

Special Transcript of the Casa Museo Otraparte Book Launch
[livestreaming event](#) for *A la sombra del hijo*

[Opens with a video in Spanish created by Michael Smith, introducing *A la sombra del hijo*]

Lucía Estrada, from Otraparte: Welcome to Literatura Otraparte. We are very pleased to have with us a friend who already had the opportunity to present his first [translated] novel, *El ojo de la luna* [*Eye of the Moon*], in the Otraparte theater.

Ivan Obolensky will be here with us tonight to talk about the translated sequel to his Eye of the Moon Series, *A la sombra del hijo*.

Bio:

Ivan wrote many articles for his wife's company, Dynamic Doingness, and she will also be with us tonight. Mary Jo has gifted us the story of the "[Maestro's Little Chair](#)" so she's very close to our hearts here. In 2011 she encouraged Ivan to write [articles](#) about current events, social sciences, and finance. Later he joined the Long Ridge Writers Course where he met Tom Hyman, his instructor and, to this day, his editor. Ivan's hobbies are photography and music.

We are very grateful to have Ivan Obolensky with us tonight on this live event through our [YouTube channel](#). So we are joined by Mary Jo, by Constanza Padilla, the editor of both books in Spanish, and by Ricardo Gómez who will do the consecutive interpreting for the author. And we have Pedro Arturo [Estrada], who will host the event. Gustavo [Restrepo], the Executive Director of [Otraparte](#)* will also join us. I am very grateful to all for joining us, and of course, I want to thank Smith-Obolensky Media, the publishing company that has produced the Eye of the Moon series, for bringing us these two books in Spanish, *El ojo de la luna* and its sequel, *A la sombra del hijo*.

Pedro Arturo Estrada, host: Good evening to all, we have a beautiful edition [of this book] to talk about tonight. Thanks to all who are joining us in this celebratory event, this reunion, where we will talk about Ivan's latest book now available in Spanish. I am happy to be here as a simple reader, feeling very happy, fortunate and privileged, to talk about a very important series that the great writer, Ivan Obolensky, has been penning the last few years.

I want to comment on something before we start, those who are joining us: we'd like to know where you are connecting from and want you to feel free to write any questions or comments online that you may have for the author. We will attend to them here.

I am very pleased to give comments on this work of which we have started to know a lot about, like the beautiful video at the beginning, which explains how this second part of the work was developed. I call it a saga, because it is what it really is—it continues and it must, because it is a story that is getting us involved in that period of time, and in life itself.

I'd like to reiterate that reading this book has been one of the best literary experiences I have had this year because, beyond the development of the plot, which started with the first book being published in 2020, *El ojo de la luna*, we have in the second the intensification of actions and the consequences of these developments, which had been established in the first book of this saga.

I think there is mastery in the writing, the style, as mentioned in the video, it is a classical style that takes us back to times in the past of great literature in the world, and I'd want to point out that there is a return to—in a good sense of the word—to a gothic style, one that gave so much prestige and beauty to Western literature. And that still continues to capture audiences, with its magic and wonder, which this novel brings to us again.

It's an invitation to the reader to submerge in this plot, a bit complex and which defies the cannon of conventional "entertainment" literature. It's also literature that reflects "on the go", around life, around themes of human existence—such as love, that never dies or fades, the passions, ambitions, jealousies, fear, the presence of evil, which is an undercurrent of the story, then you have the mysterious and admirable character of Alice, our favorite heroine, who seems to be present throughout this series.

So the invitation is to have a dialogue, we are going to hear from the author and also comments and opinions from our guests, such as Constanza.

Gustavo Restrepo, Executive Director, Otraparte: We are enchanted to have the Smith family here again, and before we start with our conversation with Ivan, we have a video of the reading [in Spanish, the video at 12:38, [English PDF excerpt](#)].

Pedro Arturo: This is from chapter 3 of the novel where we start to get into the mysteries and passion of the work.

I would like to ask the author, because there is always the curiosity of what led him to write these books, what was the motivation? And what keeps it "under construction", as more books are coming in the series. What was the idea, the origin, that gave place to the initiation of this saga?

Ivan Obolensky, author: There are two things that I think are important. The first is you don't really know what is happening until after you've written it. And that's one point. The second is, I can tell you how it started, but then it has morphed or changed into something else again.

What I see it as now, is Rhinebeck is like a transition point between a higher world and the world that we live in, and it's what I wanted to do, what I've always wanted to do, is to create a world that's better than this one, but is still accessible, and one from which we can learn.

