

The Boatmaker

John Benditt

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In a style that is both literary and fable-like, this novel follows an antihero on a journey to uniting the self with society.

In a fantasy world that oddly mirrors our own, John Benditt weaves a fable-like tale that offers subtle insights into the purpose of money, the pervasiveness of racism and religious hatred, and the redeeming power of love.

After building a boat, a carpenter leaves his home of Small Island, traveling to Big Island and then to the Mainland, leaving his family and his lover behind with the hopes of returning with wealth. Once he arrives at his destination, however, he discovers a world much different from his own simple Small Island. Greed and racism permeate the kingdom. Soon, an anti-Semitic priest convinces the self-questioning “boatmaker” to join his mission to spread his message, and the boatmaker’s destiny is shifted.

While the boatmaker’s alcoholism and lustfulness make him a not very likable character, his innocence upon observing new lands and his ambitious optimism keep the pages of the book turning; one wishes that by the end of his tale, he will redeem himself. His antihero’s journey propels him through unusual scenes populated by characters archetypal and unique alike. He emerges from his past on Small Island like a man from Plato’s cave, slowly opening his eyes over the course of the book to his own faults and strengths, as well as those of society.

The dreamlike nature of Benditt’s writing style puts a compelling twist on what could otherwise be a rather generic plot. As the story progresses, the boatmaker’s perspective widens and deepens. The book is also laced with a bit of irony; the king of the Mainland’s birthday, for instance, is on the fourth of July.

With a political slant and an understanding of religion’s effect on communities, *The Boatmaker* will appeal to fans of literary novels of self-discovery.

AIMEE JODOIN (Spring 2015)

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