

Sensitivity Read Analysis by Devyn Radke

Analysis

(Title) is an engrossing novel that highlights the captivity narrative of Mathinna, a young Palawan girl taken from her native land, and Evangeline, a governess falsely accused of crimes and sent to prison. Their narratives touch upon issues such as migration, belonging, and women's rights in a Victorian society.

Mathinna's entrance into the novel is by a third-person narrative with her experiences on Flinder's Island and being ripped away, yet her exiting scene is anticlimactic and can be seen as problematic. The representation of Mathinna, being a woman POC forced to assimilate to white colonialist ideals, wasn't illustrated out to the end. Mathinna did not get an exiting narrative and it suggests that her story isn't as important as Hazel, Ruby, or Evangeline's. It further places Mathinna's native narrative and experiences as background fluff, for the lack of better words. I question what purpose Mathinna played in Hazel's life.

Mathinna is last seen in Hazel's narrative and exits with Hazel "sitting on the bench with Ruby, watching Mathinna make her way down the street" (p.332). Readers get short and quick accounts of her time away that further dilute Mathinna's actual experiences and feelings, especially in the orphanage, such as, "'they beat me. Shaved my head. Dunked me in ice water, I don't know why. Said I was insolent, and maybe I was. Then they sent me to a kind of prison, an old convict barracks'" (p.329). While the environment might be similar to Newgate and the orphanage, Mathinna's treatment of being a woman of color in a white society was different. For instance, the warden of the orphanage states, "'We can't place a native in the general population. It just isn't done'" and that she was placed in solitary confinement because of that (p.297). Overall, the relationship between Mathinna and Hazel is endearing as they connect through their understanding of life and friendships.

On the other hand, Sir John Franklin and Mathinna's relationship shifts throughout. In the beginning, Sir John complies with his wife to take Mathinna to their home by stating, "'if you wish to amuse yourself in such a fashion, my dear, I suppose there's no harm in it'" (p.16) and doesn't seem very concerned or interested in Mathinna. Since then, Sir John "seemed to genuinely enjoy Mathinna's company" (p.198) and spent their time playing games and walking

in the garden. Their relationship becomes convoluted when Mathinna begins to call Sir John “Papa” and in turn calls her “ma chère fille,” or my dear daughter in French, at a dinner dance (p.273-4). Before this, it is unknown whether Mathinna has actually created such a bond. This instance is the peak of their relationship. Sir John even corrects a woman, Mrs. Carlisle, after she called Mathinna an “it” in turn Sir John counteracts by saying that Mathinna is a “she,” thus acknowledging Mathinna’s presence as a human equal (p.272). In the end, Lady Jane decides it’s best for Mathinna to return to Flinder’s Island to which Sir John does not want to be a part of the conversation by saying, “I would like for you to get on with it” (p.288). Throughout their relationship Mathinna is viewed as an outsider, stranger, “savage,” etc. but readers don’t know how she views Sir John, whether he is a guardian, trusted friend, “Papa,” or a detestable patriarchal colonialist. Their relationship as a whole isn’t problematic, per say. But there are gaps and lack of build up between Mathinna and Sir John, especially with the “papa” scene, that I’m not sure how the reader should feel towards their relationship. Whether it was for public appearances or a heartfelt decision made by Mathinna, and/or Sir John, it is unclear.

Other than what I have addressed, I didn’t find anything else problematic. Distinctive gothic literature themes can be seen throughout the novel and remain consistent with the timeline and era, which I enjoyed reading altogether.

Typos:

p.99: “...I’m the one (who) should be bowing to you.”

p.118: “...he inclined his ear toward to the other end.”

p.155: “The corners of him mouth turned up in bitter comedy.”

p.161: “It smells death...”

p.177: “A baby’s tinny wail.”

p.238: “The water in the River Clyde that was so lethal to drink that most people...”

p.272: “...not a member of the family, then at least a welcome guest.”

p.289: “...and now all of us is wondering will the new governor...”

p.321: “...she told him, with its leaves likes the palms of an old woman, quieted anxiety.”