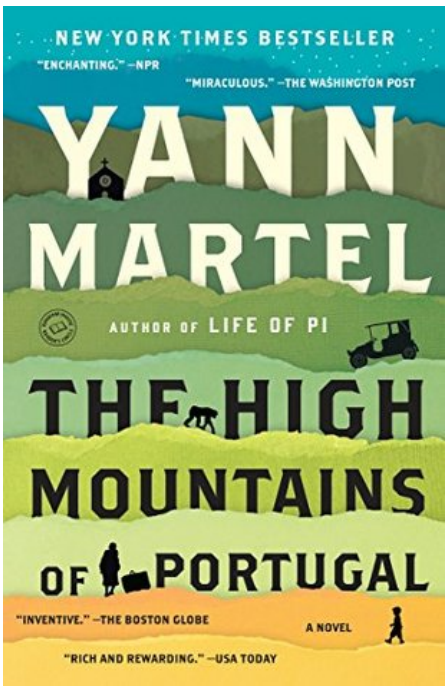

The High Mountains of Portugal

Yann Martel

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The High Mountains of Portugal Yann Martel
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER - "Fifteen years after The Life of Pi, Yann Martel is taking us on another long journey. Fans of his Man Booker Prize-winning novel will recognize familiar themes from that seafaring phenomenon, but the itinerary in this imaginative new book is entirely fresh. . . . Martel's writing has never been more charming."--Ron Charles, The Washington Post

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY NPR

In Lisbon in 1904, a young man named Tomas discovers an old journal. It hints at the existence of an extraordinary artifact that--if he can find it--would redefine history. Traveling in one of Europe's earliest automobiles, he sets out in search of this strange treasure.

Thirty-five years later, a Portuguese pathologist devoted to the murder mysteries of Agatha Christie finds himself at the center of a mystery of his own and drawn into the consequences of Tomas's quest.

Fifty years on, a Canadian senator takes refuge in his ancestral village in northern Portugal, grieving the loss of his beloved wife. But he arrives with an unusual companion: a chimpanzee. And there the century-old quest will come to an unexpected conclusion.

The High Mountains of Portugal--part quest, part ghost story, part contemporary fable--offers a haunting exploration of great love and great loss. Filled with tenderness, humor, and endless surprise, it takes the reader on a road trip through Portugal in the last century--and through the human soul.

Praise for The High Mountains of Portugal

"Just as ambitious, just as clever, just as existential and spiritual [as Life of Pi] . . . a book that rewards your attention . . . an excellent book club choice."--San Francisco Chronicle

"There's no denying the simple pleasures to be had in The High Mountains of Portugal."--Chicago Tribune

"Charming . . . Most Martellian is the boundless capacity for parable. . . . Martel knows his strengths: passages about the chimpanzee and his owner brim irresistibly with affection and attentiveness."--The New Yorker

"A rich and rewarding experience . . . [Martel] spins his magic thread of hope and despair, comedy and pathos."--USA Today

"I took away indelible images from High Mountains, enchanting and disturbing at the same time. . . . As whimsical as Martel's magic realism can be, grief informs every step of the book's three journeys. In the course of the novel we burrow ever further into the heart of an ape, pure and threatening at once, our precursor, ourselves."--NPR

"Refreshing, surprising and filled with sparkling moments of humor and insight."--The Dallas Morning News

"We're fortunate to have brilliant writers using their fiction to meditate on a paradox we need urgently to consider--the unbridgeable gap and the unbreakable bond between human and animal, our impossible self-alienation from our world."--Ursula K. Le Guin, The Guardian

"[Martel packs] his inventive novel with beguiling ideas. What connects an inept curator to a haunted pathologist to a smitten politician across more than seventy-five years is the author's ability to conjure up something uncanny at the end."--The Boston Globe

"A fine home, and story, in which to find oneself."--Minneapolis Star Tribune (less)

The High Mountains of Portugal Details

Date	:	Published February 2nd 2016 by Spiegel & Grau
ISBN	:	
Author	:	Yann Martel
Format	:	Kindle Edition 370 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literary Fiction, Cultural, Portugal, Magical Realism, Abandoned

From Reader Review The High Mountains of Portugal for online ebook

Doug H says

This Book Hurt My Brain But I Liked It

If you’re like me, you enjoyed Life of Pi more for its story than for its mind games with math and metaphysics. You might have appreciated those aspects, but you also probably shrugged your shoulders and set most of them on your brain’s back burner while you kept stirring at that great story in front. And, that worked very well.

If you’re like me, you’ll try to approach this one the same way. You’ll quickly find that you can’t. It’s much more experimental in style (several different styles actually), more subversively playful, more postmodern, maybe even more about ideas than plot. (Don’t get me wrong: there is a story and it is fun to read, but it’s also a parable about parables and it's challenging and heady as hell.)

