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Ignácio de Loyola Brandão , Ellen Watson (Translator)

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Against a backdrop of political corruption Jose lives an ordinary life, working a dead-end job catching mice in a dingy movie theater. Everything changes when he meets his wife Rosa thanks to the help of the Happy Heart Marriage Agency. They seem to have an understanding: Jose isn't bothered by Rosa's dishonesty, extra weight, and fantastically promiscuous past; Rosa isn't too put off by Jose's clubbed foot, periodic blackouts, or lack of direction--she just wants a house. Pragmatic, Jose sets out to get the money necessary to make that possible. And in doing so, he manages to become a robber, sniper, and political subversive wanted by the government. Deploying fast-paced, short chapters in a number of styles, Brandao deftly presents an array of engaging characters and conflicts, vividly depicting the absurdity of a repressive political regime with exceptional daring and humor.

Zero Details

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Nathaniel says

After grunting through over three hundred pages of Brandao's prose, I still skimmed the final pages. It is immediately apparent when Brandao thinks that he is on a role: he loses any sort of content filter (did he even have an editor?), balloons his paragraphs and rants, lists, shouts, spews nonsense and seems to feel proud of the result. He wants to be a more politicized and tragic Latin American James Joyce; but he ends up being more like a foul-mouthed, sensational and disorganized Alfred Doblin (of "Berlin Alexanderplatz" notoriety).

I would not have finished this book if I hadn't accidentally started two long train rides without other reading material--and if there hadn't been so much sex, violence and repression. In between steam-rolling sections of mediocre, under-planned, contradictory and unrewarding narrative, there are all sorts of choke-start interruptive paragraphs under recurring headlines like "Free Association" or "Affective Memory." There aren't any dimensional characters in the book and none of the people are really capable of absorbing or relating to their environment: increasingly repulsive and repressive urban Brazil. In fact, Jose, the closest thing to a protagonist, is a bit like Sean of the Dead (without humor or an actual relationship). He is a purposeless slob immersed in sickening violence.

Why does Brandao think it is okay to write, "Don't know why, but it's true, my heart beats when i see you, parala-la, parala-lay, tooky tecky tooky tootooky, gorogogo gorogoga, elephant stampedes a great many people, two elephants stampede a great many more, oooooo bah tatatatatatata, oh juicy, juicy festival of striptease."?

And why are there dozens of sadistic, pages floundering around in material of this variety, "Whap, whap. Plaft, pleft, shit, he's hit in the mouth, all his teeth are knocked out, his nails pulled out one by one, he's been burned, they've drilled a hole in one eye, thrown acid in the other, stuffed a rat in his mouth, razor slashes and briny water, wires stuck in his asshole, shocks tear him all apart, smash his fingers, his cock, jab him in the stomach, make him eat shit . . . "?

Seriously, who is the author trying to punish with that sort of prose? Both of these excerpts are representative. Neither of them is part of a key plot moment or even about a recognizable moment in the narrative of any main character. They are just outbursts. The most charitable interpretation that I can offer is that Brandao hated almost everyone in Brazil (whether perpetrators of repression or complacent accomplices) and he wanted his book to be a venom-spitting affront to everything that they held sacred or thought pleasant.

I'm sure it was a groundbreaking book for its time and location. I'm sure it posed a sort of challenge to a now defunct establishment and it might be rewarding to read it within the context of Brazilian history and literature. But in order to stand on its own as a book for the casual reader sixty years later and thousands of miles away, it needs more craft, cleaner narrative, less repetition and more imagination. I have no idea why E. L. Doctorow thinks it is so fantastic.

Jonfaith says

If it's not cruel, if it doesn't make us suffer, if it doesn't crush what good a man has inside him, then it's not a regime to take seriously.

Zero is an often atonal riff on political oppression, not only in *Brasil* but globally in the late 1960s. Surely that Brazil is long gone now, the World Cup is around the corner and the Olympics just after. No doubt the world is at least 21.2 percent happier now. The admixture of violence and piety sounds familiar to 2014. Brandão distills Dos Passos and Doblin in creating a dire world of poverty, mindless consumption and a ruthless regime which imprisons and tortures for a higher calling. Damn.

