



The Elixir of Immortality

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Since the eleventh century, the Spinoza family has passed down, from father to son, a secret manuscript containing the recipe for immortality. Now, after thirty-six generations, the last descendant of this long and illustrious chain, Ari Spinoza, doesn't have a son to whom to entrust the manuscript. From his deathbed, he begins his narrative, hoping to save his lineage from oblivion.

Ari's two main sources of his family's history are a trunk of yellowing documents inherited from his grandfather, and his great-uncle Fernando's tales that captivated him when he was a child. He chronicles the Spinozas' involvement in some of Europe's most formative cultural events with intertwining narratives that move through ages of tyranny, creativity, and social upheaval: into medieval Portugal, Grand inquisitor Torquemada's Spain, Rembrandt's Amsterdam, the French Revolution, Freud's Vienna, and the horrors of both world wars.

The Elixir of Immortality blends truth and fiction as it rewrites European history through comic, imaginative, scandalous, and tragic tales that prove "the only thing that can possibly give human beings immortality on this earth: our ability to remember."

The Elixir of Immortality Details

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From Reader Review The Elixir of Immortality for online ebook

Liliana Pinto says

Gabi Gleichmann traz até nós um romance monumental que atravessa séculos. Somos conduzidos através de épocas e de personalidades que, à sua maneira, nos marcaram profundamente.

A história é narrada por Ari, o último descendente dos Espinoza. Começa em 1140 quando Baruch é abordado por um velho mendigo e é incumbido de passar as palavras de uma tábua aos seus descendentes. Para isso ele tem de iniciar uma viagem que o irá levar até ao reino de Portugal onde se torna médico da corte e cria o Elixir da Imortalidade. O segredo do elixir passa de geração em geração, atravessando guerras e ganancias. Este livro está repleto de personagens maravilhosas e voluntariosas mas também de personagens maliciosas e invejosas. Mas também está repleto de personagens que, ou não têm nada haver com a família Espinoza ou entraram nela por casamento mas que têm um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento da mesma. Uma dessas personagens é o tio-avô de Ari que durante a sua vida lhe contou as histórias dos familiares.

Além do título ser "O Elixir da Imortalidade" este tem um papel secundário na história. É mencionado algumas vezes mas o foco é nas personagens, nos seus feitos, nos seus fracassos e sucessos. A personagem que mais me marcou foi o tia-avô de Ari, Fernando. Era um homem maravilhoso que perdeu o amor da vida dele por causa da II guerra mundial. Era uma personagem reservada que vivia unicamente para os momentos em que contava as histórias aos seus netos.

É um livro grande e que por vezes requer paragens por causa da intensidade da história mas que foi uma leitura deliciosa e que não me vou esquecer nos próximos tempos. Provavelmente o melhor livro que li em 2014. Uma boa aula de história.

Recomendo.

Lilith says

Loved this book!

A book is past down from father to son, the family history - the world history. All so well written!

Marian says

Europas historie og en jødisk familiehistorie i skjønn forening. Gjennom 800 år reiser vi. Boka er en blomst i utfoldelse. Langsom, vakker, men også trist og tankevekkende utfoldelse - som leser bare dras jeg videre, videre. Herlig leseopplevelse! Anbefales varmt!

"... det eneste som formår å gi menneskene udødelighet på jorden; vår evne til å minnes..."

Sheila rood says

I enjoyed this bok so much I may have to read it again sometime.

Vasco Simões says

O que dizer deste romance. Ufffff. São histórias dentro da História. A saga da família Espinoza ao longo de 1000 anos que detém na sua posse um livro que é um autêntico segredo. São centenas de personagens e de pequenas histórias. Aquelas com o nariz enorme que têm mortes trágicas são deliciosas. Enorme romance difícil de classificar mas muito bem e que deve ser lido.

Mishehu says

Words like elegiac, incantatory, and incandescent, come to mind when I think about this characterization defying novel. Suffice it to say, it is unlike anything I -- or likely you -- have ever read. It's also long. Too long. Though nothing was extraneous in this novel, no line wasted, the cumulative effect of so many brief chapter sections, the relentlessness of the first person narration, and the veritable onslaught of language (albeit beautiful language) eventually wore me down. Had TEoI clocked a few hundred fewer pages, it would have been a perfect novel. As it stands, it is both an unusually sumptuous and effecting novel, and a study in authorial excess. Even so, it is a work of art, a true European masterpiece. If it rivals the great 19th century Russian novels for size and sweep, it also merits being being invoked in their company. Gleichmann is an immensely talented writer. His prose is poetry, and his is the soul of a storyteller through and through. TEoI is a GREAT novel.

