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The Voyages of Consciousness

Ghassan Dib
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“In the infinite depth of dark space, in a dimension beyond the scope of human intellect, a model of our universe whirled like a top energized by the sighs of a ghost,” Ghassan Dib writes. With this mysterious and mind-boggling first sentence, Dib sets forth on remarkable literary journey that proves to be as overly confounding as its climax is satisfying. This book is not for every reader; but those willing to stick with it beyond the wordy preamble are in for a science-fiction delight.

Protagonist Jason is an intelligent young man holed up on the island of Kefalonia in Greece. Jason is penning a book about the universe and all of the weighty questions and baggage that come along with human existence. Questions like, “Why are we here?” and “What is Free Will?” are repeatedly addressed throughout the novel, just as they are in life, whether we are conscious of it or not.

It is in a small inn that Jason’s true voyage begins. The gods who rumble high above Athens are at work in this restaurant, willing Jason forward to meet a beautiful woman with the unfortunate name of Hippolyta. In Greek mythology, Hippolyta weds Theseus, sparking a war between the Athenians and Amazons. Hippolyta also appears in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, though in that play she is largely insignificant until she voices her displeasure with Theseus in Act V.

Needless to say, the names utilized by the author in this work play an important role in the outcome of the story. If the name “Jason” isn’t evocative enough, readers will get a firm understanding of the tale’s direction upon Hippolyta’s introduction. The conversations between Jason and Hippolyta are intriguing, thought provoking, and at times, downright confounding. But for readers who pay close attention to the details, the story will bloom like a spring flower.

Ultimately, Dib has a gift for creating a work of art based on a pre-existing tale. The only downside to the story is the lackluster manner in which the characters interact as real people and not, say, as doomed mythical figures bound for glory or destruction; one must suspend disbelief while reading certain conversations. Ultimately, the book is a truly interesting read and one that will keep readers thinking far beyond the final page.
LIAM BRENNAN (May 18, 2010)

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