Where it really started for me was that my father would tell me stories. I was ten years old. We would meet at the St. Regis hotel in New York and have lunch. What do you do with a

ten- or twelve-year-old, eleven-year-old, eight-year-old kid? You tell them stories. And he would tell stories about the family and about the past.

One particular time, my father said his mother died reading a copy of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. This was news to me, and it started a—that there was this mysterious element, a mystical element particularly from my Russian background that I had not—that I was unfamiliar with, and it fascinated me.

And I think that one of the—many years later, as I started to write, I always wanted to see if I could write a novel. I wasn't sure if I could. But I really needed a story. I thought I would start with a ghost story about Alice and that instance. And what cemented that for me was an article in *W Magazine* which said, or conjectured, that she was murdered, which was, you know Whoa! That was unbelievable but what if she was? How could that have happened? And that's how—that was the basis for the novel [*Eye of the Moon*].

Pedro Arturo invites Constanza to give her perceptions.

Constanza Padilla, editor: I have been following Ivan as a writer for some time now and I am very interested in knowing how he emerged as a writer. I have been close to the process of getting his work into Spanish, as the editor of both translations, but the main thing is that before I am an editor, I am a reader. I have observed the development of his characters. He said earlier that he would start to write and then would find out what happened. But I think he is an accomplice of his characters! I have seen them grow and develop, and I have seen there is a fabulous character, and it's the house [Rhinebeck]. I would like to ask Ivan why that house became a character. Why does it have such an impressive voice, why the reader feels the house speaks to him/her?

Ivan: It's an interesting thing. When I was growing up, you have places that strike you as being different. It was a world—I mean it had a butler for heaven's sakes, and that you don't have in a normal house. It had garages and cars and you know, grounds. And I mean, it had its own private train station. I mean, these were things which were unbelievable, so it was a place that was almost imaginary only it was real. I think, for me, it was terrifying. And it was terrifying in the sense that you have to live up to the expectations that go with it. Because those things—Balzac said that behind every great fortune is a great crime. You know, you gotta wonder about those things. So what do you have to be to live up to the standards of excellence, behavior, that that world represents?

I think also, one other thing, is that the greatest terrors we that experience happen in our own minds. Not necessarily in the real world. I think it's a truism that reality is in some ways kinder than what happens in our heads. Particularly when it comes to terror and things like that. That is—I wanted to communicate that. But of course, you can *say* it but you gotta have a story. Because otherwise you're just saying it. What you need to do is that it's gotta go from the head to the heart. And stories are the things that do that. So that's why the house has to be important. Because it's part of the story. And all I do is create stories and hang ornaments on them.

One other point, I think, if I could say that. That is—it's like painting. You have your canvas. But what strikes the viewer are the highlights. It's those little white bits which, Wow! Is that a person? And you look really closely, and no, it's just a dab of paint. But it's a person! And when you create stories, you are doing this to a person's mind. You are forming images in the reader's mind. And that's—when you do it well, it's fantastic. We've all read books where we go Holy Mackerel, I *love* this! This is—and this is what, I think that's what I want to do. I want that. I want people to go Yow! *That* rocks! So anyway, that's what I'm saying.

Of course, a story has to be—it has to say something. But you can't *say* it. You have to *show* it. And that's the trick. Again, you are trying to create a world in the reader's mind that is filled with the same *fears* the writer has, the same *joys* the writer has, the same *experience* that the writer had, and in a way that's like real life but it's not real life. It's *better* than life, it's more interesting. That's—again, things evolve because things don't stay the same. Stories evolve, people evolve. Everything evolves. And the story seems to be evolving and all I do is go along for the ride. It's—to me, it's one of the best things I can do.

Pedro Arturo: We have a lot of good company tonight [he mentions people online].

To add to this element of the house, I'd also like to talk about the decorations and interior design of the house, the different spaces, the garden, table setting and seating, it's all important and transcendent, there is nothing superfluous, or out of place, nothing that doesn't add to the action of the story. I like that a lot.

Ivan: That's very true, and that's deliberate. What I tried to do is do the same that a painter does. He uses a line or a dab of color or a highlight to give an indication of a thing. It's not the thing. But the *reader*—what I do is I just put bits. Little bits. And it's not a lot of bits, but it's enough for the reader to start that imagination working. It's a minimalist—it is a somewhat minimalist approach because everybody has their own “Rhinebeck”. It's different from what it [really] was** but it's their own Rhinebeck and they make it in their mind. If I, the writer, can just plant that little seed, and from that one little thing, all the world that you see is created, and that's what's—that's why you have those bits there, because they help the reader to imagine the world they're experiencing.

Pedro Arturo: Constanza, any other thoughts?

