



DOGMA

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A plague of rats, the end of philosophy, the cosmic chicken, and bars that don't serve Plymouth Gin—is this the Apocalypse or is it just America?

“The apocalypse is imminent,” thinks W. He has devoted his life to philosophy, but he is about to be cast out from his beloved university. His friend Lars is no help at all—he’s too busy fighting an infestation of rats in his flat. A drunken lecture tour through the American South proves to be another colossal mistake. In desperation, the two British intellectuals turn to Dogma, a semi-religious code that might yet give meaning to their lives.

Part Nietzsche, part Monty Python, part Huckleberry Finn, *Dogma* is a novel as ridiculous and profound as religion itself. The sequel to the acclaimed novel *Spurious*, *Dogma* is the second book in one of the most original literary trilogies since *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*.

Dogma Details

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Anna says

I found 'Dogma' funnier than *Spurious*, despite it being less concerned by Lars' mould-afflicted flat. I think the difference is that I have become far more bitter and cynical about academia, thus more receptive to the type of mockery advanced here. Once again, Lars and W. wander drunkenly about, fulminating on the precipitous downfall of academia, society, the world, and themselves. W. continually berates Lars and yet apparently sees within him some vain hope for the future. W.'s rants are very entertaining, for example:

'W. was unimpressed by the regeneration of the quayside, with its so-called public art. Public art is invariably a form of marketing for property development, he says. It's inevitably a forerunner of gentrification.'

W. is an enemy of art. We ought to fine artists rather than subsidise them, he says. They ought to be subject to systematic purges. He's never doubted we need some kind of Cultural Revolution. [...] In his imagination, W. says, a great army of Geordies storm along the river, smashing the public art and tearing down the new buildings.'

Lars and W. also take a trip to North America in this novel and are suitably baffled by both Canada and the US. Their continued fixations on messianism and the apocalypse recur repeatedly, which I liked. The half-arsed attempt to transform academia with the Dogma movement is the highlight, though. It sounds exactly like the kind of unrealistic thing that someone might attempt as a confused and ineffectual fightback against the dominance of neoliberal doctrine in universities. If you're a postgraduate student with a pervasive sense of impending doom, this novel should definitely amuse you.

Will says

LOVE IT! Lars and W. back together, this time in America, drinking their way into deeper depression even than in *Spurious*. Love the flow of these books, now that I'm two-thirds of the way through this *Spurious* Trilogy, or whatever it's called. But the books are filled with philosophy, misanthropy, a deep hope in the endtimes, and a lot of goodtimes in between. The rhythm of the each little paragraph is hypnotic, tons of reported speech by W. (to Lars, the narrator), like this one from their American roadtrip:

"W.'s looking for the *America hidden by America*, he says. The *submerged America* of the poor, W. says: that's part of it, he says. The *third world America* of the wretched and the broken-hearted, he says. But also, close by, as hope is always close to despair, a *messianic America*; an America re-enchanted and re-awakening; a perpetually new America stretching its limbs in the sun . . ." (23)

And I must add that Lars and W. are two of the most LIKEABLE characters I've read in a long time. Even when reported in negative light, Lars is sympathetic as a sort of reincarnated Hindu god, while W. tests him, a representative of the European philosophical traditions...Highly recommended, super fun, quick reads, but with lots to ponder and go back to revisit again and again.

Heather says

Like *Spurious*, *Dogma* follows the meanderings of Lars and W., two English academics who share a tendency toward the apocalyptic and a fondness for gin. As in the last book, there is a lot of angst: about horrors both big (the end-times) and personal (the failure to read and write and work). And as in the last book, W. spends a whole lot of time disparaging Lars, whose stupidity, according to W., is endless. In this book, W. worries about losing his job—there are rumors that his university is restructuring, doing away with whole departments—and W. and Lars go on a lecture tour to America, but only make it to Tennessee. After that failed tour, W. and Lars decide to make their own intellectual movement, which they call Dogma: it will be "spartan" yet "full of pathos," and driven by sincerity and collaboration (86). They start giving Dogma presentations, which start out sounding legitimately scholarly (the first one is on Kafka) but quickly deteriorate into the ridiculous—by the end of the third presentation, W. has decided that a new rule will be to "always speak of nuns, and dogs" (102). And things get better/worse from there: "For the *seventh*, but a single word was necessary, projected onto the wall behind us: *DERELICTION*" (105).

