



## Le voyage d'Octavio

*Miguel Bonnefoy*

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## Le voyage d'Octavio Miguel Bonnefoy

Une grande fable baroque sur le Venezuela, onirique et picaresque, autour de la figure d'un paysan analphabète qui se réapproprie sa propre Histoire : le premier roman de Miguel Bonnefoy, lauréat en 2013 du Prix du Jeune Ecrivain de langue française, qui a révélé des auteurs comme Marie Darrieussecq, Jean Baptiste Del Amo, Antoine Bello, etc.

## Le voyage d'Octavio Details

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Author : Miguel Bonnefoy

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## From Reader Review *Le voyage d'Octavio* for online ebook

### **Frédéric says**

Wonderfully written from beginning to end this short novel shifts to a metaphorical journey half through and lost me in the process.

In Venezuela, in the 50's or 60's probably, the illiterate Octavio starts to learn his letters with a nice woman, herself named Venezuela. For these two, not in their prime anymore (they're probably in their 50s), this apprenticeship gives birth to more sensible sentiments. Then Octavio does something that makes him leave the town... and here begins a surreal journey in the countryside which nature and goal totally eluded me.

I'm probably not the best audience for this kind of stories so take my judgement with a grain of salt. The author writes with a beautiful poetic style and I'm pretty sure people fond of Garcia Marquez or Neruda will like it more than I did.

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### **Eddie Clarke says**

Sweet little magical realist fable. Sensuous detail & some compelling imagery

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### **K. says**

Trigger warnings: Violence, probably some other stuff but I read this like a week ago and it was under a hundred pages, so.....

This book is very reminiscent for me of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. It's set in Venezuela and involves peculiar characters and magical realism. So.

Really, I don't have a HUGE amount to say about this. It's only 90-something pages, so there's not a lot of time for character development or story development or anything like that. The first half was definitely more interesting to me than the second, and the ending was downright weird. But I'm glad I read it - it definitely gave me a lot to think about.

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### **Janni\_B says**

The first thing that caught my attention was the wonderful cover. In a bookshop I would have stopped and picked up the book.

I enjoyed reading the tale of Octavio. To be honest I'm not sure if I understood the allegory of Octavio's journey and the story of Venezuela but that is probably because I'm not familiar with the history of Venezuela.

The story reads like a fable or adult fairy tale. It is charming. The wonderful descriptions make the locations jump off the page. Octavio seems a likeable enough character, a giant of a man who is illiterate. He says little and tries to avoid quarrels and any kind of violence. He works hard at any job he can find, earning little.

Then he chances to meet a woman called Venezuela who helps him learn to read and write. Then his journey begins

The book tells the story of his wanderings and the people he meets and the places he stays for a while and how he fits in with those around him.

It's a fairly short book, beautifully written, funny in parts, but also quite poignant in places. Enchanting.

[My thanks to NetGalley and the publisher Gallic Books for an ARC]

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### **Polly Krize says**

I received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Genuinely and sensitively written, you can read this book either as the story of a man's life or the story of the history of Venezuela. Either way, it is entertaining and magical. The cover also caught my eye.

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### **NADIOUCHKA says**

Petit livre, premier roman de Miguel Bonnefoy : « Le Voyage d'Octavio » mais grand coup de cœur  
Comme l'écrit « Olivia de Lamberterie – Elle » : « Simplement magique » ou « Augustin Trapenard - le Grand Journal » : « Une révélation », je peux affirmer que c'est bien vrai.

Un seul regret dans mon cas : l'avoir lu très vite mais j'ai adoré ce voyage au Venezuela où on rencontre Octavio, un géant (un colosse) qui se débrouille comme il peut pour vivre, petits métiers et cachant son illettrisme.

L'histoire débute « dans le port de la Guaira, le 20 août 1908, un bateau en provenance de la Trinidad jeta l'ancre sur les côtes vénézuéliennes sans soupçonner qu'il y jetait aussi une peste qui devait mettre un siècle à quitter le pays. »

Le périple d'Octavio va consister à retrouver ses ancêtres pour s'approprier un coin de terre où n'était restée « qu'une odeur de citronnier et une église au milieu des cyprès, comme un mât solitaire et triste, debout sur une terre sans ancêtres. »

Une femme va initier Octavio à la lecture : « Un matin, il se surprit de voir que mujer s'écrivait aussi simplement.

- J'aurais pensé que pour un personnage aussi considérable, il y avait un mot plus difficile, s'était-il exclamé.  
»

Si la lecture semble être plus importante que tout, en fait Octavio va découvrir sa véritable mission et son identité.

Ce qui ressort de cet ouvrage, c'est aussi de la magie ainsi que la splendeur des paysages traversés.

