



Vampire in Love

Enrique Vila-Matas , Margaret Jull Costa (Translation)

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Gathered for the first time in English, and spanning his entire career, *Vampire in Love* offers a selection of the Spanish master Enrique Vila-Matas's finest short stories. An effeminate, hunchbacked barber on the verge of death falls in love with a choirboy. A fledgling writer on barbiturates visits Marguerite Duras's Paris apartment and watches his dinner companion slip into the abyss. An unsuspecting man receives a mysterious phone call from a lonely ophthalmologist, visits his abandoned villa, and is privy to a secret. The stories in *Vampire in Love*, selected and brilliantly translated by the renowned translator Margaret Jull Costa, are all told with Vila-Matas's signature erudition and wit and his provocative questioning of the interrelation of art and life.

Vampire in Love Details

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From Reader Review Vampire in Love for online ebook

jeremy says

the first collection of enrique vila-matas's short stories to appear in english translation, *vampire in love* features 19 stories from throughout the spanish author's estimable career. most noteworthy (and quite surprising to this reader) is that save for a couple selections, nearly all of the stories forego the metafictional, self-referential, and literary milieu well familiar to readers of his previously translated works. the stories which compose *vampire in love* reveal an almost entirely different side to vila-matas's fiction – many dealing with death, life's hardships, and the mystery of the uncertain.

with oft-remarkable prose, wit, and more than a little playfulness, vila-matas's short fiction reveals an artisan as comfortable (and as skillful) in brevity as he is in longer form. *vampire in love* ably demonstrates the wide variety of storytelling hues available on vila-matas's literary palette. the standout stories in *vampire in love* include "rosa schwarzer comes back to life," "the hour of the tired and weary," "they say i should say who i am," "greetings from dante," "the boy on the swing," and the titular tale.

i remember—probably because it seemed to foreshadow something that would affect us later on—the long speech he made that day about how we human beings are all carriers of poisons and inner devils that can undermine our most marvelous achievements.

*translated from the spanish by margaret jull costa (saramago, pessoa, marías, de queirós, atxaga, et al.

Margaryta says

This review first appeared in Alternating Current's review column The Coil

I can remember a lot of men swearing on their lives, and yet no one knows what life really is.

(from "Invented Memories," p. 157)

Occasionally one will come across a book that is difficult to classify. It is a book that leaves an unmistakable impression yet defies definitions of genre, managing to be a quirky kind of wonderful. The short stories of Enrique Vila-Matas' collection, *Vampire in Love*, fit this description perfectly, beginning with an unusual title, taken from one of the stories found later in the collection. It is perhaps best described as a meeting of the European gothic style with contemporary speculative fiction.

Vila-Matas' stories are eccentric and witty. While the plots may be familiar to the reader?—two friends going to dinner with a potential landlady, a woman working as a guard in an art museum experiencing a midlife crisis, to name a few?—they are layered with details and personality that make it difficult to parallel them to the work of any other author. One will find a young boy who refuses to talk, his first words after 11 years being words of chastisement toward his mother, a man being fooled by his son's constant statements of how he sees the nether, and many other unusual scenarios that make it hard to imagine them as part of everyday life.

At the same time, there is something distinctly real about these stories, possibly because of how little they resemble the fantasy world. When, in "Sea Swell," one of the young men begins talking about his past life in the underwater city of Atlantis, there is no sudden switch in tone or quality to the writing. Vila-Matas makes this feel like a simple fact, a part of a completely sane and plausible scenario, as if one can go out into the street and find that every third stranger shares the same origin story. These short stories play with the concept of sanity and the surreal, though never to their own detriment. The level of absurdity is kept consistent, which is why the moments of profound clarity that escape from the mouths of some characters or enter the minds of others do not have the kind of illuminating, epiphany quality to them. They, too, feel more real and easy to process. Take, for instance, a conversation between two men in the short story "In Search of the Electrifying Act":

"Didn't you used to be Brandy Mastaza."

