



# Nights In The Gardens Of Spain

*Witi Ihimaera*

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## Nights In The Gardens Of Spain Details

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Author : Witi Ihimaera

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## From Reader Review Nights In The Gardens Of Spain for online ebook

### Highlyeccentric says

This was an *interesting book*.

Firstly: how much do you enjoy thinking about cock? Because this book is about 60% cock, and the cock ratio is even higher in the first half. Cock. The POV character thinks about cock a lot. His cock, other people's cocks, his cock again. COCK. If you don't enjoy sort of voyeuristically thinking about fictional cocks, this may not be the book for you.

Secondly: it took me a while to get really invested in the main character. He's kind of a generic white dude obsessed with cock. At first he didn't even seem to care about film studies, his academic discipline. He *did* care about his daughters, deeply; and about his wife, who is so awesome I'd read three books about her. So those were my initial hooks for caring about him.

Ihimaera endowed David, the protag, with a habit of referring to \*everyone\* by mental tags, not names. The Predator, one of his colleagues; The Noble Savage, a leader in the Maori gay community; Oh My Goodness, a fuckbuddy of his - and so on. This is really... alienating, I suppose? I assume Ihimaera did it on purpose, and it is notable that more people gain names as the book goes on - as David sorts out his relationships, I guess. I came to care deeply about Jack, a friend of his, and quite a bit about his young lover Chris. Chris' love for David's kids was really well-developed in the latter half, I thought. And the B-plot involving newly!discovered!primary!sources got me, obviously. PRIMARY SOURCES.

So. It was a gut-wrenching kind of story about reconciling sexuality, family and other kinds of identities. So far so good. However:

Thirdly: So much more interesting would've been a novel about the Noble Savage\*. Here's this out gay leader who accepts an arranged marriage to preserve his lineage, but never entirely goes back into the closet. *I want to know about him*. Witi Ihimaera would probably also have been able to write a story with roughly the same arc as David's (attracted to men, but enjoys sex with women; marries woman, has children; decides he prefers men; cue angst) with a Maori character, and I bet it'd have been awesome. As Generic White Guys go I did come to care about David, but he was so -bland- for the first half of the book!

Fourthly: SERIOUSLY WHY HAS NO ONE HEARD OF BISEXUALITY. This guy is not unattracted to women. So he prefers men in the long run, ok, that's fine. But if bisexuality had been an available category in his youth, perhaps he could've sorted through all this instead of going waaaay into denial. The fact that I don't think Ihimaera ever considered that bugs me, too.

Fifthly: Wow, this main character has some skewed ideas about hetsex. On an individual level, if he sees gay sex as an exchange of equals and hetsex as a domination exercise, then perhaps it is as well that he's gay. On a meta-level, though, I think that's what Ihimaera actually thinks, and that I find distasteful.

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\* I guess Witi Ihimaera is allowed to use his own culture as a metaphor-foil to generic white dude? 'Cos he went all out with that, the one or two Maori characters and their concern for lineage and *iwi* serving to highlight David's investment in his family.

### **Michele Harrod says**

Ah, just came upon this listing while searching for another of Witi Ihimaera's books. I adored Nights in the Gardens of Spain. I had no idea what the book was about, but I was drawn to the title. It was absolutely NOTHING that I expected. I remember reading this on holiday in Tonga. I started it in the morning, and the rest of the world faded to oblivion as I entered into the double life of David (I think that was the main character). This is raw and real, and I loved every word. I thought the content would shock me somehow, but it never did. I felt the pain of the need for secrecy, the fear of exposure that these people felt. And it broke my heart. I remember crying so hard at the end of this book, and mourning for a long while afterwards.

I finished it later that same evening, and handed it to my travel companion, saying You MUST read this. NOW. And they started it the next day. The day I spent alone on the island of Tonga, as it faded to oblivion for them.

I LOVE books that are that good, the rest of the world simply disappears for the day. And whose characters stay with me, like old friends, forever. This is one of those books.

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### **Janet Tuck says**

This was my bookgroup read for this month. I wasn't keen to read it because of the explicit content. However I persevered. I found bits disturbing, but also appreciated the telling of a believable story. The word I would use to describe it is 'gritty'.

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### **Wade says**

This is an interesting story that touches on a specific time and culture of gay history. It touched a few raw nerves for me, because my family was in a similar situation. The story is well told, somehow a little magical, yet emotionally true. I can imagine this was quite challenging when it was published, and it's exciting that such a great story-teller was brave enough to tell it. There is a story-within-a-story about the Maori gay man who chose to go back into a heterosexual marriage in order to preserve his role in his community, and I hope someday that will be told in a full-length novel.