Lars and W. talk about religion, messianism, and thought vs. feeling, and namedrop various philosophers whose work they're reading, or have read, or are trying to read, but really their main concern is their own stuckness, Lars's stupidity and W.'s, too, and the decline of modern society/civilization as a whole. This is often quite funny: here's W. on Lars's stupidity:

The roaring of the sea is like the roaring of my stupidity, W. says. It's a terrible sound, but a magnificent one, too. It's the sound of *unlearning*, he says. It's *the sound of Lars*, of the chaos that undoes every idea. (7)

And here's how W. reacts when Lars loses the address of their hosts in Nashville, leaving them stranded overnight in the airport:

W. takes his copy of Spinoza's *Ethics* from his man bag, the only thing you can do at times like this. —'Spinoza teaches you to affirm everything', W. says. 'Affirm, affirm, affirm, that's what Spinoza says'. But W. can't affirm the copy of *National Enquirer* I buy at the kiosk, nor the Twinkies I stuff into my mouth. Somehow I always stand in the way of his beatitude. (18)

Lakis Fourouklas says

Dogma, unlike the author's previous novel, *Spurious*, has received mixed reviews. The latter was welcomed as a masterpiece, but when it came to the former the critics were not that enthusiastic. Now that I have read the novel I can say that I really wonder why? Why did they not like it as much as *Spurious*? For me this a great novel, as it combines humor, irony, philosophical thought, amazing discussions-monologues and a peripatetic mood.

Even though *Dogma* is the second novel in a not so closely knit trilogy, which will come to its end next year

with the Exodus, one can easily read it as a standalone volume.

The main protagonists in this story are two friends: W, who's a Catholic Jew atheist and Lars, who's more or less, or rather less than more, Hindu. The first thinks too much and philosophizes a lot about the end of days, while at the same time he's preparing two projects on capitalism and religion ("Capitalism is the evil twin of true religion," he claims), while the second just lives, or maybe I should say survives, in the shadow of his friend. I think that this is one of the oddest couple of friends that I've ever encountered in world literature. They are so different from each other that the only thing that seems to keep them close together is the simple fact that no one else could ever put up with them. W on the one hand, never stops thinking and talking, every now and then he points his poisonous words towards his friend, who's a non-thinker, he often enough throws one-liners in their conversations while trying to make a point, he gets angry and revolts constantly, at least in his head, and he makes new decisions all the time; decisions which sometimes he sticks to, but most times he doesn't; to put it simply he's not only a man of words, but also one of action. As for Lars, who's the narrator, he simply seems to be nothing more than a receptacle. He just listens to his friend, he puts up with his whims, he follows him in his varied adventures, he learns from him, and every now and then, when he absolutely has to, he opens his mouth to say a few words to appease the spirits and bring serenity to W's soul. Most of the times all he has to do to achieve that is quote the Vedas or tell him stories from the Hindu mythology.

Their dialogues, or rather W's monologues, are simply a joy to behold. And, as one would expect, quotation time it is: "You should never learn from your mistakes"; "We must read if we want to live"; "We're not capable of god"; "Philosophy's like an unrequited love affair"; "Always claim the ideas of others as your own"; "The Dogma must always be drunk"; "Only the hopeless can truly understand the everyday."

W looks and sounds like a prophet of the end. He expects catastrophe to hit the earth any time now; and he feels that more strongly than ever in America, where the ignorant natives apart from having no Plymouth Gin for sale, they have also "made a Disneyland of Armageddon."

"It's time to die," he says at the end, "but death does not come." Thankfully, I should add; because if it did then we'd miss the opportunity to enjoy the third part of his unique mental and physical escapades.

Highly recommended to everyone out there who loves good literary fiction.

Neil says

Part two of the trilogy that started with *Spurious*. I think it's less of a trilogy and more of a single book published in three volumes: this one starts off as if it is simply the next page of the previous one and continues from there.

More of the same, really. There is more plot here than in *Spurious*. W. and Lars go on a disastrous lecture tour and set up their Dogma philosophy in response. The tenets of Dogma are a bit variable but seem to always require a lot of gin. The apocalypse is still very present and perhaps made all the more immanent by the threat to their employment in the world of academia. The damp in Lars flat is less prominent but is replaced by rats. Other than that, we still get a lot of philosophical musings and some very creative insults from W. about Lars which Lars continues to report with complete equanimity.

It's funny in the same way that *Spurious* is funny. By which I mean it requires you to find a certain type of thing funny. I laughed out loud at several bits, but I can appreciate that it might not be for everyone.