If you’re like me, you’ll have it knocking around in your brain for a long time after you finish it. You’ll wake up at night with a headache. You’ll remember those bible stories you learned in Sunday School before you gave up on organized religions and learned to think for yourself. You’ll try to remember which Agatha Christie novels you read when you were young and you'll wonder if Murder on The Orient Express is really anywhere near as much about Jesus as Martel thinks. You’ll read Robert Ardrey and you'll wonder where he's been all your life. You’ll have weird Doctor Dolittle dreams where apes and birds and trees talk to you telepathically.

(Okay, you might not read Ardrey and you probably won't have those dreams.)

If you’re like me, you’ll write more than one review and you’ll scrap all of them before you post them. You’ll give up on writing a review entirely and go on to read some other books. Then, a couple of weeks later, you’ll come back to this novel and read it all over again and you’ll be amazed at how much more coherent it is with a set of keys. Except for those incoherent bits...

If you’re like me, you’ll finally just write a review where you say I’m really not sure what anyone else will think, and I’m still not even totally sure what I think, but it did make me think and I think I liked it quite a lot. I think I’d even like to read it a third time - this time with a book club.

One tip: Reading this with an e-reader will help you when characters, geography and symbols reappear in later sections and it might even help you avoid that headache I mentioned.

Ron Charles says

Pack your bags: Fifteen years after “The Life of Pi,” Yann Martel is taking us on another long journey. Fans of his Man Booker Prize-winning novel will recognize familiar themes from that seafaring phenomenon, but the itinerary is this imaginative new book is entirely fresh.

In fact, “The High Mountains of Portugal” is actually a set of three delicately connected novellas that take place decades apart. With Martel’s signature mixture of humor and pathos, these three stories explore the rugged terrain of grief. But they also contain the author’s reflections on the connection between storytelling and faith.

The first part, “Homeless,” is the longest and the most itinerant. It opens in Lisbon in 1904, a place and time cast in Old World elegance. A young man named Tomás has recently. . .

To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/entert...

Sandra says

Set mostly in Portugal, this tale tells of three main characters, in three different timeframes and settings. They each lost someone they loved dearly, and all of them have to cope with the grief in their respective ways. All the stories have science and religion interweaving the narrative and elements and characters appear and re-appear in the different settings.

In 1904, Tomás goes on a quest to find a religious artifact he is sure will *'turn Christianity upside down'*. Starting off slightly comically, imagine learning how to drive for the first time, let alone driving in one of the very first cars, the speed of the story however, slows down greatly. A nice detail is seeing Tomás' quirk turn into a local tradition.

On New Year's Eve 1938, we meet Eusebio Lozara, a pathologist, and his wife Maria, theorizing and comparing Agatha Christie's work against the Bible. *'...describe the life of Jesus, as a Murder Mystery'*, Maria muses. This is where the story drags and could've done with less.
Another Maria turns up, who has this peculiar wish to be with her husband.

And in 1981, Peter Tovy rescues Odo, a research chimp and decides to emigrate to Portugal with it, then finally finding peace in a more primitive world than the fast paced life he is used to.
But that ending...I'm still not sure what happened? If there is a deeper meaning behind that ending, that meaning is lost to me.

I haven't read *Life of Pi*, nor seen the movie, but Yann Martel's writing is quite interesting in this book alone!

word gem, not a new word for me, but I love it so much that I think it is worth mentioning.
saudade (pronunciation): *a deep emotional state of melancholic longing for a person or thing that is absent*

Review copy supplied by publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a rating and/or review.

LeAnne says

"Is this the real life?

Is this just fantasy?
Caught in a landslide,
No escape from reality..."
- Freddie Mercury

No spoilers. To fully appreciate this book, you are going to have to loosen your conventional grip on terra firma. For somebody who cannot abide magical realism, I adored this - and that is really saying something. There are no people floating about with magic cloaks or turning into giant rabbits, but as in Yann Martel's fantastic Life of Pi, you may ask yourself what the symbols and stories really mean. As Martel might say, this thing barks and screams with metaphors.

Martel works in allegory, as usual, telling us tales that are loaded with oddity and leaving it up to us to interpret. The title of the story itself has some meaning because we are told that there actually are no high mountains in Portugal. One can never fully trust Martel's facts (remember the floating island of acid-extruding plants full of meerkats in LofPi?), so I looked it up. Unless you consider a 6,000' peak a "high" mountain, then the author can be believed. Throughout the entire book, the phrase "the high mountains of Portugal" is repeated, and we come to understand that the term is just a metaphorical and relative one...and the theme of relativity pops up again and again.

There are three interlocking parables in The High Mountains of Portugal, each set decades apart, that are parallels in that the protagonists are men who deeply loved their wives and who had to deal with death in one way or another. Religious dogma is questioned throughout the book, but belief itself is still held intact - otherwise, the astounding coincidences would be far too outlandish to have occurred naturally. Or would they? There is challenge, Martel asserts, in combining faith and reason.

