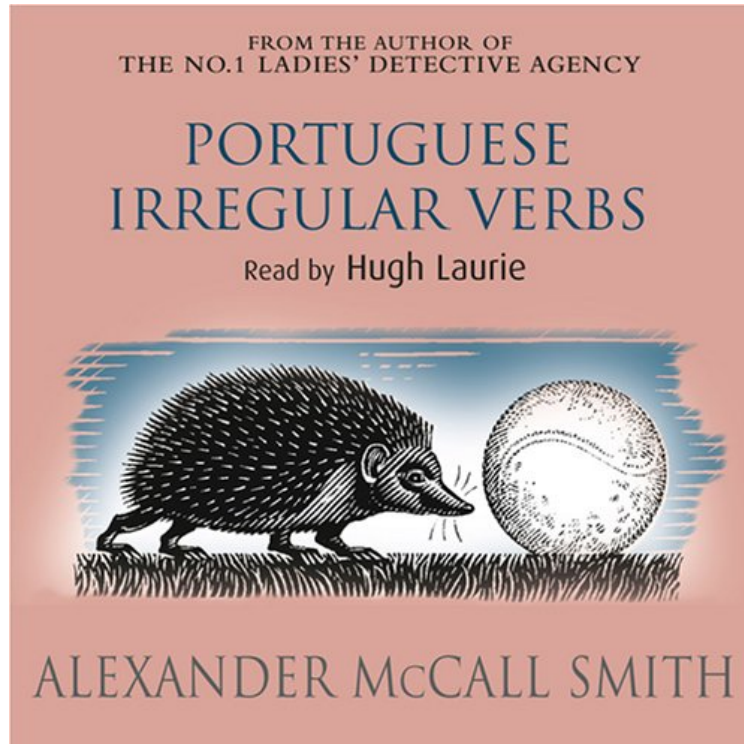


Portuguese Irregular Verbs

Alexander McCall Smith

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Alexander McCall Smith : Portuguese Irregular Verbs before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Portuguese Irregular Verbs:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A delicious, quiet read By Debra Hamel Portuguese Irregular Verbs is one of only three books in Alexander McCall Smith's series featuring Professor Dr Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld, author of the philological masterwork that gives this book its title. (See my reviews of the other books in the series, *The Finer Points of Sausage Dogs* and *At the Villa of Reduced Circumstances*.) All of the von Igelfeld books were published in 2003, so that there is arguably no starting point to the series, yet readers would be advised to begin with this volume. The eight stories included in *Portuguese Irregular Verbs* provide a great deal of background information about our hero. We learn of his acquaintance while a student with Florianus Prinzel, now his colleague at the Institute of Romance Philology in Regensburg, and of his early work as an assistant to a professor of Celtic philology: "I couldn't have hoped for a better start to my career," he confided in Prinzel. "Vogelsang knows more about past anterior verbs in Early Irish than anybody else in the world." We are given accounts, too, of the very moment when the idea of writing about Portuguese irregular verbs came to Igelfeld, and of his ill-fated near courtship of a certain lady dentist. Von Igelfeld travels to Ireland and Zürich, Siena and Venice and India in these stories. He meets a holy man and (maybe) a murderer, gets a tooth pulled, and provokes a sword fight. Throughout von Igelfeld is characteristically self-important and endearingly out of touch: "Von Igelfeld sat down in the reception room and picked up the first magazine he saw on the table before him. He paged through it, noticing the pictures of food and clothes. How strange, he

