



The Godless Boys

Naomi Wood

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If you were forced to live with faith, or without, which would you choose? England. 1986. The Church controls the country, and all members of the Secular Movement have been expelled to the Island. On the Island, religion is outlawed. A gang of boys patrols the community, searching for signs of faith, and punishing any believers. When an English girl arrives - intent on finding her mother who disappeared, mysteriously, ten years ago - she is swept up in the dangerous games of the gang. But while one boy falls in love with her, the other wants revenge for the wrongs of the past, and, as the violence escalates, the English girl becomes their pawn. The Godless Boys is a book about faith, and life without faith; about love, and its absence. But above all, it's about power, and how dangerous it can be to stand out from the crowd. Both violent and tender, it's a remarkable debut, and clearly marks Naomi Wood as a name to note.

The Godless Boys Details

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Author : Naomi Wood

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From Reader Review The Godless Boys for online ebook

Heather says

What really annoyed me about this was the fact it had SO much potential and Ms. Wood simply didn't live up to it. The plot is excellent, I was gripped. I enjoy the story for the most part and felt Ms. Wood have a fairly decent portrayal of how lonely life can be without community, stuck in the middle of nowhere. How perceived freedoms can be just the opposite. There were a lot of threads put into this novel and I just didn't feel Ms. Wood managed to make a knot out of them.

Do. Not. Get me started on the ending. I detest endings like that. We only really got a bit of Jake's side towards the very end so it was all a bit of a shock and a bit silly for me!

Karen Angelico says

This is a good debut novel - there is far too much criticism levelled at debut novels. A fledgling novel writer is still learning their craft and we readers can be far too critical. Reading The Godless Boys, I can appreciate the huge potential of this writer, and Ms Wood's next novel, Mrs Hemingway, certainly lives up to this potential.

The Godless Boys explores some great themes - religion, community, unconditional love, forgiveness. The premise of the 'alternative' England of the 1970's and 1980's, where rebelling atheists are banished to an island 10 hours from Newcastle, is an interesting one. The characterisation of the Malades (the gang of godless boys living on the Island) is reminiscent of the Lord of the Flies. The use of colloquial language and rituals gives a vivid picture of life on the Island and is handled well. The ominous feel to the Island really builds as the story progresses and the characterisation of the main characters is well handled with a mixture of omnipresent third person narrative, third person POV and inner dialogue. Some of the metaphors are perhaps a little clunky in places, and the sub-plot of Mr Verger is perhaps not developed enough to give a big impact on the reader, but overall, this is a great debut and I look forward to watching the writing career of Ms Wood blossom.

Amanda Patterson says

This dystopian novel is from debut author Naomi Wood.

Highly recommended. Unsettling. Imagine England in the 1980s. The Church has expelled non-believers to an island. Nathaniel was born on the island. He is bored. He is angry. He is a gang leader who defends atheism. He punishes the religious. Then he falls in love with Sarah, a stowaway from England, looking for her terrorist mother. And everything changes.

Don't read this book if you want to smile. It's laced with sadness and despair. But love always brings hope...

P.S. For everyone who asks

'2. dystopia - a work of fiction describing an imaginary place where life is extremely bad because of deprivation or oppression or terror

fiction - a literary work based on the imagination and not necessarily on fact'

Victoria Sadler says

I thought about giving this two stars so I am in a generous mood. It takes 100 pages for this story to become interesting and that's way way too long. The characters aren't particularly interesting and it's unclear what the stakes are which does make it drag. More frustratingly for a dystopian book, it is wholly unrealistic and sheds no light on our society today. It is no warning or observation, which is kind of the point of dystopian books.

The book is of an England where secularists have been banished to the Isle of Wight by a hyper-Christian state. I mean, not even remotely possible. Surely more of a commentary if the religious have been banished.

Anyway once you let go of the fact that it says nothing about society, and you get past the first 100 pages, it is a well plotted story about a myriad of characters trying to find purpose and meaning to their lives.

Vanessa Quintal says

For our December read, our book club chose this book. For the most part, it was not as gloomy as I expected it to be since it's my dystopia novel ever. What I liked about it was that it was an easy read, enough to let my hair down a bit after a long working day. The ending was what I didn't like even though I anticipated it from the moment Jacob Lawrence broke into Nathaniel's ma's bedroom. The author nearly steered me in another direction when describing the anger in Jake towards Eliza, Nathaniel, and even Arthur the fishmonger could have been among his victims. Wood left readers wondering what's gonna happen to Sarah, would she be rescued and find her way back to England?

