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A mesmerizing tale of a father and daughter's sailing adventure from Trinidad to the Galapagos Islands

Monique Roffey, vibrant new voice in Caribbean fiction and author of the Orange Prize finalist *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle*, returns with *Archipelago*, a new novel that is a journey of redemption, healing, and hope in the wake of devastating loss.

When a flood destroys Gavin Weald's home in Trinidad and rips his family apart, life as he knows it will never be the same. A year later he returns to his house and tries to start over, but when the rainy season arrives, his daughter's nightmares about the torrents make life there unbearable. So father and daughter—and their dog—embark upon a voyage to make peace with the waters. Their journey takes them far from their Caribbean island home, as they sail through archipelagos, encounter the grandeur of the sea, and meet with the challenges and surprises of the natural world.

Archipelago Details

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From Reader Review Archipelago for online ebook

Shonna Froebel says

This novel begins a year after Gavin's home was hit by a destructive wave of water during a storm, damaging the home badly and dealing a debilitating blow to his family. As the rainy season begins again, Gavin's six-year-old daughter Océan begins having nightmares about the events that changed her life, and Gavin finds himself still stuck in the depression that has been with him since that day. He makes a spontaneous decision to take his old sailbook Romany and head west from his home in Trinidad with Océan and his dog Suzy. He has no real destination at first, just moving away from the source of his and Océan's sadness, but his old dreams of sailing to the Galapagos Islands begin to surface.

Gavin regains his old comfort with sailing gradually, and for one difficult stretch advertises for someone to help, bringing a young Swedish woman, Phoebe, into their lives, and breaking into their protective aloofness. Océan's comfort with the sea increases as the trip progresses, and the two find that the sea encourages them to ponder their sadness, which has followed them, and interests them in their lives once more.

The trip takes them from Trinidad first to the Venezuelan Margarita Island, on to Los Roques, and from there to the ABC islands of Bonaire, Curacao, and Aruba. Then a long open sea stretch over to Cartagena, on to the San Blas Archipelago, through the Panama Canal and on to the Galapagos Islands.

It also exposes them to fascinating creatures on land and sea, to a wide variety of people and ways of living, and to more sadness and loss and to joy. This is the story of a father and his daughter healing together, discovering together, growing closer, and finding a way to move on. Roffey's writing is easy and flowing, bringing the world around these travellers to life, along with their feelings.

The only criticism I found was towards the end, where I felt the plot manipulated to bring about the ending.

Kate says

"A modern day Moby Dick" says one of the blurbs on the back of the paperback edition which I found on the shelves of my local little island library. "Big hearted" from another. Yes, this is a novel dealing compassionately with big human issues like life, death, love and survival (the "journey of redemption" thing and don't all throw things at me at once. You know what I mean.).

A father, his young daughter and their dog run away to sea, sail from Trinidad to the Galapagos, after a flood has killed the baby son/brother and left the wife/mother catatonic with grief. There's a journey, some dark moments of crisis, some epiphanies, loss, sorrow, temptation, recovery and ultimately growth and gain. The resolution was a little too neat for my liking. I would recommend this to adventurers and especially waterpeople and sailors - those who find themselves in thrall to the mercurial Mistress Ocean but it is, in the end, a story about grief and healing.

Would make a good all genders book discussion group - told from male POV. Caribbean author, Orange Prize finalist for other titles, this one won 2013 BOCAS prize for Caribbean lit.

Josie says

Counted this one for "The Caribbean" in the **666 for 2016 - An Around the World Reading Challenge** .

This is the 3rd book I have read by Monique Roffey, and I am officially a fan!

Although I didn't enjoy this as much as **The White Woman on the Green Bicycle**, this book took me on a journey. I loved the characters, and the storytelling was fantastic.

I'm looking forward to getting my hands on the 4th novel **House of Ashes**

Charlotte says

DNF

I just couldn't get through this book, not after reading September Girls and suffering through that. I was expecting an inspiring journey of a father and her daughter but what I got was boring monologue that consisted of the most random, detailed and absurd thoughts ever.