thought--what sort of Zeitschrift is this? Do people really read about these matters? He turned a page and began to read something called the Timely Help column. Readers wrote in and asked advice over their problems. Von Igelfeld's eyes opened wide. Did people discuss such things in open print?"Some of the stories included in the book are better than others. In the most poignant of them ("Portuguese Irregular Verbs") Igelfeld attempts to beef up sales of his monograph to save it from being sold off by shelf foot. His quest for readers leads Igelfeld for the first time to the home of his colleague and nemesis, Professor Dr Detlev Amadeus Unterholzer. The visit is initially infuriating: "Von Igelfeld peered at the plate above the bell and drew in his breath sharply. Professor Dr Dr D-A. von Unterholzer. What extraordinary, bare-faced cheek! It was little short of an outrage, on three counts, no less. Firstly, Unterholzer did not have two doctorates; there was no doubt about that. Secondly, what was all this nonsense about the hyphen between Detlev and Amadeus? Amadeus was his second name, as the whole world knew, not part of his first. And finally, and perhaps most seriously of all, there was the von. Von Igelfeld felt the anger surge up within him. If people got away with adding vons to their names whenever the mood took them, then that immeasurably reduced the significance of the real vons."But after a moving discovery while browsing Unterholzer's bookshelves, von Igelfeld finds himself warming to the man. Alexander McCall Smith is a charming writer, and von Igelfeld a delightful character--pretentious and jealous and deeply flawed, but ultimately capable of goodness. The Igelfeld stories are delicious, quiet reads. It's unfortunate that there aren't more of them. Debra Hamel -- author of *Trying Neaira: The True Story of a Courtesan's Scandalous Life in Ancient Greece* (Yale University Press, 2003) 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Dr JAMusing but not as good as African detective series 16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. When *The Ivory Tower Meets The Real World* By Jon Linden This book is the first in McCall Smith's "Professor Dr. von Igelfeld" Series. The Professor is the protagonist of all these books, as Precious Ramotswe is the protagonist in all the "No. 1 Ladies Detective" Series books. But Professor Dr. von Igelfeld is quite a different character all together. A professor of Romance Philology, Dr. von Igelfeld sees himself as a great academician in the present day world. Yet his field is so narrow and so esoteric, that there are few who really have interest in it. Yet, the good Dr. writes the definitive book on Portuguese Irregular Verbs, and thereby; has earned a place in immortal history: or so he would see it. The book is extremely amusing and entertaining as McCall Smith takes us through the ill fated travails of the Good Professor Dr. von Igelfeld. The Dr. is always trying to do the "societal correct" thing. Yet he often manages to botch that effort rather enormously. Of great interest is McCall Smith's last chapter, called "A Death In Venice." And the chapter is a direct and unobscured reference to Thomas Mann's story of the same name. The chapter is unusual, and brings all types of questions to mind about Prof. Dr. von Igelfeld, not least of which is whether he has a personal sexual identity crisis. Mann's story was about latent homosexuality, and that precise topic is eluded to, in a very unusual manner. Yet, not unlike Mann's story, the allusions are very subtle. The book is recommended for all McCall Smith readers. The Series is greatly amusing and shows what can happen when people take themselves just a little bit too seriously.

Welcome to the insane and rarified world of Professor Dr. Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld of the Institute of Romance Philology. Von Igelfeld is engaged in a never-ending quest to win the respect he feels certain he is due—a quest which has the tendency to go hilariously astray. In *Portuguese Irregular Verbs*, Professor Dr von Igelfeld learns to play tennis, and forces a college chum to enter into a duel that results in a nipped nose. He also takes a field trip to Ireland where he becomes acquainted with the rich world of archaic Irishisms, and he develops an aching infatuation with a Dentist fatale. Along the way, he takes two ill-fated Italian sojourns, the first merely uncomfortable, the second definitely dangerous.

“In the halls of academe, a setting fraught with ego-driven battles for power and prestige [Alexander McCall Smith] has rendered yet another one-of-a-kind character: the bumbling but brilliant Dr. Mortiz-Maria von Igelfeld . . . [a] deftly rendered trilogy [with] endearingly eccentric characters.” —Chicago Sun-Times From the Inside Flap Readers who fell in love with Precious Ramotswe, proprietor of The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, now have new cause for celebration in the protagonist of these three light-footed comic novels by Alexander McCall Smith. Welcome to the insane and rarified world of Professor Dr. Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld of the Institute of Romance Philology. Von Igelfeld is engaged in a never-ending quest to win the respect he feels certain he is due—a quest which has the tendency to go hilariously astray. In *Portuguese Irregular Verbs*, Professor Dr von Igelfeld learns to play tennis, and forces a college chum to enter into a duel that results in a nipped nose. He also takes a field trip to Ireland where he becomes acquainted with the rich world of archaic Irishisms, and he develops an aching infatuation with a Dentist fatale. Along the way, he takes two ill-fated Italian sojourns, the first merely uncomfortable, the second definitely dangerous. About the Author ALEXANDER McCALL SMITH is the author of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, the Isabel Dalhousie series, the Portuguese Irregular Verbs series, the 44 Scotland Street series, and the Corduroy Mansions series. He is professor emeritus of medical law at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and has served with many national and international organizations concerned with bioethics. He was born in what is now known as Zimbabwe and was a law professor at the University of Botswana. He lives in Scotland. Visit his website at

