



Electrico W

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By the celebrated Oulipo writer, this brilliant and witty novel set in Lisbon explores love, relationships, and the strange balance between literature and life.

Journalist, writer, and translator Vincent Balmer moves to Lisbon to escape from a failing affair. During his first assignment there, he teams up with Antonio—a photographer who has just returned to the city after a ten-year absence—to report for a French newspaper on an infamous serial killer’s trial.

While walking around the city together to take notes and photos for the article, they visit the places of Antonio’s childhood, swap stories from their pasts, and confide in each other. But the more they learn about each other, the more their lives become inextricably intertwined.

With a structure that parallels Homer’s *Odyssey*, *Eléctrico W* recounts their nine days together and the adventures that proliferate to form a constellation of successive ephemeral connections and relationships.

Electrico W Details

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From Reader Review Electrico W for online ebook

Amy says

A lovely, easy read! Dreamy, a bit like reading a Wes Anderson movie (even the serial killer reminded me of the SNL parody), and although the main character was not very likable, I couldn't put the book down! It did take a little while to get into it, though, because it seemed so...translated. The flow, I guess, and some overwritten bits. Still, it starts getting more interesting near the beginning when Antonio (slightly more likable than the narrator, Vincent, who is an outright creep) talks about his long lost love (whom Vincent proceeds to track down via stalking her father and lying in wait in a cemetery), and it's a nice ride, at a nice pace, all the way to the end. I'm happy there's an epilogue, too, because the whole book takes place over nine days, and I wanted to know what happens to everyone!

Αγγελικ? says

3.5?

Marisa Fernandes says

"Neun Tage in Lissabon" é um passeio pelas ruas de Lisboa, mas também por uma parte da história e cultura portuguesas. E aqui reside, no meu entender, a maior beleza deste livro. É extremamente agradável ler sobre autores portugueses conhecidos e menos conhecidos nas palavras de um autor estrangeiro; ler no meio da escrita em alemão algumas palavras portuguesas de um poema pertencente a Fernando Pessoa... Aquece a alma!

Sem entrar em detalhes acerca da história (não me apetece fazer spoiler), este livro centra-se na história de dois amigos, cada qual, com a sua história de insucesso na relação com as mulheres. Esta foi a parte que menos me fascinou porque estou cansada de histórias que não correm bem... Mas vá, isso é um problema meu.

Por outro lado, a descoberta da namorada (dos tempos de adolescência/juventude vividos aquando do Estado Novo) e mãe do filho de um deles, conhecida como Pata, mesmo no fim da história tem um sabor agridoce, sendo simultaneamente um aspecto agradável para quem a descobre, mas desagradável para quem é descoberto. O que deixa o leitor a pensar... em como o ser humano tudo complica quando se "mete onde não é chamado" e/ou quando tudo compromete quando se acobarda assistindo impávido, sereno e em silêncio ao desmoronamento da(s) relação (ções) em que está metido. Ambas as situações estão presentes em "Neun Tage in Lissabon".

Repito, porém, novamente: a maior beleza deste livro está nos dias passados em Lisboa pelos dois amigos luso-franceses, um jornalista e outro fotógrafo, e na descoberta que vão fazendo da cultura portuguesa, dos anos do Estado Novo e da década de oitenta em Portugal. Gostei bastante disso!

Marien says

I'm so glad I picked up this book on a whim the last time I visited Barnes and Noble! I decided to pick what I believed the best parts of Herve Le Tellier novel were relating to his eloquent style and artfully created plotline to share and entice all other potential readers (so here I go ?):

1.) The relatable emotions of all of the characters. Even though the novel seemed a much more adult novel, full of tangled relationships with surprising tangents, I was able to truly connect with some of the characters on a deep level. In one spot of another, they all experienced loathing, intense sadness, feelings of revenge, love, and jealousy. I appreciated the fact that Le Tellier focused on the complicated sides of relationships, including betrayal and disagreements, rather than only the typical emotions of love and affection. Therefore, the novel seemed quite twisted as both Antonio and Vincent faced great trouble in their casual and lasting relationships with multiple women.

