



The Ghost's Child

Sonya Hartnett

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Maddy yearns for her life to be mystifying, to be as magical as a fairy story. And then one day, on the beach, she meets the strangest young man she has ever seen.

The Ghost's Child is an enchanting fable about the worth of life, and the power of love.

The Ghost's Child Details

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Author : Sonya Hartnett

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From Reader Review The Ghost's Child for online ebook

Amanda says

Such a beautiful little book

Clare Cannon says

Permit a philosophical review, for it is a philosophical book. It is a superbly written story that immediately submerges the reader in lyrical prose. The style is perfectly suited to the poetic theme which has the echo and poignancy of an age-old fable. Style and structure gradually build the narrative and leave the reader in anticipation of some great event, of some significant and completely transforming act.

My hope was that it would glorify complete selflessness, and show the beauty of giving everything in order to be open to the gift of others. This story got only half way there. Suffering was present as the purifier of selfishness and herald of coming greatness. And there was selflessness, but it wasn't complete. Both of the main characters managed to keep their deepest selves to themselves. I wasn't expecting them to renounce their identity. But one can give everything without renouncing one's identity. Ultimately it is their lack of genuine communication (which is what mutual self-giving consists of) that brings them both to sadness. They say they love, but really they refuse to love.

The story then fades away like a wave on the sand, gliding back to an unnatural peace. Unnatural because where there was once such passion, there is now only 'contentment' in accepting that the passion and idealism will never be satisfied. There is some truth in this, for passion and idealism are never fully satisfied. But it is not the whole truth. So many wonderful stories show that through purified passion it is possible to attain a happiness far deeper than contentment, that in giving more of oneself one can be open to receiving from others. This is very different to the lonely contentment each character is left with in this story.

All of that was to say that this is quite a depressing story, perhaps more aloof than bitter, but deeply unsatisfying.

Jonathan says

What does it mean to love someone very deeply, and then lose that love? And what does it mean to love someone deeply, but still yearn for something more? Once again, Harnett illuminates the hidden places of the human heart with truth and beauty.

Roya says

Why does Sonya Hartnett write so well, HOW does she write so well? I love everything she writes; they are not conventionally children literature, and they are not exactly adult either. Almost like fairy tales. This one certainly WAS a fairy tale.

Eshusdaughter says

Matilda, an old woman, enters her sitting room to find a mysterious young boy waiting there for her. His smoky colored eyes are familiar and though he has surprised her with his arrival, the two share tea and conversation for an afternoon.

Maddy's life unfolds in a lyrical recollection told to the young boy, swinging from scenes in the present in her sitting room back to the distant past when she was girl and first fell in love.

This is a gorgeous story that reads like a dreamy fairy-tale, a fevered fancy half glimpsed. It settles into your mind and heart and lingers there, soft and compelling. Filled with beautiful description, whimsy and an underpinning of mystery, this is a quick read that is at once light and airy and deep and thought provoking. At times you have to wonder what is real and what is made up in Maddy's mind. Was she crazy or one of those people who walks on the edge of life and world, seeing the impossible? In the end it doesn't really matter because the basic story is heartfelt and bittersweet. It will stay with you long after you close the last page.

Emma says

I'd only read one of Sonya Hartnett's books previously, *Shadows of the Side-Step Wolf*, which is a young adult novel I read in high school. I was curious to read more and with my track record with book covers to go by there was no way I could go past this one given it's lovely illustrations.

I'm so pleased to say the book lived up to its gorgeous cover by being an eerily beautiful story. I love how Sonya Hartnett turns the Australian bush and beach into a fairytale setting - unique and strange but no less magical than those forests of European fables. And I love that the story and the characters are somewhere between the real world and fantasy. I think *The Ghost's Child* is such a charming little story, sad but happy and with a lovely ending.

'It is one thing to converse with aquatic life, but another to address a wind'

Miss Book says

This was just beautiful.

Like yeah, characters were nice, plot was really interesting, but what really stood out to me was a writing style. LIKE SONYA WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR WORDS WOMAN

Nafiza says

I'm reading this for Contemporary Children's Lit and according to my Prof, this is "simply divine and unlike anything you have ever read." It sounds exquisitely painful.