I mean the father literally thought that pissing was like a

... strange dull orgasm

This is a 40 year old man we're talking about. Do I really want to know about this? He's peeing and then also thinking about having sex with this women at his workplace because he hasn't had sex in a while and feels 'less of a man'.

What finally convinced me to stop was when he found a bundle of cocaine at the sea and started to get high on it but stopped when his daughter wanted to try some and his dog wanted to stuff her nose into it. Uhm what? Your kid is right there and you want to get high on cocaine? You're in the middle of nowhere.

I do not need to know every single painstaking detail of what Gavin does and all the sensations he is feeling. This book is a good reminder to me as to why I am reluctant to read any old adult book because of how boring they usually are but this is the tip of the iceberg because I haven't read such an awful adult book in a long time and I don't DNF every single day, I have a pretty high tolerance so if I do DNF, there's something really bad about this book and I tried not to because this was a review book.

Sophia says

When we meet Gavin he is a broken man, struggling with grief after a terrible tragedy, drowning under the pressure of trying to raise his six year old daughter, Ocean, alone and floundering in a job he no longer cares about. In time, it all becomes too much for him to bear, and one day he walks out of his job, picks up his daughter and dog, and sets sail in his old boat, which had been unused and neglected ever since his marriage. Together this bruised and battered remnants of a family sail from Trinidad, to the islands around the coast of Venezuela and beyond, enjoying a new adventure while trying to come to terms with what has happened to them.

Monique Roffey's greatest strength is her beautiful descriptive writing; she's able to effortlessly conjure a scene with words that's much richer and more immersive than any photograph. Read this and be prepared to sail away with Gavin and Ocean, feel the sun on your face and taste the salty tang in the air. The story itself

moves quite slowly, and there's a melancholy feeling to the whole book which matches Gavin and Ocean's mood. We don't find out the exact nature of their tragedy until quite a long way through the book, and it has more impact for us having got to know Gavin and Ocean quite well by then.

The book is written in the present tense, which is unusual for a novel that moves at such a leisurely pace – usually the present tense is used to propel a story more quickly, but that's not the objective here. The author does a good job with both her main characters, especially Ocean, who manages to come across as bright but not unrealistically mature for her age. Ocean is struggling with the massive change in her life but, as a child, she's adaptable, and arguably copes better than her father, who longs desperately for his old life and finds it impossible to envisage what the future could hold for him.

One of the major themes of Archipelago is the environment, and Gavin and Ocean observe many of the ways in which mankind is slowly destroying its own habitat during their voyage. The book is at least a third travelogue, but Roffey never shies away from the harsh truths that lie beneath the picture perfect beaches and seas.

I'm not sure I loved this quite as much as Monique Roffey's previous book, which really caught my imagination while also teaching me a lot about Trinidad, its history and culture. Some may find Archipelago a little too slow and sad, but if you enjoy first class descriptive writing and sensitive prose about loss and its aftermath, I would highly recommend this.

Tuck says

fun book about sailing west from trinidad to margarita, los roques , curacao, aruba, cartagena, san blas, the canal, galapagos

so fairly interesting and accurate sailing stuff. interesting plant animal water descriptions of stopping points/islands (neat map too), good incorporation of geopolitics and culture.

so but for the heartbreak part, there are lots of tears, a devastating flood that ruined narrators life, wife, killed his infant son, ptsd his young daughter, even affected his damn dog.

so wifey is awol, kid is pyscho, dog is hanging in there, and gavin, the dad is losing it. so he packs up daughter, dog , and a hat and sails west from t and t. he thinks quite a bit about just jumping off his sailboat, romany, and doing the suicide, though how serious? when your dog and daughter are on board?

aaanyway, they all 3 reach some epiphanies, and tend to cry less by the end. wonderful writer, some great dialog (i would have liked to heard waaay more from the kid and dog though) and hearttugging (even a cool 4 way sex scene in a brothel in aruba, no, the dog and daughter were asleep in the van in parking lot) so lots to like here, and hopefully more from author roffey in future and more from caribbean too!