2.) The interweaving of a journey that connected with Odysseus' in the Odyssey. Just like in Homer's iconic tale, Antonio's life is full of obstacles including muses and bloody battles against his enemies. As he leaves his home at a young age in Spain, he leaves his beloved girlfriend Duck, who later becomes pregnant with his son. He cheats on Duck many times with other women, which she discovers when she desperately tries to find him and realizes that he began a new relationship with another woman (represents Circe). In addition, later in life he meets Irene (Calypso), who often engages in relationships with older men to gain fortune and wealth. Lastly, he meets the magical Aurora, who I believe represents the sirens as she steals away his heart with her exuberance and love of freedom and lively spirit. At the end of Antonio's journey, rather than easily asking for her forgiveness, he calmly decides to leave Duck alone and not interrupt the new life she has built after her enormous heartbreak (strays away from the tale a bit). However, both stories share the themes of determination and perseverance: not matter how far one must dig until they find the answers, they must never give up until they reach that far away point.

3.) The placement of different stories into the plotline. Even though the plotline is introduced with the idea that Antonio and Vincent are stationed in Spain for the Pinhiero murder case, the story evolves with the purpose of Vincent's search for Duck. Long story short, Vincent and Irene have exclusively dated before, yet Irene has chosen Antonio (neither Antonio nor Vincent know that they have both dated Irene). Vincent becomes extremely jealous and believes if he secretly finds Duck and can convince both Duck and Antonio to meet, he will somehow get Irene's love and attention back to himself without the interference of Antonio. Therefore, I found that Vincent's long and excruciating process of finding Duck parallels the Pinhiero case. Pinhiero, a man who has killed over a dozen women, seems full of secrets, yet he never gives a reason for why he murdered as many women as he did. This represents Vincent's pursuit for Duck because of the many untold previous exchanges between her and Antonio, which are shared in the epilogue.

4.) Vincent's translation of *Contos Aquosos* by Jamie Montestrela. Throughout the novel, Vincent explains and writes how for the past few years, he has been translating a book of extremely short stories (5-6 sentences long) into French from Spanish. Interestingly, the short stories provide comfort in Vincent's life of gloom. Even though they rarely make much sense, they give a bit of comic relief to the sometimes heavy and depressing novel.

With these innovative elements as well as Le Tellier's metaphors (one demonstrates how some secrets never give way to an answer with the story of an abundant river in Africa which splits into several smaller rivers but never reaches the ocean), he paints a complicated story of love and relationships, turmoil and revenge, and loyalty and determination. In sum, I truly recommend this novel for any reader looking for a new, different read without the excitement of action, but rather the excitement of difficult investigations.

Buchdokter says

Ein Fotograf und ein Journalist sollen für eine französische Zeitung aus Portugals Hauptstadt Lissabon vom Prozess gegen einen Serienmörder berichten. Vincent, der diese Ereignisse von 1985 rückblickend erzählt, ist dieser Journalist, zugleich auch Autor und Übersetzer. António, der Fotograf, stammt aus Lissabon. Verbunden sind die beiden Männer nicht nur beruflich durch ihre Vergangenheit als Kriegsreporter, sondern auch durch Irene, die Vincent liebt und mit der António eine Beziehung hat. Der Prozessbeginn verzögert sich und so haben der Besucher und der Einheimische überraschend Zeit für die müßige Entdeckung der Stadt. Nach wenigen Tagen werden sich ihre Wege wieder trennen, ein Anlass für António, sich Vincent zu öffnen und von seiner Jugendliebe Pata zu erzählen. António hat Pata (die Ente) auf dem Schulweg kennengelernt. Das jüngere Mädchen verführt António in provozierender Weise, zu spät zur Schule zu kommen. Eine enge Freundschaft entwickelt sich. Als Pata 15 ist, wird der Kontakt zwischen beiden von den Eltern verhindert; sie verlieren sich aus den Augen. Vincent besetzt die Person Pata, deren wirklichen Namen er noch nicht einmal kennt, stellvertretend für António und sucht in der Stadt nach der Jugendliebe seines Kollegen. Beim Besuch des botanischen Gartens Estufa Fria taucht eine junge Geigerin auf, die ebensogut eine Phantasiegestalt Vincents sein und seine Vorstellungen von Irene überlagern könnte.

