



The Stormwatcher

Graham Joyce , John Picacio (Artist)

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"Of those writers who stoically refuse to trudge along horror fiction's well-worn path, Joyce, with British Fantasy Awards to his credit for *Requiem* and *The Tooth Fairy*, has perhaps had the most success. And now we can add to that list *The Stormwatcher*... For this remarkable, fine and almost unclassifiable book is a complete breath of fresh air, even considering his past achievements.

The story is simply (!) the interaction of a group of somewhat dysfunctional friends during a two-week holiday in a lonely cottage in the Dordogne region of France. The group comprises James and his French wife, Sabine, and their two young daughters - Beth and the confused Jessie -plus James's one-time colleague Matt and his wife, Chrissie ... and, just to make things interesting, the sultry Rachel, another work-chum of James and one with whom he has shared considerably more than the occasional business meeting.

As the story progresses we discover that one of the party - an unnamed instructor whose identity is kept hidden until the end of the book - is engaged in secret lessons with the impressionable Jessie, for reasons not immediately clear. Meanwhile, courtesy of a nicely-realized series of tense-changed flashbacks, we learn more of the instructor's background and an almost symbiotic relationship in which both she and her lover speak only lies to each other.

All the time, Jessie grows more intense and confused while, around her, other members of the party grow, by turn, increasingly belligerent or subservient, manipulative or malleable, paranoid or confident. And underpinning the sequence of events is an intense feeling of primal sensuality evoked both by the environment and an approaching storm (its progress cleverly interjected into the proceedings by a series of half-page chapters explaining meteorological behaviour) and by the behaviour of the adults as their feelings for each other - and their protectiveness and confusion at the antics of and comments from young Jessie - swirl and eddy."

Signed by the author. This is the only US edition.

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The Stormwatcher Details

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Author : Graham Joyce , John Picacio (Artist)

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Trunatschild says

I think Mr. Joyce was using this book to practice his tension building. I've read nearly all of his books and so far, this was my least favorite. I think it's because none of the characters were attractive, even the children were just children, with nothing to make them anything but objects of pity. The author knew that the characters weren't pleasant as he mentions it in his dedication. The only thing that kept me reading the book was the desire to find out if my guess at who the 'instructor' was correct. It was.

I'm glad I read the rest of his books first, I probably never would have read another and some of his books are amongst my favorites of all time.

Glen Engel-Cox says

There's a certain rawness to Graham Joyce's stories, in that he always manages to shock me somewhat in his frank writing about taboo subjects—in this case, as in most, sex. I hate to think that I'm something of a prude, but I did grow up Baptist. In the typewriters of lesser authors, this wouldn't be worthwhile, but Joyce always is well-grounded in the foibles of people and the frank writing about sexual matters is not puerile but necessary to understand the characters.

The story here is a vacation outing of a family (man, woman, two girl children), and three of their friends (another mixed couple and a single female). The problems occur because that which brings them together—their connections to each other, their focus on the children—is also what begins to drive them apart. The father who had once employed his male friend and bagged him because he felt threatened by his friend's success merges with the knowledge that his friend has of the father's past affair with the single woman. The mother becomes a hen over her children, one of which has been having decidedly strange “spells” of strangeness (actions and words that seem to emerge full cloth rather than through mimicry).

Joyce writes on the edge of fantasy, similar to Jonathan Carroll and Robertson Davies, and also similar to the Latin American style of magical realism. In this novel, he attempts to break somewhat from the fantastic and strives for a New Yorker-style realism in the make-up of his characters. Stylistically, he's too straightforward in his sentences to be one of the new literati, even while he retains that strange subtlety that keeps you wondering about just how much you really know about this world and the characters that inhabit it.

Fi says

Huge fan of Graham Joyce but if this had been the first book written by him that I'd read? I'd never have picked another. If you're looking to read this as your first experience then please don't. Try The Tooth Fairy, Dark Sister or The Silent Land, please.

Lynn says

I really like Graham Joyce's fantastical realism but this one had a bit too much dysfunctional family drama compared to the fantasy. Nicely atmospheric Dordogne setting, though. (Terrible kindle formatting issues, tho.)