Paul Fulcher says

Dogma is the second volume of Lars Iyer's trilogy of novels that started with Spurious.

It has all of the fun, foibles and failings of the previous book, and my review for that can largely suffice for this.

This book is a little more expansive and if Lars and W. reminded me of Beavis and Butthead in the previous book, this one resembled Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan in The Trip:

W. does impressions of me to cheer them up ... but our hosts are unmoved.

Our hosts don't understand our bickering W. says. It upsets them. Don't they see that it's the only way we can express affection? It's a British working class thing.

The damp in Lars flat from Spurious is replaced by an infestation of rats, an image employed elsewhere in the book: Academics fighting for a diminishing number of posts rather than collaborating; "*crowd rates into smaller and smaller spaces, and they turn on one another, devouring one another*" and in literature the Oulipans, per Raymond Queneau "*rats who will build the labyrinth from which they try to escape.*"

Lars and W. visit the US, and spend most of their time in the UK, but their real love is the Old Europe.

Britain is not a country of thought, we tell ourselves. The Anglo-Saxon mentality is opposed to abstraction, to metaphysics, we tell ourselves. It is completely opposed to German profundity and French radicality, to Central European Weltschmerz, and to Russian soulfulness ... It has nothing to do with Spanish duende, or the Greek sense of fate.

Lars and W. also develop a Dogma, a series of rules for their philosophy lectures inspired by Lars von Trier's Dogma 95, which they also give the alternative name Broken Immanence [as Krasznahorkai is a key literary reference, I wondered if this was inspired by Seiobo Down Below]. The rules are developed through the book but include:

*Dogma is spartan
Dogma is full of pathos
Dogma is sincere
Dogma is collaborative
Dogma plagiarises
Dogma is personal
Dogma is democratic
Dogma is clear
Dogma is reticent
Dogma is studious
Dogma is apocalyptic
Dogma is peripheral
Dogma is affirmative
Dogma is experience
Always speak of nuns, and dogs
Always use Greek terms you don't understand*

and perhaps most importantly:
The Dogmatist must always be drunk

Kobe Bryant says

This is just like the last book only this time Lars has rats in his house instead of fungus

Ian says

Finally, a book about a character who hates Jandek as much as I do.

Alev ignatius says

O kadar güzel, canlı? ve e?lenceli diyaloglarla bezenmiş? ki insan elinden b?rakam?yor bu kitaplar?. Uzun zaman?r bu kadar zevkli bir okuma yapmam??t?m. Üçlemenin son kitab?ndan da ayn? zevki alaca??m? umuyorum. Bu absürt ikiliyle tan??n bence. Her ne kadar onlar dü?ünemese de onlar? okuyanlar?n çok ?ey dü?ünece?i kesin.

Kendime not: Bela Tarr ikinci kitapta da kar??ma ç?kt? bir i?aret gibi. Üçüncüde de varsa, 450 dakikal?k Satantango'yu izlemek farz olacak:)

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

By all laws of the current literary market, the comedic novels *Spurious* and *Dogma* by philosopher Lars Iyer (comprising two-thirds of an as-yet unfinished trilogy) shouldn't really exist at all, and it's a testament to the suddenly hot Melville House that they've not only published them, but have been promoting the newest with all the pomp and resources usually afforded only to Stephen King potboilers; for these are not traditional novels nearly as much as they are the spiritual grandchildren of Samuel Beckett, absurdist and cyclical tales where the point is not really to see "what happens" but rather to wallow in the abstract pleasures of language itself. Comprised as a series of conversations between a philosopher who just happens to be named Lars and his doppelganger and frenemy known only as W., and with the story details grounded in just exactly enough reality to seem plausible (they live on opposite sides of Britain; W. has recently become a Malcolm-Gladwell-type popular public prognosticator; Lars is experiencing a mysterious mold problem in his house that threatens to take over the entire building), readers will nonetheless get quickly frustrated if expecting such silly things from these books as a plot or character development; instead, this is more like getting a glimpse of what it must be like inside the head of a college professor while they're in the middle of having a nervous breakdown, a series of funny yet sometimes impossible-to-follow rants and arguments between the two that reference as many obscure thinkers and experimental artists as *Family Guy* does '80s television shows (and many times just as randomly). I agree with a lot of other critics I've come across, that I

immensely enjoyed these silly yet high-falutin' comedies, but can't imagine another human being who will as well; and for that many unrelated strangers to say the same thing is a powerful statement indeed, and makes one understand why the publisher has put such a big promotional push behind what's essentially the very definition of idiosyncratic writing. As you can tell, it takes a special type of personality to enjoy these books; but if you're already a fan of such things as *Waiting for Godot* and *A Confederacy of Dunces*, you owe it to yourself to at least take a stab at these frustrating but ultimately satisfying head-scratchers.

