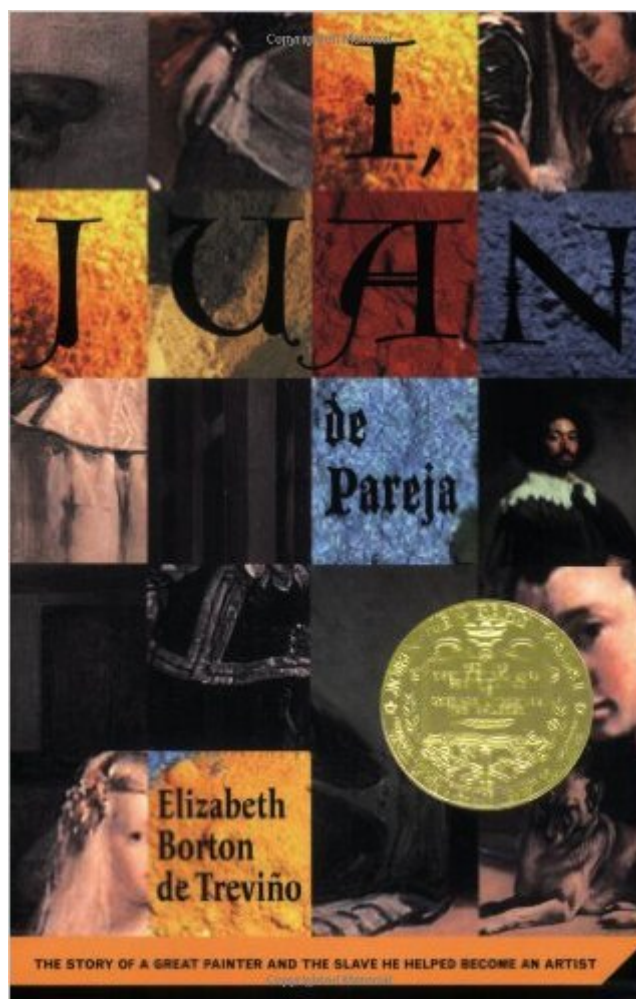


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I, Juan De Pareja



Synopsis

When the great Velázquez was painting his masterpieces at the Spanish court in the seventeenth century, his colors were expertly mixed and his canvases carefully prepared by his slave, Juan de Pareja. In a vibrant novel which depicts both the beauty and the cruelty of the time and place, Elizabeth Borton de Treviño tells the story of Juan, who was born a slave and died an accomplished and respected artist. Upon the death of his indulgent mistress in Seville, Juan de Pareja was uprooted from the only home he had known and placed in the charge of a vicious gypsy muleteer to be sent north to his mistress's nephew and heir, Diego Velázquez, who recognized at once the intelligence and gentle breeding which were to make Juan his indispensable assistant and companion and his lifelong friend. Through Juan's eyes the reader sees Velázquez's delightful family, his working habits and the character of the man, his relations with the shy yet devoted King Philip IV and with his fellow painters, Rubens and Murillo, the climate and customs of Spanish court life. When Velázquez discovers that he and Juan share a love for the art which is his very life, the painter proves his friendship in the most incredible fashion, for in those days it was forbidden by law for slaves to learn or practice the arts. Through the hardships of voyages to Italy, through the illnesses of Velázquez, Juan de Pareja loyally serves until the death of the painter in 1660. I, Juan de Pareja is the winner of the 1966 Newbery Medal. Latino Interest.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1100L (What's this?)

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Square Fish; Reissue edition (April 29, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312380054

ISBN-13: 978-0312380052

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.5 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars See all reviews (54 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #82,428 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Biographical #46 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Prejudice & Racism #50 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Europe

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Customer Reviews

One reason the story is so powerful is because it is NOT an adrenaline-packed full-bodied cry against social injustice. It's a quiet, beautiful story, and these very qualities highlight why slavery was such an insidious institution. Some reviewers claim the book is slow. They are right, but let's examine the slowness in a little more detail. First of all, the book is intended to be a realistic look at a fictional person (not a biography as reviews state), which forced the author to cut back on the "page-turner" syndrome we're affected with today. (I'm going to sound preachy here, but most people don't lead perilous lives!! We aren't secretly spies, we don't get lost on islands populated by enigmatic others, and we don't become pop stars on American Idol.) The book lacks whips, and bloodhounds, and chases across Southern swamps in the moonlight with a baby strapped to the hero's back. But that doesn't make the book any less of a voice against slavery. The sheer genius of the book is that it shows why slavery was an accepted part of life, and also shows why slavery is wrong. Juanico (he's referred to by a child's name for almost the entire book) is well-fed, he's loved, he's taken care of. He's a model slave leading a perfect life of servitude. At the time people would point to slaves like Juanico and say slavery clearly wasn't evil because Juan was well-treated. As privileged readers, however, we know Juan doesn't like his permanent childlike state. He wants to paint. He wants it bad enough to steal from a man who has served as his father figure. Bad enough to risk death. That's what slavery is all about -- limiting someone's life based on the color of their skin.

Trevino's 1966 Newbery winner may seem a sleeper by today's standards of violence and adult themes in YA literature. Nevertheless, I consider it an excellent representative for both Biography and Historical Fiction genres. Careful research yields authentic 17th century detail as Trevino recreates the Baroque court of Spain, from the viewpoint of the royal painter, Diego Velasquez, and his faithful Black slave, Juan de Pareja. Narrated in the first person by Juanico from his sheltered childhood, this gently-paced book relates the historical events and reconstructed dialogue and emotions for much of his life. The poor boy suffered horribly at the hands of a cruel gypsy mule driver, but once he reached the haven of his new master in Madrid, such torture would never be inflicted on him again. Juan discovers that he also possesses artistic talents and ambitions, but in Baroque Spain it was illegal for a slave to practice any form of art. Thus he had to steal colors and paint in secret, as the punishment for disobedience to this particular law was most severe--even

unto death. During this partial biography of the great court painter, Velasquez, we meet two other famous artists who visited the master: Rubens and Murillo. We are treated to private, behind-the-scenes glimpses of the blond King and his pompous entourage. As Juan travels in Italy with his famous Master, he receives conflicting impressions of Italians and their artistic style. Yet he earns the respect of those around him with his impressive, folkloric healing skills. But art is his private passion; he refuses to stop painting on the sly. Since he is an honest man, such deception causes him great guilt and shame.

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