Die Geschichte Vincents, der dreist die Erinnerungen Antónios an Pata okkupiert, nimmt Hervé Le Telliers Leser mit in das alte Viertel Lissabons, durch das sich die Straßenbahn (nach der der Originaltitel des Buches benannt ist) dicht an den Fenstern der Wohnhäuser entlang den Berg hinauf quält. Die Vermittlung der Atmosphäre Lissabons, wo die abblätternde Pracht der Paläste kurz nach dem Ende der Diktatur Salazars noch von der ehemaligen Kolonialmacht kündet, ist die Stärke diese Buches. Wie Vincent sich in Träumen von unerreichbaren Frauengestalten verliert, harmoniert in idealer Weise mit Lissabons melancholischer Ausstrahlung, konnte mich mit der verspielten Darstellung jedoch nicht erreichen.

Monika says

Hervé Le Tellier's *Eléctrico W* is a simple, quiet kind of novel. It has a minimalist plot, keeping the main focus on its characters and their stories - the stories that make them who they are.

We experience these nine days through Vincent's narrative. Vincent seems to be working through a lot of confusion regarding his affair with Irene. He manipulates those around him, even those he has yet to meet, in order to reconcile and work through his conflicted feelings. He also doesn't seem to have considered the natural consequences of his interference. Vincent is definitely confused, still trying to figure out what he wants and how he feels.

The novel seems to just drift along... slowly, not a lot of action, but there's something kind of nice about it. The characters are strongly developed, each one unique. When the plot lulls, which to me felt often, the interest is shifted to exploring each character. I especially liked Aurora's spirited energy; she was by far the most entertaining personality in the book.

Eléctrico W is a nice character-driven read that shows how our relationships can impact even those we meet briefly. This book is due to be released by Other Press on June 18, 2013.

<http://www.lovelybookshelf.com>

I received a copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. I did not receive any other compensation for this review.

Susie says

Original posted at Insatiable Booksluts. E-galley provided by Other Press.

Rating: 4.43/5 women you drive away before they ever have a chance to love you back

Recommended if you like: Books that take place in Europe; flawed main characters; reading books that are sometimes uncomfortable but that ring with truth.

My lovely friend Tara over at BookSexyReview says that Le Tellier is actually kind of a big deal and he belongs to a movement of writing called Oulipo. If that floats your boat, I urge you to head on over to her post and check out information about that. For me, I'm much more clued into art movements than literary movements, so I'll let better minds than mine field that while I talk about the reading experience of this book.

It is a testament to the skill of Hervé Le Tellier that this novel can be so compelling while also featuring as its main character a man who, had he been born 25 years later, would have been a prime candidate for Nice Guys™ of OKCupid. Vincent is so much of a textbook case that I was furiously making notes about his Frustrated Beta Male Syndrome within the first chapter or so. Most authors couldn't tackle a character like Vincent and make him anything other than a whiny, absurd caricature; Le Tellier manages to do the improbable and makes Vincent a character that, while you still kind of hate him, you feel just enough sympathy for him that you can read the book fluidly and enjoy it without complications.

Le Tellier does this by cheating the perspective a tad; in paintings, artists often take liberties with "true" perspective to get more of the picture in the frame. You end up with impossible tables that couldn't hold up a bowl of fruit in real life, but you get to see everything the artist wanted to paint. I feel that, in writing Vincent, Le Tellier employed a similar technique; Vincent is self-aware enough that he is able to admit his flaws, even while being fully captive to them. I don't think most people like Vincent would be that self-aware, but it is a necessary cheat.

The book starts with Vincent, our tragically unloved hero, fleeing Paris to escape the wiles of the beautiful Irene. Irene has dragged his heart through the muck and stomped all over it by rejecting his constant mewling to be loved. He sets up house in Lisbon, picks up a few hobbies, and tries not to cry every time he thinks of her (which is all the time).

Sidenote: it is a fact that I once was friends with a man who, despite my clearly telling him over and over and over that I was not in the slightest romantically attached to him, persisted in trying to win my heart. I was approximately twenty-one years old at the time, and not smart enough to realize that this wasn't a real friendship; I let him fly across the country to meet me, against my better judgment, and I shit you not, he was already trying to make out with me within 24 hours. There were no mixed signals; my signal was a clear *no*. He sobbed like a child when I wouldn't kiss him; he had been *fully expecting* me to succumb to his charms against everything I'd ever said. So, Irene, I feel you, girl.

