

REVIEW / RESEÑA

The Book of Nonsense

Slater, David Michael

Austin: CBAY Books, 2008. 265 pp.

David Michael Slater's pre-teen book, *The Book of Nonsense*, (2008), will introduce your child to a smattering of Borges. The book opens with quotation from "La biblioteca de Babel," suggesting that Borges was a precursor and an inspiration. One could say much the same thing about works such as the Harry Potter series, which my 11 year old son found captivating and intriguing. Here, however, the references to Borges are more explicit. Among other, they include a bookstore whose labyrinthine description mirrors the Library of Babel, and Asterius Rash, the owner of the store, an old man who is blind like Borges, and who turns out to be a villain. Also, Rash is searching for a book that is the key to the magical language, the First Tongue, that will give him ultimate power ("Death and the Compass," "The Library of Babel"). One of Austerius' foes is a grandmother-like figure, "Ruby Scharlach" who turns out to be a villain in her own right.

The protagonists are two 13 year-old paternal twins, Daphne and Dexter. Their father is a searcher for and seller of old books. He discovers an exotic book *The Book of Nonsense* in the region near where the twins' mother died. Daphne convinces him to try to sell it to the owner of a new, antiquarian bookstore, Rash. When Rash hypnotizes their father into paying Rash to take the book off his hands and arranging for Daphne to read the book to him, the mystery and adventure begin. The plot is somewhat formulaic and fashionable: two children in a world of magic

find themselves in a situation where the fate of the world depends on them. However, it moves beyond the simple expectations that one finds in a formulaic plot. The twists and surprises, the inventive quality, and Slater's handling of the suspense keep the reader involved. In order to give the characters and the book a bit more depth, Slater takes the time to develop the family dynamics and the sibling rivalry of the twins as well as their relationship to their rather simplistic father and deceased mother. As there are several unresolved plot strands, I suspect that this is the first book in a series.

My 11 year old son, David, read the book also, and wrote the following:

Critique of The Book of Nonsense

This was a very interesting book. I found that while using common issues that teenagers can relate to like overprotective family members and problems with friends, it also has "never done before" ideas like magical words from thousands of years ago that can control people. I find that the theme in this story is a very important one, especially for kids becoming teenagers to remember: you can be a hero at any age or way and people aren't always as they appear. This was also so close and so far from my life that I felt that I could relate to it on the one hand, (which made it enjoyable), and that I had never experienced it (which made it even more enjoyable). It had so many twists in it that I couldn't put the book down. I liked that at the end of the book you didn't get a clear answer to anything. It made you wonder about many things.

While this book does not offer the Borges scholar any original insights into Borges, it presents the young reader with at least a cursory introduction to some of Borges's themes and images in a decent mystery and detective story. It also underscores the reciprocal relationship between children's/teen literature and Borges.

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