα που πιθαν?ν ?φησε ο κρυπτογρ?φος Ρ?τκοπφ πριν πεθ?νει. Μαζ? με τον Μπ?ρχες, θα προσπαθ?σουν να αποκαδικοποι?σουν τα δι?φορα μην?ματα και να βρουν ποιος ?κανε τον φ?νο. Θα γ?νουν μπ?λικες αναφορ?ς στο ?ργο του Π?ε, αλλ? και του Λ?βκραφτ, θα ασχοληθο?ν με τον μυστηρι?δη μαθηματικ?/αστρον?μο/αστρολ?γο/γεωγρ?φο/αλχημιστ?/αποκρυφιστ? Τζον Ντι και τους "αι?νιους ουραγκο?γκους" του, την Καμπ?λα και δι?φορες ?λλες θεωρ?ες.

Πρ?κειται για μια κλασικ? "μπορχεσιαν?" ιστορ?α με κρυφο?ς κ?δικες. Το τ?λος θα ε?ναι σ?γουρα ανατρεπτικ?. Δεν του β?ζω μεγαλ?τερο βαθμ? γιατ? δεν ευχαριστ?θηκα ιδια?τερα ?λες τις αναφορ?ς σε Π?ε, Λ?βκραφτ και Μπ?ρχες, γιατ? πολ? απλ? δεν ?χω διαβ?σει και πολλ? πρ?γματα απ? το τερ?στιο ?ργο τους. Σ?γουρα η γραφ? ε?ναι π?ρα πολ? καλ? και το στιλ αφ?γησης πρωτ?τυπο. Μπορε?τε να βρε?τε το βιβλ?ο με ?να τ?λιρο και κ?τι ψιλ? στην Πολιτε?α.

Kansour says

"Γρ?φε και θα θυμηθε?ς. Ο γραπτ?ς λ?γος. Τα π?ντα για να υπ?ρξουν πρ?πει να γ?νουν λ?γος. Ε?τε απλ?ς ε?τε σ?νθετος".

Julia says

At 131 pages, this little gem came up as a recommendation in one of my goodreads groups, and I read it in an hour. *Borges and the Eternal Orangutans* is written by Luis Fernando Verissimo and translated by Margaret Jull Costa, who has won several awards for her elegant translations.

The Amazon blurb says: "Vogelstein is a loner who has always lived among books. Suddenly, fate grabs hold of his insignificant life and carries him off to Buenos Aires, to a conference on Edgar Allan Poe, the inventor of the modern detective story. There Vogelstein meets his idol, Jorge Luis Borges, and for reasons that a mere passion for literature cannot explain, he finds himself at the center of a murder investigation that involves arcane demons, the mysteries of the Kaballah, the possible destruction of the world, and the Elizabethan magus John Dee's theory of the "Eternal Orangutan," which, given all the time in the world, would end up writing all the known books in the cosmos. Verissimo's small masterpiece is at once a literary tour de force and a brilliant mystery novel."

I've always loved Borges' magical realism, especially in *The Garden of Forking Paths* and *The Library of Babel*. Verissimo fills this tiny book with many allusions to Borges, as well as to Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, so those who are familiar with these three writers will get the "in-jokes" sprinkled through this charming novella.

The reference to John Dee led me to seek some more information about him.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dee His life demonstrates that, even in the time of Elizabeth I, the worlds of science and magic overlapped. Verissimo captures that hunger for magic and mystery which motivated all

three authors--Borges, Poe, and Lovecraft.

Rebecca Foster says

Surely one of the best titles for a novel *ever*. It's an enjoyable academic comedy and locked room mystery, with nods to Borges and Poe (though I probably didn't get them all).

Meg says

Borges and the Eternal Orangutans was a delight. Short and sweet, it was the palate cleanser I so desperately needed just now.

This novella is a literary whodunit that's also a homage to Poe, Lovecraft, and above all, Borges. The narrator Vogelstein was quite funny and I definitely had a dumb grin on my face on the train while I was reading this. There are so many literary allusions and hints (some of which I certainty didn't catch) lovingly stitched into the pages, and passages that will delight those who love puzzles, language, words, and of course, Borges. It was just really refreshing to read a book about books and literature that doesn't take itself too seriously but is a good mix of comedy and intellectual detective-ing.

Some quotes I liked:

"When we invent, it is only to remember the truth more exactly."

"To live is to leave ruins."

"Victor Hugo said that the X signified crossed swords, a battle with an uncertain result, which is why it symbolised destiny for philosophers and the unknown for mathematicians."

"Me: O. The mother of all vowels. Symbol of God. That which has neither beginning nor end."

You: "A snake eternally biting its own tail. Symbol of Eternity."

Me: "Its origin is the Semitic word ayin, which in Phoenician means 'eye'."

You: I disagree. It must be a pictogram of the Sun. The symbol of the pharaoh Akhenaten, who was the first to conceive of god as 'author' of the Universe, and consequently of the author as god. Our patron saint, Vogelstein."*

“...[N]ew England, a land of witchcraft and gloomy valleys, the only American equivalent to the dark forests of Europe.”