A serial killer is caught in Lisbon, and Vincent is assigned by the newspaper to cover the trial along with photographer Antonio Flores. Antonio is everything that Vincent wants to be, and Vincent kind of hates him for it from the get: Antonio is a man who has women approach *him*, who has an achingly romantic lost-love story, who has gained notoriety for his photographs. Vincent, on the other hand, drags the albatross of the feeling of failure everywhere he goes. He claims it is a necklace of quirkiness and underdog victory, but we can see its true feathers.

The two men form a tenuous friendship (if you can call a relationship where one person is wildly jealous a friendship), but that is largely undone when Vincent learns the identity of the French woman who pines away for Antonio: of course, it is Irene. And she is coming to Lisbon, where the men have adjacent hotel rooms. Vincent crafts quick (and terrible) lies to save face; he invents a girlfriend, Lena Palmer. Secretly, he hatches a plot to reunite Antonio with his long-lost love so that he will abandon Irene, and Irene will be as wounded as Vincent (and, he won't let himself admit, available to him).

Things go awry, as do they always. Irene does turn out to be a flaming bitch, but again, Le Tellier masters his craft in such a way that we can see her without being filtered through Vincent's lens of bitterness. She does not stand in for all women who turn down Nice Guys™; she is her own woman, and she just happens to be a bitch, even though she's totally right about not going out with Vincent (because honestly, he's kind of a creepo). There are other women who wander into the story: Aurora, who is a bit Manic Pixie Dream Girl for my tastes; and Manuela, who doesn't put up with any of Vincent's shit, much to the reader's delight. Also to my delight, there is character growth. Vincent makes a few choices differently than the old Vincent would have. He turns right a few times instead of left. They are small choices, but they are redemptive.

This is a book that made me think, and I think I like that most of all. I have little Kindle notes (and I so love being able to do Kindle notes, y'all) about literature sprinkled all through the book, ones that make me feel like kind of a smarty-pants, and I enjoy that feeling. His writing style is smooth; the translation is wonderful. The setting is lovely and the book is interesting. (And, did you see that cover art? I didn't notice it until after I finished reading, because Kindle. LOVE.) Overall, I highly recommend it.

Tami says

i enjoyed this chronicle of a week in time. vincent be craycray jealous and plotting, but in such a civilized way. very good writing and story telling

Jill says

So let's start with the simplest question. What is Electrico W? It's a rather ancient yellow-and-white Lisbon funicular train that unflinchingly carries its cargo of housewives and office workers every workday morning. It forks off, continues its way, enters into dark tunnels, and sputters its way into daylight once again.

In short, it's a metaphor for love.

Love and relationships are subjects that fascinate Herve Le Tellier, who focused on it in his prior book, *Enough About Love*. Here he explores it once again in all its glorious (and not-so-glorious) aspects.

Vincent Balmer – middle-aged journalist, writer, translator and lovesick fool – moves to Lisbon after being spurned by Irene, a much younger woman who is the object of his obsessions. There he partners with the photographer Antonio to report on an infamous serial killer's trial...while at the same time, pursuing his own obsession of writing a book (with the provisional title *Electrico W*).

Vincent is dense about love, unlike the more jaded Antonio...who harbors his own love for a girl he calls Duck, whom he met as an impressionable teenager and can't get out of his mind. Irene may have a thing for Antonio. But so does another girl he meets. And is another woman about to shock Vincent out of his love

addiction?

Yet in addition to the love theme, Herve Le Tellier is interested in relaying the stories we tell. Vincent – in addition to the novel he is working on – is translating a number of quirky short-stories by Jaime Montestrela. Fiction and fact, truth and perception, and love, obsession and languor all co-exist simultaneously, leading the reader through his or her own journey. Sometimes it seems slightly contrived, other times it works beautifully. To quote Arthur Miller, “Attention must be paid.”

It’s worth mentioning that Le Tellier is a member of a French literary group Oulipo, which is dedicated to finding new patterns and structures that writers can use in any way they enjoy. As one story recedes and another begins, as stories overlap, it becomes evident that Electrico W is really about how we tell ourselves stories...and which stories are true and false. 4.5 stars.

