



The Island Walkers

John Bemrose

Download now

Read Online ➞

The Island Walkers

John Bemrose

The Island Walkers John Bemrose

A stunning debut novel of power and grace that tells the story of a family that slips from fortune's favour in a southwestern Ontario mill town during the mid-1960s

Within a bend in the Attawan River lies the Island, a small neighbourhood of white-washed houses and vine-freighted fences, black willows and decaying sheds. It is here that Alf Walker, a fixer in the local textile mill like his father before him, lives with his family.

It is 1965, and when a large corporation takes over the mill, and workers attempt to unionize, Alf's actions inadvertently set in motion a series of events that will reverberate far into the future and burden him with an unspoken shame. This is also the year when his eldest son, Joe, falls headlong for a girl he first glimpses on a bridge - and his world is overturned by the passion and uncertainty of young love. The bittersweet story of Joe and Anna is juxtaposed against his father's deepening role in the tensions building at the mill and his unsettling connection with a local Native woman, Lucille Boileau. Meanwhile, Alf's wife, Margaret, must reconcile her middle-class English upbringing with her blue-collar reality, as her marriage is undermined by forces she cannot name.

Set over the course of a single year, the novel reaches back to the past - to Alf's haunting memories of the Second World War and his brother's death; to the stories of the town's founder, Abraham Shade, and those of the eccentric river man Johnny North.

Bemrose weaves an intricate, absolutely spellbinding narrative. Besides the five members of the Walker family, he introduces a large cast of characters, including Archie Mann, Joe's sad and inspired teacher; Liz McVey, the wilful daughter of the town's richest man; union organizer Malachi Doyle; and Anna Macrimmon, worldly, gifted, mysterious, who turns Joe's world upside down.

In *The Island Walkers*, Bemrose creates a world entire that immediately draws us in. His portrait of the town of Attawan and of the community of people who inhabit it is magnificently drawn, alive with detailed, evocative description. The sense of place, the characters themselves, their conflicts and deepest longings, we cannot help but recognize as our own.

Dark, intensely moving, beautifully imagined, this remarkable debut follows one family to the very bottom of their night, only to confirm, in the end, life's regenerative power. Richly textured, at once intimate and epic in scope, *The Island Walkers* signals the emergence of a new novelist of vision and rare accomplishment.

The Island Walkers Details

Date : Published April 11th 2005 by John Murray (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780719566707

Author : John Bemrose

Format : Paperback 448 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Historical, Historical Fiction

 [Download The Island Walkers ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Island Walkers ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Island Walkers John Bemrose

From Reader Review The Island Walkers for online ebook

Wanda says

28 JUL 2015 - another terrific recommendation from Bettie. Many thanks!

M Robin says

This book is tragic, unforgettable and pervaded with a certain sense of hopelessness. Because that doesn't sell it very well, I'll add: I really loved it. Hold your loved ones close and be thankful and fight for any agency you do have in your life. The characters in The Island Walkers have regrettably too little.

Nick says

I may have to stop reading books that are Award winners and highly acclaimed by famous writers and book authorities.

This book has some great character development, and good descriptions of the very canadian scene, and I did read all the way to the end, but I was hoping for much more in the story, and I was disappointed. Lots of details and lots of small stuff, but too many pieces that did not really fit in as part of the story, and several that did not go anywhere - just kinda hung in space without any point or coming to any ending.

I found it all very slow and hard work reading. The feeling throughout was dark, pessimistic and foreboding, verging on just plain depressing.

With apologies to those famous writers who loved it - it was definitely not my type of book. I didn't get it.

J. Ewbank says

This book by Bemrose is about a family. The family has their share of problems. From an idealistic father to other problems it is a very interesting and good story. I enjoyed it.

J. Robert Ewbank author "Wesley's Wars" and "John Wesley, Natural Man, and the Isms"

S says

I absolutely loved this book. I loved it so much in fact that I hugged it after I finished.