For a novel its length, *A Ghost's Child* is surprisingly heavy where the themes are concerned. The book deals with self-discovery in a multitude of ways. Before the story of Maddy and Feather even begins, Maddy sets off on a journey of self-discovery with her father. Maddy and her father travel around the world together, seeing wondrous things, places and people. Maddy discovers facets of herself in everything she sees.

Another moment for self-discovery is when Maddy realizes she has a question to ask Feather so sets off on a sea journey helming her own boat to find Feather and ask him that question. When she finally finds him on his island and asks the question she wanted to ask, she makes another realization about her own self: she is not prepared to be stagnant in a world that is always moving. Her ability to pick up the pieces of her life and live without Feather shows her discovery that she is more than a broken heart and that she can still live no matter how much she has been hurt.

Another theme in this book is loss. Not loss caused by death but loss caused by intentionally letting go of a person, a dream or an idea and finding the strength to continue life without these things. Maddy loses her adventurous fun-loving father to the rigors of daily life when they return from their journey around the world. She chooses to let go of Feather twice because she has realized that she cannot accept his philosophies and adopt them for her own. She has to let go of her house in the woods and the dreams with which she built it.

Death is another prevalent theme. Maddy loses her parents and her grief is present throughout the narrative but it is an accepting pain unlike the loss of her baby due to miscarriage which causes Maddy a whole different kind of anguish. However, as much as death is a theme, so is life and living. The book is, if you'll pardon the floweriness, a celebration of life and living. Maddy makes a choice when she leaves Feather on his never-changing island. She chooses to live and she does so, wholly and fully. She lives to the old age at which we find her and relates the story of her life, the good, the bad and the painful. And that is what makes the book beautiful.

If I had to attach a literary term for the style the book is written in, I'd say the author makes use of magical realism. Wikipedia defines the term as an aesthetic style or genre of fiction in which magical elements blend with the real world. Maddy has a nargun for a friend (consult handout for information about it) whom she consults on everything from her parents to her love life. Maddy also goes on a crazy journey on a boat and converses with sea animals and birds. She is also part of the audience watching an organized fight between a kraken and a leviathan. She talks to a wind called Zephyrus who helps her get to Feather's island. Most magical of all, perhaps, is the young boy who sits in Maddy's very ordinary living room and listens to her story.

The prose itself is incredibly detailed but deceptively simple in its diction. There is careful attention given to colours and the way things are described so they become easier to visualize. This novel is definitely a cross-over novel that will appeal to both adults and children. However, I do believe that this one book that librarians will need to recommend to get kids to pick up. I can see it being very popular if its read out to kids because as I said, the writing is simple but exquisite and the plot is also full of adventure. However the fact remains that the protagonist at the time we meet her is an old woman. There is an instance in the novel when the boy tells Maddy, as though he is delivering very bad news, "your house smells like old people." Most kids like reading books with protagonists they can relate to.

There is a duality to this novel that I appreciated. An adult reading the novel will have a different take on it than a child. For example, the author never explicitly states that Maddy miscarries or the baby dies. The baby is always called the fay. And it's abstract enough in the way it is mentioned that a child would probably not

realize the fay is a baby but an adult would.

The book feels Australian in its regard for the sea. We are somehow always in or around the sea whether at a beach or on a boat or on an island. There is also the mention of tea and biscuits which is what we call cookies on that side of the world.

In conclusion, the book is beautiful. It's eerie, poignant and lingering. Please read it.

marie says

Dear Sonya Hartnett,

I love your books and can't wait to read more.

Love,
me

Judith says

I am not generally a big fan of Sonya Hartnett. It's not that I don't appreciate the skill of her writing, I just never feel emotionally connected to her books. (Apart from "Forest", which was about cats, not people. I think I have a problem with her oft-times misanthropic take on humanity.)

Anyway, I didn't expect to care for "The Ghost's Child" any better than I had (most of) her other novels, and it's true that when I started the book, I felt quite disconnected, as much as I—yes—admired the writing.