Terry Mark says

When I write a book review I don't like to give too much of the storyline away, it's for others to discover. But just to say it's about a group of people holidaying in France with so many twists and turns that you don't know who's who and what's what, and then when you think you do everything is flipped on it's head. A brilliant read.

NyxShadow says

<http://www.nyx-shadow.com/2015/10/en-...>

Lapetitesteph says

Excellent.

Ginger says

A book centering around power and the use and misuse of it towards an impressionable young girl. Human values are involved and a mysterious ghost (or not) is included.

This book is set in France and concerns two families on vacation together and a mystery that occurs whilst there.

Mark says

His poetic language was quite lovely. He used imagery and descriptive language in a really remarkable way which I found very satisfying however the plot itself was weird, unsettling and not a single one of the characters rang particularly true. I have no problem with the use of swearwords or 'foul' language if they serve to illustrate character or create tension but Joyce's use of language in that context quite often appeared purely....if that is not a contradiction in terms...to show that he was prepared to use them; rather like a silly little school boy having discovered he could shock a maiden aunt. Would I read another of his novels.....not sure. His use of imagery is powerful but the story, which could in itself been quite a powerful gaze into the depths of relationship, jealousy and power dallied about on the surface with all sorts of odd disconnections.

Then again maybe that was his intention.

Andrew says

On the surface, a group of friends are holidaying in France with one of the couple's two children. The elder child, Jessie, has instances of disturbing behaviour and appears to be under the influence of one of the adults. But she isn't the only one who is disturbed and as the surface is cracked and the inter-relationships of the couples are revealed we understand that the world of adults is just as chaotic as that of the children. And as the storm which has brewed for days descends on the group so does the sense of foreboding and the expectation that something awful will happen.

Joyce is a highly-competent writer, delineating the intricacies of the relationships with precision and building the novel to a satisfying climax. Whilst I wasn't always convinced by some of the characters actions and I felt the short chapters describing the creation of the storm rather unnecessary, this novel works well describing the multi-layered mishmash of human relationships, coupled with the hint of something supernatural which is more an accurate reflection of the way the world revolves around us and how we impart meaning to the unexplainable rather than a full-blown fantasy which would ultimately have undone the work.

Bill Kupersmith says

Love & death are the most romantic subject for a story that there is, ever. Graham Joyce was unknown to me till I found his novel *The Silent Land* on the shelf @ B&N nearly five years ago. Downloaded a copy to my Kindle & found it very moving indeed but it was obvious from the Americanized vocabulary that an editor with a tin ear had vandalised it, & so ordered the real thing from Amazon.co.uk & read it again in the original. Not only was *The Silent Land* one of the most moving love stories I have ever read, but it is amongst the few that celebrate married love, married love in the face of death, with deep affection mixed with some coarse banter, sexual desire, profound plangency & really good skiing in the Pyrenees. Appropriately, the title comes from Christina Rossetti, a poet who's @ once mushy as a marshmallow roast yet can get you all teared up in seconds. (Listen to 'In the Deep Midwinter'.)

So when I found a signed copy of the 1st (& only?) American printed edition of *The Stormwatcher* @ a used-book store in Cedar Rapids, I snatched it up, not quite expecting another *Silent Land*, but eager to find out if it showed promise of Joyce's future development. Read later @ Amazon this was Joyce's 'famously "lost" novel' (available on Kindle now) & it indeed offers some parallels with *The Secret Land*, being also set in France & treading the narrow line betwixt 'realistic' & 'paranormal' fiction. James, an advertising executive in his early 40s, is on summer holiday in the Dordogne with his French wife Sabine & their daughters Jessie & Beth (11 & 7). They are accompanied by another married couple, Matt & Chrissie, as well as Rachel, James's PA & the girls' piano teacher. There's some history. Matt had worked for James's agency till James gave him the boot in humiliating fashion & has been mostly drifting since. Rachel had an affair with James that is supposed to be over. James has become a semi-alcoholic suffering from terminal hypochondria. Surrounding their rented farmhouse are fields thick with corn ready for harvest. As we Yanks use the word 'corn' exclusively to designate maize, I wasn't quite sure at first whether it was blé or maïs, but it's apparently the latter. Maize seems to be a major crop in southern France & I was sort of getting a feeling that Peter Mayle met Stephen King. Indeed, what we Iowans call a 'combine' figures in the story as an