Cindie Harp says

I truly debated how to rate this book. Partly because recently I have rated so many books 5 stars. Is the rating based on the empirical (as if there were such an objective thing...well, maybe there is. Nah) quality of the writing, the plot, the editing? Or is it my personal reaction to it? In this case, it is the latter. I could not wait to get to this book. Had it belonged to me, I would have written in it, underlined it, and begun to reread it immediately upon finishing. It took me nearly a week to read. As I approached the end, I slowed down considerably. I did not want it to end. Could it have benefitted from some editing? Refining? Yes -- not unlike this review. I will recommend it highly to some people who like this sort of thing (sweeping epic, fictionalized history/historicized fiction; existential questioning and angst, repeated many times) because, of course, that is the sort of thing they like.

Enough navel-gazing.

Ari Spinoza, the ephemeral narrator, gives the sweeping history of his family as well as the Eastern European world, in a high-brow Forest Gump sort of way. The cast of characters (helpfully appended with a purely imagined family tree) was overwhelming and, at times, too numerous to remember or keep track of from one storyline to the next, which could jump either forward or back by decades or centuries, then back again. He throws in philosophical movements, political trends and satire, Torah, Talmud, a bit of Yiddish, French and

some German. Also some Russian history and language. There are some (to whom I will not recommend this book) who could justifiably say, "Too much!" to the whole morass.

Indeed, my head was spinning by the end. However, that is probably my own shortcoming, irrespective of the book. And I suspect that is the reaction the author was going for.

Ymichaelmeigsyahoo.com says

Loved it. Translated it for the publisher.

Martin says

What an incredibly beautiful book. Spending the last couple of weeks with it has been like listening to your uncles stories. There are passages of sublime beauty.

So, I'm halfway through, and I'm very much enjoying it. (If I wasn't, I would not have made it 360+ pages.) There are stories within the main story, digressions aplenty, and a narrator of dubious reliability. Given the way in which he learned the stories that's to be expected. Either Kirkus or PW mentioned Dan brown, but this book is different on a lot of levels, not the least of which is the quality of the writing. The way in which the stories are told mirrors that of conversation, which I very much appreciate.

Michelle says

Spanning 1,000 years, The Elixir of Immortality weaves the Spinoza family saga through European and Jewish history. Acting as the frame story, Ari, the narrator, begins by explaining that he is childless, dying and wants to keep his family history from disappearing with him. Focusing on one son per generation, we follow the path of the secret elixir of immortality as it's passed from father to son.

The touches of magical realism reminded me of 100 Years of Solitude and read like a Forest Gump/Big Fish mash-up. The fictitious history used real conflicts, events, and historical figures as the backdrop for each character's story and served to both ground and propel the narrative forward.

Ari and his great-uncle Fernando's stories are interjected throughout the narrative, breaking up the monotony of his ancestors' tales. Genes and the idea of certain desirable and undesirable traits being "in your blood" were repeated themes. This sanguine connection becomes even more apparent as we watch each generation suffer, fail, triumph and fall in love. As the story progresses, we can trace the interweaving threads that connect not just blood, but all people. This wasn't a Jewish epic, but a story of the importance of family, memory and storytelling.

While a long book, don't be intimidated. It was easy to put down and come back to without feeling lost. When events from earlier in the story are brought up again, a quick synopsis was usually included, and since this book ran to over 700 pages, these recaps never felt redundant.

From the Moors in Spain, to World Wars and Trotsky, this book covered a lot of ground and introduced a lot of characters, but without ever feeling overwhelming. It covered all the emotions you'd expect a family epic to cover, heartstrings were tugged and laugh lines were activated.

But, the Spanish inquisition? That, I wasn't expecting.

Audrey says

Not sure what to say about this one. I obviously enjoyed it somewhat, considering I plowed through the entire 700 page thing in 3 days (bear in mind I've been sick in bed all day today without other reading materials.)

However. Not sure if this is the fault of the author or the translator, but the story often presented the same facts multiple times as if we had not read them yet. It got old. Also, the translator sometimes used the wrong words in sentences, words that don't make sense given the context of the rest of the sentence.

