An Ocean An Iowa Essay, Research Paper

JonDoe

An Ocean in Iowa

Joan, the mother in Peter Hedges’ second novel, “An Ocean in Iowa,” is onstage for only part of the book but she hovers over every page. She’s that new icon: the woman who landed in suburbia by mistake. She’s an artist, a dedicated smoker and the shelter, the best friend, the nonconformist inspiration in the life of her 7-year-old son, Scotty, the novel’s hero. She’s also an alcoholic, but it’s a measure of what’s good about this novel that Hedges doesn’t present her drinking as some scarring trauma, some trigger for abuse. Scotty simply accepts it, as most kids accept what happens around them, so that we experience it as he does, as not that big a deal. That’s probably the most unconventional thing about “An Ocean in Iowa” (the title comes from Scotty’s last name, Ocean), which follows Scotty through his seventh year — 1969 — after Joan moves out, enrolls in college and takes an apartment 90 miles away from Scotty and his two older sisters. Scotty’s father, “the Judge,” who we can see is doing his best to be both parents to his children, but who remains too distant to ever engage our sympathies. After Scotty and Joan, Hedges’ most successful characterization is Scotty’s elementary-school teacher. She’s instantly recognizable, the sort of woman who, after years of teaching, still greets each new class with enthusiasm, is firm and encouraging in equal measure and can still make her students think that learning is the thing that will usher them into the ranks of the big kids. Finally, though, none of the novel’s limitations do much to diminish its emotional satisfactions. Hedges lets us understand Scotty (who’s something of an enigma to others) without ever resorting to explaining him. He writes straightforward, uncluttered prose that’s sensitive without being fussy. He doesn’t make childhood falsely poetic or falsely tragic. I don’t think you need to have had a childhood like Scotty’s (I didn’t) to feel that his fears and fantasies and suppositions remind you of what it was like to be 7. Recapturing part of your emotional past isn’t a bad gift for a modest novel to give its readers.

n I believe that Scotty is acting like an ordinary child because if a 7 year old lost a mother, he or she will be sad, this is how he feels, tries to take out sadness by trying to stay 7 years old

n I think the mother did a stupid thing of leaving a family

n I really enjoyed the book because it showed the fluctuations of life

n I would recommend this novel to other people

Vishal Patel

Tara Road Part II

Maeve Binchy has a deft touch with her characters and effortlessly involves her readers in the multiple layers of their lives. Portraying the characters in an elemental way, she captures some small pattern of speech or cadence that makes them recognizable as they come in and out of the story. These portraits are highly effective over the long story. The luxury of time spent with this unabridged version provides the reward of savoring all the details and humor of Binchy’s story.

Ria lived on Tara Road in Dublin with her dashing husband, Danny, and their two children. She fully believed she was happily married, right up until the day Danny told her he was leaving her to be with his young, pregnant girlfriend. By a chance phone call, Ria meets Marilyn, a woman from New England unable to come to terms with her only son’s death and now separated from her husband. The two women exchange houses for the summer with extraordinary consequences, each learning that the other has a deep secret that can never be revealed.

Drawn into lifestyles vastly differing from their own, at first each resents the news of how well the other is getting on. Ria seems to have become quite a hostess, entertaining half the neighborhood, which at first irritates the reserved and withdrawn Marilyn, a woman who has always guarded her privacy. Marilyn seems to have become bosom friends with Ria’s children, as well as with Colm, a handsome restaurateur, whom Ria has begun to miss terribly. At the end of the summer, the women at last meet face-to-face. Having learned a great deal, about themselves and about each other, they find that they have become, firmly and forever, good friends.

A moving story rendered with the deft touch of a master artisan, Tara Road is Maeve Binchy at her very best–utterly beautiful, hauntingly unforgettable, entirely original, and wholly enjoyable.