That "used to be" rather shook me.

"And you," I replied, "never used to be anyone, which is much worse."

(p. 54).

The absurdity of the situation?—?a now forgotten and quite fat actor goes looking for a very skinny partner who will balance him out in an act?—?is neither emphasized nor downplayed when Vila-Matas inserts such moments of clarity, not just in this particular story but in any one might choose as an example. The result is a collection of stories that illustrates the general trend of daily life, albeit with slightly more exaggeration at times.

If one isn't fully convinced by the plot of the stories, then the writing style will do the convincing instead. The well-crafted and rounded sentences frequently veer off into asides or details that both add to the story as well as provide a comical addition to it that is an extraneous treat. *Vampire in Love* is sure to be memorable, and even if the plot of each story doesn't come to mind right away, then the titles are sure to jog the memory easily. It's a collection whose charm cannot be compared to anything else, and its readiness to bestow words of measured wisdom is truly impressive, reminding readers that:

[t]hey say the imagination is a place where it's always raining.

("An Idle Soul," p. 155).

Alan says

Nineteen stories of deception and fraud.

That headline may not capture the theme of all of the stories in "*Vampire in Love*", but it was certainly the first thought I had when I glanced over the book after finishing it.

"*Vampire in Love*" is the first English translation anthology of Spanish writer Enrique Vila-Matas' short fiction. If you don't think you'll remember the name, then think of it backwards as "Satam-Aliv" (within spitting distance of "Satan-Alive") as one character says when introducing himself in the story "They Say I Should Say Who I Am" (orig: 'Me dicen que diga quién soy'). The character is a boatswain and not a writer,

and this is just one of the ways that Vila-Matas finds to interject himself into his fiction, itself a deception. In that story the seaman is berating an artist for becoming famous for painting portraits of people in a part of the country he has never actually visited.

Although the title of the anthology is taken from a short story it contains, that story is not actually about vampires except in a metaphorical sense. So another deception, perhaps one to assist in the marketing, although the toothless comb on the cover mimicking pronounced canine teeth seems to wink at us to let us in on the joke.

My favourite stories here were "Sea Swell", where the author's proxy goes to dinner at the home of Marguerite Duras in Paris with a view to renting a room (which is something that the real-life author actually did do) and "The Boy on the Swing", where an office worker goes to dinner at retiring colleague's home and hears a surprising revelation. I got a good chuckle from "I am Not Going to Read Any More E-Mails" where the writer replies to his correspondence without actually reading it, apparently a take on composer Erik Satie's real-life methods (from whom I think composer John Cage also took his trick of answering audience questions with unrelated pre-written responses).

Trivia and Links

The stories in "Vampire in Love" were selected by the translator Margaret Jull Costa with some suggested additions by Vila-Matas himself. Jull Costa discusses the process in this interview.

I am fairly certain that I have never previously read a story/novel where an inanimate object was the narrator, as is the case in the story "An Idle Soul." Even if there are other cases like it, they are unlikely to be as odd as a mosquito net.

Since this anthology is a unique selection for the English translation, there is no equivalent original Spanish language book. But presumably most of the stories are contained in the collections *Suicidios ejemplares* (Exemplary Suicides) and *Chet Baker piensa en su arte: Relatos selectos* (Chet Baker Thinks About His Art: Selected Stories).

Chitra says

This collection is filled with stories that range from his earliest works to his much later stories, each one in his signature style (which doesn't seem to have changed all that much which I suppose, is the mark of a talented author). Unfortunately for me, his signature style is just not for me. The stories are all beautifully written, don't get me wrong, they are descriptive, interesting and oftentimes captivating. But they are unnecessarily long winded and sometimes, most lines seem to fail at pulling me in or delivering the emotion I expect he meant it to deliver.

WHAT I LIKED : I adored the author's descriptive writing. I can picture each place beautifully and that is what one looks for in stories set in places we haven't and probably never will see. Spain in a recurring theme in these tales and I can feel how much he loves his country and it's people and customs and that love makes me feel affectionately about those stories I enjoyed here.