CuteBadger says

After his family home in Trinidad is torn apart by a flood which leaves his family in tatters, Gavin takes his six-year old daughter Ocean and their dog Suzy on a sailing trip to try to run away from their grief. But the sea has a habit of making you address things you'd rather not have to face.

I absolutely loved this book and read it in a single sitting. Gavin, Ocean and Suzy are wonderful characters who you want to look after and protect from the terrible things that have happened to them. The book is

funny and tragic and really gets across that the aftermath of a tragedy goes on and on, sneaking up on the victims when they least expect it. One particular chapter towards the end of the book made me cry, which hardly ever happens to me while reading.

The book points out the frailty of mankind and how we affect the world around us. Monique Roffey writes movingly about nature, animals and the impact we have on them, as well as of the inter-relation of all humans and everything else on the planet.

I felt quite upset when I finished the book as I had become so fond of the characters that I wanted it to go on and on. They will stay with me for a long time.

I can't recommend Archipelago highly enough.

Ellie says

On the island of Trinidad, floods have destroyed Gavin's home and wrought havoc on his family. Left to raise his six-year-old daughter, Océan, by himself he's struggling with work and overwhelming loneliness. When he wakes up one morning he decides he wants to run away; take his boat, his dog and his daughter and sail out into the Caribbean and beyond.

Archipelago has made me want to hire a boat and sail round the Caribbean! Whilst the natural beauty may be a tourism advert, it is balanced by the darker side of the islands, unethical tourism, natural disaster and the seedier side of the locals. The sea itself is both mesmerising and dangerous. And whilst Gavin and Océan are surrounded by beauty, there is an underlying feeling of melancholy and a loss that is rarely talked about.

Océan makes a convincing six-year-old; she is perceptive and curious but not in a way that is beyond her years. She comes out with questions typical to children her age and her sadness is quiet, from someone who is not quite sure what is wrong in her world but knowing it is definitely not right. Despite some of the content, I never found it a depressing read and there are several moments that will bring a smile to your face to counteract the bad. It might be a bit too slow a read for some but if you love books about the sea, I would highly recommend.

Margritte says

A good read for a lazy Sunday afternoon. I probably won't remember much of the detail in the book, but will remember the topic and great feeling I was left with.

I've never been on a long sea journey of any kind. Spending the time with Gavin, Océan and Suzy on this small vessel for two months was certainly an unexpected adventure. I was just as happy as they were when the voyage came to an end! I also wanted to leave all sorrows behind and celebrate the joy of living at the Trinidad festival.

It took a serious adventure, like Gavin's need to sail west in his boat Romany to sort out his feelings of

devastation and deep sorrow with the drowning of his baby son and the mental obscurity his wife chose after the event. But in the end it was time which brought the healing for both him, his wife Claire and his daughter Océan. They all learnt how to deal with death in many ways and make it part of life. The narrative leaves a message of hope and how to celebrate life unconditionally.

Wesley John says

Having read Monique Roffey's last tome, *With Kisses from his Mouth*, I approached her latest oeuvre more in hope than expectation; *Kisses* was largely autobiographical, whereas *Archipelago* is a return to her Alma Mater, fiction. Sure enough Roffey narrates a story with a sure footedness & balance that was only fleetingly present in *Kisses*.

Once again she mines her (bottomless) seam of loss, but the loss of a child is far more comprehensible, and she uses the conceit of travel (i.e. road movie) as a vehicle that is universally resonant (helping the medicine go down).

However the acid test. Is *Archipelago* worth investing £5 and several hours of endeavour, still remains to be answered.