"Faith is grand but impractical: How does one live an eternal idea in a daily way? It's so much easier to be reasonable. Reason is practical, its rewards are immediate, its workings are clear. But alas, reason is blind. Reason, on its own, leads us nowhere, especially in the face of adversity. How do we balance the two, how do we live with both faith and reason?

If religious introspection gives you the yawns, fear not. The story lines mostly leave dogma out of it, except for a middle section which compares the Christian faith to the series of murder mysteries by Agatha Christie. Yes, I know - odd. And wonderful!

The initial journey taken on in the first of this trio is a quest to locate a religious artifact created by a Portuguese priest stuck in old Angola. He has volunteered to baptize the ill treated slaves and in seeing the disgusting morality of man toward one another, questions his faith. As the book closes, the reader will ask himself exactly how much he really does believe - in God and in eccentricities that seem unreal.

I desperately am eager to discuss this book, to write my thoughts here - but the surprises in these stories would be somewhat ruined for those of you reading this. If you loved Life of Pi, are a fan of magical realism, or enjoy unraveling symbolism, I give you a wildly waving green flag to get your hands on this novel. If not, scan the distribution of the star ratings - this book is not for everyone.. but once begun, it has to be completed to be fully appreciated. Disregard the DNF ratings.

There is one little discovery I will share with you - something not in the book. A side character - the priest in Angola - early on is somewhat homesick and to assuage that sadness asserts to himself over and over: "I am home, I am home, I am home." So what really is home - a place itself or where love abides? We meet a quiet character later in the book whose nickname is Odo. Being the grounded, unimaginative type that I am, of

course I looked it up. It's a shortened form of the Old Germanic name "Odilo." Its meaning?

Fatherland.

Whether or not this is just a coincidence or Martel meant something else (or nothing) by that name, when I read his stories, they fit me. "I am home. I am home. I am home."

Angela M says

I'm at a loss for how to rate this book so I'm not going to . I just don't understand what it's really about . It's odd from the beginning with a story of a man who walks backwards as the result of his grief over losing his lover, his child and his father. Tomas becomes obsessed with an object he reads about in a priests journal , a cross. A journey reminiscent in a way of Harold Frye, meeting people along the way to their destinations. It's sad and it's about loss and grief but brilliantly humorous at times . There are some very funny scenes as Tomas drives through the small towns in his uncle's automobile on his way to find the church in the high mountains that holds the cross . Quirky but I liked this first part the best .

I have no clue what the second part was about . A pathologist, talk of miracles and the bible and Jesus , and Agatha Christie and chimpanzees - oh my ! The third part is also about a grieving man and a journey . Chimpanzees and grief seem to be a common theme across the three sections . I read Doug's 4 star review and he says "This book hurt my brain ." It hurt my brain too because my mind kept wandering while I was trying to understand it and I just didn't. I recommend
Doug's review : https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...

I don't want to steer people away because I didn't get it or thought it a bit too quirky . The writing is lovely in parts and if you are a fan of Yann Martel , you just may like it .

Thank you Random House Publishing Group - Random House and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this advance copy.

Wen says

This was my second book by Yann Martel, and I liked it at least as much as I did his Life of PI.
The book consists of three novellas linked by chimpanzees, family lineage, the high mountains of Portugal, and coping with the death of the beloved family members.
The third part, Peter’s tale, with chimpanzee Odo as pet after the death of his beloved wife, was my favorite, and would be a 5-star in its own right. It had the lightheartedness I much enjoyed in Life of PI. The stunning beauty of high mountains of Portugal tempted me to drop everything right away and get on the plane for my dream vacation. Oto was not as mythified as the tiger in Life of Pi, therefore the story felt less surreal. It was just a quiet, warm account of an elderly man giving up his comfortable lifestyle in Canada, getting on in a secluded Portuguese village where his only companion Odo felt most like home. The man and the chimp learned from each other, took care of each other, and together bonded with the residents of the village.
The other two paled considerably. In the first story, Tomás walking backwards after losing his father, darling and son and all the fuss around the novelty automobile both felt corny. And in the second novella, the excessive detail on autopsy and human anatomy turned my stomach.

The novellas are allegories. According to Yann Martel, part one is atheism , part two is agnostism, part three is belief. Though didn't occur to me while I was reading the book, they more or less made sense when I reflected back.
On the other hand, I recognized the three stages of grieving while reading the book: anger/revenge (part one), rationalization/acceptance (part two) and reconciliation (part three).
I thought the use of Chimpanzee as a symbol linking the novellas was a brilliant idea, although the ape was brought to the foreground only in the third part.
In this book Yann Martel's prose sounded more lyrical; I hardly noticed in Life of PI, perhaps I was too focused on the plot and the humor.

Kasia says

It was not even a book. It felt more like a hostage situation, where 3 random stories are kidnapped in the middle of the night, forced to stay together against their will, violently stitched with a rope and a glue and pretend to be hight literature. Yann Martel, please Sir, move to High Mountains of Portugal and never write another book.

Sam Quixote says

Yann Martel's latest novel, The High Mountains of Portugal, is crap.