Constanza: Now that we are here dissecting the work and also its author, which I'm enjoying very much, I would also like for him to tell how we writes, how he does it. What is his discipline as a writer? What vices has he developed? What has he learned through the exercise of writing two novels? Do you write in the morning or afternoon? How is Ivan as a writer?

Ivan: Interesting. I write, or try to write, every day. Now that I have the third, and I'm interested in it, I really want to write every day. I think where I—what I do, is I sit down, and I read what I wrote before. One of the things that is interesting as a writer is when you start at the beginning. Chapter One. You go—what's happening? You put down a scene in

the same way that you would do a skit. Or a movie shot. A person. A thing. And something happens. What is strange is the more you get into the novel and the story, the more restricted the writer is as to what he can do. Because the storyline follows organically, and all the other bits have to match. So the way you write is you read over, and over, and over, and over, and *over*, everything, always, until it is *perfect*, in your estimation. And of course, you always find something wrong. But you at least know it's smooth, the story fits, and I can hold it. And now because of all that has gone before, I know what is going to happen next. That's how you write.

Follow up question from Constanza: You are accompanied by a great reader, who is Mary Jo, your wife, and who is also your editor in English. What is the contribution of having a person who understands not only what is happening in the novel, but what is happening with the author on a personal level? She reads you permanently and makes interventions as needed, a person whom you trust as a reader. Tell us about that relationship in terms of the novels.

Ivan: Okay. If you are a storyteller, by definition there must be a listener. Because you cannot have one without the other. Mary Jo is my listener. She hears me. And that's interesting because it means you have a person who can understand you. And is also—you play off the audience. I mean, if you look at any singer, musician, you know, Miles Davis—you *feel* the audience. You know what—because you play for that audience, and you know how to change it up so that the audience responds. And if it's done very, very well, it sends the music to a much higher level. As a writer, Mary Jo is like my muse. I mean, she is a person—not—like the muse, I have my muse, she's different, but Mary Jo is something—somebody—who I really want to enjoy what I have written. And just really have a great time with it. So I am always conscious of my reader. And Mary Jo *is* that reader. She's what I call my Dear Reader. Because—and I think every writer has to have one. You just have to have a person that you *write* for. And she is that thing. And it's worked for me. It's worked for both of us, I think. It's a journey and I find it fabulous.

Pedro Arturo: [Question from someone in the audience.]

A question for Ivan from Ana Velez: “The ideas that come up in the process of writing, the ones that get edited out, do you keep them? May there be other parallel stories to this one?”

Ivan: (laughs) Okay, this is a good one. The—okay, everybody has their gift. Some of them have many gifts. Mozart could come up with a melody at the drop of the hat. I can do that with stories. I can do that with ideas. I will never run out. I've got thousands of them, and I don't know what to do with them. All I know is I'm focused on the one I have and make that as great as possible. Sometimes those other bits come flying in from the side, and they do. But it's mostly things that happen in living that trigger something that I need to know and that goes into the story and changes it, in a weird way. It's like a give and take between living and your mind. And the two mesh in a strange and peculiar way, and the result is the result, and it's—that's how it is. I mean, I don't know. I have a thousand, million, billion ideas. I will never run out. Which means I'm not really worried about it. I don't worry

about all those other little stories that go flying about. I could make—a dime a dozen. I could make—I can start a story in any way. Here's a story. You're in a morgue. There's a body bag. It starts moving. That's a story.

Pedro Arturo: Audience comment from Julio Betancourt: “I am very surprised at Ivan’s ability to combine so many opposite features in one character in such an organic way. Evil and darkness and, on the other side, forgiveness, love, and generosity. I love that one manages to both hate and love a character at the same time. This keeps the reader connected to the story at all times.”

I think this is a good point we have yet to mention, and to follow up, which is that at the end of these books there is a great lesson, which is that we human beings are not a model of anything. We are not archetypes, the absolute good ones and absolute bad ones, and we are immersed in that ambiguity, the permanent ambiguity of life. Life isn’t categorical. Often it is circumstances that make us act one way or another. This is one of the greatest lessons of the work, and I am very grateful for this comment by Julio Betancourt.

Ivan: Well, thank you for that. I mean, you know, I like it. It’s true. I think in everybody there is great good, and the capacity for great evil. It’s—you know, how do we deal with that? And that is the human question. Because you either can, or you can’t. And I think it’s—everybody has the capacity for all things. It’s how you—again, it’s like we can be anything we want to be, and that’s what’s so great, it’s just that sometimes we go too far on the things that maybe we shouldn’t. And maybe not enough on the things we should. But that’s life. Life is complex. Life is—life is life. It’s exciting! It’s full of surprises! It’s got stuff there that just blows your socks clean off. And you know, if you’re not getting it, well then I’m sorry but you’re not living enough. Because that’s what you gotta do. And in my books, I try and put some of that *zest* into the world so that we can maybe be better. Maybe we can do more. Maybe things *will* work out, you know what I mean? Why not? I think that’s really, you know—that’s what you have to do. Because when you’re a writer, you gotta write and you gotta say something, but you can’t say it, like I just did. You gotta do it in a story. That’s the way it is.