But then it began to get under my skin and into my heart. I really began to care about the old woman's story, to feel involved, and by the end of it I was totally won over.

My main quibble? Audience. It has, predictably, been shortlisted for the older readers category of the Children's Book Council of Australia awards, but I am not sure how YA readers would really respond to it. It seems to me to be concerned with very mature, adult, retrospective considerations of life and love.

But I'm glad Hartnett has broken her run with me. I was beginning to feel like the sulky girl in the corner at the party.

Kira Simion says

Edit: 7-20-16

I just have to quote this:

What is the world's most beautiful thing?

Later the young girl answers "*Seagulls*" Of course. Seagulls. This was the second answer since the first one she chose was "*Victory*."

Do you know what her father said the answer was? "*Her*." How sweet.

Edit: 7-22-16

Wow. Just wow. This was beautiful in a vague sort of way. It let you interpret things (I realized the beautiful way the author had written in the way that there was detail but, just enough that you could stitch many things together to make different conclusions by reading other peoples' reviews and their thoughts.) This is what made it more philosophical since you could decide, in a way, your own interpretations and see the world differently if you looked hard enough and how you viewed things in the world.

The characters were pretty good in their own ways too but, honestly when I tried to think of who they were it was pretty hard and I couldn't come up with any characteristics. I fell in love with the writing but, less with the characters.

There was Maddy, and I really enjoyed old Maddy since she had a little twinkle in her eyes from experience so every time I read about her I found myself being like the little kid, questioning and interested in her story. Younger Maddy was a little more vague but, still interesting however, I felt pity for her when all she wanted was to be happy with Feather when in reality what she wanted wasn't really *feather* but someone different with the same wonder and soul he had for the sea. She wanted his love and for a long time, he couldn't give the love she wanted but, she clung to the idea and for years she watched as he grew distant, well *stayed distant*. I felt pity and wanted her to move on or for Feather to change a little. To trust. To love. To open up. ~~and to tell me his real name.~~

Feather. While many were fascinated by his views, I was also interested but, I was annoyed by some of his actions and reactions too.

(view spoiler)

Edit: 2-10-18

The writing style is much like *Anna and the Swallow Man* by **Gavriel Savit**.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2...>

Lisa says

This was a fable :) I really liked Maddy, but with Feather I have some bones to pick. I do not get "Truth" from Feather the way Maddy did. I get isolation and omission. Maddy mentions that maybe it would have been better had she never met Feather. Personally, I'm in that camp. Maybe I'm too much of a realist. But come on! What did he bring to the table, really? He was mopey and impossible to communicate with, and dare I say it, PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE. And when she loses the Fay, what does he say? I'm sorry for YOUR loss? WHAT? Excuse me, beach boy? I think you had a hand in this fay. Maddy needed closure, and who wouldn't in that situation, so she gets it as best she can and manages to pull herself up by the bootstraps and make a meaningful life for herself. Meanwhile we can assume Feather is in a state of being on his lame

stillness island, helping no one and contributing nothing. BUT I liked the book b/c it was neat and it made me think.

Eva Mitnick says

Gorgeously written and managing to be at the same time both warmly human and puzzlingly mythical, this book is not easy to categorize. It will probably be of most interest to older teens and adults, as the main character is an old woman named Maddy looking back at events - and a relationship - that happened to her as a teen and young woman.

There are fairy-tale elements (Maddy's young man, whom she calls Feather, is an otherworldly sort of person) and moments when (as during the fight between the Kraken and the Leviathan, which all sorts of talking sea creatures gather to watch) I was reminded very much of Alice in Wonderland.

The whole premise, as one discovers at the end, is built on a magical or mystical idea - and yet this is also a very down-to-earth tale in some ways. Maddy is a solid if solitary girl, whether traveling around the world with her father, falling in love with Feather, or sailing alone through enchanted waters - and the lovely simplicity of the narrative voice reflects that.

Highly recommended for the exquisite writing - and the poignant ending.

Alekz K. (Bookupied) says

Wonderful!

Sarah says

The moment they meet and find beauty in pelicans is unexpected and beautiful and not cliché.