It's split into three sections set at different points of the twentieth century: 1904, 1938, and sometime in the early 1980s. Each section is set in rural Portugal and features a chimp at crucial points of the three stories. Also, I have no idea what the point of this novel is!

So I went back to the blurb and re-read that this is a novel about faith and love and loss. I get the feeling that the reason why this book is described in this broad, wishy-washy way is because neither the publisher nor the author knows what the hell it's about either! Let's look at each of the three sections - they're loosely connected but they don't add up to anything by the end.

The first section is the most trying by far - I can see why some readers would abandon the novel during this part as it is interminable. A grief-stricken man called Tomas discovers the journal of a 17th century priest who observed the slave trade in Africa and goes on a road trip to a remote Portuguese mountain village to find a special religious artifact. What follows is roughly 100 pages of description on how a fucking car works.

I know contextually this would be an alien contraption to most people back then (1904) but do today's audience need to suffer - and you will SUFFER - page after page of mind-numbingly tedious descriptions of how a car operates? The answer is no but that's what you get anyway. The story is quickly finished off with a baffling and flat finale.

Thank goodness then that that go-nowhere plotline is abandoned entirely! The bad news is that the rest of the book only marginally improves from here on out. The second section is set on New Year's Eve 1938 and features a pathologist and his wife talking in the pathologist's office. His wife has a really well-thought out speech comparing Agatha Christie's novels to Jesus Christ that was genuinely fascinating (though the reason

why she came up with it is completely stupid). She leaves, the pathologist conducts an autopsy, there's some bonkers magical realist stuff, and then it's over. Not great but better than the nothing that was the first section.

The third and final part of the novel is set in the 1980s and features a Canadian senator whose wife has recently passed away. Through some contrivances he winds up with a chimp called Odo and decides to visit the rural Portuguese mountain village his ancestors were from. This part of the novel was the best if only for the adorable descriptions of Odo's behaviour - so cute! Some tenuous links are made to connect the three sections and the book's over. It's so underwhelming.

What bothered me by far was the goddamn Literary-ness of the whole enterprise. Tomas decides to walk backwards from now on. He decides to go on this strange quest with even stranger goals. The pathologist's wife has a lengthy speech contrasting Agatha Christie and Jesus Christ. The pathologist autopsies a corpse and finds extraordinary things contained within the body. The senator - apropos of nothing - throws away his career, buys a chimp, goes to Portugal, and spends his days hiking with the chimp. The ending of the senator's story in particular - that image (you'll see if you read this). Why to any of that? Because it's Literary and Quirky. What twee garbage.

I've honestly spent time trying to figure out what this novel is about and I've gotten nowhere. Maybe it's about how animals, particularly primates, embody a purity that is the ideal of Christianity better than human believers and we should aspire to something like that? Maybe animals are more holy/spiritual than humans could ever be or civilisation dilutes belief? I don't want to say love and loss make us do weird things because that's too banal, though both themes feature prominently throughout to no effect. The repeated imagery of chimps went right past me. I have no idea what relevance - if any - chimps have in Portugal.

All I can say is that this book left no impression on me besides a certainty that, though I may have enjoyed Life of Pi years ago, it'll be a long, long time before I pick up another Yann Martel novel again. The Agatha Christie speech and some of the Odo passages were good but those are a small part of this extremely precious, insubstantial book full of ambiguity for ambiguity's sake. Boring and empty of ideas, let alone possessing a compelling story or interesting characters, The High Mountains of Portugal is utter rubbish.

Steven Langdon says

It's very rare that I finish a book and then re-read it immediately because it is so intriguing. But that's what I felt compelled to do with this superb new novel from the author of "Life of Pi."

That's not because the story told kept me caught up in unfolding narrative. Nor because one central character was so charismatic and engaging. This book is a tapestry, with a set of separate but interwoven designs -- an abstract painting, its diverse yet connected elements balancing each other and creating impact -- a symphony, its musical parts each distinct yet forming a powerful whole. An exploration of loss, of oppression, of faith and of love, this is also a novel that underlines again the interconnection between humans and animals that Yann Martel insisted on in "Life of Pi" -- and a celebration of allegory and story-telling as central to coming to terms with life and death.

There are three separate parts to the book, but there are actually four intertwined stories that it tells. Tomas is the focus of one narrative, a sorrowful young man who has lost his lover, his child and his father to diptheria, all in one week; he's so devastated that he chooses to walk backwards in his ongoing life in Lisbon, so as to

turn his back to God. His quest to the northern mountains of Portugal in one of the country's first automobiles (which he barely learns to drive) becomes a picaresque comedy, beautifully rendered by Martel, before it suddenly turns into harsh tragedy. A second narrative focuses 35 years later on a doctor, responsible for performing autopsies; he is visited late on New Year's Eve by his wife, bringing a bottle of wine, a bag of books and imaginative musings about Agatha Christie's mysteries and their ties to the stories of Jesus in the New Testament. Again, Martel gives us a witty but wise treatment on the insights of fiction writers and the importance of allegory, before this segment also veers into sorrow, tragedy and grim description of dissecting bodies. The third segment, some 40-50 years later, focuses on a Canadian politician, born in Portugal, who also loses his wife, to cancer, and tries to recover by rescuing a chimpanzee from a bleak US animal research centre, then taking the animal back to the rural terrain where the Senator came from originally in those northern mountains of Portugal. The ape is named Odo (Martel says he was originally going to call him Godot, a tip-off to his Zen-like character and existentialist role in the novel.) Again, the section explores in loving detail the remarkable relationship that develops between man and ape -- then shifts toward sorrow.

