



The Wandering Unicorn

Manuel Mujica Láinez, Jorge Luis Borges (Foreword), Mary Fitton (Translator)

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The inspiration for this enthralling mediaeval romance is an ancient legend: condemned by the chicanery of her wicked mother to spend centuries languishing invisibly in her belfry, the beautiful Melusine is an immortal outcast, half woman, half serpent. Translated by Mary Fitton.

The Wandering Unicorn Details

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Catherine Vera says

Una hermosa historia que me fascinó totalmente, sobretodo al ir descubriendo que en sus hojas se entrelazan hechos/personajes reales con la fantasía medieval.

Mi único pero y que me demoró en la lectura fue la forma de escritura, incluso esto mismo me hizo bajar la nota general de la obra.

Sin embargo, el conjunto general da forma a un libro maravilloso, donde es posible escapar a siglos en el pasado de mano de una de las tantas historias del hada Melusina.

Andrés R. G. says

Mujica Lainez recrea la Edad Media (el siglo XII) desde la voz narrativa del hada Melusina. A través de la mezcla de datos, lugares y personajes históricos con la ficción, el libro emprende la dura tarea de ambientar el medioevo y de trasladarnos a él. La narradora-personaje resulta efectiva en esta tarea y con minuciosas y riquísimas descripciones, la magia y la vida medieval confluyen en esta novela. Repleto de alusiones a leyendas, referencias históricas, maravillas, criaturas míticas y religión, El unicornio refleja la erudición de Mujica Lainez y sus dotes narrativas, excepcionalmente talentosas.

Recomendado más que nada a quienes les apasiones o tengan gran interés en la Edad Media europea.

Caroline Eising says

I've been struggling with this book for months. I don't know why -perhaps in that it was just barely readable enough. Perhaps part of me held out hope that it would pick up at the end. Perhaps I just wanted to know what happened?

But no, the real reason I read this book is to get ideas on how *not* to write. This book was such a clear example of crippling passive voice and excessive foreshadowing that I had to keep going - just to satisfy that little budding author voice inside of me that was crying out "Oh, I see! Don't do that or the reader is going to be disappointed. And oh! This would have had much more impact in active voice!" My inner author got plenty out of this novel, but the part of me that desired escapism and a good story was battering down the doors to get out!

Here is what frustrated me about this book:

Major action often took place off-screen. Huge battles were only described by their aftermath or not described at all. Deaths of major characters are mentioned almost as an afterthought. An example - one character discovers his sibling dead after only just being re-united with them. This is announced by the passage 'the next day she was dead' and goes on to describe the surviving sibling's depression, but not one word is spoken about the discovery of the body or what happened when they found out she was dead. Surely a dramatic moment, but it is not even touched.

Almost every major event is so heavily foreshadowed it has absolutely no surprise, and I was begging for major characters to just hurry up and die, as if it was the opposite of Game of Thrones.

The passive voice everywhere! Maybe it was an issue with the translation, but it seems the majority of the book is written in the most passive voice imaginable.

The narrator also blabbers. Melusine wanders off into philosophical musings and the personal histories of irrelevant characters at every opportunity. Even at the climax of the book she wanders off into self-indulgence yet again, forcing me to skim entire pages or abandon the book entirely in frustration.

I did not know until I finished the book that it was a translation. I try to read books without knowing too much about them or it can skew your expectations. Perhaps I would have been more forgiving had I known that it was not originally written in English, but at the end I found this book very unsatisfying in almost every respect instead of its lessons to the writer in what not to do.

scarlettraces says

Tries and fails to explain this book in a sentence

If you -

were ever in love with the middle ages (especially troubadours and/or doomed Kingdom of Jerusalem - yes I know colonialism but that wasn't on my radar as a child)

like a writerly tone that's dry and sharp like a good rose wine

like repurposed fairy tales

then this is the novel for you.

I was feeling bad about never having heard of Mujica Lainez, but the internet seems to indicate this is the only one of his books readily available (or translated at all?) into English. God bless the 80s and their rediscovery of fantasy.

Bryn Hammond says

I did love this tale, and in particular for the unconventional ending. About which I'll promptly shut up.

Jane says

The beautiful fairy, Melusine herself, states tartly: "It's a fairy's life, a fairy story. Anyone who doesn't believe in fairies had better shut these pages here and now and throw them into the wastepaper basket, or cut them up to line his bookshelves... he will miss some extremely interesting things... perhaps the stupidest [way of being poor in spirit] is to say no to the hidden relish that gives life its magic."

She is confined in a tower and begins her life's story...

She angers her mother and is cursed. After the death of her husband, she heads for the 3rd Crusade with a travelling player, Aiol. Aiol is her descendant. They obtain a magical unicorn's horn. After that, she thinks to entitle her memoirs "Wandering Unicorn." Aiol wishes to find the Holy Lance [which pierced Christ's side.] They arrive at the Crusade and become friends with Baldwin IV, the Leper-King. Melusine's mother gives

her a human body--that of a youth. Melusine and Aiol become knights and fight Saladin with the other Crusaders. Does Aiol find the Holy Lance? The ending of the story is quite unexpected.

This was a clever take on this legend. But I didn't like Melusine much; she was a name-dropper; I got lost in all those names, despite a Guide to Kings of Jerusalem--and their relatives. I finally tried to skim them and just concentrate on the story. She was also verbose, a complainer, and a real yenta.

It was confusing how the story kept switching from different time periods, mostly in different parts of the Middle Ages, but sometimes in present-day, with references to Proust, Freud, and cars. I felt there was much repetition and the book could have been tighter. Sometimes it was a slog to read, but other times enjoyable. I enjoyed the lore of unicorns and Melusine's telling us the Oberon and Huon of Bordeaux story, a medieval tale.

