

The Book of Pearl

Timothee de Fombelle

Sarah Ardizzone, Translator

Sam Gordon, Translator

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The Book of Pearl is a beautifully imagined tale of grief and love. Timothée de Fombelle's book, originally published in French, is impeccably translated by Sarah Ardizzone and Sam Gordon.

The story is luminous, with a plot that delicately weaves multiple worlds across multiple time periods into a seamless whole. A prince, Ilian, is banished to another world, separated from the fairy he loves. He will spend a lifetime trying to find his way back to her. A fairy, Olia, deeply in love with the prince, follows him to a new world, but she has been cursed so that if he ever sees her, she will cease to exist. She will spend a lifetime in hiding, trying to protect her love.

A young man unwittingly falls into this tragic love story when he sees Olia many years after the pair arrive in twentieth-century France. He gets lost wandering through the woods and is rescued by a mysterious man, now known as Joseph Pearl, who is living in a cabin surrounded by suitcases filled with random objects. It will ultimately fall to this young man to form the ending to Ilian and Olia's fairy tale.

The complexity of the book will likely challenge some of its young adult audience, but the challenge is more than worth the effort. Characters are beautifully developed, motivated by fear and loss and love. Various settings, from a summer palace in a shimmering land of magic to a charming confectionary in pre-World War II Europe, create vivid environments for the characters to inhabit. The story is a brilliant mixture of history and fantasy, and is filled with longing and hope.

The Book of Pearl is a celebration of imagination and the power of storytelling. As it builds each layer of the intricate plot, the book itself becomes part of the magic. It is an absolute must for anyone who has ever loved a fairy tale.

CATHERINE THURESON (January/February 2018)

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