Archipelago ticks several boxes when it comes to a last minute airport afterthought, and will engender envy as you lay on some Baleariac or Grecian atoll, contemplating your return to our recession laden Stygian skies with the Metropolitan daily drudgery and the pervasive depressiveness that is Cameron Britain.

You can only admire the vistorial breadth of the novel, as Gavin the father meanders from one island paradise to another, in his ancien sail boat. Indeed as a land lubber I felt moved to follow Gavin's sails. The novel feels well researched, with an torrential effluence of largely incomprehensible nautical terms. (the constant reference to Ahab, and hoisting the mainsail induced flashbacks of obscure Beach Boy songs, Robert Newton's Long John Silver and Gregory Peck's pindown regime). Notwithstanding Roffey's affliction of stylistic tourettic outbursts the prose is lucid, well written, typoless with the episodic discipline underpinning a transparent structure (the unattributed dialogue working 90% of the time).

Océan and Suzy the dog are sympathetically imagined to the extent that you yearn for the possibility of their narrative, rather than the humourlessly measured angst of psoriasisitic Gavin (though I still find the dog biscuit scene worthy of reporting to the CPtA).

Archipelago will make a beautiful film (breaching the Caribbean black hole), though Roffey will probably not receive a screenplay commission; there is a distinct lack of cogent action and narrative drive (Batman Returns ennui). Only Suzy and Océan render credible sympathetic characterisations. The back story of Gavin's loss, his flight, and subsequent travails for someone who has experienced both seems what it is ... superficial. Indeed the novel contains a smorgasbord of issues, Slavery, Tourism, Ecology, Chavez, notwithstanding the pulled punches on racism, which strangely only arises in the Dutch Arses comment. However these thorny strands are never weaved into a substantive analysis and thus appear as mise en scene wallpaper.

Roffey's strength is her poetic observations ; the wildlife :- flamingoes, tortoises, flying fish, seals, the albino whale, the dolphins; Océan's insights are page charmers : penetrating and life affirmingly naive. From the accuracy and translucency of these sketches of Ocean and the assorted wildlife, Roffey is clearly not observing from the fascistic telescope of say W.C. Fields, but imho she struggles to make Gavin either sympathetic or credible.

Little gripes include the fact that the source of Gavin's finance source/supply is never explained, how to pronounce Océan (e acute ?), the plotless randomness as personified in Phoebe, the punctuative crying, the academic sex scenes, Roffey's embarrassing attempts to write and integrate passable Trini patois (dem nah learn yah dat pon creative writing course gal?), and the final trite denouement ...

In all a worthy Touristic and Cinematic Caribbean novel but one that should have been much more and thus will probably leave the 2012 bestsellers chart (costa?) untroubled this wet summer.

Camera lite diction : wh'appen ta deh rice n peas?

WebBlog :- <http://nnmentoring.co.uk/wordBlog/>

Debbie Zapata says

Found this at Dollar Tree right after arriving in Arizona in early November.

The story is stunning: told slowly, no tsunamis of information coming at us. We learn bit by bit why Gavin's life has gone out of control and we struggle along with him to find a way to recover some sort of normality for himself and his daughter.

Will his plan to sail to the Galapagos Islands with only his daughter and their dog be the right solution? He always wanted to go there, he used to talk about it with his buddy years ago. Maybe now is the proper time at last, even though he hasn't been at sea for years and is not absolutely confident that he can handle what to do and when to do it.

I want to read this again soon; it is so captivating and just plain pretty, once through is not enough to feel it all.

And I need to find more by this author!

Tim says

A man, his daughter, a dog and the sea. Simple elements in a simple story; moving over the sea can be lulling, where you're actually headed lost to you in its immensity.

In "Archipelago," a year after a catastrophic flood took the life of his son and led to the incapacitation of and separation from his wife, Gavin Weald takes his 6-year-old daughter, Ocean, and their dog, Suzy, away from their home in Trinidad and toward ... something. Actually, it's more of a flight from than a journey to. A year later, the rains have brought back memories of the tragedy and made Gavin unable to deal. So, spur of the moment, off they go, on a months-long voyage to the Galapagos on Gavin's boat, Romany. Sometimes when you're at a loss, all you can do is flee.