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### **Gordon MacLellan says**

A mix of intriguing and frustrating - we watch the lead character grow up (even though he is a married man to start with) with all the attendant irritation of someone missing their own (to us) obvious emotional flaws. Once I finished wanting to slap him, I felt for him and wanted to see him sort himself out, find his feet and live the life that would fulfill him

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## Chuck says

Witi Ihimaera's family was reportedly not thrilled over the publication of this fictionalized autobiography. Understandably so, for Ihimaera (a/k/a "David Munro") provides an honest and graphic look at the "underground" gay scene in Auckland to which he was drawn, and which eventually caused the breakup of his marriage. The author details the painful process of coming to terms with his homosexuality -- a process made all the more difficult insofar as it was met with incomprehension by his staunchly conservative parents and his loving but traditional wife. Never far from Ihimaera's mind are his two daughters who were too young to understand the grounds for their father's departure, but whose love for him was unbounded and constantly reciprocated. Fortunately, the father-daughter relationships appear to have survived.

The author/protagonist's decision to marry apparently sprang from his belief that he could become straight, but within a couple of years the old patterns reasserted themselves. Even so, the marital breakup was neither quick nor easy; Both Ihimaera/Munro and his wife tried for some time to hold on, but in the final analysis each party had to acknowledge who they really were.

As one might expect, this book is full of scenes of bath houses, beaches, and bedrooms, but they play a central role in the unfolding story and never seem to be gratuitously inserted for the sake of titillation. Moreover, such exotica are significantly tempered by accounts of AIDS, loss, gay-bashing, and suicide. Nonetheless, all is not morbid, for themes of love, commitment, and generosity also reign.

In sum, Ihimaera portrays a slice of life that many people will never know first-hand, but which is deeply grounded in the humanity of everyone.

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## Kate says

Upon completion it amuses me that I picked this particular book up in a Presbyterian Church's communal room from bookshelf that acts as a book swap. I had not noticed the shelf in the year I had been walking past it and for what ever reason that day I noticed it. As I age I find myself comfortably able to describe my religion as an agnostic humanist having tried Christianity, atheism and recently begun reading about Buddhism. On the shelf there was a number of iconic New Zealand authors. As I had not actually read any Witi Ihimaera (as a New Zealander this is shameful) I figured I'd give him a go. Of course, I didn't read the blurb. After a few chapters I quickly discovered that title and subject matter were not related. The Gardens of Spain being written about were nowhere near the Mediaterrain country. But rather a euphemism for soliciting erotic male-male encounters in the central Auckland of the mid-1990's.

The symmetry and irony of how I came to this book have since resonated deeply. My 19-year-old son had come out several months earlier after breaking up with his girlfriend. The location of the church and its bookshelf a stone's throw from David the protagonist's marital home. The one which he leaves due to his internal tussle with his authentic self. David has tried to compartmentalise his sexuality and the well structured deceptions to self, family, lovers and colleagues have begun to unravel. This is a beautifully honest account of how as Carl Jung describes needing to examine our shadow. He explains that The educated man tries to repress the inferior man in himself, not realizing that by so doing he forces the latter into revolt. CW 11: Psychology and Religion: par 136, pg 79. Personally as a cis woman I am no stranger to Auckland's gay male scene, I partied alongside The Italian Stallion, Born to Boogie and likely worked with Left Dress. Previously I had worked in the "aids" ward in 1986 where many of our young men returned to, from London, San Francisco, and Sydney to come out to their parents and sadly pass.

The story, language, history, characters and landmarks were so incredibly familiar - weirdly reading this felt

more of a homage to much I have experienced quietly for the last 25 years. In fact, it has allowed me to understand why up until now that past has been a hidden aspect of deeply foundational and fundamental aspects of my current values and choices. It exposed the Auckland I have long known and gave me a real appreciation of why the author is so revered.

I am looking forward to returning the book to the church and choosing another.....who knows what it will turn up.

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### **Teotakuu says**

Purchased at Borders closing down sale

It would be easy to see this book as the author's 'coming out' book and maybe it is, in part, at least. However, to me it is rather more than that. I first read it several years ago when it was first published and it helped me understand some of the complex worlds within worlds we all inhabit but particularly those whose lifestyle is so far from the norm.

As I have become older I have been able to apply some of the lessons of the story to my dealings with my homosexual foster son, his friends and lovers as well as use the insights it has given me in my dealings with others.

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### **Shelley says**

This book is amazing. I have read it before and I'd forgotten how beautiful it is. It is just so full of love and sadness.

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### **Elizabeth Heritage says**

I found this book to be a compelling, vivid portrait of what it was like to be a gay man in Auckland in the 1990s. Ihimaera's writing is honest, raw and graceful; and the plot of this fictionalised autobiography is both emotionally and narratively satisfying. Highly recommended.

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### **Gardy (Elisa G) says**

★★★ ½ - Qualche anno fa ero in una libreria neozelandese e - sembra ridicolo ma è così - ho sentito che questo romanzo irradiava dalla copertina inspiegabili vibrazioni queer a bassa frequenza. Che fai, sei in Nuova Zelanda (dove, per inciso, i libri costano cifre spropositate) nella libreria di una cittadina terremotata e non compri neppure un tomo del primo autore Maori a raggiungere la fama internazionale scrivendo in lingua inglese? Spinta dalla suddetta vibrazione e dalla fascinazione lussureggiante del titolo, ho posato il ben più noto "La ragazza delle balene" e ho comprato "Nights in the Gardens of Spain".