Pedro Arturo: There is a wonderful theme across the books, which is friendship, which is constantly present. The friendship between Percy and Johnny through the continuous dialogues. There is a question from Vicki Botero in the audience: “I would like to know if Ivan has had a Johnny in his life, the accomplice who is so loyal. Is Johnny inspired by a real person?”

I see here Mary Jo, who, while in a feminine figure, could also be that permanent accomplice, in your creativity?

Ivan: (laughing) Okay, remember, life has many parts and life has many moments. You could probably group them in ten-year blocks. When I was growing up, I had my brother, and he was a really important part for me. Then we got sent to school, and that part left. When I was reading, and I read an awful lot, an author by the name of Patrick O’Brien wrote 21 books, you probably know them as *Master and Commander*, and there is the key

character, and he's blonde, and he's go-get-um, and then you have the doctor, who is his sort of alter-ego, and he's much darker, and a bit paranoid, really intelligent, but you know (grunts). Those were my—I looked at that, because I think growing up I always wanted a friend, and I figured it was about time I had one. Now the really great news was that I found a friend in Mary Jo. And that was very, very good. She is my bud. We are *compañeritos*. You know? It's like this is—we work together. And it's seamless, as we get into—but you know, it's *seamless*, it just works for us. And it's so important to have such a thing. And it floated into the novel. I mean, in some ways they're [Johnny and Percy] both halves of me, and in other ways, they're not. They're just—they're characters, and they're real to me. Each of them. They—I mean, all the characters, believe it or not, live in my world. I know what they're going to say. I know what they're going to do. They speak to me. And you know, it's weird. And they change. You know—as they go through stuff, they're different. I don't know why that is, but they are. It's wonderful, and that's why I like that world. I do. And I like to communicate it to readers because everybody should have such a world.

Pedro Arturo: To wrap up, we'd like to hear from Mary Jo, what does she think after this evening's conversation?

Mary Jo Smith-Obolensky, publisher: I have been enchanted by everything this evening. Thank you very much for the opportunity. Living with Ivan and living with Ivan writing these novels has been an absolute adventure. I am delighted with the process; I have figured out when to allow spaces and time. He is a fascinating person. I love being with him. He's very entertaining, I entertain him, we laugh a lot... we have a very special relationship, and being here, in Uruguay, in this little world we have, it is very conducive to creativity. There is a lot of space, a lot of freedom. We don't have the energy from the North, which is so intense. We have a much calmer environment. There is a group of people supporting the author. I am the first in line, but there is a large group supporting us. Like for this event tonight, and I'll mention them later.

I look at myself and see that I have been preparing for this my whole life. Where I came from, the relationship with Fernando Gonzalez, Otraparte, my mother and home Todaspartes***, those beginnings, and I meet this Russian that has all these amazing stories, and look what I brought to Colombia, I brought you this present! These books in Spanish are very important to me, to share this with the Latin, Spanish-speaking public. So, I feel I am in between Ivan's world and the world where I came from, and it all makes sense, it fits. My life makes sense. I hope this makes sense.

Pedro Arturo: Yes, it makes a lot of sense.

Ivan: Awww. *Qué bueno. Qué bueno.* (that's good, very good.)

Pedro Arturo: We would like to talk about the fans, the younger readers, who have been following Ivan avidly since the first book. One of them sent a video we want to share.

[The Vlog is shown in Spanish at 1:18:18.]

Pedro Arturo: Isn't this what every author wants to be prized with? An enthusiastic reader that can synthesize so clearly all the work put into the novel, and with so much emotion. I think this is a great closure for this evening, with this fan and her thoughts. I think it is marvelous. I'm not sure what else we could add? Constanza?

Mary Jo asks Ivan if he'd like to comment on the video.

Ivan: Yes! I love it! I think it's fantastic to see young people reading. And as we start to end our program, I just want to say something to everybody: It all works out okay. Don't worry.

Pedro Arturo: We have questions still pending.

Constanza: We have to save them for the next time. I would like to thank Ivan and Mary Jo for making us part of this adventure, for being part of what we have put together to get these books out in Spanish. And I want to say that indeed, seeing happy readers such as the one we saw, is very satisfying, and I think all who have read these novels are just as excited. We hope you enjoy this second one, which is fantastic.

