
Verne y la vida secreta de las mujeres planta (Verne and the Secret Life of the Plant Women)

Ledicia Costas is a Galician author who has won several literary prizes for her children's and YA fiction. Verne and the Secret Life of the Plant Women was originally written in Galician but Costas also translated it into Spanish, and the novel was awarded the 2015 Lazarillo Prize. Ledicia Costas is a popular and successful author of YA fiction, whose stories tend to fall into the fantasy genre, addressing modern themes from a more creative perspective.

Verne and the Secret Life of the Plant Women follows this tendency, by mixing real events and characters with fiction and fantasy in an imaginative storyline. The novel is set in Vigo in north-western Spain in the late-nineteenth century, and inspired in the visits by the great French writer and adventurer Jules Verne and his acquaintance with Antonio Sanjurjo Badia, who built an incredible new submarine and successfully tested it in the town's estuary. Costas, however, recreates a whole new story and reason behind Verne's stop in Vigo, when her character visits a local pharmacy where the women of the family bear an ancient secret. As they age, they transform into plants. But this transformation must be completed where they can put down roots in a hidden forest that can only be reached by an underwater journey. When Verne visits the family, the grandmother is in the last stages of her transformation and must get to the forest as soon as possible or her human form will die and her plant form will be unable to live on. Violeta and her grandfather are desperate to help her, but they don't know how to find the forest, and Verne might just be the answer to their prayers. Violeta must undertake a daring adventure to try and save her grandmother before time runs out, and to ensure her own future.

Although the novel is set at the end of the 1800s, the characters are modern, and the story combines fantasy and science in what could be called light steampunk. The book skips along at quite a pace, mirroring the excitement of the story as well as the urgency the protagonist faces to save her grandmother...

The language, while appearing quite effortless, is actually very varied and imaginative, although the structure sticks to short simple sentences.

The book approaches many modern themes for its young readership that are common to both Spanish and English-language culture, such as the gender inequality faced by Violeta, and which are currently relevant to people united by their age and experience even across nationalities. Costas addresses such themes along the way, as they tend to occur in real life, and while Violeta's experience as a teenage girl, for example, is prominent enough to reflect modern issues (in particular the current movement for new gender perspectives), the approach is not explicit or overly political.

All in all, this book has all the promise of being very popular in an English-language market, and would work very well in translation...

[From the reader's report by Suky Taylor](#) [1]

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