Stavrula says

3,5

ΠανώσK says

Μπορε? τη λ?ξη «πλο?σιος» να μην την πολυσυμπαθ? ?ταν ?χει να κ?νει με ανθρ?πους και τα υλικ? τους αγαθ?, αλλ? δεν με πολυχαλ? ?ταν χρησιμοποιε?ται για να εκφρ?σει ποιοτικ? χαρακτηριστικ? σε αφθον?α, και για να γ?νω επιτ?λους λ?γο ξεκ?θαρος, «πλο?σιο» ε?ναι ?να επ?θετο που ταιρι?ζει γ?ντι στο μυθιστ?ρημα «Ενα τραμ στη Λισαβ?να» του Ερβ? Λε Τελι?. Πλο?σιο σε: συναισθ?ματα, ιδ?ες, παρ?λληλες ιστορ?ες, αναφορ?ς, επινο?σεις, ε?ναι το λογοτεχνικ? αντ?στοιχο εν?ς υπ?ροχου γε?ματος, σου αφ?νει δηλαδ? την ?δια α?σθηση στο τ?λος: μακ?ρια πληρ?τητα μεν, μικρ? μελαγχολ?α για το ?δειο ταψ? γεμιστ? δε.

Tara says

Let’s talk about Oulipo. It’s a French movement that includes authors and mathematicians who use constraints when creating literature. For example: writing an entire novel without using the letter “a”. Or using palindromes. Or starting every sentence with the same word or phrase. Or, my particular favorite, replacing every noun with the seventh noun after it in the dictionary (this constraint has its own name: N+7).

Italo Calvino was a member of Oulipo – which is why *If On A Winters Night A Traveler* is a book of only beginnings. As was Oskar Pastior, Duchamp and Georges Perec. I consider Julio Cortázar’s novel *Hopscotch* Oulipian, but discovered he was not a member. That book, though, shares Oulipo’s fascination with puzzles – so it’s not surprising that Cortázar wrote it while living in Paris.

Hervé Le Tellier is a member. Though, in terms of constraints the one he used for *Eléctrico W* seems a bit weak. The novel follows the structure of Homer’s *Odyssey*. And while I’m by no means an expert, it does so in such a vague way that I couldn’t find the parallels.* Be that as it may – puzzles and games and Oulipo all put aside – *Eléctrico W* is an entertaining novel.

In the opening paragraphs we are introduced to the narrator, a middle aged journalist named Vincent Balmer. He's recently moved to Lisbon, leaving behind his life in Paris and an affair that had run its course. He's kept his job, though. The French newspaper, which still employs him, has him cover the trial of a serial killer. He is partnered with a photojournalist, Antonio Flores, who he knows from the Paris office. The two men spend nine days together. One night Flores reveals to Vincent that he grew up in Lisbon... eventually telling the story of his star-crossed love for a girl called Duck. The story captures Vincent's imagination ("imagination" being the key word) and he attempts to track down Duck with the vague idea of reuniting the pair. *Eléctrico W* is the story of Vincent's quest over those nine days he and Flores are assigned to the murder trial.

Vincent's voice is introspective. Sedate. He does not seem to be subject to emotional peaks or valleys – regardless of what he sometimes claims. While he describes himself as more conventionally handsome than Antonio Flores, he lacks that male version of "jolie laide" which makes the other man irresistible to women. In fact, Vincent learns that Flores is currently sleeping with the woman who had broken up with him/Vincent in Paris. She, Irene, eventually joins the two men in Lisbon. Despite all of Vincent's professed passion for Irene his attempt at revenge seems half-hearted at best. Based on my previous reading experience, Vincent is part of that long tradition of utterly charming but romantically (and otherwise) inept Frenchmen whom French authors seem to adore. A cross between Chaplin's "Little Tramp" and Gérard Depardieu.

Vincent also has a hobby. Interspersed throughout the book are short stories which he is translating, written by the fictional Portuguese author Jaime Montestrela. Montestrela who appears in many of Le Tellier's books.

"In the town of Chiannesi (Umbria, Italy), on Shrove Tuesday, it was customary for every inhabitant to swap minds with another, women played at being men, children being parents. This swap included animals, and mice could be seen toying cruelly with cats. The municipality brought a definitive end to this custom in 1819, when the swap between cows and flies led to a crisis."