I did like the historical aspects of it, whether they are true or not (mostly not.) I even enjoyed the author's habit of jumping around in the narrative, I felt it kept the stories more interesting and lively. If you're interested in reading an immense book spanning the history of a European Jewish family over the course of centuries, this is probably the book for you. I'd place it in a similar category to *The Historian*; enjoyable but not super noteworthy, overlong, don't take it as historic truth.

Alison says

I enjoyed this book, but it never quite pulled me in all the way. I found many of the individual stories within the novel very compelling, and particularly enjoyed the way the fictional characters in the book interact with historical figures and events throughout European history, but the overall story arc did not hold together for me. The book is heavily influenced in its themes and structure by Gabriel Garcia Marquez -- basically, it's a version of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* about Eastern European Jews -- but whereas in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* you are sucked along the family into the vortex of isolation and solitude and catastrophe, in this you are left wondering why the family ultimately disintegrates. Are the horrors of the Holocaust and Soviet repression ultimately their undoing, or is it supposed to be something about the family members themselves? Maybe it is because the historical characters are so much more clearly drawn than the more contemporary characters, but in the end, I felt that the story peters out and fails to draw all the threads together. Still, a very interesting read.

Jeff Bjorgan says

A novel that elaborates on the history of a fictitious family of Jews, blending their stories with true historical

events. Gleichman writes well, but the book, whether lost in translation or done purposefully, struggles with its pacing and its description. The narrator rabbit trails many times throughout each chapter resulting in the loss of chronology of the stories and interest in the characters. And descriptions go from vague to extremely detailed, all under the guise of an uncle recalling stories to his young nephews. However, the stories do tend to stick with you, and the idea of "The Elixir of Mortality" being our memories is a thoughtful theme to chew on.

Owlseyes says

UPDATE; I consider this NEWS relevant:

Originally published on January 29, 2015 3:21 pm

"Portugal's Cabinet approved a law Thursday that would offer citizenship to the descendants of Sephardic Jews who were expelled, burned at the stake or forcibly converted to Christianity 500 years ago". in NPR

Maybe, because this is a book about Portugal, Spinoza, and his ancestors and descendants ,it's surely a book I'd like to read in the near future.

Gabi Gleichmann (born in Budapest in the 1950's) is living now in Oslo. He recently gave an interview to the Portuguese paper Publico, on its section Ípsilon. Some of the affirmations really struck me, positively: they've fired my imagination,....brought new facts to my historical knowledge.

(1) Once upon a time a man called Baruch Halevi, the son of the rabbi of Espinosa, a place near Burges, had a vision,...it was the year 1148, he'd seen Moses who assigned him a mission: the foundation of a Sephardic community in a place, now called Lisbon. Moses told him another secret, something humanity has been after for a long time.You figure.

(2) Baruch became the medical doctor of our first King: D. Afonso Henriques,....Baruch progeny would last for 36 generations, which span almost 1,000 years of duration.

Gleichmann recalled his childhood: how many books his father had access to,...that influenced him;but at the top: The Arabian Nights,...whose structure he tries to replicate in this book. One thousand Nights it's about "story-telling". Something Gleichmann believes in. He says in the 1950's, in Hungary, only the soccer matches results were not cheated. Those were the grey days of the communist era.Totalitarianism.

He moved to Sweden when he was 10. His father, a diplomat, made that move due to the anti-Semitism resurgent and for political reasons. In Sweden , "he learned about democracy and respect for others" and studied Literature and Philosophy ; today he's a literary critic and editor. Again, The Arabian Nights introduced him to a colorful world, a world of adventure.

(3) The book is the recount of the last descendant of Spinoza family:Ari. It's an account of Europe's history; ..."The murderous Nazi slaughter which exterminated 6 million Jews, but also an almost fatal blow on Jewish culture".

The narrative is a voyage starting in the medieval Iberia peninsula, ...then Renaissance,... the Espinoza family in Holland,... Paris, the French revolution,...two World Wars, the Holocaust,...Siberia gulags...and finally Oslo.

(4) Gleichmann is of Hungarian Jewish descent.

(5) It's, for sure, a book about Jewish culture...still alive;...immortal.

Joan-Marc says

Masterpiece contemporánea.

De esos libros en los que entras siendo una persona y sales siendo otra.
