Roque 6
Author:
José López Rubio
Reader's name:
Brendan Riley

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**ON A SCALE FROM 1 - 10 (10 being the highest score) how would you rate this book? 10**

**A deceptively gentle modernist satire by José López Rubio (1903-1996) published in Madrid in 1928,*Roque Six* seems now a forgotten classic of its time. This is a sunny, highly amusing, often hilarious, sometimes mordant meditation on the travails of the modern Everyman. The titular Spanish character, the hapless, benighted Roque, dies and--in a by now familiar existential fantasy--is surprised to find himself reincarnated several different times, forced to inhabit unfamiliar bodies and lives, seemingly belonging to others, each one stranger than the last, each rebirth offering him a variety of social obstacles that serve as opportunities for the author to skewer a great many social conventions (family life, office camaraderie, beach vacations, lottery dreams, irresponsible gambling, the power of the pulpit, adultery, etc.). López Rubio creates humor by having Roque see even the most mundane experiences with childish naiveté as he strives to succeed in each new life and role he finds himself trapped inside and at odds with. One of his zaniest incarnations is as a Presbyterian minister in Ainsworth, Nebraska. Realizing that his new life obliges him to preach a sermon each Sunday, Roque sets to scouring his library (or is it "the minister's?") for inspiration, and, in addition to standard Biblical stories and lessons, embellishes his preaching with whatever bookish trivia he encounters during his daily reading, including hand-shadow puppets, juggling and sleight of hand, and Robinson Crusoe's choice of the name Friday for his island companion, much to the delight of the already bored congregation.**

**A novel of meticulous prose, absurd from first to last, composed in the great Spanish artistic moment known as the Generation of `27, the style is traditional, clear, and unadorned, propelled by an extremely smooth, matter of fact tone, a rhetorical pokerface effectively narrating ridiculous scenes (Roque working off a heavy hangover from a night of cabaret going in Paris by singlehandedly sweeping the streets clean (for which he is awarded a medal by the city government), or drawing a large crowd on the beach at Biarritz as he leads various children in building sand castles, or choking to death on the ball from a casino's roulette wheel) or offering wry comments on the familiar vicissitudes of daily life. It's a charming drollery, silly and erudite, with an ever present ironic twinkle, whimsically positing that the best way through life's chaotic labyrinth of misfortune is to make your own luck by embracing the unexpected. Inoffensively modernist**

**in style and attitude, this novel seems quaint now, gazing upon it from the far side of postmodern insanity, but it's a gem of a book, totally focused, eminently clear. Its mission is to amuse, and it succeeds spectacularly on every single page.**

**This novel will present a fine challenge for any translator; in addition to having a rock solid grasp of the Castilian of the day, a successful translation will require rigorous revision and polishing to match the original's smooth, well-rounded, throughly consistent, transparent style.**

**Published in a beautiful paperback volume by Barrett, with a handsome cover, the pages graced by occasional diagrams and line drawings (by José Luis Ágreda) representing Roque's incarnations or other narrative quirks (diagrams about piñatas; how to fold a paper boat), and witty glosses on some unfamiliar terms (the pantograph: a copying device; *el hachón*: "a large wax candle formerly used to burn down towns and bridges and such"; and the Netherlands' tradition of "Domino Day") written by José Maria Torrijos, the personal secretary of López Rubio, who also penned a helpful introduction about the author and his career.**

**A delightful novel imbued with a subtle, pervasive dadaism, and a keen, surprising, inventive erudition, *Roque Six*seems like it would be right at home among some of the more whimsical and less heavy facets of Lorca, Dalí, Buñuel, and other artists of the time. An excellent literary reincarnation for the 21st century. (10/10)**