Some of the characters and stories here are unique and surprising. For instance, there is a story told from the point of view of a mosquito net observing a couple who are in a different country. And another about a man who was spying on his ex wife. Some of these will leave you in awe of the author's ingenuity.

WHAT I DISLIKED : But my biggest dislike is the endings and POVs. Most of the characters seemed to be the same person, maybe they're all the author? whether it is the people watchers or the mosquito net I mentioned earlier, they seem like the same person and I ended up feeling like I was reading a long story about one character. Another thing was the endings. It almost feels like the author wasn't sure how to end the stories. They fell so flat. I am not one who wants a satisfactory ending in a story, particularly a short story but these just didn't work for me.

There are characters here that I think are famous in Spain but that I do not know. so that might have been cause for me not enjoying a couple of tales here. Atleast that's what I felt, those stories seemed incomplete and blank to me but since a lot of people have raved about them this is the conclusion I must come to. This isn't necessarily a dislike but more of a disadvantage for those outside of Spain reading these stories.

I would suggest this for people who are already fans of Spanish literature and are looking to read someone they missed (this is, I believe, the first ever translation). I think this is my first completed contemporary Spanish author and I'm excited for that.

Full review on booksnstrips.wordpress.com

Gorkem says

Vampire in Love is the short story collection of Vila-Matas published in 2016 in English. The stories present a surreal compounds that require the reader to figure out complexities of hopelessness and extreme tiredness through the great, dark sense of humor displayed in the short stories.

Vampire in Love has 19 stories in total. The characters are outcasts, writers, terrorists, actors and criminals who search of something, which is also a favorite theme used by Vila-Matas.

Reading Vila-Matas's stories is a strange experience. His virtuosity of using absurdity themes and his amazing touch of humor in surreal situations are brilliant.

I extremely love this book.

10/8

Michele says

"I turned another corner and have still not woken up from the nightmare of waking up from a nightmare and finding that I'm still working in a circus in Oklahoma, and there is no way out." p. 123

Odd stories about odd people in odd situations, ranging from very funny to poignant to WTF. Vila-Matas has been compared to Borges and I can see why: the stories play with time, space, identify, what's real in a similar manner, and have a similarly complex style. Most of the stories are more or less humorous but there's also sort of a hint of darkness, round the edges as it were. Suicide/death shows up in several, though it's as an idea than an actual event.

My favorites were the one about the women who collected bread-rolls and the one about the man who wants to rent an attic apartment from Marguerite Duras. "Invented memories" was the most tricky and "Identifying Marks" the most WTF.

The writing is sprightly and supple (the translator, Margaret Jull Costa, must be a genius), although the frequent references to unfamiliar artists, novelists, composers, historical events, and so on made me feel a bit like I was eavesdropping on the conversation of people much smarter and more cosmopolitan than myself. I had frequently to employ my google-fu while reading. Which of course means I now know what Paul Klee's *Monsieur Perlenwein* and *Black Prince* look like, and have added Antonio Tabucchi's *Little Misunderstandings of No Importance* to my to-read list.

Vivek Tejuja says

I love long-winding stories, so much to the point that if the author rambles sometimes, I am okay with that as well. Maybe that is also because of the style of the writer. There is something to it which doesn't let go of the reader. Enrique Vila-Matas is one such writer whose works have always eluded me – left me hanging for more and made me not want to make sense of them as well – because the stories and books he has written are enough. He is one of those authors who should just keep writing. Nothing else really matters. Maybe I am praising him too highly, but don't go by what I am saying. Read him. No matter place to start than his short stories and this collection titled, "Vampire in Love" is just what the doctor prescribed.

"Vampire in Love" is a collection of stories that are mostly absurd but also fantastical and profound. It takes a lot of time to get into this collection, but once you do, it will have you by your throat and not let go. Vila-Matas creates a world within each story that can be books in itself but it is best when it isn't. When the stories leave you wanting more and you don't get it.

