

From the Lighthouse

Chad Musick

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In Chad Musick's novel *From the Lighthouse*, a mysterious nonbinary person searches for their place in the multidimensional universe.

Musick holds a PhD in mathematics and lectures on knot theory, which informs the novel's looping structure. The narrator is called "Knot," a name that functions as both play on words and plot point. "That's the problem, you think you're in charge, but you're Knot," says Bigman, Knot's untrustworthy caretaker. The book's central conflict revolves around Knot's identity: is Knot human, animal, male, female, magical, or ordinary? Bigman keeps Knot isolated, going so far as to tie them up with a rope. When tragedy erupts in their beach community, Knot explores it beyond the limits that Bigman has set.

Knot's world is multileveled and rich in paradoxes. Biblical images, as of babies in reed baskets, exist alongside changelings and secret doorways. The book's vision rejects the either-or dynamic and is wide enough to accommodate diversity and change. Shifts in setting—even toward the conclusion, when those shifts become frenetic—are handled with clarity.

The contradictions posed by Knot's vulnerability, violence, and musical, childlike voice make them sympathetic, even though their identity is uncertain. Uncertainty is the truest pathway into the book's themes of gender fluidity and the flexibility of personalities. These important issues are handled with care and intelligence, acknowledging the variety of emotions they raise. They are framed in a fantasy world, where the path to self-knowledge travels through gorgeous, frightening places of magic and violence.

Veering into the territory of an allegory, *From the Lighthouse* is an exceptional and poignant novel in which a social outsider takes a fraught path toward authenticity. It's a haunting story of the enigma of identities.

MICHELE SHARPE (January / February 2022)

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