Ryan says

At a certain point when fragmentation plays its tricks on you and you think all has spun off into absurdity--this book is in fact absurd; irredeemably, essentially absurd--you hit the last fifty pages and, as in Bolano's *By Night in Chile*, everything is laid bare...in horrific detail.

Pete Camp says

Bizarre, wild , surreal, violent tale of a man living in a " fictional" country (Spoiler: Brazil) under a repressive political regime

Otávio Augusto says

It is a book for those who wish to widen their mindscape. Might not be fully understood, but the pictures it creates!

So real, even nowadays!!!

Daniel Garrison says

Wow, that's a tough book to get through. It was worth it, but it left me wondering if I'm too stupid to deal with it or maybe, not...? As a review, all I can say is - you're on your own with with one.

Hesper says

AN ANALOGY

You know how you go to a concert, engage in substance* use and some two or three hours into the show, when you're probably delirious from dehydration and those substances, the song to end all songs happens and all you can do is a lighter salute?

Well, lighter salute, *Zero!* Lighter salute!

ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT A REVIEW

This is the weirdest, most intense dystopian novel. Ever. If I were a crazy yet vaguely benevolent-looking dictator** I'd totally ban this book. And do horrible things to people who mentioned it.

CONCLUSION

Not for Victorian maiden aunts. There's crazy sex that goes on for pages, even more pages on torture, bucket-loads of scat references, token human sacrifice and so many stylistic shenanigans*** you'll either want to put your own eyes out or go fisticuffs with the author.

It is one intense, surreal and unforgiving ride, but well worth reading by anyone with a thing for dystopia.

*Alcohol is a substance. Whaddaya think I meant?

** Wikipedia time!

***If the style of this review annoys you, then you'll probably opt for fisticuffs. Or eye gouging. Maybe both.

Arthur Dal Ponte Santana says

90 dias e ninguém ainda provou que o faquir come

Smoothw says

An angry, angry, sometimes funny, but mostly angry tale/satire of living under a repressive dictatorship. The story, such as it is, follows Jose through his unfulfilling if bizarre life, and his eventual descent into a sort of nihilistic rebellion against the state. The novel is kind of exuberantly experimental, mixing in drawings, satirical asides, repetition, paragraphs that consist almost entirely on onomatopoeias, and a hint of mysticism. Despite the fact that I generally love this type of thing I thought this was only okay, mainly because the novel wasn't exactly subtle in its emotions, and at times it became of bit monotonous.

Natalie says

In a long series of short, oddly-formatted chapter, Ignácio de Loyola Brandão creates a political statement on the not only the state of Brasil in the 1960's, but also much of South America. Full of intensely-detailed sex and torture, this novel is not for the faint of heart - but the truth in it is hard to ignore. Brandão pulls no punches and he shows the situation as it is. This is definitely a novel that readers can find new details and information in every time they read it, assuming, of course, that they can get through all that torture, violence, and repression multiple times.

The odd formatting of this novel makes it both intriguing and difficult to read. It's not something to be read under any sort of time constraint. It features lists, boxes, random letters, tons of headings and subheadings,

and advertisements. The dark humor will draw a laugh - if readers notice it. Despite this, *Zero*'s political statement is powerful and hard to ignore.

Vic says

Orwell channels Burroughs to write South American version of Dos Passos

Adam says

Zero is a wild, profane, irreverent, surreal novel written in Brazil's years of lead during a repressive military dictatorship. The author uses collages, random illustrations, textual experiments, cinematic technique, faux documentary and textbook appropriations, advertisements, hilarious footnotes in a exuberant style that resembles Dos Passos, the over the top dark humor of Vonnegut or Pynchon, torture sequences worthy of de Sade's 120 Days of Sodom, Michael Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius adventures, and foreshadows Junot Diaz, while creating a funny vibrant, and very black humored indictment of his time period that still feels fresh.

Lua Limaverde says

<https://lualimaverde.wordpress.com/20...>

Sam says

Good book, but it is very disturbing. Lots of sex, lots of violence, lots of confusion. I don't know if I'd be up for reading this one again.

Tara says

Confusing at some points, gripping at others. I did not thoroughly enjoy Zero, due to its absurdity and vulgar prose. Although, I did appreciate the authors attempt to make a political statement, I feel as if the writing style distracted from it. The indirect plot line almost reminded me of Chuck Palahniuk. I'm proud of myself for getting through it, but I would never suggest it or read it again.
