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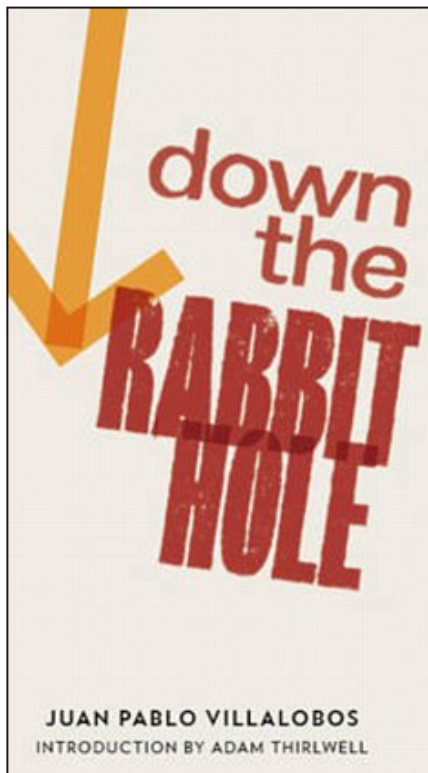
SHORT STORIES

By JANE SHILLING
Last updated at 7:15 AM on 23rd September 2011

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DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE BY JUAN PABLO VILLALOBOS (And Other Stories £10)



There was a time when the Brits were notoriously unkeen on 'funny foreign food'. Now we've come to terms with sushi and tapas, our caution seems to have transferred itself to 'funny foreign literature'.

Perhaps we could regard short fiction as the equivalent of a chef's tasting menu: bite-sized chunks of exotic flavour, just enough to whet the appetite.

Down the Rabbit Hole, by the Mexican writer Juan Pablo Villalobos, is a brief, disturbing, but very readable novella, well translated by Rosalind Harvey.

The narrator is Tochtli, a precocious seven-year-old who lives in gilded imprisonment in a violently dysfunctional household headed by Yolcaut, his Mexican drug baron father.

Villalobos creates Tochtli's half-corrupt, half-innocent world - his obsession with hats and acquiring a Liberian pygmy hippopotamus -

with a brilliant, tragi-comic light touch.

Just be sure to avoid the achingly pretentious introduction by Adam Thirlwell.

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