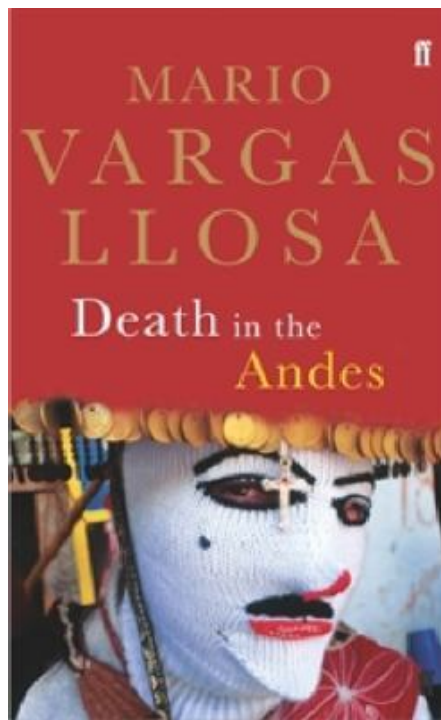




Death in the Andes

Mario Vargas Llosa , Edith Grossman (Translator)

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Death in the Andes

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Death in the Andes Mario Vargas Llosa , Edith Grossman (Translator)

In an isolated community in the Peruvian Andes, a series of mysterious disappearances has occurred. Army corporal Lituma and his deputy Tom?s believe the Shining Path guerrillas are responsible, but the townspeople have their own ideas about the forces that claimed the bodies of the missing men. This riveting novel is filled with unforgettable characters, among them disenfranchised Indians, eccentric local folk, and a couple performing strange cannibalistic sacrifices. As the investigation progresses, Tom?s entertains Lituma with the surreal tale of a precarious love affair.

Death in the Andes is both a fascinating detective novel and an insightful political allegory. Mario Vargas Llosa offers a panoramic view of Peruvian society, from the recent social upheaval to the cultural influences in its past.

Death in the Andes Details

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ISBN : 9780571175499

Author : Mario Vargas Llosa , Edith Grossman (Translator)

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From Reader Review Death in the Andes for online ebook

Miss Ravi says

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Andrea says

I have enjoyed everything I have read by Vargas Llosa, so I am biased. This was a great read, I didn't want to put it down. I was quite surprised that it had a (relatively) happy ending, considering the whole novel is about the death and destruction brought on by terrorism and corrupt government.

I first read this novel in Spanish in June 2008. Three years later, I am reading it in English, planning to teach it in a freshman seminar, and trying to read it through the eyes of an 18-year-old.

This time around, the novel seemed more vulgar (I guess the English words are more shocking to me than the Spanish), and Lituma less likeable. I still loved Tomás and his storytelling, and I still found this to be a masterfully written novel. But I was much more attentive to the misogynistic and racist language characteristic of Vargas Llosa's works. My love-hate relationship with him continues: I love everything he writes (above all, I love a well-told story) but I hate the blatant racism, elitism, misogyny, etc., that fill his pages.

Read for the third time in Spanish, with a group of Spanish majors. Blown away again by Vargas Llosa, this time because I paid more attention to the numerous narrative voices that are woven together to tell this story. I don't understand why this novel is not more widely read. Despite my own issues with his ideology, he is undoubtedly a master of language, character development, and stylistic experimentation. In fact, I am tempted to give the novel five stars this time!

Read again in English and Spanish with students who don't understand how amazing this novel is. Frustrating. Also frustrating to reread all the horrifically racist descriptions of the serranos. Lots of emotions this time!

Michael Finocchiaro says

This was an excellent story with great characters and captivating narration. Lituma is now stationed in the mountains in Naccos (after being ejected from Piura after Palomino Molera and needs to solve a triple homicide which superficially looks like it may be the work of the Sendero Luminoso terrorists (whom we also gets glimpses at during the book through some of their victims). The pace never lets up and we also are treated to local folklore like in The Storyteller which plays an important part in the story as well. I liked the triple narrative framing of each chapter and found each character engaging and realistic. I enjoyed Death in the Andes very much even if its predecessors such as The Green House and The War at the End of the World pleased me even more. Mario Vargas Llosa is an extraordinary storyteller and novelist and this was another standout book for me.