A small step above flash-fiction, these relatively straight-forward tales (we're told that Montestrela might have intended them as allegories, but as Vincent doesn't seem too worried about what they represent why should we?) provide "air" between the denser, atmospheric prose that makes up most of the novel.

All the writing, as translated by Adriana Hunter, is stylistically elegant. As are the characters. Vincent, in particular, is a flawed but sympathetic protagonist. And Le Tellier's plot nicely mirrors the tenets of the Oulipo movement. Just like an Oulipian work is more than what is superficially apparent (though *Eléctrico W* still functions very nicely at that level if you aren't interested in delving into it) so is there more to the story of Antonio and Duck than meets the eye. Early on Vincent tells us how at the end of their time together he looked at Antonio and "... no longer saw a thirty-year old man in flesh and blood sitting beside me on that seat with its cracked leather, but a character, a character from a book." He projects his own narrative onto these two people, much like Le Tellier has projected the structure of *The Odyssey* onto this book. It complicates things, but not in a bad way. It causes confusion and, at times, surprising reveals. I wouldn't call Vincent an unreliable narrator, just a misguided one. And, to my mind, all the more interesting because of it.

For more reviews, please visit [BookSexy Review](#)

Jim Fonseca says

Two men meet in Lisbon to cover the story of the trial of an old man who is a serial killer. They have worked

together before but they have an on-again, off-again acquaintance. Both have also fled Paris due to woman problems. And mainly that is the focus of this book, a saga of two thirty-ish men inept at dealing with women. During their 8-day stay in Lisbon, they manage to get involved with four women, and, surprise, it all turns out badly one way or another. Not to give away any plot, but we learn early on that, unbeknownst to one of the men, one woman is involved with both of them.

The journalist is our main narrator. He is a Frenchman who had a Portuguese mother; the other man is a Lisbon native. Because the native decides to show the other man around, we get quite a bit of local color of the city. The title is taken from a tram line that used to run through old town Lisbon.

So how inept are they? The narrator decides to look up a childhood flame of the other man to get them reacquainted in hopes that he will lose interest in the woman they have joint affection for. (I'm using the term affection loosely here.) As you can imagine, that ends badly. The narrator tells us "the only time I understand woman is when they break up with me." He sums up his relationships with women as "Let's say the ones I liked didn't like me enough, and the ones I could have attracted were too ready to be attracted by pretty much anyone."

Maybe it's genetic. As we learn a bit about the narrator's life, we learn that his father, who committed suicide after his wife died, had been having an affair all during his wife's (the narrator's mother) final illness. After she died he broke off the affair because he could no longer be unfaithful to his wife now that she was dead! The narrator has a younger brother, from whom he is estranged, but we learn that he too has woman problems. He married, had kids, but his wife left him after five years.

We are treated to vignettes of projects the narrator is working on. One is a biography of Pescheux d'Herbinville who killed the French mathematical genius, Évariste Galois, in a duel when the latter was only 20 years old. (True story.) The other is a translation, *Contos aquosos*, black humor tales by the Portuguese author Jaime Montestrela, which the author, Herve Le Tellier, actually did publish.

All in all, a good read with humor, some black humor, interesting twists, and a good manual for males of what not to do in the woman department.

Jonfaith says

Somehow Lisbon has haunted my 2017. Inscrutably, it exists--befogged--but entices with only a half remembered tune. Of course Pessoa is to blame for this condition as is his refracted double Tabucchi but Jim Gauer is responsible as well.

This is Sebald type excursion, though one more personable and less visual. Two journalists arrive in Lisbon to cover a murder trial. Each has baggage.

The protagonist is a bit of a shit.

I relate to him.

The debris of romance-gone-wrong litters not only their past but their present activities, perhaps polluting their agenda. I was smitten. The fact that the asshole protagonist is translating an obscure exiled author connected personally. I only wish there was more drinking. This is a classic cleverly vague European novel, one which offers modernist ambiguity and thus market appeal.

Matt Kuhns says

This is okay. It took a while to get into, but finally I just read the last 2/3 through. (It isn't a very long novel.)

Some of it feels a bit flabby and indulgent... a lonely 40-something man caroming between encounters with one younger woman after another, all of whom are both magical, and ultimately disdainful of him. Meh.

The smaller stories and vignettes woven in were enough to sustain interest, though, at least for the book's modest page-count.