Miguel Bonnefoy a ainsi écrit une épopée initiatique, parlant autant de la résilience du Venezuela que du mystère de l'écriture. On trouve du réel et du merveilleux.

Don Octavio, qui vit seul dans un bidonville de Caracas, est le représentant d'un « pays entier de mangues et

de batailles. »

Venezuela, une comédienne de Maracaibo, est la femme qui va l'initier à la lecture, l'écriture, l'amour.?

Après un cambriolage au domicile de celle-ci, notre héros, chassé du Paradis des bras de sa Dulcinée, entreprend, à travers tout le pays, un parcours semé d'épreuves qui font resurgir les mythes fondateurs du pays, à commencer par la légende de Saint Christophe. Il part pour traverser tout son pays afin de retrouver son peuple et va ainsi parcourir, entre autres, des forêts profondes, tandis que la statue du Nazaréen passe de mains en mains au cours de l'Histoire du pays. Cela donne un second fil conducteur pour le récit, le premier étant le voyage d'Octavio.

L'écriture est simple, poétique, ironique. L'auteur s'introduit avec « je ». On trouve aussi de la musique dans les mots.

Dans ce récit de voyage et d'aventures d'un anti-héros, on voit une grande humanité, de la dignité, un grand dévouement de la part de cet être hors du commun, « un personnage inoubliable à l'image de son pays. »

Mais on remarque également de l'humour car, parfois, l'illettrisme d'Octavio est cocasse.

Ce problème d'analphabétisme est évoqué avec pudeur par l'auteur : « Personne n'apprend à dire qu'il ne sait ni lire ni écrire. Cela ne s'apprend pas. Cela se tient dans une profondeur qui n'a pas de structure, pas de jour. C'est une religion qui n'exige pas d'aveu. »

Ainsi, Octavio, grâce à son voyage, a pu entrer dans la connaissance de son pays et l'auteur nous offre un périple poétique, tendre, attachant pour son pays.

J'arrête ici ma chronique car ce livre a été largement commenté, raconté et en dire plus serait bien inutile. Par contre, je vais rajouter que, une fois de plus, inutile d'écrire des centaines et ces centaines de pages pour tomber sur un livre aussi passionnant avec un dénouement étonnant.

Es pintoresco y Gracias Miguel !

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### **Kristine says**

*Octavio's Journey by Miguel Bonnefoy is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early February.*

While acting as a domestic accomplice to a local street gang, Octavio struggles to hide his illiteracy when he meets a bohemian intellectual named Venezuela. It's a really well-written short story that talks about the slim divide between the old and new cultures of South America and very, very accurately depicts both the feeling of meeting someone vicariously new and going off on your own for a soul-searching journey.

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### **Chris says**

I was given an advance copy of this book by the publisher through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I wish that I had read this novella in a college level literature class. I am a bit frustrated because I feel that I only was able to appreciate about 2/3 of this fine book. Octavio's journey is an allegorical story of the history of Venezuela. The author clearly had much to say and while I was able to follow the concepts of Octavio (the main character, a giant who symbolizes the country as it develops) as Venezuela, betraying his own culture and history, wandering lost until ultimately finding himself, I feel that in a University class some historical background would have really made the difference.

If I may make a suggestion, it might be interesting to include an introduction in a subsequent printing that

provides a brief historical essay (no spoilers for the novella, please) that outlines historical events and could give someone without knowledge of the history of Venezuela a frame of reference for the events and what they symbolize.

A beautiful story with a heart as big as its gigantic protagonist. Full of artistic skill as well as emotion. One of those few allegories that actually work as an interesting narrative story as well.

4 stars.

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### **Dagio\_maya says**

***“Ogni popolo ha la sua piaga fondatrice: la nostra risiede nel crollo della nostra storia. E per poterla ricostruire abbiamo dovuto rivolgerci al mito.”***

Octavio vive in una bidonville di Caracas.

Solitario e silenzioso escogita stratagemmi per non rivelare di essere analfabeta.

*“Con gli altri scambiava solo parole semplici, plasmate dall’uso e dalla necessità. Aveva attraversato l’umanità contando sulle dita, indovinando certe parole dalla somma delle loro lettere, leggendo altrove, negli occhi e nelle mani, la mimica delle persone, estraneo alla gelosa relazione tra suoni e lettere. Parlava poco o niente. Ripeteva quello che sentiva per imitazione, a volte senza capire, sopprimendo sillabe, pronunciando a orecchio, e spesso le parole posate sulle sue labbra erano come elemosine chiuse nelle sue mani. Dal mondo prendeva solo l’ossigeno: al mondo restituiva solo il suo silenzio.”*

Casi fortuiti lo guidano in direzioni mai immaginate in un crescendo che fonde sempre più storia e mito.