engine of destruction. Jessie too is a bit disturbed & is given to things like climbing onto the roof stark naked & asking the adults to join her. She also has a secret mentor, whom the 3rd person narrator calls 'her instructor' but identifies only @ the last part of the book, tho' by the middle 'the instructor's' sex is designated & the reader can easily eliminate all but two of the characters & you'll probably guess the right one. We get bits & pieces of 'the instructor's' backstory throughout, but have to wait till the end to fit it together. Through her unusual tutoring, Jessie become fascinated with weather, clouds, storms, mirrors, & caves (all of course highly charged archetypes)

My feelings on finishing this one were mixed. It's cheering to discover that authorship is indeed an activity in which practice far overcomes absence of initial promise. I first discovered that truth on going back to Susan Howatch's early gothics. They were downright bad, yet you could see the seeds of the wonderful Starbridge series. So too with Stormwatcher. Lots of the best elements of The Secret Land are there: the setting in France, the focus on marital relationships, spooky events but still barely explicable by naturalistic hypotheses, & love & death. But most of the characters are too common to approach tragic dignity. (view spoiler) But the principal artistic fault was keeping 'the instructor' anonymous, as it was quite obviously necessary that Jessie knew that character's identity. To have Jessie know something that the reader is not permitted to know simultaneously is extremely annoying & makes it obvious that the author is jerking us about as well as displaying his poverty of imagination, especially as I had a pretty good take on who it was anyway. It would have been a better book if Joyce had skipped the trickery, especially as what is truly intriguing is not who the instructor is, but why & how that role came about. As the saying goes, the art is to conceal the art. Not the information. (Unless of course you're Julian Barnes, then you get a Booker award for playing cat & mouse games with the reader.)

If you've not read any Graham Joyce, go read The Silent Land now (in the genuine version). He is a great loss to literature, even tho' none of his other books has quite engaged me. (I may finish Year of the Ladybird tho' I found the Butlin's holiday camp setting rather off-putting.) If you are curious about origins, The Stormwatcher is quite readable, especially if you like being @ the crepuscular (I word I learned from this book) boundary between natural & supernatural fiction. But if not, there are better spooky reads, such as The Mind of Winter. If this book were new or by somebody else, it'd be a three star. But as a precursor to The Silent Land, it gets an extra star for historical importance.

Bill Mazzola says

i'm still puzzling out what category this book was fits into - but it was emotional, dark, scary, weird and engrossing. joyce is 2 for 2 in my book. looking forward to the next one.

Lectrice Hérétique says

De plus en plus pesante au fil de la lecture, la tension psychologique entre les personnages tourmentés est superbement mise en scène. Les relations dégénèrent et la tension sans cesse grandissante mènent le lecteur jusqu'à la conclusion fatale. L'ensemble fait nettement penser au fabuleux et angoissant Tour d'écrou de Henry James. À mi-chemin entre roman fantastique et roman psychologique, cette histoire habilement conçue nous met en garde contre le secret, la dissimulation et le mensonge. L'ambiance est étrange, on sent parfaitement les tensions sous-jacentes de plus en plus palpables. J'ai adoré et j'ai bien l'intention de lire

d'autres romans de cet auteur que je découvre.

Joe says

Probably his best book next to Requiem. A little slow to start, but kept me wondering till the very end, and beautifully constructed as always.

Freesiab (Bookish Review) says

I so want to love his books! The last quarter of this book was what the whole book should have been. Here were the problems 1. 2 congruent stories. Great plot device! It failed here. Neither story developed as a result 2. Strange and unusual story lines. Great! I love those! That's why I chose this book, however, you don't really pick up on it until way later and the principal isn't described. Ok, there are more but I'm over this book. I thought Silent a Land was over rated but at least I liked it, so I may yet.... In the future, give this unique voice another chance.