Si è rivelato essere il racconto autobiografico di un'onesta brutale del vissuto personale di Ihimaera stesso, che cominciò a vivere apertamente la sua omosessualità negli anni turbolenti dell'AIDS, consumato dal desiderio per i corpi maschili e dall'angoscia di perdere le due amate figliollette. Per il bene della prole ha temporeggiato, scritto e riscritto il libro, a suo dire sfumandone e sfussandone i contorni.

Sarà, ma la sua qualità migliore è quanto le vicende che vive il protagonista David risuonino continuamente come drammaticamente verosimili e vissute in prima persona. Il fatto che Ihimaera abbia tentato di nascondersi usando il punto di vista di un caucasico rende la storia in qualche modo dissonante, perché si sente che i dilemmi dell'essere gay e dell'essere Maori risuonano in misura simile all'interno del romanzo.

Laddove la letterarietà viene un po' meno, è la forza della storia e la drammaticità degli sbagli compiuti da David a spingere il lettore verso la conclusione. Insomma, il mio super potere X-men ci aveva visto giustissimo.

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### **Karyl says**

I very nearly gave this book four stars, but then I went ahead and gave it the extra star. Why? This book is wonderful.

David Munro has a successful career as a Film Studies professor in Auckland, New Zealand. He has a gorgeous wife and two adorable daughters who are the light of his life. He has everything. Except one thing - he's living a lie. In reality, he is gay, visiting various gay haunts at night (ie, the Gardens of Spain) and engaging in quick, anonymous sex with whatever man catches his eye.

At first, it's somewhat hard to like David. He's tearing apart his wife emotionally, not wanting to admit the reason for his leaving her and the girls. He hasn't told anyone in his life -- not his wife, not his family, not his co-workers. He fears coming out because it will be the end of his perfect life, and he's not sure how to forge a new life as a gay man. But the author does a fabulous job of developing David's character, showing how he grows and matures and finally accepts who he truly is, regardless of how society will perceive him. By the end of the novel, David has decided to be true to his own self.

The imagery in this novel is really wonderful. To me, it was more like watching a film unfold rather than reading a novel, which is unusual for me. I enjoyed the author's comparisons with Peter Pan, quoting from that classic story to showcase David's unwillingness to grow up. I even appreciated his use of nicknames for several of the recurring characters, since it made it easier to keep track of who was who. It also made it clear when a character crossed over into being a more important player in the story because then his given name would be used, instead of a nickname (for example, when The Slut became Warrick near the end of the novel).

I highly enjoyed this book. Not bad for a one-dollar purchase at a used bookstore in Portsmouth, NH.

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### **Ming says**

I thought this book was okay, capably done but so-so. A Maori author writing about a white man in New Zealand makes that main character and his story only marginally interesting...at times. This adequacy reflects just how easy it is to get that trope accurately. (We all need diverse reads.)

I read this book for #PasifikaReads. #AAPIHM

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### **Daniel Gamboa says**

“When you're sorting yourself out, family are not often the ones you can turn to. They represent the place of departure and not the place of arrival.”

I experienced all kinds of strong emotions with this book, which is something I can say about very few books.

This is not a book about a hero; it is a book about a real person. It's not a book about meeting others' expectations but your own, as a whole person, in order to be who you really are.

David Munro is a Pakeha. He has the perfect life in the eyes of everyone around him, but what about in his own eyes? He can come off as a little selfish at times, but aren't other people's expectations based on their own selfishness and needs, too?

"When we become ourselves we reach right back to the time when we were conceived out of our parents' passion. We murder their lives. There can never be any forgiveness.”

Although there's a movie adaptation of it called "Kawa", the film and the book are almost two different things, so don't watch the film thinking "I'll watch the film first and if I like it, I'll go ahead and read the book".

This novel and "The Uncle's Story", also by Ihimaera, have become two of my all time favorite novels. Thanks to these two novels I realized that my expectations and happiness must come first.

I read the 2010 Raupo edition, which, in the author's own words, he rewrote in a less explicit manner. I am curious as to why he felt compelled to do so, but I loved this second version all the same. This is my fourth Witi Ihimaera book, and I cannot wait to read more of his novels.

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### **Tatjna says**

This was the first gay literature I'd read by a male author. Somewhere down below there's a review that mentions how much our protagonist thinks about cock - and it's true, but I didn't find it particularly in-your-face. It was an interesting foray into the emotional life of someone in the process of coming out in middle age after years of closeted married life and a successful academic career.

If I had to use one word to describe it I'd say poignant. And because it's Witi, also earthy. Nice read, interesting and a bit wrenching, worth the effort.

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