Underlying all these sections, though, is a fourth story -- that most captures the oppression and loss that can be seen as shaping the Portugal in which the other three narratives play out. That is the story of Father Ulisses, a seventeenth-century Portuguese priest who went to Africa to try to save the souls of those that Portugal was enslaving in Brazil and Sao Tome. The quest of Tomas is driven by finding the journal of this agonized witness of the slave trade's appalling oppression. And this book is filled with detailed testimony of the horrible human tragedy that was unfolding -- how ships threw overboard ill but living people before they came into port, how cramped and terrible the slave ships were with their hundreds of captives moaning and crying at all hours, how hopelessness overcame the slaves working dawn to dusk on plantations -- so much so that they would eat earth to counter their hunger. Finally overcome by the death and viciousness around him, the priest lashes out against slavery -- and when that comes to nothing creates a dramatic wooden crucifix that is sent back to Portugal when he dies.

This book, then, for me, is not just an exploration of love and loss and sorrow among individuals finding solace -- in faith and family and friends. It is also a novel about the systematic and unforgivable oppression practiced by the Portuguese on the peoples of Africa. Father Ulisses and his crucifix are symbols of that tragedy and its enduring legacy.

As Yann Martel says, or course, we each read a book differently. And none of the other reviews I have seen focus on Father Ulisses and the slave trade. But for me his grim priestly testimony, continually quoted in the first section, is not just a counterpoint to the comedy of Tomas and his automobile, it is the underlying sorrow that gives this whole book its force.

The reviews of this novel have been extreme in their variation. One bewildered reviewer calls the book "bafflingly batty;" the Globe and Mail says it is "genuinely thrilling and entirely heartbreaking." But for me this is a book that works. Works in its words, in its depth and in the questions it raises. Thank you, Yann Martel!

Robin says

Magical, surreal, mountains of grief

Yann Martel has done it again. He's mixed the mysterious, spiritual, animal and human together into a

powerful literary potion. If you can surrender completely, and let go of reality with its safe boundaries, then you will be touched and expand.

A story is a wedding in which we listeners are the groom watching the bride coming up the aisle. It is together, in an act of imaginary consummation, that the story is born.

This book is told in three parts, all seemingly different stories set generations apart. But they are linked, as becomes apparent. Aside from the plot continuity, they are unified thematically by one thing: grief. Each of the three protagonists is engulfed in a loss that has them disconnected from life. Each is trying to make sense of that loss or heal from it, in a unique way.

A man who walks backwards, searching for a holy relic that will exact revenge on God. A pathologist whose wife makes sense of Jesus' miracles through Agatha Christie mysteries (I SWOON and genuflect at his audacity here). A Canadian senator who befriends a chimpanzee. They are all in the High Mountains of Portugal. Spoiler alert: there are actually no physical high mountains in Portugal. I believe they are metaphorical for the mountains of grief these men have to climb.

Martel had me both laughing out loud and wincing in pain for these characters. Those who loved Life of Pi as I did, will find much to love here, and recognise many similar themes: journey, religion, animals, magical realism. The animals espouse divinity while the people are much more wise as they shed their humanity. I admire the simple way he writes. So readable, yet he takes his readers into a deep and meaningful place of mystery and contemplation.

This won't be for everyone - it has baffled and even angered some people, going by some reviews I've read. It's a risky recommend, but I loved this eccentric, magical, compassionate novel.

4.5 stars

Marianne says

“In the course of one week – Gaspar died on Monday, Dora on Thursday, his father on Sunday – his heart became undone like a bursting cocoon. Emerging from it came no butterfly but a grey moth that settled on the wall of his soul and stirred no farther”

The High Mountains of Portugal is the fourth novel by award-winning Spanish-born Canadian author, Yann Martel. In late 1904, Tomas Lobo, an assistant curator at Lisbon’s Museum of Ancient Art, sets off to the High Mountains of Portugal in search of a seventeenth century artifact that he believes to be profoundly important.

At the start of 1939, Eusebio Lozora, a Braganca hospital pathologist, is asked to perform an autopsy under strange circumstances. In the late 1980s, Canadian Senator Peter Tovy finds himself travelling with a chimpanzee from Oklahoma to a small village in the High Mountains of Portugal.