It's the story of the Walkers, particularly father Alf and oldest son Joe, but it's also the story of a whole town maybe even of a specific time. Small town politics play a big role in this story. Everyone knows everyone and that comes with positives but also negatives. How do you leave your past behind when it's not just your past, it's shared by the whole town?

Alf and the Mill are the central story here but Joe's story stands out to me. He falls in love with a new girl in school and here we see class politics at play. Joe doesn't feel he's worthy of a girl like Anna, feels he has to become more than he is to win her over. In spite of it being pretty clear that this is his own issue, not necessarily hers, it weighs him down to a point where he struggles with his own family and upbringing while constantly trying to escape it. Joe and Anna actually reminded me of Pip and Estella from *Great Expectations* in some ways. Not quite as dark or tragic as that pairing but still I saw a lot of similarities there.

There are a few different threads of different stories in this book and for once I feel like every one of them was rounded off perfectly. Everything was wrapped up in one way or another. I finished the book feeling completely satisfied. Except for..... there's one chapter in the middle there, where Jamie and Billy go to cut a Christmas tree.... if you've read it you know what happens. I'm still not sure why it was in there, and in such detail? I kept thinking it'd come up again later, but it didn't really.

That issue aside *The Island Walkers* goes right onto my list of favourite books, and straight to the top of my "Make This Into A MiniSeries When I Win The EuroMillions Lottery" list. High praise indeed.

Bibliophile says

Beautiful prose style and descriptive prose, but I just couldn't care less about the plot and the characters weren't sufficiently interesting to draw me in either. Maybe if Joe had gotten his rich girlfriend (who was also a poet and half-French and ever so sensitive and different from every other girl ever - ugh!) pregnant and then taken her out on the river on a boat ... wait, that's *An American Tragedy*.... A snoozefest, and I don't think I'm going to be reading anything else by this author.

Cris says

Wonderful, full of life, typical Canadian way of living, in small towns, far from the quotidian big town fuss, where everything is tightly linked to an industrial site, which when is closed by corporate decisions everything is going sadly down. Loved this book.

Sharon Plett says

I did not like this story. I did not sympathize with the characters and I found it dreadfully heavy. I kept waiting for something good to happen in the book but Bemrose does not reward the reader at the end for sticking with this fictional family. The ONLY reason I kept reading to the very bitter end is that John Bemrose is a very good writer. So while I did not like Bemrose's story, I do enjoy his writing style and recognize that he is a very talented writer.

Bettie? says

Description: It is 1965, and when a large corporation takes over the mill, and workers attempt to unionize, Alf's actions inadvertently set in motion a series of events that will reverberate far into the future and burden him with an unspoken shame. This is also the year when his eldest son, Joe, falls headlong for a girl he first glimpses on a bridge - and his world is overturned by the passion and uncertainty of young love. The bittersweet story of Joe and Anna is juxtaposed against his father's deepening role in the tensions building at the mill and his unsettling connection with a local Native woman, Lucille Boileau. Meanwhile, Alf's wife, Margaret, must reconcile her middle-class English upbringing with her blue-collar reality, as her marriage is undermined by forces she cannot name.

Set over the course of a single year, the novel reaches back to the past - to Alf's haunting memories of the Second World War and his brother's death; to the stories of the town's founder, Abraham Shade, and those of the eccentric river man Johnny North.

Opening: A TOWN OF OF TWO RIVERS, its plunging valley an anomaly in the tedious southwestern Ontario plain.

Bridges. Water at dusk. The play of ghosts on the sloping face of a dam.

High windows shot with gold, glimpsed among maples. Streets that beckon and disappear. The traveller, coming across this place, might be forgiven for imagining that life is better here.

The Victorian facades of the downtown stores, the deep centre of town. The backs of these buildings fall straight to the Shade River. From the Bridge Street bridge, you can savour the Old World atmosphere conjured by their wooden balconies, perched randomly above the water, above the cut stone of foundations, which seem to move upstream as the Shade brushes past through a flecking of shallow rapids. The cries of gulls.

For a debut this is a remarkable achievement. Loved the writing style.