Out of 10: **8.8**

Lee Razer says

Further adventures of Lars and W., Britain's most misanthropic and despairing professors of philosophy. Perhaps it was a mistake on my part to read this right after reading *Spurious*, the first novel in this trilogy of eruditely absurdist slagging off. About halfway through I started to find this getting tiresome, and not at all as amusing as I found *Spurious*. Perhaps my general attitude shifted. Or perhaps the book really did tail off. At any rate, all my notes came from the first half of the novel, and looking at them now I have to admit this is pretty good stuff:

But what would I know of all that? There's no tenderness in me, W. says. Lust, yes. A kind of animal craving. Foam on the lips. I'm like one of those monkeys in the zoo with an inflamed arse - what are they called? Oh yes, mandrills. I'm the mandrill of romance, W. says.

In the end, I excel at only three things, W. says: smut, chimp noises and made-up German. That's all my scholarship has amounted to.

Sometimes, in my company, W. feels like Jane Goodall, the one who did all that work with chimps.

Glee: that's what W. always sees on my face. That I'm still alive, that I can still continue, from moment to moment: that's enough for me, W. says. He supposes it has to be.

When not insulting Lars, on the evidence of these two novels his primary activity, W. joins with Lars in a sparsely attended speaking engagement in America, founding a philosophical movement called Dogma which collects no followers, drinking with Lars in pubs and informing the working class blokes they find there about the imminent apocalypse, and fighting his university to avoid redundancy (one of the all time great Brit euphemisms, there). Lars, for his part, turns his attention from fighting the takeover of his flat by Damp to fighting the takeover of his flat by rats. And listening to Jandek. Lord help him.

Jim says

It's not necessary to have read *Spurious* beforehand but it will help a little (if only to explain a bit about Lars' living conditions). Really, though, you can just jump into this rollercoaster of a novel and enjoy the ride. Don't worry that you don't understand most of it and don't feel you have to look up every archaic philosophical work or strange expression (I wasted ages trying to understand the concept of eternullity and was none the wiser). Most of what they say doesn't make much sense anyway. They ramble, they jabber, they whinge, they debate and opine (W. especially has an opinion of everything) and rant and orate and fret

about mostly inconsequential things. I say 'mostly' because W. does have something to worry about: his potential redundancy.

The rumour is they're going to close down all the humanities, every course. The college is going to specialise in sport instead. They've brought in a team of consultants to manage the redundancies, W. says.

Oh, some staff will be kept on, they've said that. The college needs some academic respectability. They'll probably make him a *professor of badminton ethics*, W. says. He'll probably be teaching *shot put metaphysics* ...

When not worrying about his future the two of them do what they do to fill their days. They go on a predictably unsuccessful lecture tour of America, decide on a new intellectual movement along the lines of Dogma95 and drink far too much.

When it comes to Dogma they begin, as they often do, on solid ground but as time goes on their concept falls to pieces before our eyes. I've extrapolated the following list:

First rule: Dogma is spartan.

Second rule: Dogma is full of pathos.

Third rule: Dogma is sincere.

Fourth rule? Dogma is collaborative.

Fifth rule: Always write as though your ideas were world-historical.

Sixth rule: Always claim the ideas of others as your own.

Seventh rule: Dogma is personal. Always give examples from your own experience.

Eighth rule: Always speak of nuns, and dogs.

Ninth rule: Always use Greek terms that you barely understand.

Tenth rule: The Dogmatist must always be drunk.

Eleventh rule (a very short-lived rule): Dogma is sober. Especially sober!

Twelfth rule: Dogma is clear.

Thirteenth rule: Dogma is fundamentally democratic.

Fourteenth rule: Dogma is reticent.

Fifteenth rule: Dogma is studious.

Sixteenth rule: Dogma is apocalyptic.

Seventeenth rule: Dogma is advocative!

Eighteenth rule: Dogma is peripheral.

Nineteenth rule: Dogma is affirmative.

Twentieth rule: Dogma is experimental. More rules can be added, but only through the experience of Dogma.

Apart from the first few the rules are added following (as if always the case with them) increasingly farcical presentations. The short-lived eleventh rule, for example, is proposed following this passage:

Our *eighth* Dogma presentation, our first overseas, we gave drunk, hopelessly drunk, and were almost completely incoherent. Only one person attended our *ninth*, so we went to the pub instead. For our tenth, we drank steadily through our presentation, cracking open can after can.

