
Muerte a Seis Veinticinco

Author: Jordi Cervera

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Although 'Muerte a Seis Veinticinco' is aimed primarily at teenage readers, the taut style and dark subject matter of this detective novel make it equal, or even superior, to many adult examples of the genre, and a worthy winner of the Edebé Prize for Young Literature in 2009. The intricate plot develops and unfolds in an intriguing manner, and is narrated from the point of view of a variety of characters, allowing the mystery at the heart of the novel to be gradually and tantalizingly revealed to the reader. The story and setting enable the author to explore some interesting social and psychological themes without ever patronising or preaching to his readership, presenting them with a challenging, but absorbing read.

The novel takes its title from the 6.25 metre line in basketball, and the story commences as Ray 'Bicho' Barbosa, the star player of Juventut Badalona, battles for points in the final seconds of a crucial match. Barbosa's wife and son are later found murdered at their home, and while the obvious suspects are a gang of skinheads seen leaving the scene of the crime, Sergeant Joan Pons believes that the killing bears all the characteristics of a professional hit. His progress on the case is hampered by pressure from local government and the press, and unofficially aided by his daughter Carla, a fledgling investigator studying for her police exams. Multiple viewpoints are used to dramatic effect, suggesting that people and events from Barbosa's past may have a bearing on the tragedy. The main narrative of the story is interspersed with pages from the assassin's diary, providing us with an insight into the psychology of a killer with a chilling sense of pride in the perfectionism and professionalism he applies to his work.

Descriptions are very visual, with details of Barcelona and its environs providing a dynamic backdrop for the action. This mis-en-scene and the episodic character of the narrative lend the novel a filmic quality, and it would be easy to imagine the story transferred to the screen. There are numerous references to art, architecture and design, as well as literary and musical name checks, reflecting the author's wide range of interests, as well as his obvious pride in Catalan culture. There are also some sardonic swipes at lawyers with smart addresses and designer chairs, alongside politicians more concerned with public opinion than the pursuit of truth and justice. Cervera writes with an effortless and deceptively simple style, which nevertheless conveys a complex range of ideas and emotions. The book tackles controversial and topical issues, including the psychology of violence, the reasons for racism, and the challenges of overcoming a difficult background, but the tone is never moralistic, and the author leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions.

This is a summary of the reader's report by Lise Jones.

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