The stories are matter of fact and to the point, so don't be alarmed if your imagination isn't soaring boundless. The thing to remember is the craft and the emotion each story will generate (because that it will). From empathizing with an effeminate barber who falls in love with an innocent choirboy to a lonely ophthalmologist, Vila-Matas' characters are regular people and yet they aren't. "Vampire in Love" is a collection which isn't for all and yet I would urge you to read it, only to test your boundaries as a reader.

Mitra Salasel says

Excellent collection of short stories revolving around the point/absurdity of life. His writing style is terse and devastating like Hemingway--highly recommend.

Carrie Jensen says

I had a hard time with this collection of short stories. I think Vila-Matas' style just is a little too abstract for me. There were a few stories that I like but others were just too weird. I didn't make it through the entire collection.

Ellie says

Vampire in Love is a collection of short stories by Enrique Vila-Matas, written over a period of 30 years. They are somewhat uneven but even the weakest contain classic Vila-Matas, who is a favorite author of mine. Once you're hooked on Vila-Matas, anything he writes has value.

For example, the story "Invented Memories" was not one of my favorites but it has one of my favorite passages in which he says that life must be told, turned into a narrative ("if only to yourself") if it is to really exist and not just be a series of events. He also writes that "when I tell stories, I can be anyone's shadow."

And that is Vila-Matas to me, anyone's shadow. His stories speak in an opaque way often to our shadow sides, our failures and our bad dreams. In the title story, Vampire in Love, the narrator is a hunchbacked vampire who is also a pious Catholic but who find that "perfect evil...is perfect beauty."

In Nino, a father recounts the story of his relationship with his son. In the course of describing the son's failure we become increasingly aware of the father's defects. Many of Vila-Matas' narrators are people who both literally wander the streets and metaphorically wander through the moral universe, unsure of their way. They are at home no where. What they believe to be true often turns out to be false, as in the first story, A Permanent Home, in which a son seeks to find out the truth of his parents' relationship. The son speaks of his "tender, albeit terrifying inheritance," that inheritance that so many of Vila-Matas' characters share. Life is elusive, always down the next street or in the next bar. "[L] is not achievable while on is alive." But the only way, as flawed as it may be, to give any meaning to life is through fiction, by shaping it into a narrative. Vila-Matas' characters are all, in some way, exiled from their lives, from their selves.

I am captivated by Vila-Matas' tone, a sad detached one that continues to search for meaning even in the conviction that all is meaningless. And the refuge that he finds in this nothingness is in fiction. I completely understand that faith, even though my world view is nowhere near as bleak as Vila-Matas.

Yet despite this bleakness, Vila-Matas is frequently extremely funny. His characters in their one-note determination to either find or refute meaning in their lives are, despite their ultimate sadness, frequently hilarious in their stubborn obsessiveness. I, at any rate, enjoy their humor. It makes his world view more palatable. We are all sad and all funny in this universe.

I want to thank NetGalley, the publisher New Directions, and Vila-Matas for allowing me to read this fascinating and, ultimately, wonderful book of stories in exchange for an honest review. If you haven't read Vila-Matas, this is a good place to begin and if you have, of course you'll want to read this.

Bar?? Okursoy says

"My father, who had once believed in many, many things only to end up distrusting all of them, was leaving me with a unique, definitive faith; that of believing in a fiction that one knows to be fiction, aware that this is all that exists, and the exquisite truth consists in knowing that it is a fiction and that, nevertheless, one should believe it."

P.D. Dawson says

'... the exquisite truth consists in knowing that it is a fiction and that, nevertheless, one should believe in it.'

Vampire in Love is a collection of nineteen stories by Enrique Vila-Matas, which are literary in style and deeply profound and wide in scope. I am new to the writings of Vila-Matas, but from the outset I found his writing style to be paradoxically both enigmatic and satisfyingly convincing. Reading through each story it is clear the complexities and subtle deliberations of the narrative could only be achieved by an author well-versed in the inner workings of the human mind, and the strange absurdities and characters in life that are so often overlooked.