Hannah Sharp says

I really enjoyed reading this book, it's a relatively big book but not too much to read. It's set twenty or so years ago, after a rebellion by The Secular Movement, who burns churches and the like. After these people have been banished to the Island, they are forced to live without meat, etc, and only some of the occupants remember England as it used to be. Eventually a girl from England comes to the Island searching for her lost mother, and so the story goes.

It's an interesting read, though the character of the girl, Sarah, isn't too developed. It's an easy read, nothing too serious or relevant, though obviously it does hint about the effects of religion in society. It's told from several viewpoints, which I quite liked, and contains two love stories. I liked the setting of the Island and the general story. Worth a read.

Gloria says

I decided to read 'The Godless Boys' by Naomi Wood after reading the brilliant 'Mrs Hemingway. It is not a

book that I would have chosen by the 'blurb'.

In 1951 Britain is controlled by the Church and a Secular Group challenges the Church by setting fire to churches. The result being, those found guilty were exiled to 'the island'. There were two expulsions, in 1951 and 1976.

The island received supplies weekly via a boat sent from Britain.

On the island a group of boys, bored and troublesome, start to intimidate the islanders. When a girl, Sarah stows away on the weekly boat the group disintegrates when Nathaniel, the leader, falls in love with her and everything changes.

Sarah is in search of her mother who she believes was sent to the island ten years ago.

This is a very good, imaginatively written book by Ms Wood, granted not as good as Mrs Hemingway which was brilliantly written, however well worth reading.

Andrée says

I enjoyed the premise i.e. that the Church 'won' and threw out the unbelievers but there were some holes - e.g. where did they get the fuel for roaring fires? Those kind of islands are short on trees to start with.... Why didn't they escape to Europe? Why no sheep? Why not eat sea birds and their eggs? Why no music or radios even? A weekly drop of a few boxes of supplies was woefully inadequate for the number of people living there (who were far too few for the 'troubles' described)

It was clearly stuck in the past as shown by the boys' attitudes which some readers don't like. It was obviously influenced by Clockwork Orange but logically the kids would rebel against the dull clothes and long hair of their elders.

It captured the sheer dreariness and boredom of being stuck somewhere forever with little to do and even less to look forward to.

It made a change to read a dystopian tale that didn't involve plague, nuclear fall out, zombies or war but overall was rather low key which won't appeal to all

E J E cashmore says

Dystopian debut novel

A book about faith, power, love. Filled with sadness and despair. If you like this sort thing then it's a good read.

BestChickLit.com says

The Godless Boys is without a doubt one of the most intriguing novels I have read this year. The island setting for the book is as cold and bleak as it is atmospheric, the old English spoken by its inhabitants is

curious and endearing, whilst the characters themselves are guarded and suspicious.

The forming of teenage gang the Malades threatens this small community, as the boys begin to police residents as they were once in England. As hormones begin to rage so does the intensity of the members' violence and menace, becoming a time bomb waiting to explode.

The overall feel to the book is heavy, the islanders are living with the freedom they so craved yet are still trapped within the control of the church and government. A shining light amidst the gloom is Eliza and Arthur, my favourite characters by far. Their complex relationship is a glowing beacon that keeps the reader's hopes alive for a happy ending. The climax of the book shocked me, I didn't see it coming and I was left contemplating the outcome for a long time. Simply breathtaking.

Reviewed by Charlotte Foreman on behalf of BestChicklit.com

Vivien says

Well described book about life on a 'Godless' island after all non-believers banished there in the the 50's and 70's. The whole scenario was un-believable in that (even in a parallel universe) the British would never believe or not believe enough to be bombing churches and killing vicars!!! Having said that the build up of tension was very well done.

Ian says

This one got a lot of positive word of mouth last year, so I thought it would be worth a go. In 1951, a Secular Movement opposed the increasing hold the churches had on British society. This prompted a government backlash. The secularists were rounded up and exiled to an island off the north-east coast of England. In 1977, there was another wave of church burnings, and yet more people were sent to the Island. And on the Island, a decade or so later, a group of youths, led by Nathaniel, see themselves as guardians of the inhabitants' godlessness. That is until a young woman arrives, looking for her mother, who disappeared in 1977 and was implicated in the burning of a church. I wanted to like this book, but it was trying so hard to be *A Clockwork Orange*, and failing, that it annoyed me. The Island came across as some parody of "grim Up North", the neologisms felt horribly forced, and I never really got a good handle on the age of the protagonists. It comes as no surprise to discover that Wood has a MA in Creative Writing.