Here are three seemingly unrelated stories which inevitably intersect: three male narrators, each mourning their awful loss. But their grief does not overwhelm their stories. Martel fills his novel with unusual, different, interesting, and often amusing, elements: a brand new 4 cylinder Renault in the hands of a novice; a welcome ghost; a diary written by a missionary to slaves; the fabled Iberian rhinoceros; a very different

take on the novels of Agatha Christie; a car journey across a country with a wilful chimpanzee; and a very unusual autopsy.

Martel gives the reader some wonderful descriptive prose; there is plenty of humour, some of it dark, some of it laugh-out-loud, almost slapstick; his characters are appealing, often quirky, multi-faceted, passionate and occasionally quite naive; there are interesting plots and curious sub-plots; there is profound love, deep passion and devastating loss; all of this would make rereading this novel (perhaps even several times) an unalloyed pleasure, but this one with the added bonus of uncovering even more of the numerous common elements linking each of these three loosely intersecting tales.

Martel touches on slavery, on religion, faith and saints, the ethics of primate research, how people cope with loss, the origins of man and on learning how to be in the moment, to live in the present. There are many words of wisdom and perceptive observations. He wraps it all up in brilliant prose and presents it within a wonderfully evocative cover (designed by Simone Andjelkovic). An utterly enchanting read.

A few examples of Martel's beautiful prose:
"Loneliness comes up to him like a sniffing dog. It circles him insistently. He waves it away, but it refuses to leave"

"Every dead body is a book with a story to tell, each organ a chapter, the chapters united by a common narrative. It is Eusebio's professional duty to read these stories, turning every page with a scalpel, and at the end of each to write a book report"

"Stories full of metaphors are by writers who play the language like a mandolin for our entertainment, novelists, poets, playwrights, and other crafters of inventions"

"Grief is a disease. We were riddled with its pockmarks, tormented by its fevers, broken by its blows. It ate at us like maggots, attacked us like lice - we scratched ourselves to the edge of madness. In the process we became as withered as crickets, as tired as old dogs"

Trish says

Somehow the word "novelist" doesn't quite capture Yann Martel's art. If I had to describe what he does, I might say he writes storybooks for adults. They often have talking animals and a kind of magical realism. They can be extraordinarily effective in reflecting us back at ourselves. He questions the ordinary, celebrates the fantastic. "Stories benefit the human mind." We understand through stories, and each of us interprets a story differently.

Martel's new novel drops us into a strange and distant land, at a time before any of us can claim first-hand knowledge. While he presents the facts of the case, we wonder what knowledge we are meant to bring to aid understanding. We listen, feeling homeless, unsure. He then leads us homeward, and in the last third we find ourselves quite at home and at peace…with a chimpanzee…in Portugal.

Religious belief, the bond animals and humans share, and big questions ("That's the great, enduring challenge of our modern times, is it not, to marry faith and reason?") are enduring themes in Martel's work. We move through a century in one family's history, collecting wisdom, only to have to succeeding

generations keep the form but not the reason for an added custom, like walking backward in a state of grief, or the name and circumstance of one they worship as a "saint." In three parts we have three married couples, all of whom have lost one lifelong partner, searching for meaning in their grief.

> "Grief is a disease. We were riddled with its pockmarks, tormented by its fevers, broken by its blows. It ate at us like maggots, attacked us like lice—we scratched ourselves to the edge of madness. In the process we became as withered as crickets, as tired as old dogs."

Martel's stories are always filled with symbolism, some sitting on the surface and easy to discover, and others discovered only after much contemplation. Real issues critical to our understanding of the world are treated with whimsy and humor, not scorn or disdain.

Martel makes the point that neurosurgeon Paul Kalanithi makes in his memoir When Breath Becomes Air: that the goodness and blind faith required of us by religion is too hard to live up to on a daily basis. Reason is easier, both to comprehend and to use as a kind of measure of goodness. Neither faith nor reason is enough on its own: neither explains the world adequately. "Reason is blind. Reason, on its own, leads us nowhere, especially in the face of adversity." And what of joy? Love? Reason doesn't explain those, either.

Martel creates a character who suggests that an Agatha Christie murder mystery might combine the two: "the solution [is] stories that put reason on brilliant display while keeping one close to Jesus of Nazareth." He compares the form of Agatha Christie novels to the gospels and hypothesizes that both are stories with a central murder mystery. The facts are laid out with great formality and ceremony, but no one ever seems to remember who the murderer is. Who killed Jesus? It is true that murder mysteries are compulsive reading material for adults, as are our bibles, whichever religion we examine.

Martel goes further. He takes the central imagic trope in the novel, an ancient carved wooden crucifix, and proposes us that the figure of Christ on the Cross might actually be a Chimp on the Cross--a crudely-carved naïve attempt at perspective, a statement on the development of man from ape, or a challenge that man was more pure, present, and godlike before he developed reason. That would be to say nothing of the literal: that humans have lorded over and crucified wild animals, even those so close in genealogy to ourselves, bringing us shame and not salvation.