Mahdi Lotfi says

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Mag says

The old mingles with the new in Vargas Llosa's Peru. Human sacrifices and spirits of the mountains, road building, terrucos – uncompromising, ruthless and cruel freedom fighters coming out of nowhere and conducting their cruel people trials, and superstitious mountain people (serruchos) are the backdrop for the plot and its main characters. Captain Lituma and his adjutant Tomasito, people from the new, more modern world, are posted in a remote mountain village to guard the road building against the terrucos. The terrucos don't attack them, yet three people go missing without a trace. Captain Lituma is obsessively trying to piece what happened to them. At the same time his adjutant, Tomasito, can't stop thinking about Mercedes, a prostitute he has fallen in love with and for whom he is longing. Tradition and superstition, death, love and obsession interweave and drive the plot in this tale.

It was very well written, and I loved the style. I found the world portrayed sinister yet fascinating.

Brad says

This book doesn't just tell a story. It is told through stories, through storytelling, and this makes all the stories of Peru, even those beyond the confines of the page, one story. Mario Vargas Llosa doesn't give a damn about time or space or traditional plot; he doesn't care about making the reader comfortable or making reading easy; he cares about connections, and he makes them however he damn well pleases.

Death in the Andes follows three stories (for a while). The first follows Corporal Lituma's search for the truth in the disappearances of a mute, an albino and a mayor posing as a miner who's hiding from the *terrucos*. The second is a string of short stories wherein characters peripheral to Lituma's investigation are shown interacting in some way or other with the *Sendero Luminoso*. Some hide, some are executed, some help the Senderistas, some escape, some bear witness, but all are touched by the presence of the *terrucos* in the Andes. The third is the tale of how Lituma's aid found himself in the crappy town of Naccos, and his great obsessive passion for a beautiful woman named Mercedes.

It is difficult to place these tales in time, even more difficult to place them in space, but none of that is really important because Llosa isn't trying to deliver a plot or even a character study; he is trying to express the reality of brutality, and its omnipresence in Peru -- now as ever.

So when Llosa abandons the short stories and the retelling of Tomasito's love for Mercedes, replacing them with the history of the cantineros and his wife — debauched Dionisio and the seer Doña Adriana -- it is a seamless shift into further confusion. Suddenly we're listening to Lituma's speculations spun as a story about the death of the mute. We can't know if it is a true story, but it doesn't really matter because whether or not it happened to the mute, it happened to somebody somewhere.

And when we finally discover what did happen to the mute it is even more brutal than we could have expected.

Yet even with all the brutality that swirls around and through Llosa's Andes, his tragic Peru, there is life and living. It might not be pretty or gentle or caring or healthy, but it is beautifully alive.

And all of that is reflected in Llosa's structure and prose. Death in the Andes is an exercise in language. And I read this wonderful Spanish novel in English. How sad is that? I must continue my Spanish lessons just so I can read this in its original form. I am sure it will blow my mind.

Sawsan says

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Joaquin Castañ says

Me ha gustado esta novela que fue Premio Planeta en 1993.

"Lituma en los Andes" de Mario Vargas Llosa

Algernon says

[7/10]

A haunting and disturbing story, skillfully presented, but I hold Mr. Llosa to higher standards after including his sprawling, philosophical War Of The End of The World on my favorites list. I learned a lot now about modern Peru, which is why I picked the book up in the first place, but I also had issues with the muddled dialogue, with the slow pace, continually fragmented by flashbacks, and with a perceived bias against the Sendero Luminoso guerilla, who received an extremely harsh treatment as brainless, blood crazed terrorists.

I have seen a review on the net calling the book a Latin American version of **Heart of Darkness**, where instead of horizontal movement along an equatorial river, we get a vertical movement into the high Cordillera (Richard Eder). The comparison feels appropriate, due to the prevailing downbeat mood, the permanent danger and the soul crushing climate and isolation. Another connection can be made to the noir books, as the main plot deals with an investigation of three deaths / disappearitions, and a secondary plot is a love story of a couple on the run from the local mafia (reminding me of James M Cain in particular).

The setting is Naccos, a semi abandoned, dirt-poor high altitude village consisting of a highway labour camp, a police post and a cantina for getting drunk after work. A sergeant (Lituma) and an Adjutant (Carreno) try to unravel the mystery surrounding three missing persons : a mute simpleton (Pedrito Tinoco), an albino (Casimiro Huarcaya) and a team foreman (Medardo Llantac). As we learn about their identities and backstories through flashbacks, the only apparent connections are the fact that they were all strangers for the local population, and they all had suffered grievously at the hand of the *serruchos* : the blood thirsty Maoist rebels who control the region and who could descend on Naccos at any moment. As if the stories of these three missing unfortunates were not enough, Llosa includes a couple more high profile atrocities committed by the *serruchos* against foreign tourists and against an environmental activist, which prompted me to suspect the novel is being used to vent the author's dissatisfaction with a government report he helped write on the reconciliation between the different factions in the civil war.