Three male members of one family, the eponymous Walkers, are examined over a year of change: Alf, the father, Joe, the eldest son, and Jamie the younger boy. There are peripheral females yet they are not brought fully to life, and I can say that even after wading through the gratuitously long section about the new kid in town. What a 'Mary Sue' Anna was in Joe's eyes!

So it is the father and the younger lad that I became most interested in.

Because of the obvious start out flaws this couldn't grab the full dongs, yet hot damn! I became involved with this story: when I wasn't able to read due to outside influences, I was thinking about these characters. Recommended.

Nancy says

I picked this up in an airport and it was a good slice-of-life novel. Hit on some of the seedier sides of life, and was made more interesting by a kid's perspective.

Melody says

A much more complex book than I was expecting. Yes, it is about a small town, dependant on the local textile mill and the changes that occur when a big corporation takes it over and the workers try to form a union. But it is also about so much more. Constant references to divisions: real divisions – class, labor, economic, racial, and educational – and the metaphorical: the river, the island, and the train trestle. The characters are fully developed and interesting. The story is dark yet ends with hope.

Sooz says

only a few chapters in but i am really enjoying it. Bemrose has a real gift for developing characters - or rather letting them develop themselves, for that is what it feels like. it feels so natural and organic. his writing never feels manipulative or forced. AND on top of that he has a beautiful sense of language. i'm looking forward to immersing myself in the story.

finishing the book with only one minor criticism. The Island Walkers essentially tells the story of a man and his teenage son. and whether Bemrose is writing from the 40 something or the teen perspective, it comes across as very believable. he creates story lines for two minor characters - a younger brother and younger sister - story lines outside their place in the family. neither of these story lines feels useful to the story. to me they distracted from the main story line. a minor complaint to be sure. on the whole i really enjoyed the book.

i've added his new novel to my 'to be read' shelf

Ayny says

I enjoyed the Canadian setting and descriptions of water ways, old buildings and vehicles. Interesting every day story, and perspective from the male main characters. First 3/4 of the book are intertwined experiences, then it seems people in the story fizzle out. The ending was not at all what I expected, and left me wondering the fate of two of the young boys in the story. (?)

Sarah says

Reading this on the Kindle without a blurb and having forgotten what it was about, I was expecting some historic Cape Breton thing... not at all. The island is a river-bound bit of a Southern Ontario mill town, the

Walkers are a family and it all unfolds in (only slightly atmospheric) 1965-66: the abutting stories of the members of the family, particularly of the middle-aged father feeling union pressure and his teenaged son with girl problems. People living together and yet not together - in fact having only quite small, random effects on the lives of the others. I'm not sure that the author wasn't trying to suggest the opposite, but the effect for me is plutôt existentialist.

It's very strong on characters (imagined in great detail), rich in interior thoughts and nicely descriptive (especially of the natural world, both threatening and restorative - a Canadian speciality, cf Atwood et al.), and it's full of foreboding as everyone seems frequently on the verge of some, probably river-related, disaster. In fact, there is just too much of this in the book, too much of everything. Too much detail about what people are doing step by step, too many thoughts, too many little things happening, too many characters - too much business, basically, and some loose ends - in fact some stories that are loose at both ends, ie they come from nowhere and go nowhere. (I'm thinking of Mr Mann's chapter, and Billy and Penny.) The plot is moderately engaging but the writing is janky in spots and overall the effect is rather heavy, too earnest and meaningful by far. I was unconvinced by the ending. But there is something here for sure: the chasms between people, how close we are to death at all times, just how many thoughts can be drifting around a room at once...

Moved on next to Richard Ford's *Canada*, which is also about a family in the 60s, and somehow it's so different: for instance, Bemrose telling us what people are wearing seems irrelevant and rather inept, whereas Ford tells us the same thing three times and it's important and illuminating.

Jane Glen says

Well, I did get through this but found myself checking several times- yes, it was a Giller finalist, as well as being nominated for other awards. But it just never really seemed to go anywhere, but I kept hoping. The characters were insubstantial with seemingly little control over their lives or circumstances. And the ending was a let-down, to say the least. Ah, well...
