

12-14-2014

The Invention of Hugo Cabret: A Novel in Words and Pictures

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Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "The Invention of Hugo Cabret: A Novel in Words and Pictures" (2014). *Publications*. 86.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/lib_pubs/86

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Selznick, Brian. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret: A Novel in Words and Pictures*. New York: Scholastic, 2007.

JUV PZ7.S4654Inv 2007

“I like to imagine that the world is one big machine. You know, machines never have any extra parts. They have the exact number and type of parts they need. So I figure if the entire world is a big machine, I have to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason, too.” – page 378

Hugo Cabret is a thief. Orphaned when his father dies in a fire and sent to apprentice with his uncle who himself soon disappears, Hugo is left to live alone in a Paris train station. Twelve-year-old Hugo must steal to survive, but after a while, he begins stealing more than just milk and croissants: Hugo steals the automaton his father had been working to restore before his death, and Hugo steals toys and small parts from a toy booth in the train station so that, using his father’s notebook, he can begin to restore the automaton himself.

When the old man running the toy booth catches Hugo stealing, Hugo agrees to pay his debt by working at the booth. Hugo juggles his time at the booth, where he watches the old man perform card tricks and meets Isabelle, the old man’s goddaughter, with tending the station clocks and with – what is quickly becoming an obsession – repairing the automaton. But as Isabelle rekindles Hugo’s love of movies, as the old man introduces Hugo to magic, and as Hugo finds a book combining the two with his own mechanical skills, Hugo’s world begins to change.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret is a fictional tale, but the story is grounded in fact: Georges Méliès, a prominent figure for Hugo and Isabelle, was an actual filmmaker, the films mentioned in Selznick’s work are real, and Méliès’ collection of automata, which was donated to and neglected by a museum in Paris, serve as inspiration for the story. But the realistic and layered plot is only part of Selznick’s exceptional tale. In *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, Selznick seamlessly combines straightforward text with film stills, actual sketches by Georges Méliès, and his own intricate full-page black-and-white cross-hatching to create a visually stunning and wholly unique reading experience.