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BOOKS, ESSAYS

THE BOY WHO BELONGED TO THE SEA

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It's not often that I pick up books on a whim, but there was something in the cover of **The Boy Who Belonged to the Sea** that brought me to think, "yes, I should definitely buy this and read it as quickly as I can." Is it the lone seagull? The blending of the plain paper with the sea to render it the sky? The beautiful sea itself? The in-built cultural association and expectation that international literature is inherently good and worth reading?

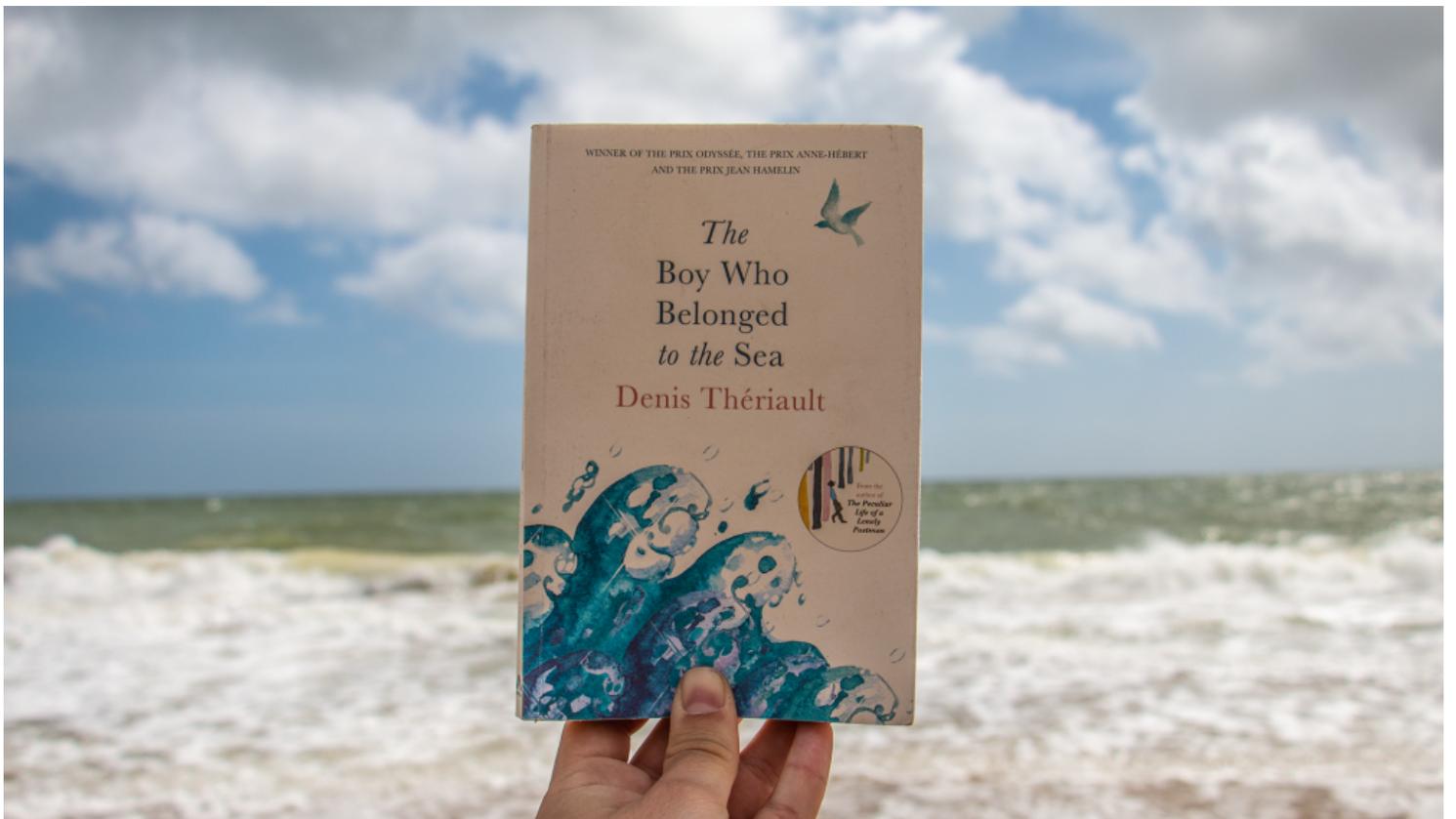
The Boy Who Belonged to the Sea tells the story of a young boy (the unnamed narrator) who befriends the mysterious Luc, bonding over shared parental grief. What initially appears to be a traditional coming-of-age narrative quickly transforms into a quirky, hallucinatory and profoundly strange exploration of just how far the mind can go in its efforts to overcome mourning. I can certainly see how the story can be unsavoury for some readers. It is sometimes unclear where Thériault's sympathies lie; is he indulging in the fantasies of the children or warning against them?

It's emblematic of the problematic relationship between fantasy and reality, and to what extent it is safe to blur the boundaries. Their penchant for imagined worlds produces both positive and negative results, but is it worth it? The book's ending would appear to suggest that it is, which is, admittedly, a little dark.

But dark doesn't mean bad. The book is beautifully written, balancing the line between childish sensibilities and ethereal observations, its story of mysteries engaging and the lore it builds interesting, at the very least. **The Boy Who Belonged to the Sea** is innately evocative, and I couldn't help but picture it as a film throughout. It's a curious mixture of **A Monster Calls**, **Moonlight** and **Swiss Army Man**: endearing children who come together to tell stories, forging a meaningful relationship, but through objectively weird means.

I could see the rich blues and purples of the beach, the night sky, and the sea. I could hear its softness and ferocity. I could see the cave, lit by moon and candle. I could see the snow, encompassing the lands of Canada. Most of all, I understood everything the boys did. I understood their desperate need to believe that death is not the end, the confusion of how it can be that an entire existence can end at any moment. There are lots of poor tales of loss and grief, but I did not find **The Boy Who Belonged to the Sea** to be one of them.

"When I entered this lacy cathedral, I was surprised to see how thick the grass on my father's grave already was. I came to look for a sign, some sort of confirmation, and I questioned his epitaph for a long time, but it remained silent. Unless, of course, one counts as a reply the rustling of the leaves, the creak of branches stirred by breaths of ocean air, and those quiet sobs drifting up from the trees – the ethereal sighing of the wind."



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