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# The Moon, Come To Earth: Dispatches From Lisbon



## Synopsis

A dispatch from a foreign land, when crafted by an attentive and skilled writer, can be magical, transmitting pleasure, drama, and seductive strangeness. In *The Moon, Come to Earth*, Philip Graham offers an expanded edition of a popular series of dispatches originally published on *McSweeney's*, an exuberant yet introspective account of a year's sojourn in Lisbon with his wife and daughter. Casting his attentive gaze on scenes as broad as a citywide arts festival and as small as a single paving stone in a cobbled walk, Graham renders Lisbon from a perspective that varies between wide-eyed and knowing; though he's unquestionably not a tourist, at the same time he knows he will never be a local. So his lyrical accounts reveal his struggles with (and love of) the Portuguese language, an awkward meeting with Nobel laureate José Saramago, being trapped in a budding soccer riot, and his daughter's challenging transition to adolescence while attending a Portuguese school—but he also waxes loving about Portugal's saudade-drenched music, its inventive cuisine, and its vibrant literary culture. And through his humorous, self-deprecating, and wistful explorations, we come to know Graham himself, and his wife and daughter, so that when an unexpected crisis hits his family, we can't help but ache alongside them. A thoughtful, finely wrought celebration of the moment-to-moment excitement of diving deep into another culture and confronting one's secret selves, *The Moon, Come to Earth* is literary travel writing of a rare intimacy and immediacy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Moon, Come to Earth: Dispatches from Lisbon is so enchanting: It dances and sighs. It

twitches and hums and stumbles and then rights itself, with a winsome smile. It's like a living thing, filled with desire and uncertainty and joy and regret . . . Graham is a nimble, witty writer with a penchant for teasing out the small, telling detail from the crowded scene around him. . . and this book is the perfect companion as one contemplates those mysteries, those ceaseless journeys outward and inward." (Julia Keller Chicago Tribune)"Graham's writing is unobtrusive and gentle, and . . . there is a pleasant luminosity that renders this little books of essays serene and enjoyable." (Observer UK)"In *The Moon, Come to Earth* Philip Graham takes us on the best kind of journey, as he simultaneously reveals the fascinating city of Lisbon--its neighborhoods, its writers, its customs, its cuisine--and offers an intimate portrait of his beloved family. With his far-reaching intellect Graham is the ideal travelling companion, and *The Moon, Come to Earth* is a beautiful and surprising book." (Margot Livesey)"I have long been a great fan of the delicately nuanced, keenly perceptive, beautifully articulated sensibility of Philip Graham.Â Â In his dispatches from Lisbon,Â Â *The Moon, Come to Earth*, he is at his exquisite best.Â Â I am very happy to follow this wonderful mind wherever in the world it wishes to go." (Robert Olen Butler)"A good part of the reason I feel so passionately positive about *The Moon, Come to Earth* is how well Graham is able to convey his compassionate, generous, and comic spirit to the reader. Unfailingly endearing, whether he's trying to figure the number of cobblestones in Lisbon or trying to find an ATM to buy tickets for a futbol match, Graham becomes the reader's traveling surrogate in the best sense. But this book is as much about parenthood as it is about Portugal, with Graham's daughter Hannah as the most constant figure in the narrative. The portrait of this father-daughter relationship is about as lovely as I've seen." (Robin Hemley, author of *Do-Over!*)"A beautiful Valentine to Lisbon. Philip Graham and his family take their artistic keenness to Portugal and capture its mystery and contradictions: Whether it's visiting the set of a reality TV show where famous writers play hosts, or overlooking a gorgeous stone labyrinth used to trap wolves, Graham adores the offbeat even as he captures the soul of the city with good humor. There's a taste of wine here, and giant sardines, and carnivals, and saudade, and a moon made of canvas with a light like a glowing heart. This is about a family living everyone's dream of trying out a year abroad. But it might be the saga of the daughter, Hannah, and how the adventure abruptly becomes a journey into the loss of childhood, that grips the reader most deeply." (Katherine Vaz, author of *Saudade, Mariana, Fado & Other Stories* , and *Our Lady of the Artichokes and Other Portuguese-American Stories*)"Part travelogue and part memoir, Philip Graham's *The Moon, Come to Earth* brings us the news of Portugal past and present, touching on food and sports, religion and language, music and literature and art. Graham's greatest strength is his ability to observe sharply and think clearly through the

