

El apicultor de Bonaparte (Bonaparte's Beekeeper)

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*El apicultor de Bonaparte is set on the island of Elba and is a work of historical fiction focusing on Napoleon's exile to the island in 1814-15. In addition to Napoleon himself, the other protagonist is Andrea Pasolini, the island's principal beekeeper.*

*The book opens with a letter received by Pasolini three months before the book's main action from his former tutor, the local priest Father Anselmo, who is no longer living on Elba. The letter tells him about the 1814 Treaty of Fontainebleau and suggests that Napoleon's arrival on Elba could be a great opportunity. We soon learn more about Pasolini: that although he is a beekeeper by profession he is in fact highly intelligent and intellectual and ended up a beekeeper after inheriting his father's bees. Pasolini had previously been Anselmo's protégé for seven years from the ages of twelve to nineteen, and although he took on his father's business and married because it was what was expected of him, he has a secret and extensive library in his cellar where he devotes much of his time to reading and studying.*

*Pasolini had an epiphany many years ago when he read a report that mentioned the presence of a swarm of bees influencing Napoleon's decision making at the Battle of Marengo and has since made a detailed study of Napoleon's life and military achievements in the context of unusual apiarian behaviour. This has involved correspondence with beekeepers throughout Europe, trips to Tuscan libraries and even writing directly to Napoleon himself some fifteen years ago, although all he got in return was a jar of honey from Ajaccio, Napoleon's hometown.*

*... Back on Elba, Napoleon finally visits Pasolini's bees. As he peers inside the hives, he suddenly sees all his previous battles as though through a camera obscura. He watches a large queen leave one of the hives, followed by her retinue, and helps a straggler along before galloping purposefully back to his headquarters.*

*El apicultor de Bonaparte is definitely an unusual and original book. While other books do deal with Napoleon's time on Elba, they are few and far between... The focus on bees and beekeeping is also original*