Cate O'Connell says

Clunky prose and plot points were too tidy. I would have liked more information about the rockets, as that's why I read speculative fiction. Was very disappointed, as based on the subject matter I assumed I was going to love it.

Vanessa says

A very good debut novel although the subject matter seemed a trifle unbelievable. The human relationships on the island to which all the non-believers are banished was done with a simplicity and a gentle touch which leaves the reader aching for more. The personal growth is astounding and the ending, although expected, bittersweet. I look forward to reading more of Naomi Wood's work.

David Hebblethwaite says

[Continued from my review of Chris Beckett's *The Holy Machine*.]

A search with a more concrete objective provides the impetus for Naomi Wood's first novel, *The Godless Boys*. The Church gained political power over its alternate England in 1950, and a series of riots led to members of the Secular Movement being sent to 'the Island', where they and their children now live in isolation. The Malades, a gang of boys born and bred on the Island, have taken it upon themselves to root out any English spies or believers; they'll attack the houses and persons of anyone they suspect.

In the last week of November 1986, a girl named Sarah Wicks stows away on the last boat of the year bringing supplies from England; she intends to find her mother Laura, who was involved in a church-burning ten years previously, and may have been deported to the Island. Sarah is discovered by Nathaniel Malraux, one of the Malades, who falls in love with her, and tries to keep her existence a secret from his fellow gang-members; inevitably, though, he can't do so forever.

Wood creates a wonderful sense of place in her novel. Cut off from the technological advances of England, the Island feels like a community out of time, one that's almost hermetic (an impression reinforced by the fact that we don't actually see life on the mainland, nor even hear mention of the other countries in our British Isles). It's a community where the glorious optimism of independence has been replaced by inertia ('Now the Islanders were free to do what they wanted, and they did very little,' p. 189). Wood evokes the drabness of this place through the detail in her prose; and her careful use of dialect words (all the Islanders speak a north-eastern dialect; as a rebellion that would have been at least as much political as religious, the Secular Movement appears to have been a largely regional phenomenon) also goes a long way towards constructing the novel's atmosphere, in a nicely subtle way.

The issue of religious faith itself impinges on *The Godless Boys* in a different way than on *The Holy Machine*; we see much of Wood's novel through the eyes of characters who don't truly understand what religion is, but they do know that their parents were against it; for those young people, it's as much a political issue as anything, or even a matter of tradition. Nathaniel emphasises to the Malades the importance of knowing their history ('You have to go [to the Island's museum] often...so you can ken your past...You've got to go so you can understand who you are,' p. 17); but one of his fellow young Islanders, Eliza Michalka, finds the letters INRI in the Island's ruined church, and doesn't know what they signify.

The only truly religious character in the novel is John Verger, one of the original exiles, who later found God whilst wandering through the remains of the very church he helped to burn down. Verger's faith is shown to be a guiding hand and source of comfort in his life, which is elastic enough to hold, whatever the circumstances. To the Malades, in contrast, what religion really represents is the opposite of the wild freedom offered by the Island; as one of them, Jakob Lawrence, reflects:

Jake had felt sick when he'd first seen these paintings of Christ. To be so coddled, he thought, with blurry distaste, to be so watched, was as abhorrent to him as his rare imaginings of what went on in England, with its damp and girlish God, and its feeble, pandering folk. (p. 209)

As with *The Holy Machine*, there are pairs of characters who may be seen as opposites: Sarah comes to the Island in search of answers; Eliza yearns to leave it for the life that she wants. Nathaniel's love for Sarah and fondness for John Verger (who brought his parents together) leads him to feel conflicted over the gang's activities; Jake, on the other hand, takes a much firmer stance. All these matters come to a head in the finale of *The Godless Boys*, which is brilliantly tense.

Both Wood and Beckett create worlds through which their characters negotiate with some difficulty. Some find their way, others don't; some get what they wanted, others don't even know what that is. It all makes, though, for a pair of very interesting and compelling novels.