Martel has no sacred cows. Reviewers have criticized him in the past for challenging the sanctity of well-protected myths and histories. I find Martel dazzling in his fearlessness, rigorous in his thinking, and deep in his conclusions. He is not dismissive of faith: he thinks it both interesting and necessary, providing a kind of useful moral structure. The formal ritual of organized religion does not impress him: "architectural modesty best suits the religious sentiment. Only song needs to soar in a church; anything fancier is human arrogance disguised as faith."

There is something intoxicating and deeply reassuring about the final section of the book in which is recounted the story of Odo the chimp, rescued from the research lab in America's southwest. Odo is old and wise enough to have developed a kind of culture and a rudimentary understanding of language. He can communicate, if not without misunderstandings. Odo seems to have no notion of past and future; he is all about the present. His human companion, Peter, discovers that he would prefer to become more Odo-like in his "profound simplicity of means and aims...members of [Peter's] own species...are too noisy, too fractious, too arrogant, too unreliable. He much prefers the intense silence of Odo's presence, his pensive slowness in whatever he does…"

A couple of last things: There is a profoundly affecting marriage consummation scene in this novel which

gives readers a glimpse into what kind of man the author is, for who else could create such a scene? Both husband and wife are virgins; he twenty-one and she seventeen. Sex itself is all still a mystery, but they work it out together. The bride had never known desire, nor where hers lay, but her new husband searched for, and found, her hidden place and they lived and loved passionately ever after. Martel makes it beautiful, sexy, joyous, and absolutely right-sounding.

Was there ever an Iberian Rhinocerous? I doubt it, though he had me believing, just a little.

I’m a fan.

Lynne says

This book really touched me on so many levels! It's about dealing with grief in various ways. Three stories are interconnected with thought provoking symbolism. While it was difficult to initially see the greatness of this story, it is worth sticking with it. You will continuously be thinking about the ties within each story. I really enjoyed reading it. Thank you NetGalley and St. Martins Press and to Yann Martel for all that went into this book.

Amy McLay Paterson says

"Hey Yann, how's the book coming?"
"Dude, it's so good. I have this great idea for a character!"
"Oh yeah, what's he like?"
"Well, his wife is dead!"
...
"And his son is dead too!"
"Ok...maybe we could dig a little deeper?"
"He...walks backwards everywhere?"
...
"Oh, and the best part: he's a total technophobe, and he has to drive this crazy car made of elephant parts! Ahahaha, I crack myself up sometimes. Anyway, I was thinking the book could double as a driving instruction manual! I've got pages of just learning how to drive; it's so next level! In the future all books will double as driving instruction manuals."
"Um..."
"Oh, how stupid of me! I haven't told you about my next character!
"Ok, what's he like?"
"His wife's dead too! But. We don't know it immediately. It's pretty slick."
"And..."
"And he loves Agatha Christie! Isn't that wild?"
"Sure...any other characters?"
"Yes! There's a guy and his..."
"...Wife is dead?"
"Yes, how'd you know?"
"Just a guess."

"But I wanted this guy to be unique, different than the others. So I made him Canadian."
...
"And he has a monkey!! Ahaha I'm cracking myself up again!"
"Ok, how about female characters? Got any of those?"
"Dude, tons! Check it out! There's the first guy's girl and she doesn't want to marry him because she's a servant, and then she dies!"
"Anything else about her?"
"I thought the death thing could be like her defining characteristic. I didn't want to muddy that up with details."
"Ok, I guess..."
"But then the second guy's wife is super religious and also into Agatha Christie. It's like a passion they share; that's how the readers will know they're an amazing couple. She has this whole thing about Christie and Jesus; it is the highlight of the book!"
"Oh, so she's not..."
"Dead? Of course she is! But that one's the fake-out. That's why I put in the Jesus and Agatha stuff, to throw readers off."
...
"And of course there's the last guys wife."
"Well, you told me she's dead, but what else?"
"Nothing! That's the beauty of it. She is purely dead, no messy details. But I named her Clara; isn't that a beautiful name? I thought that would really drive the grief home."
"So it seems like there's a theme going on here..."
"Yes, totally! I knew you would get it. It's about grief and love and faith, and they're all kind of on a quest, but not after anything really important! They're all just so sad!"
"Um..."
"Oh, and there's some random monkeys. I like monkeys."
"And you can get 300 pages out of this?"
"Dude, of course!"
"Okay, we can sell it. Send it to the printer."

