

Aprendices de brujo

Constanza Jaramillo

Known for his children's books and for two short story collections, Rodríguez is a nomad with an impressive talent for impersonation. He was born in Havana, has lived in Costa Rica and Colombia, and currently resides in the United States. [*Aprendices de brujo*](#) (Rayo/HarperCollins, 2005) takes readers to 1920s Bogotá, "The Athens of South America."

Situated on a plateau enclosed by high peaks, the city was known as a keeper of the purest Castilian, as upheld by a handful of morose Catholic aristocrats. Rodríguez, a Caribbean by birth, seamlessly reproduces this dialect and the Bogotano psyche, capturing the dry wit that practically redeems the Bogotano's aloofness amid the city's eternal rain. His main characters, though, are rare and colorful exceptions in this Andean mausoleum: two gay dandies looking for ways to spend the fortunes forged by their families, both bastions of the country's conservative party. No project is too expensive or futile.

After cautious consideration, the couple decides to cancel a trip to Luxor, Egypt, to check out how debonair the newly discovered mummy of Tutankhamen looks and instead travel to Havana to interview Eleonora Duse, the most elusive of aging divas and a rival of theater actress Sarah Bernhard. The two gentlemen are violently changed by their new Caribbean home as they immerse themselves, always sweating profusely, in its cutthroat artistic world, Bolshevik meetings, and Santería spells.

Rodríguez's Spanish is carefully crafted, his prose full of fine humor, and his plot complex and elegant. Strongly recommended.

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