
L'home manuscrit

Report by Laura McGloughlin

L'home manuscrit is a well-written, distinctive and erudite novel in which Baixauli manages to explore big ideas - the writer and the act of writing, the reader and the act of the reading – while never allowing these concerns to overwhelm the story.

The novel follows the story of a nameless narrator, who lives a solitary life of reading, writing and re-writing what he calls his Account Book and tracing the influence of an unknown person - to whom he refers as He – on his life. He charts four occasions on which He has intervened and is preparing for a meeting with Him, after which, he says, he doesn't know what will become of him. That meeting does indeed prove fateful and spins the novel – up to then a straightforward if creative narrative – into something wholly unexpected and ambitious.

The novel's biggest strength is the quality of the writing. There is a sense of economy in Baixauli's writing, as if every word has been calculated and calibrated with precision. The repetition of words, phrases, names and events induces a giddy hallucination in the reader and the narrative's twist into something wholly unexpected is effective and occurs at just the right stage in the text. Abstract concepts are introduced but never overshadow the story at the heart of the novel. At one point, the narrator says: "I like open endings, with readers...abandoned by the writer, depending on themselves," and appropriately the novel concludes by circling back to the beginning, with a meeting with Him in the not too distant future.

This novel is one that would work exceptionally well in English – it is intelligent and well-written, intriguing and engaging. Although Baixauli writes in a Valencian dialect and the novel is set there, its scope and appeal makes it universal in its reach. In L'home manuscrit, Baixauli invites the reader to participate in a literary game of cat and mouse. Those who do will find this novel a challenging but ultimately rewarding read.

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