

BOOK REVIEW

of the month

Shrawan

BOOK REVIEW: THE SPY

Author: Paulo Coelho

Publisher: Vintag, Penguin Books

Year of publication: 2016

Genre: Fiction, Historical

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Introduction

“The Spy” is a historical fiction novel written by Paulo Coelho, an Corine International Award winning author for his novel “The Alchemist”. The story is written in the form of letters and divided into three separate parts. Part I and Part II are in the perspective of Mata Hari as she writes about her memories growing up and throughout her life before her ultimate death. She writes each chapter in the form of a letter to her lawyer Mr Clunet. In Part III, the chapters are written in the form of a letter in which Mr. Clunet writes back to Mata Hari explaining his side of defending her in court and trying his best despite countless setbacks.

Summary

The story follows Maragaretha Zelle, a girl who detested her name because she shared it with a famous actress, to Madame MacLeod, a woman forced to adopt the name of her abusive husband. The girl who became Mata Hari, a dancer who bewitched the era’s richest and most powerful men, only to be accused of espionage and executed.

PAULO
COELHO

READ BY
HILLARY HUBER
AND PAUL BOEHMER



THE SPY

A NOVEL

AN UNABRIDGED PRODUCTION

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As we see the story of Mata Hari's life unfold we are able to understand many prejudices and powerful quotes on the life many people were forced to live. This novel is able to give us a detailed view of life during war and through abuse. Along with Mata Hari's view we are also able to read the point of view of Mata Hari's lawyer as he attempted to defend Mata Hari in the court of law. This novel enlightens us on the mystery of love, the warning of abuse, along with other themes and emotions such as desperation, perseverance, unrequited love, and much more! Told in the point of view of Maata Hari through her final letter, "The Spy" is the story of a woman who dared to defy all conventions only to pay the ultimate price.

Critical Analysis

This novel has many individual themes within it, the main themes are :

- **Love:**

Mata Hari struggles finding her sense of love throughout the novel, this novel provides us many meaningful quotes on love and the animosity towards it. How love could truly be a sense of downfall if taken in a frightening manner.

"Never fall in love. Love is a poison . Once you fall in love, you lose control over your life -your heart and mind belong to someone else."

"Love does not obey anyone and will betray those who try to decipher its mystery."

These two quotes were both told to Mata Hari on the basis of her feelings toward love. One convincing her to lose the rest of hope she has in the feeling, and the other explaining to her that love is a feeling which cannot be controlled, that cannot be used and will forever be a mystery to those who follow its path.

BOOK REVIEW

of the month

Shrawan

- **Change:**

“There’s no wind strong enough to make the boat change direction; it stays in the harbor, venturing only among still waters.”

“Everything in this world has two sides. People who were abandoned by the cruel god called love are also culpable because they look into the past and wonder why they made so many plans for the future.”

These quotes explain how life can be once second, as steady as a boat in still waters, worried that if it ventures out of its waters, that everything may change, or how people spend so much of their life planning what to be and what should be, when change comes it and makes them discard their future plans. This also shows Mata Hari changing her view on love, how instead of following it as a path, that she is now thinking of love as a burden or an emotion that can obey the one who feels it.

- **Abuse, Freedom, and War:**

“I concealed the scratches and bruises under extra makeup.”

This is one of the first glimpses we get to the domestic violence faced by Mata Hari, this is a reoccurring theme and is one of the first instances we can say truly made an impression on Mata Hari’s idea of love.

“My heart had stopped bleeding and was now beholding beauty in its purest form.”

In this quote we could say the first part represents Mata Hari constantly feeling abused and unheard, her heart that once was filled with love, was bleeding, yet, as Mata Hari observed dance, she finally felt as though her heart was full of beauty.

“I’m not doing this for me but for all those women who are prisoners in their alleged freedom.”

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Freedom was said to come with marriage, however most women often felt trapped, this quote signifies that. Those women, too scared to stand up for themselves under abuse, yet to outsiders seem to have all the freedom in the world, a happy life, and love.

“Sin was not created by God; it was created by us when we tried to transform what was inevitable into something subjective. We ceased to see the whole and came to see just one part; and that part is loaded with guilt, rules, good versus evil, and each side thinking it’s right.”

Sin was not created by God, rather it was created by humans. When God created animals, he did not put the idea of sin into their minds. For example, animals such as coyotes and lions kill to survive, even if it means killing their own species, humans on the other hand take killing as a sin. Which is often contradicting in times of war.

The end of the quote also symbolizes how in war, each side thinks that they’re in the right, because they represent their own personal ideas while disregarding the ideals of the other side. In this way, neither is exactly “good” or “bad” . Wars aren’t good versus evil, it just depends on the narrative the ideals are presented and the opinions of the people.

Conclusion and Recommendation :

In conclusion the novel “The Spy” is a riveting story of a woman who spent her life seeking love only to lose its meaning in the process. A woman who was surrounded by admirers, abuse, and war. This novel is the retelling of Mata HAIR’s life as through fame she experiences struggles that eventually lead to her death.

I would recommend this novel as I find the meanings valuable and many quotes present in this novel still rise at the back of mind considering how meaningful and still prevalent they are in our current societies.