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The Elephant's Journey by Jose Saramago, Harcourt, 2010

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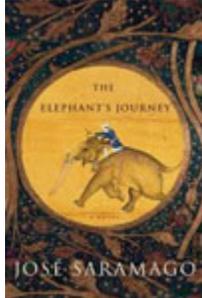
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Recommended Readings



The Elephant's Journey

by Jose Saramago, Harcourt, 2010

Reviewed by Eloise Sureau-Hale

When King Joao of Portugal and his wife resolve to present Archduke Maximilian of Austria with a matrimonial gift, they think big! What better way to show their appreciation than to send a live elephant. Now the question that arises is that of transport. No plane, no train, no large motorized vehicles because it is 1551! So this is how Solomon the elephant finds himself on a journey on foot from Lisbon to Vienna via Valladolid, equipped with his own mahout, Subhro, and a gathering of soldiers instructed to make sure the journey goes well and safely. On the way, they will face many dangers and encounter countless interesting people, from a Catholic priest set on exorcizing Solomon to a young man lost in the woods whose path he will find thanks to Solomon's trumpeting trunk. No matter who crosses their path, people young and old will find themselves changed by Solomon's sole presence and by Subhro's philosophy on life. This posthumously published novel by Nobel Prize winner José Saramago is deep, wise, sprinkled with rich dialogues, extremely funny at times and most definitely a "must read." Reminiscent of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps with a touch of Don Quichotte, the story is a fascinating commentary on life which teaches us that we all can learn worthwhile lessons, no matter where the teaching comes from, even from an unassuming Hindu elephant keeper and a large grey trumpeting pachyderm.

- Eloise Sureau-Hale is Associate Professor of French at Butler University.