Coming back to the two policemen, they are linked by their lowland origins which makes them also outsiders among the imposing peaks and freezing nights of the Andes. The threat of a *serrucho* attack that they would be unable to resist hangs like Damocles sword over every moment of their stay in Naccos. Their only recourse is to turn their backs on the world and hold endless conversations in their dismal shack, which frankly makes an already glum novel even less appealing. Llosa experimental technique with dialogue, where he mixes up past and present from one line to another is not helping things along very much. It often feels like the two cops are holding a contest about who is the most depressed:

He took drag after drag on his cigarette, and his mood changed from anger to demoralized gloom. - Lituma.

I've never been so miserable in my life as I was here. - Carreno.

and an exchange between the two:

- I was tired of living. At least that's what I thought, Corporal. But seeing how scared I am now, I guess I don't want to die after all.

- Only a damn fool wants to die before his time, asserted Lituma. There are some fantastic things in this life, though you won't find any around here. Did you really want to die? Can I ask why, when you're so young?

- What else could it be?

- Some sweet little dame must have broken your heart.

Some of the local details that give the novel its authentic flavour and kept me interested in the plot:

- vicunas are a smaller version of llamas, living in the wild at high altitude, very shy animals whose fur is greatly appreciated in luxury clothing, and who are listed as endangered species.
- apu are ancestral mountain spirits, their essence can get incarnated in condors, and they are often malefic
- huaycos are devastating rockslides, send by angry apus according to the locals, probably caused by earthquakes to the scientific mind;
- [edit] serruchos - are the local population, speaking in quechua dialect, the remnants of tribes older even than the Incas. (*You have to understand their thinking. For them, there were no natural catastrophes. Everything was decided by a higher power that had to be won over with sacrifices*)
- pishtacos are the Peruvian version of vampires, feeding on human fat instead of blood, and using a dust made of powdered bones in order to put a glamour on their victims
- mukis are a sort of gnomes hiding in the deep mines and scaring the workers
- pisco is a distillate from wine, specific to Peru, and the drink of choice in Dionisio bodega.

Which brings me to the most interesting aspect of the book for me: the mystical component, the primeval myths and traditions that can be traced back to the stone age and illustrate peculiar similarities across continents. In our case, Dionisio the barman is a clear reference to Bacchus, and his witchy consort Dona Adriana is a maenad - one of the god's followers, achieving ecstasy through drink, dance and debauchery:

When we're dancing and drinking, there are no Indians, no mestizos, no rich or poor, no men or women. The differences are wiped away and we become as spirits.

Later new references are introduced to the bachanalia mysteries, secret practices reserved for the women and translated to preconquista cultures in the Lord of the Fiesta tradition: choosing a person to rule the festivities for one year:

He did some hard drinking, he played the charango or the quena or the harp or the tijeras or whatever instrument he knew, and he danced, stamping his heels and singing, day and night, until he drove out sorrow, until he could forget and not feel anything and give his life willingly and without fear. Only the women went out to hunt him on the last night of the fiesta

Whether these mysteries had anything to do with the disappearances, or if there are even older myths hiding in the heart of the Andes, is for Lituma to uncover and for the reader to wait until the last page.

I will close with my earlier reference to a 'noirish' love story. Llosa chooses to finish this plot line in an unconventional way, but I felt it was appropriate in underlining how the key to the story may be neither with Lituma's cynical attitude nor with Dionisio's escape into drink, but with the young adjutant's naive belief in a better world.

Fabian says

So now I am really getting a feel for the Peruvian maestro (have had the pleasure to read 5 of his like 20 or so books). "Death in the Andes" is a horror story made comical, like most Latin American tragedies ("Before Night Falls," or "Kiss of the Spider Woman", or more recently, M.V.L.'s "The Feast of the Goat") which persist hard in trying not to be overtly sad. Thematically rich, with tragedy piled atop tragedy, the narrative flow is invigorating, forcing the reader to forget all about airport terminals and the general flying population; the dialogue is laugh-out-loud funny, the whole canvas is expertly painted. The interplay of magic is not as phantasmagorical as, say, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, but the voice is distinct & literary. It is not as perfect a gem as that previously mentioned novel ("Goat"), but it has its own luster, its own vibrancy. I really can't think of a writer with more tricks up his sleeve than Mario Vargas Llosa!