Gustavo: In closing, I want to make some comments. In the first place, I would like to apologize for saying at the beginning that we welcomed and were so happy to be again with the Smith family. I should have said the Smith-Obolensky family. The Smith family is a friend of Otraparte's since the '60s. For over 60 years, the relationship of Rosa Girasol [Mary Jo's mother's pen name as a poet, writer], the relationship with Gonzalo Arango, with Michael Smith, their friendship with Fernando Gonzalez, his wife Margarita, in their home, Otraparte. It's a long-term relationship.

But I want to talk about Ivan today. I haven't had the opportunity to read Ivan's second novel, but I did read the first, *El ojo de la luna*. But what I want to highlight is that well before Ivan wrote novels, I was reading his articles published on dynamicdoingness.com. I knew Ivan was a great writer back then. I already knew that Ivan had a plethora of subjects in his mind, as he has researched all kinds of subjects: politics, science, philosophy, psychology, theology, sociology, anthropology—all subjects interest Ivan.

His Russian and North American background add a lot to this curiosity. I said in my review of the first book that Ivan was an "atisbador"—one who is watching, observing, taking in. Just like Fernando Gonzalez was. Ivan is interested in *life* and all it contains. Fernando had the same thirst for life and living.

And I also want to highlight the number of times Ivan said "life" tonight. I don't know if you all realized the emphasis that Ivan puts on life, living, the number of times he mentioned it. Life is so interesting, that you have to investigate it night and day. I think that is the mission of a human being: investigate what life is. What is it made of and how does it present itself on a daily basis?

We are privileged beings in that we have a consciousness that allows us to know we are alive, aware of our living. And I think this is what Ivan puts in these novels—a saga indeed, as Ivan is writing the third, and will probably write a fourth, so this is what I appreciate so

much in Ivan's work: the intelligence, experience, and putting all of the concerns he has, and that he invites people to *think*. Think about what life is. As he says, everything is possible. Because life is infinite in possibilities.

So I thank Ivan for gifting us his knowledge and experience, his enthusiasm and “ánimo” [enthusiastic encouragement]—a word often used by Fernando Gonzalez. Always thrilled to have the Smith Obolensky family come and visit.

Ivan: I would totally agree with that. Yes, yes. I love it. Thank you very much Gustavo, many thanks to everyone, Pedro, Ricardo, Constanza, Germán [the translator of the books], of course; Mary Jo. You know, there are so many wonderful people I have met on this journey that I value so highly, and I thank you so much for your support, and all the things you do. It's just—it's great. And I love Colombia. Because Colombia is always dialed to ten. I mean, it just is! You know, it's like, wild, you never know what's going to happen there. And it's just great! Because that's what living is all about, it's surprise. And I just to thank you for all the opportunities you have given me and for all the work you've done. Pedro, for being a genius, you know, and your sister Lucia for being a genius, you know, these are *great* things! But anyway, that's all I wanted to say. I think we should this end off now, we've gone about an hour and a half and anything more than that, I think my rear will start to stick to the chair [laughter].

[The video at 1:34:56 showed where the books are sold, essentially worldwide through [Amazon](#) and in the US through [Smith-Obolensky Media](#), in [Colombia](#) via Instagram [@ivanobolenskyofficial](#) and [Libreria Nacional](#)].

Mary Jo: Read the first one [*Eye of the Moon*, or *El ojo de la luna*] first, then the second [*Shadow of the Son*, or *A la sombra del hijo*]. Then read them again. Once you know what happens, you can go back and find many layers in the stories. The more you read, the more you find! So at least twice. What a thrill for those readers who can go from one to the next without having to wait.

*To find out more about Otraparte please visit their [website](#). There is an [audio guide](#) to the museum that you may enjoy.

** “Rhinebeck” in the series is completely fictional but based, in some details, on the real place Ivan Obolensky summered at as a child, the estate that once belonged to his aunt Alice Astor, who truly did pass away reading *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. As such, it was said that estate was haunted. Ivan Obolensky writes about this, and offers more background, in his [blog](#).

*** Mary Jo was friends with Fernando Gonzalez when she was a child, through her mother, Rosemary Smith-Kebe, who was active in that artistic community. Part of Mary Jo's story is told in [“The Maestro's Little Chair”](#) referenced earlier in the interview.

In closing: To find out more about Fernando and his life philosophy that affected and continues to affect society, artists, thinkers, and the population of all ages, read [“From Rebelliousness to Ecstasy”](#) and [“Journey to the Presence”](#).