“We have a gift for placing one word after another coherently and creatively, but we could unwittingly be serving a coherence entirely unknown to us and thus inventing terrifying truths. We write in order to remember, but those memories might belong to other people. We could be creating universes, like Akhenaten's god, merely to amuse ourselves. We might unwittingly be placing monsters in the world. And without even leaving our chairs.”

“If nature teaches us anything, gentlemen, it is to distrust too much symmetry.”

Lamski Kikita says

After reading the Club of Angels, I thought an author could not possibly do better, but on my, this was such a riveting read. The narration (as a letter) is very engaging, the plot is mysterious and just has you on the edge of your seat, the characters interesting, the events mesmerizing, and the interpretations and conversations simply magical.

If you think one cannot combine Borges, Poe, and Lovecraft in 130 pages, you are sorely mistaken. This book is enticing and has me running to the bookshelf gasping for some Borges. I will also be reading Poe and Lovecraft this year, all because of this wonderful book.

Who ever thought writers were boring?

Marne Wilson says

A pleasant little mystery story that involves Jorge Luis Borges, Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, John Dee, and many other figures of occult literature. This is the second book I've read by Verissimo, and I admire his sense of the absurd and the delight he takes in poking fun at pretentious intellectuals, as well as the conciseness with which he writes. Some writers would have turned this plot into a 500-page slog, but he brings it in at under 150 pages and doesn't allow it to wear out its welcome.

Ευθυμ?α Δεσποτ?κη says

?να παρ?ξενο βιβλιαρ?κι, γραμμ?νο στο δε?τερο πρ?σωπο (πιθαν?v το πρ?το βιβλ?ο γραμμ?νο στο δε?τερο πρ?σωπο που διαβ?ζω). Ε?ναι σ?γουρα αστυνομικ?, αλλ? ανακατε?ει τον Π?ε, το Μπ?ρχες,

το Λ?βκραφτ και μια ολ?κληρη σημειολογ?α σχετικ? με τους τρεις αυτο?ς στα ?ρια της ερωτικ?ς μονομαν?ας. Η ιδ?α ε?ναι ?ξυπνη και στ?κεται μ?σα στον κυκε?να των υποθ?σεων που κ?νουν οι λογοτεχνικο? ντετ?κτιβ. Η γραφ? ε?ναι σπιρτ?ζικη, γεμ?τη με πνε?μα, και αυτ? που περιγρ?φονται μπορε? να μην ε?ναι κραυγαλ?α ανατριχιαστικ?, αλλ? σε κ?νουν να σαλε?εις στην καρ?κλα σου. Το τ?λος ε?ναι ταυτ?χρονα αιωρο?μενο και καταληκτικ?, με την ?ννοια ?τι ξ?ρεις ?τι η υπ?θεση λ?θηκε, αλλ? δεν ξ?ρεις αν ε?ναι στ' αλ?θεια αυτ? η υπ?θεση που δι?βασες, ? αυτ? το τ?λος της.

Γενικ? σε κ?νει να εκτιμ?ς και το συγγραφ?α και την επιλογ? της φ?ρμας του και κυρ?ως να μη μπουνκ?νεις απ? το πειραματικ? του ?φος. Π?ει να πει, μπορε? ?ντως να πειραματιζ?ταν με το ?φος του, αλλ? στο σερβ?ρει σαν κ?τι ε?κολο, κ?τι που το κατ?χει.

Θα το πρ?τεινα σε ?λους, κυρ?ως γιατ? ε?ναι ευχ?ριστο στην αν?γνωση, με δρ?ση και φιλοσοφ?α μπλεγμ?νες ταυτ?χρονα.

Michael Sanderson-green says

Great title for a book . Great story that is full of academic, comic and mysterious elements . Although a bit too erudite for me a times it all comes clear at the end. Worth more than one read.

David says

Okay you guys who've been pushing all those "bizarro" novels: take your favorite bizarro author, and Jorge Luis Borges will totally *drink his milkshake*. Even as a fictional character.

Borges wrote what's called "magical realism" nowadays, but while his fans may think "fantasy" is too undignified a label, Borges himself was a huge fan of science fiction, fantasy, and pulp fiction. The murder takes place at the Israfel Society Conference (Edgar Allan Poe was one of Borges's favorites), so you have Borges (a real person) fictionally attending a fictional conference studying a real author whom Borges really numbered among his influences. This book is a tribute to Borges and Borges's fiction, and Verissimo actually has the cajones to use Borges *as a character* in his Borges homage. In fact, the narrator is an author, addressing his narrative *to* Borges, and in the end, Borges answers back.

Under all this meta-fiction, the book is a locked-room murder mystery (with an unreliable narrator, another Poe element), and you can read it on that level, but you won't come close to appreciating it unless you've read a few of Borges's short stories.

Brazilian author Luis Fernando Verissimo totally nails the feel of a Borges story, and while this is a novel (Borges famously only ever wrote short stories; he wrote no novels), it's a short one, which also makes it more believable as what could have been just a really long short story by Borges. Since Borges writes the ending (... just read it) you might find yourself repeatedly checking the cover to remind yourself who the author really is.

If you haven't read anything by Borges, you are missing a treat. Go read *Labyrinths* or *Ficciones*. Then read this book. Then read some Poe or Lovecraft. Not necessarily in that order.