Most of the stories contain such arbitrary details, that at times; one can imagine such randomness could have only come from real life, but I hasten to add Vila-Matas weaves illusion into his fiction with great aplomb, and the perspective of the frequently used first-person narrative, only serves to strengthen the autobiographical qualities of the text. In the opening story, A Permanent Home, a father tells his son stories that become more and more absurd. The father is on his deathbed, but still has enough energy to create stories in order to teach his son a lesson, a lesson that fiction should be seen as fiction, but nevertheless, one should still believe in it as if it were truth. A contradictory lesson, yet one can't help but see the beauty in such a statement, especially when the advice comes from a man facing the cold and harsh reality of death.

The stories in this collection were written over a period of thirty years or so, and that very much comes across in the variety and scope of the stories on offer, but what brings the collection together as a cohesive whole, is the very unique sensibilities of its author. In the title story, Vampire in Love, we follow José Ferrato, who resembles a vampire and is often jeered for it, but feeling like a failure, he has come to the end of his tether, and decides that he will no longer try and be good and will do evil instead, ultimately though he fails at this too.

That summarises many of the stories of this collection, and is perhaps the central theme, the fact that so many of the characters, either central to the story or on the fringes, have something odd about them. But we see this oddness is a truer and more peaceful way for them to exist, than for them to live with the pretence of trying to be something that they are not. In another variation in form, we have a story made of many fragmented parts called, Invented Memories, in which the first person narrator decides, having scarcely no biography of his own, that he will invent one of many sides and colours, and so each part is a playful fragment of a life that seems varied and fictional, yet strangely believable too.

We as reader and observer of the strange worlds concocted by Vila-Matas, must believe in the absurdity and ultimately in the truth of his fiction, and be left with the ambiguity of deciding which stories might well be truth disguised as fiction, and which might well be fiction disguised as fact. This collection is a reminder of the power the short story has, and that even with its limitations of scale, it can still produce beautiful and believable worlds that belie their brevity.

Melissa says

See my other reviews at [Never Enough Books](#)

An unsuspecting man receives a mysterious phone call from a lonely doctor, and upon visiting his home becomes privy to a secret...

An effeminate barber on the verge of death sees Heaven and falls in love with an innocent choirboy...

For the first time, a collection of stories by the esteemed Enrique Vila-Matas is made available in English. These stories span his remarkable career and have been chosen as among his best. Translated from their native Spanish, these tales are filled with Vila-Matas signature erudition and wit. Their aim; to leave the reader questioning the interrelation of art and life.

It is rare, dear reader, that I find myself struggling to finish a book; any book. And yet I found myself doing just that with Vampire in Love. Despite how small this book is and the fact that it is a collection of short stories, it was a fight for me to finish this book to write this review.

While there are many who enjoy Vila-Matas' work, I found this collection of stories rather boring. It was very staid and stale and did little to capture my imagination. As I said before, I found it difficult to finish this collection simply because I found it so bland.

The translation of the stories was smooth and very well done. That is about the only good thing I can find to say about this book.

Readers familiar with Vila-Matas and his work will likely enjoy this collection of stories. More casual readers will do better to look elsewhere.

Marie-Therese says

3.5 A tad uneven (the short story is not Vila-Matas' preferred form, certainly not what he's best known for), but what's good here (the title story, 'The Hour of Tired and the Weary', 'Greetings from Dante' among others) is really, really good and distinctively Vila-Matas: playful, cynical, always a bit rueful. A must for Vila-Matas' fans and a good collection for lovers of the ludic short story in general.

Josephine Quealy says

When you read a collection of stories and even you can see they're very clever and you're entertained and intrigued but you don't connect with them in any emotional way which, for you, is at the core of your fictional experience, if not your real life experience. That.