The Dogmatist must always be *drunk*, that's the next rule, W. says. Drunk: yes, of course. We used to think drunkenness might come after thought, might *follow* a successful presentation, a fruitful discussion. But now we understand that drunkenness *belongs* to thought. In the current

madness, close to the end, who can bear the thoughts that must be thought? Who can bear it—the coming end?

You have to drink, we agree. Drink to think; drink to present the results of thought. It's a discipline, we decide. You have to start early and continue, steadily. We owe it to ourselves. No: we owe it to thought!

But for our *eleventh* presentation, we drank too much. W. was sick in the toilets before we started. I was green faced. Green lipped! Never again, he says.

Finally they end up presenting things to each other. If it all feels a bit like a philosophical *Withnail and I* then you're on the right track. Comparisons to Beckett (particularly the abusive relationship of Hamm and Clov) are inevitable too; W. says *the nastiest* thing to Lars who never seems to bat and eye not that he ever gets a word in. But really they mirror so many double acts. Jay and Silent Bob are another pair that jumps to mind. Alfred Hickling in *The Guardian* called them “the Abbott and Costello of arcane thought” and that works too.

Essentially the book consists of W.'s monologues, sometimes presented as dialogue but most as reported speech; Lars is the actual narrator but although he comments in the text often enough he rarely seems to talk much when around W.:

W. takes me aside before we get back in the car. I should talk more, W. says. I should try and engage with our hosts!

Ah, why have I never learnt to talk?, he wonders. Why has it always been left to him, when we're in company, to speak for both of us? For long periods, I'm mute, thinking of God knows what, W. says. I'm like some great block of stupidity. Like some great stupid Easter Island statue ...

This book won't be for everyone—nor is their taste in music (I'd never heard of the outsider musician Jandek before reading thing and he's definitely an acquired taste)—but I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed it and there were several passages I wished I'd written. (Mostly I just wished I created these two.) I do expect I'll read the final book in the trilogy some time but I think this is a guy you need to take a break from between books.

p.s. I've just read over my review of *Spurious* (which I also gave four stars to and which I hadn't read prior to writing the above) and I do make a lot of the same points.

Victoria says

Is there thought outside the university philosophy department? the answer seems to be no, so the reduction and even elimination of liberal arts departments portends a new dark age -- it seems -- or at least, the end of philosophy is thus at hand -- it seems. Toward the end of *Dogma*, volume two of a trilogy that began with *Spurious* and will...end...with *Exodus*, it began to seem possible that that would be A Good Thing.

In any case, I'm on board for *Exodus*, whatever it might contain, including a particularly peculiar form of male bonding away from the battlefield and out of the locker room.

Zac Smith says

A little derivative of the 1st one (lmao) so the impact in style is lesser. It's less funny, more dire. Our protagonists are no longer bullshitting about dark themes but now kinda dealing with them. The damp was funny, but the rats is kind of sad. Speculation about the end of society is funny, but speculation about losing your job is kind of sad. Overall it's kind of less focused. Spurious only had a couple pop culture reference points-- Kafka, some philosophers, Godspeed, and that Hungarian director. This one casts its net wider, but it loses its impact. Music festivals, more philosophers, Joy Division, Jandek, another director, some more stuff, i dunno. (Jandek only has three songs on spotify, unfortunately, although I had, I swear, intended to listen to him years ago and never did!)

The Dogma thing gets kind of darker and sadder. I'm curious where it's gonna go. Their drinking has progressed, now, it's no so lighthearted, as well. The actual 'plot' events are also darker. Some is subtle and some is less so.

There are still some chuckles, though. I liked the exchange about Isaac Brock. I liked the bits with W.'s girlfriend hating Jandek. I liked the observations about America, and wish they'd spent more time there. Or gone back, maybe. Also some of the geographic and local references in the UK were lost on me-- all these bar names, i dunno, I think he could've just said "another pub" each time and gotten the point across.

I'm very curious about what Exodus will be like. It's longer. I'm worried it will lose more of the charming humor of Spurious and parts of Dogma.

Also, since I keep wanting to unconsciously typo this: Dogman. Ha ha ha.

Melanie says

This book is absolutely ridiculous. I didn't want it to end. Can't wait for the third volume in the trilogy. I want to hang out with these characters. They make me feel better about myself and the state of the world.