Along the way they'll encounter a bold pirate, a young woman taken aboard to help with the roughest part of the journey and who will charm both of them, several ports of call and exploration of the land, and all that nature has to offer in that colorful part of the world.

It's an adventure tale in idea only; not a lot of big things actually happen, as plot points go. "Archipelago" manages to be both fast-paced in its telling and languid in its plot. Most of the delight of the book comes from the relationship between Gavin and his daughter that, movingly, rings true. Gavin and Ocean (there's an accent mark over the "e" in the girl's name, but I can't for the life of me remember how to make that symbol) talk about many things, "Moby Dick" and Ahab among them, and while their journey is a sort of voyage of self-discovery, we're obviously dealing on a much smaller scale here.

In addition to Suzy, we're to encounter all sort of animals, from the fishy sort to Galapagos tortoises. Often, it's like a National Geographic travelogue.

Monique Roffey, who is from Trinidad but based in the U.K., throws in some wonderfully simple but beautiful touches in her writing, and "Archipelago" all in all is a low-key delight. I'd be suspicious of someone who called it a masterpiece, but I'd also wonder how someone could not be moved by it.

It's not as if nothing bad happens to Gavin and Ocean along the way, but I found their journey very soothing. I didn't even mind much that Roffey threw in one of my pet peeves: a gimmicky approach to quotes (there are no quote marks whatsoever). Oh, well; when you're dealing with the power of the sea, it's best to look at the big picture.

Cat says

This novel seeped into my pores like the sea it is so obsessed with. It nagged at my mind as I was reading it, and it entranced me with lyrical descriptions and then brought me crashing down like the merciless waves, storms, and tides it described. By the end of the book, I was breathless and dazzled, much like the protagonist of this adventure.

The book follows a middle-aged father trying to piece his life back together after a flood that destroys his former life. He embarks on a mad quest to sail to the Galápagos Islands with his six year old daughter. Rarely have I seen a child depicted so convincingly and affectingly in fiction (nary a cutesy moment in sight). The novel grapples with the relationship between slavery and environmental exploitation, global capitalism and pollution, waste, and overdevelopment. While the novel feels redemptive because of the tone of the ending and its focus on immersion, ritual, bacchanal, and baptism, what resonates longest past its conclusion are the mournful images of the marred relationship between man and animals and the tragic and gorgeous geography of the Caribbean and the archipelago of the title. With this novel, Roffey is urgently reminding us that we are a part of nature and that may lead to our tragic end, not in an Ahabian man versus nature kind of way but rather drowning in our unfathomable guilt for (and vulnerability to) tearing at its balance.

Hemavathy DM Suppiah says

Sometimes you have to run away to heal. And figure out whether home is still home.

Paul says

Monique Roffey in Archipelago shows storytelling at its best, as you do not notice how quickly you are getting into the guts of the book as the story is so engrossing.

This wonderful story of Gavin and his daughter Ocean, along with their dog Suzy running away from Trinidad to escaping what had been a terrible year for his family. His young son killed in a flood, his wife's nervous breakdown and the home he had to rebuild. The 12 months since disaster have not been good to Gavin or his daughter, stress is getting the better of him.

He decides he and his daughter will sail away island hoping on the boat he and a friend have owned for 20 yrs. From there and the reefs and islands he heads for the Panama Canal and head to the Galapagos. Gavin and his daughter are learning and enjoying the sea and all the islands they visit. It is a wonderful learning curve they are both on.

The four months that they are away they are on a journey of learning and moving on. It is not until the death of their dog Suzy that they realise how much they miss their home. I have to admit there was even a tear in my eye as Suzy had bound them together in love and trust through out the book.

This is a wonderful book, a pleasant read and in a way warming and comforting, the story is rich in detail and the imagery it gives is beautiful.