All in all, recommended for fantasy-lovers and for those who love retellings.

Kevin Faulkner says

In his utterly charming novel *The Wandering Unicorn* (1965) the Argentinian author Manuel Mujica Lainez (1910-64) develops the legend of Melusine.

Set in medieval France and the holy Land of the Crusades, Lainez's novel is a rich serving of fantasy and romance. Narrated from the perspective of the shape-changing Melusine, the early events of the original legend are soon recounted before she embarks upon an adventure and love-affair with Aiol, the son of Ozil, a crusader knight who bequeaths a Unicorn's lance to his son. Together the young knight Aiol and Melusine travel across Europe to eventually arrive in war-torn Jerusalem of the Crusades. The reader is drawn into Lainez's neglected gem of magical realism with growing empathy towards Melusine's first person narration of her adventures and devotion to Aiol, only to experience the full emotional impact of the tragic and sad ending of the love between a mortal and an immortal spirit.

Althea Ann says

I'd seen this book highly recommended for fans of Tolkien, so I picked it up. I'm not sure where that recommendation came from, because I didn't see any similarity in the writing style or themes. The writing style was particularly stilted; perhaps because it was translated from the Spanish, and I simply didn't find it particularly enjoyable.

Inspired by mythology, but without a 'mythic' feel to the story, the book briefly outlines the story of the fairy Melusine, who took human form to love a man, but was cursed to be rejected when her lover came upon her in her true, monstrous form, in her bath. The largest part of the book follows the incorporeal spirit of Melusine as she follows around a young knight in the Crusades, her descendant, that she is obsessed with. Although at one point she tries to take human form to be with him (it doesn't work out, as she ends up in a male body, and the knight isn't gay), this places the bulk of the narrative at a remove, actions being described by an intangible observer, which is distancing.

Min says

an elaborate tale about a fairy during the events of the crusades. a very pithy way of describing it, but it's really well done and the ending moving. i think it was shortchanged at being marketed as some kind of tolkienesque fantasy at the time, which it is very much not.

mujica lainez is practically unknown to most since so few of his writings were ever translated (the other being a 1960s or 70s translation of bomarzo) but he was an amazing writer and if you're big on the latin american magical realism genre, this is for you.

Sara says

This book was very beautiful, and beautifully written, and my version was a translation! I especially loved the main character. She was wonderfully complex and made a wonderful narrator for this story. I enjoyed the historical novel feel mixed in with the fantasy. Excellent book!

Eric Taub says

I adored this book when I read it years and years ago; time to find a copy again.

Jenika Ioffreda says

interesting book.

Horacio says

Español:

Uno de los trabajos más ambiciosos de Mujica Lainez. El autor nos lleva a la edad media para asistir a la vida de un hada.

Magia e historia hermanadas en una gran obra de arte.

English:

One of the most ambitious works from Mujica Lainez. He leads us back to the middle age to attend the life of a fairy. Magic and history entwined as one in a great piece of art.

Nancynarcolepsy says

I really liked this book! It's so magical! The only annoying thing about it, is the over attention to details, names, and history fact; they overwhelmed the story and were distracting....and long! (At least for me

because of my limited history knowledge, but if you are interested in the history of the middle-age it is a must have!!!) Also the book is written by a man and it is something that you can easily detect in this book (the main character is female)

But in whole it is a great book if you like imaginary and book of the fantastic genre.

Leonardo says

En cierto sentido, Mújica Lainez es una de las joyas ocultas de la literatura latinoamericana. Quizás eso se deba a que su estilo no fue tan abiertamente experimental como el de Borges o por qué su temática no fue particularmente "latinoamericana", a lo García Márquez. Sin embargo, en sus obras, su prosa delicada se ven combinadas con una gran erudición. Una de los leitmotifs centrales de su obra es la recreación minuciosa del pasado. En el caso de "El unicornio", Mújica Lainez recrea y expande la leyenda medieval del hada Melusina. A través de su prosa, su personaje central no sólo se vuelve (literalmente) un ser de carne y hueso, sino que se vuelve nuestra guía en una Edad Media en incontenible ebullición, plena de caballeros andantes (manteniendo un precario equilibrio entre sus ideales caballerescos y la cruda realidad que los rodea), un mundo poblado de visiones místicas y realpolitik, de seres angelicales y fééricos, de leyendas vueltas realidad y de realidades de proporciones épicas. La recreación del mundo medieval no se consigue sólo a través de las descripciones minuciosas, sino por la recreación del "world picture" de los personajes.

A. says

Es la mismísima hada Melusina quien nos relata esta historia. Melusina, la condenada a vivir por la eternidad (y para completar la desgracia, a hacerlo con la mitad de su cuerpo convertido en serpiente) habitando invisible, por los siglos de los siglos, el campanario del Castillo Lusignan, desgarrándose en gritos y lamentos cada vez que alguno de sus nobles descendientes emprende su viaje final. Melusina nos traslada con sus recuerdos a una época pasada, en la que los hombres creían en el Honor y en el Poder de la Magia y se sabían en compañía diaria de ángeles y de demonios. Y de unicornios con cuernos mágicos. Y de hadas como Melusina, que nos relatará su triste historia y la de un descendiente de su real estirpe, el hermosísimo Aiol de Lusignan.

Una novela completa y compleja de Manuel Mujica Lainez, plagada de descripciones detalladas y referencias mitológicas e históricas. Al menos en lo personal, no me ha resultado nada sencilla su lectura pero si enormemente satisfactoria.

Katherine Fischer says

I really enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, the prose in this book. Lainez has a very poignant style of writing that drew me in and made the plight of Melusine very relatable (even though I am not an immortal faerie!).
