Esta bruma insensata
Author:
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Esta bruma insensata (This Foolish Haze)

Enrique Vila-Matas's latest novel is a first person narrative that plays brilliantly with ideas of originality and intertextuality within literature.

The novel unfolds during a period of three days at the end of October 2017, coinciding with the Catalan Declaration of Independence, although the work is not overtly political. The narrator, Simon Schneider, lives in the north of Catalonia, in a ramshackle house on the edge of a cliff which is in danger of tumbling into the sea, just as he feels his life is at risk of doing. Simon describes his employment as a "pre-translator" who anticipates problems. In fact his main task is to send lists of quotations to his brother Rainer who, after a failed career as a writer in Barcelona, moved to New York, became the famous author Rainer Bros (Grand Bros), published five acclaimed novels and then went into hiding in Pynchonesque style.

On the Friday of the period in question Simon receives an email from Gran Bros stating that, after an absence of twenty years, he is about to board a flight to Barcelona and wants to meet him on the Sunday. Simon spends much of that day considering his solitary life in Cap de Creus since his father's death, realizing how the people he becomes close to are in the habit of disappearing, thinking about his conflictive relationship with his brother—a mixture of admiration, jealousy and childish rivalry. His thoughts are founded on the knowledge he has amassed during his life as a collector of quotations: Pynchon, Queneau, Salinger, Perec, John Ashberry etc.

Enrique Vila-Matas is renowned for the brilliance of his prose style and he does not disappoint in this novel. The plot is woven with great complexity and the frequent quotations are skilfully used. In Simon's musings the reader moves back and forth in time through the events of a largely dull life but is also invited to consider serious questions related to literary theory and the task of the writer. The characters of Simon and Grand Bros are intriguing, infuriating, perplexing, contradictory, but they are definitely characters. There are in addition moments of great humor. Although the novel is not political in nature, the events surrounding the Catalan Declaration of Independence ground the novel in a reality that the text to some extent belies.

From the reader´s report by .