João Carlos says

out of bounds

Tuizelo - Vinhais - Bragança - Portugal

O escritor canadiano **Yann Martel** (n. 1963) constrói o romance **”As Altas Montanhas de Portugal”** conjugando três “contos”, separados no tempo, em 1904, 1938 e 1981, situados, essencialmente, em Lisboa, Bragança e numa pequena aldeia no Nordeste de Portugal, Tuizelo, concelho de Vinhais, distrito de Bragança.
Na **Parte Um – Sem Casa**, Tomás, solteiro, é um assistente do conservador no Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, em Lisboa, um homem dilacerado pela dor e pela perda, a morte de entes queridos, (view spoiler) que começa a andar “às arrecuas”, “com as costas viradas para o mundo e para Deus”, empreendendo uma procura, um crucifixo, referenciado no diário do padre Ulisses, que se inicia em 17 de Setembro de 1931, em Luanda, Angola.
Em tom de comédia dramática, com um humor e uma ironia sublime, a dor de Tomás vai-se acentuando,

numa viagem inesquecível e errática, de Lisboa a Tuizelo, num dos primeiros automóveis existentes em Portugal, um Renault.

Bragança - Portugal

Na **Parte Dois - Para Casa**, Eusébio Lozora é médico legista em Bragança, no Hospital de São Francisco, o maior de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, acreditando que **"Cada corpo morto é um livro com uma história para contar, cada órgão um capítulo, os capítulos ligados por uma narrativa comum. É dever profissional de Eusébio ler essas histórias, virando cada uma das páginas com um bisturi, e escrever um relatório final de leitura. O que escreve deve reflectir com exactidão o que leu no livro, o que resulta numa espécie de poesia pragmática. É a curiosidade que o faz avançar, como a todos os leitores. O que aconteceu a este corpo? Como? Porquê? Busca aquela ausência ardilosa e forçada que nos vence a todos. O que é a morte?"** (Pág. 116 – 117)
Eusébio está na cave do hospital na véspera de Ano Novo em 1938, e recebe duas visitas, primeiro a da sua mulher Maria Luísa e depois a de Maria das Dores; que pretende que o Dr. efectue uma autópsia ao seu marido…
Este "conto" tem uma longa dissertação sobre Jesus e os Evangelhos, sobre a religião e a fé, numa "associação" com os romances policiais de Agatha Christie. **"As histórias de Agatha Christie são narrativas com pormenores reveladores, daí a linguagem comedida e direta e os inúmeros parágrafos e capítulos curtos, como nos Evangelhos. Apenas se conta o essencial. Os romances policiais, tal como os Evangelhos, são produto de uma destilação."** (Pág. 132)

Tuizelo - Vinhais - Bragança - Portugal (Fotografia de Feelix)

Na Parte Três – Em Casa, o senador canadiano Peter Tovy, viúvo, a viver em Otava, adopta um chimpanzé, um símio que se chama Odo, e regressa às origens, a Tuizelo, donde partiu com apenas dois anos de idade.
Uma dupla improvável, que faz viagem de Lisboa a Tuizelo num 2CV, um Citroen, sem extras nenhuns, com janelas cortadas a meio na horizontal, capota em lona grossa e uma alavanca de mudanças que sai do tabliê.
"Tuizelo surge ao fundo de uma estrada sinuosa, na berma de uma mata, enfiada num vale. As ruas empedradas, estreitas e inclinadas, abrem caminho até um pequeno adro com uma fonte que gorgoleja no centro. (...).
É imediatamente conquistado pela tranquilidade e o isolamento da aldeia. E os seus pais eram originários dali! Na verdade ela nascera ali. Mal consegue acreditar." (Pág. 216)
Peter Tovy, tal como Tomás e Eusébio Lozora, são três homens dilacerados pela angústia e pelo desespero de perderem a mulher que amavam.

O trabalho de investigação que **Yann Martel** realizou sobre Portugal, com destaque, essencialmente, para as questões culturais - as tradições e os costumes ancestrais de um povo – e as referências geográficas, é admirável, distinguindo alguns conceitos, "exclusivamente" portugueses, realçando-se a **saudade** (sentimento de mágoa e nostalgia, causado pela ausência, desaparecimento, distância ou privação de pessoas, épocas, lugares ou coisas a afectiva e ditosamente ligado e ditosamente ligado e que se desejaria voltar a ter presentes – fonte: Infopédia), o desenrascanço, o é para *amanhã*, a dor e a tristeza.
"As Altas Montanhas de Portugal" é um romance emocional e alegórico - uma viagem inesquecível por Portugal - que convoca inúmeros temas, com destaque para a solidão, a angústia, a dor, a fé e a religião; num registo simultaneamente, bizarro e emocionante, por vezes, descritivo e detalhado, com múltiplas leituras, profundamente religioso (aos Evangelhos) e literário (a Agatha Christie), numa junção original sobre a

religião e os chimpanzés, ou os símios, animais, que conectam as histórias, ligações ténues que se estabelecem de uma forma surpreendente, contemplativa e surreal.
”As Altas Montanhas de Portugal” *é um romance excepcional - de forma alguma consensual - num registo em que* ***Yann Martel*** *revela uma imaginação prodigiosa e uma escrita que “acompanha” as vivências das personagens, num livro em que cada leitor lê e interpreta como muito bem entender…*
No meu caso – **Adorei…**
E vou querer fazer as viagens de Tomás, Eusébio e Peter/Odo...

Ilustração **Raffi Anderian**

http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016...

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