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Analysis of excerpt from «The Other Hand» by Chris Cleave

«The Other Hand» is a novel written by Chris Cleave in 2008. The text is about a girl from Nigeria, where she mostly speaks of her experiences from Britain. The story appears to take place in the modern age, but could be from everywhere between the end of the 20th Century to the present day. We are never told the name of the main character, she simply refers to herself as "I". When she arrives in England, she is placed in an immigration detention centre, and stays there for 2 years. Whilst she is there, she tries to learn how to speak the Queen's English as well as possible. The fact that the national language in Nigeria is English makes it slightly easier, even though she had to stop speaking it like she did at home

We are not told when the story takes place, but we do know where. It is also revealed that the main character is an African girl, and that she travels to Britain. She eventually ends up at an immigration detention centre in Essex. The setting is important, but the writer could have used other countries as long as we know a lot about one and less about the other. We see everything from the main character's point of view, but we also hear a little about her friends and family. When she returns to Nigeria, she has difficulties explaining what she has experienced to her acquaintances from the completely different society. So far in the novel, we do not get to know many people, and our knowledge about them is limited.

Due to the fact that she refers to herself as I, we know that the story is told from a first person perspective. This enhances the feeling that she speaks of her own experiences. This is of great importance, since the plot is all about explaining how foreigners experience their visits to other nations. She also speaks of her journey after she has completed it, which lets her think more about it. She has already experienced what she would need to tell others how it was as a whole. It is also written in such a way that she speaks directly to the reader, which makes it a lot more immersive. Other points of view would of course be possible, but would not necessarily strengthen the theme in a manner like a first person view does. A third person view could make it feel a lot more like fiction, and we would not be attached to the characters as greatly as we do.

Like many texts, one important aspect is to make the story entertaining. Not doing this, will naturally lead to the reader not being interested.

Making your text both entertaining and serious, can be a challenging task. The theme of the novel is not hidden at all, and would be obvious to most people. In the beginning the main character says "Most days I wish I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl", this sentence tells us a lot about the theme. For the most part, she describes how she is treated differently from the others because of her ethnicity. All of this makes it easier to conclude that the theme could be something similar to "respect", "cultural differences" and "immigration".

The story is told chronological, and appears to be told in a very straight-forward manner. This could be to steer our attention towards what is important. There are a few flashbacks where she speaks of a few people from her country of origin, like for instance "…some of the girls explained to me: to survive, your must look good or talk even better.". So far, there isn't really much suspense leading to a climax, nor do we see too much foreshadowing. In short, there are few literary devices. Personally, I enjoyed reading the text even though I have read many resembling it. It does not only describe how the protagonist changes after having been in a very different place, but also how she tries to explain it to her own people. They do not always understand, and things that may seem obvious to us, may not make as much sense after all.

Sources

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