varied roles of public spectacle: the many ways in which the Portuguese tell stories of and to themselves through fireworks festivals and bullfights, medieval fairs and theater, magic shows and soccer matches and transformational public art. Given structure by his repeated return to the concept of saudade--'a complicated feeling that combines sorrow, longing and regret, laced perhaps with a little mournful pleasure'--and given buoyancy by the ebullience of his voice, *The Moon, Come to Earth* shows Graham at the top of his game." (Roy Kesey)"*The Moon, Come to Earth* offers manifold delights. For an uninitiated reader, it's an introduction to Portuguese culture, language, literature, and history. At the same time, Graham speaks eloquently to the wider processes of discovering emotional truths through self-reflection and of revealing philosophical and political insights through a close attention to particulars. Graham's voice--with its stunning metaphors, elegant turns of phrase, and delightful wit--carries such warmth and charm that one keeps reading partly for the pleasure of his company." (Kirin Narayan, author of *My Family and Other Saints*)"Philip Graham shows us how to write honestly and well about an unfamiliar culture . . . Written like a poem, and full of the poignant details one only notices when embedded in a new culture, not just passing through . . . *The Moon, Come to Earth* should be required reading for all those about to travel abroad, especially if they plan to pack along pen and paper." (Dinty W. Moore Brevity)"The wonderful collected memoir . . . *The Moon, Come to Earth* lifted me up from my humdrum life and transplanted me into the Graham family's Lisbon adventure. It was a day-to-day adventure, full of the familiar, full of new routines and small struggles. It was a bit sad to leave it all, a bit of saudade creeping into my own life." (-Andrew Saikali *The Millions*)

Philip Graham is the author of two short story collections, *The Art of the Knock* and *Interior Design*, and a novel, *How to Read an Unwritten Language*, and is the coauthor of a memoir of Africa, *Parallel Worlds*, winner of the Victor Turner Prize. He teaches at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Graham takes readers on a surreal romp through Portugal as he encounters both the strange and the luminous: a poltergeist that tinkers with the appliances in his rental apartment; a mysterious, silent ticket-taker who appears more involved with his own inner world of thoughts and dreams rather than the "real" world of the train station where he works; a miniature Portuguese village where small, powerless children loom large as giants. In the spirit of Fernando Pessoa (Portugal's much-revered poet who wrote under a multitude of pseudonyms--one for each of his many multiple,

writer-ly personalities), Graham also runs up against some of his own secret, conflicting, multiple selves, as well as those of others. In Graham's Portugal, the past, secrets, and ghosts share the stage with the lovely, earthy, realistic details of Portugal--the music, the feasts, the street carnivals, the cobblestones. And some of the synchronicities that occur on Graham's sojourn are so uncanny that the narrative sometimes slips into the realm of the surreal, or magically real. You won't find essays like this anywhere else--a true original.

Last year, on TAP air, I brought a copy of your book *The Moon. Come to Earth to read*. My family was originally from The Azores and the Disquiet writers workshop was the reason for my first trip to Portugal, so I thought I would follow your journey while I was in the air on my own trek. And, wow, what a good choice. For the duration of the flight, I was grocery shopping with you, worrying about how your wife would find pork-less sausages and concerned for your daughter in school and losing weight just to fit in. I was along for your family walks and the organization of the apartment. The art festivals. The soups. The fireworks. It was a delightful entry point for my own trip to Lisbon!

I read this book while visiting Lisbon and appreciated Graham's account of the year his family spent living there. He has written a thoughtful and honest account of the benefits and difficulties of disrupting the life his American preteen daughter to live in another country for this period, and the book is worth reading for anyone who has done this (as we did in Rome when our daughter was 12) or is thinking of doing so. He's a very good writer, and I will seek out more of his work.

*The Moon Come to Earth* is a gem of a book. It's a nugget of love felt for a family, a city, and the joy of life itself. If you're interested in Portugal than it's a must, but even if you have never heard of fado, have never (knowingly) felt saudade, and don't even care for futebol, you should read it... it's more about discovery and family and raising a child than it is about Portugal. Every chapter, indeed every page brims with tenderness and humor and are written with a kind of easy mastery that comes only to truly excellent writers. I enjoyed it immensely and can recommend it without hesitation.

I was delighted to come across this book while halfway through my own year in Lisbon. The tales Graham tells of his own struggles with life and bureaucracy in Lisbon were at times laugh out loud funny and at others poignantly sad. You quickly get sucked into the story of his family and the struggles they had in adjusting to life abroad, which he uses to showcase excellent insights into the culture and history of Portugal. A real masterpiece, and a must read for anyone who has ever lived

overseas.

Philip Graham takes us on a travel ethnography of current culture in and around Lisbon, Portugal. The work is both anthropology and literary reflection and family memoir. Through these three streams of reflection we come to know contemporary Portugal through the fascinating remembering of one of America's most gifted postmodern fiction writers and teachers of creative writing. "The Moon, Come to Earth" is more than an entertaining and revealing account of today's Portugal; it is also a tender, heart-filled meditation on the joys and hardships of family fieldwork abroad. This new and valuable work builds on Graham's earlier joint account with his wife anthropologist Alma Gottlieb of fieldwork among the Beng people of the Ivory Coast in the 1980s (Parallel Worlds: An Anthropologist and A Writer Encounter Africa). Sample of Philip Graham's fiction works: How to Read an Unwritten Language Interior Design: Stories

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