Gauss74 says

Non un posto facile il Perù di metà novecento, colpito in modo durissimo dalla crisi economica e traversato da disagi sociali che sfociano nella guerriglia del gruppo rivoluzionario marxista Sendero Luminoso da una parte, e nelle altrettanto sanguinose repressioni dall'altra. Ancor più duro nelle Ande, dove alla totale mancanza di vita pubblica si sommano la miseria atavica e quella della recente crisi, che fa chiudere le imprese minerarie e le strade che le servono riducendo alla fame più nera i minatori indio che si aggirano per questi monti.

Questo almeno quello che appare al caporale Lituma, soldato di mezza età ormai navigato che viene mandato insieme al suo aiutante Tomasito (giovane ed innamoratissimo di una donna irraggiungibile) tra gli sperduti villaggi della cordigliera ad indagare su alcune misteriose scomparse che hanno interessato il piccolo paese di Naccos, poco più di un agglomerato di baracche sorto intorno ad un cantiere stradale. Stretto tra lo spettacolo deprimente della dura vita dei minatori da una parte, e dalla minaccia della sanguinosa violenza senderista dall'altra, sulle prime al sottufficiale questa sembra una via di mezzo tra un ergastolo ed una condanna a morte. Ma man mano che il suo cocciuto spirito di giustizia lo porta avanti nell'indagine, scoprirà sempre nuove sorprese, sia sui tre scomparsi sia sullo spirito delle Ande, che pare ancora pulsare indomito e vitale tra i dirupi.

Vargas Llosa ci offre con questo romanzo un ritratto del Perù andino, coi suoi rivolgimenti sociali, le sue speranze di riscatto stimulate dal vento comunista che soffia con forza in tutto il sud America; con l'attrito non solo economico ma anche e soprattutto culturale tra mondo occidentale e spirito indio, che umiliazione dopo umiliazione sembra emergere di continuo dai fianchi delle montagne. Queste sembrano vivere di vita propria, animate da demoni antichissimi che non tollerano di perdere la loro parte di venerazione in favore del dio cristiano o del dio denaro (che in questi luoghi assumono lo stesso volto).

Così grande il sentimento religioso del continente latinoamericano! con i suoi spiriti, ma anche con i suoi canti e le sue danze nelle quali uomini e donne si perdono lasciandosi dominare per venerare i demoni della montagna e pagare loro il giusto tributo...una forza superiore a qualsiasi meschina umiliazione che non si lascia piegare dall'occidente liberale e che non si fida e non scende a patti con l'occidente comunista. Gli uomini dell'ovest pensano all'America solo in termini di sfruttamento da una parte e conversione dall'altra, ma con il loro bieco materialismo guardano a questo mondo senza capirlo, e puntualmente falliscono.

Anche il caro vecchio Lituma che ne è il portavoce finché ragiona alla maniera dei suoi superiori si aggira impotente e rabbioso sentendosi prigioniero delle Ande come se i monti fossero le mura di una cella; quando impara a vedere questo mondo non con volontà di dominio ma lasciandosi condurre da esso, comincerà a capirlo (pur continuando a non accettarlo: sarà molto felice di andarsene, quando sarà il momento) e sfruttando questa comprensione risolverà il mistero delle scomparse.

Scomparse che, tuttavia, dopo questo magnifico e terribile incontro con la gente delle montagne perderanno di rilevanza.

Emerge da quest'opera la tormentata complessità del pensiero politico di Vargas Llosa, che da un lato è disgustato dal materialismo e dalla violenza del mondo comunista (che non sa vedere se non inganno nel spiritualità andina) non puntando questa al benessere economico; dall'altro esprime la più dura condanna del mondo liberale, che con una violenza ancora peggiore vuole piegare questo antico rapporto con la terra a logiche di sfruttamento e di tornaconto economico di potenze per di più straniere. Si può parlare quindi di un Vargas Llosa conservatore, ma non secondo il significato che di questo si dà in Occidente: il geniale premio Nobel non si fida infatti di rivoluzioni nate in base ad idee che non sono locali e che hanno solo insanguinato

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