Octavio attraverserà contemporaneamente la geografia e la storia del Venezuela.

Un viaggio che è metafora della meravigliosa scoperta del sapere.

Un breve racconto che ha fatto reso Miguel Bonnefoy (classe 1986, nato a Parigi da madre venezuelana e padre cileno) un degno erede della migliore tradizione letteraria del realismo magico.

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### **Makis Dionis says**

Μια Mujer... φανταζόταν ?τι για ?να τ?σο σημαντικ? πλ?σμα, θα υπ?ρχε μ?α πιο δ?σκολη λ?ξη..  
Η αν?σα του μ?ριζε currunchete.  
Ad augusta per angusta.

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### **Jimena says**

A little jewel and homage to magical realism. If you like García Márquez, you'll love this book.

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## **SueLucie says**

Review copy courtesy of Gallic Books via NetGalley - many thanks for the opportunity to read this.

I understand this to be an allegorical tale of Venezuela's history but I confess that was lost on me and I enjoyed it as a story of a man's life. The most moving aspect of the book for me was Octavio's experience of learning to read and write, having been illiterate throughout his childhood and early adulthood. Not only can he get by more easily in daily life, it is as though he has been cured of blindness and he sees everything differently. He is enthralled by the way he can now hang on to words and feelings that would have vanished as soon as they were uttered before. Very well written.

Octavio flees his home after becoming caught up in a burglary gone wrong and spends decades wandering the forests and villages of Venezuela, his unusual height and strength finding him odd jobs to keep him going. An uncomplicated soul, while he is living a simple life close to nature, his country is being transformed by global modernisation. A touching story, building up to an unexpected and poignant ending.

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## **Mandy says**

This short but affecting fable set in Venezuela tells the story of Octavio, an illiterate man whose chance meeting with a dynamic woman – called Venezuela – changes his life in ways he could never have imagined. There's no happy ending for his relationship with the women Venezuela but I assume we are to understand that somehow his relationship with the country is more rewarding. The story line is compelling enough even if, like me, you don't really understand what it's all about. I've read a quote from the author that "It's the story of a man travelling through a country, and of that country travelling through a man." I'm not familiar enough with Venezuela to know how effective the novel is as fable or allegory, and would have appreciated an introductory essay, but the narrative and Octavio himself are interesting enough to outweigh any incomprehension about the deeper meanings, and the magical realism elements light enough not to intrude. A puzzling – for me – little book but one which I nevertheless quite enjoyed.

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## **Barbara The MarSienne says**

Une petite histoire très sympa. J'ai aimé découvrir comment cet analphabète trouve des astuces pour le cacher, ensuite l'émerveillement de l'apprentissage et enfin son voyage pour se découvrir.

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## **Fran says**

Don Octavio is one decision away from determining his life's trajectory. Born in Trinidad, he is illiterate like his father before him. As a member of the native population, he has been denied an education. He stays in the shadows trying to blend in. He works in shady places as a messenger or laborer.

In 1908, he is living in a Venezuelan slum. Noise and commotion are pervasive. Don Octavio lives in a flimsy hillside abode where wealth is defined by the number of windows in your dwelling. He hides his illiteracy by cutting and bandaging his hand rendering him temporarily unable to write. Presenting this

excuse during a doctor visit and having no paper to write on when the doctor has forgotten his prescription pad, Octavio asks the doctor to write the name of the medicine on his table. Octavio, a muscular giant, carries the table on his back to the chemist. The prescription has become illegible since Octavio has lent his table, when needed by village residents, during his descent to the village apothecary. A replacement prescription is later presented but is missing the last letters of the medicine. Enter Venezuela, acute insomniac, incessant talker and fan of men who listen silently to her bold opinions. Venezuela is able to decipher the name of the medicine. Venezuela, non judgmentally, convinces Octavio that writing only involves a few strokes of the pen. As his writing improves and he learns to read, the world becomes brand new. He no longer cuts his hand.

Octavio now has two jobs and two teachers. In addition to Venezuela's mentoring, Octavio is a member of the brotherhood. He belongs to a group of burglars who plunder while residents are away. Guerra, lead burglar, justifies the brotherhood's actions by using secret ballot voting to determine burgle sites, teaches respect for victim's property and believes in equal distribution of the booty. No weapons are allowed. Items pilfered are given creative back stories and sold for a handsome price. When Guerra sets his sights on Venezuela's house, Octavio's decision will determine his journey through life.

First time novelist Miguel Bonnefoy is a born storyteller. "Octavio's Journey" is magical. I enjoyed the ride.

Thank you Gallic Books and Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review "Octavio's Journey".

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