

El navegant

Author:

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Reader:

Peter Bush

The Navigator is an adventure novel written in the first-person. It is well-constructed and very readable. Set in the second half of the nineteenth century, the novel encompasses various scenarios: Perpignan, the hero's birthplace; Paris, besieged by the Prussians in the reign of Napoleon III; the revolution of the Commune and its defeat, and finally the landscapes of New Caledonia.

As a child, the hero of the novel, Assiscle Xatot - also nicknamed Nuvolet, or Little Cloud - discovers that he has a gift: he is able to learn any language after only hearing one word uttered in that tongue. When he hears a word in a language he doesn't know, he immediately feels nauseous and, then, as if by magic, he finds he is fluent in it. In this way he immediately learns Latin, classical Greek and many other European languages. Although Assiscle tries to hide his gift - only his father is in on the secret - it is soon noticed by his teachers in the religious school he attends in Perpignan and they try to persuade him to enter the Seminary and become a priest. But Assiscle doesn't feel any religious calling and rejects their offer. In Perpignan, Assiscle speaks Catalan at home, French at school and Romany with a Roma friend.

...The Navigator is an original adventure novel that also highlights the riches that all languages possess. The historical backcloth to the novel - with its veiled critique of French centralism and imperialism - is extremely convincing and manages to take the reader into the political struggles in France and the paradigmatic changes they represented. It reminds us that this was the era when Darwin's theory of evolution was being debated as were Humboldt's linguistic theories. Thanks to the subterfuge of the gift of tongues that Assiscle possesses, the author introduces the theme of linguistic diversity and reflects on the phenomenon of world languages without becoming pedantic... In terms of style, the novel recalls Zola's (especially in the pages relating the agitated months Assiscle spends in Paris), and also Jules Verne, although, unlike the latter, Joan-Lluís Lluís is not averse to erotic scenes and doesn't sidestep the role that sexuality plays in the life of his hero.

... To conclude, The Navigator is an original, well written novel with a style of its own that hooks the reader. Although it is a historical adventure novel, its perspective is contemporary and thought-provoking.

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