

The poisonwood bible

Literature



Methuselah is a parrot character in *The Poisonwood Bible* written by Barbara Kingsolver. The novel is set in the late 20th century in a village of The Congo called Kilanga. Methuselah is a parrot who is left by brother Fowls for the Price family. He has been denied freedom for very long and has been kept in a cage. Later when Nathan Price sets him free, he has no idea what to do with his independence. So he keeps flying near the Price house and depends on the Price girls for food. When Congo's independence is announced, Methuselah gets killed and eaten by a cat.

The imprisonment and freedom of Methuselah can symbolize the current and the future conditions of the Price family as well as the colonization and independence of The Congo. Methuselah's imprisonment reflects the fact that the Price girls and Orleanna are kept in The Congo against their will by Nathan Price so that he can spread the word of Bible which according to Rachel, is not "worth saving" (301). Methuselah is kept in a cage in the Price house. The parrot lives there as a pet who is kept captive and forced to live in the cage. It has spent most of its life "caged away from flight and truth" (211).

Orleanna and the Price girls have a similar story because Nathan is "all psyched up to stay [in Congo] forever ..." (201) and he has forced his family to stay with him against their consent. Nathan is the one who actually has got the power to decide the fate of the Price girls and Methuselah. Nathan "let the parrot go" (87) because its language was not in accordance with the principles Nathan had set for the house. Even though the Price girls wanted to keep the parrot, it was Nathan who decided to award him freedom. The same thing happens with Nathan's family who is totally under his control.

Orleanna, who feels “occupied by a foreign power,” (226) claims that she has been “swallowed by Nathan’s mission ...” (226). She is not happy living in The Congo with Nathan but she has to because Nathan controlled her and her daughters lives. The imprisonment and later the freedom of Methuselah also represents the colonization and the independence of The Congo. The Belgians had colonized The Congo for its natural resources like many other western powers at the time that “aimed for no more than have dominion on every creature that moved upon this earth” (10) as it is confessed by Orleanna at the beginning of the novel.

In a very similar way, Methuselah was kept in a cage by the humans against its will only because it was a weaker creature. Just like The Congo, Methuselah is not allowed the freedom of speech as every time he says something, Nathan Price gets mad and inquires “which one of [the daughters] taught [it] to say that word” (76). In a similar way, The Congo is denied the freedom of speech and is not considered as a sovereign state. The effects of the colonization of The Congo can still be seen as the country could not cope up with it even after half a century.

The country remains poor and divided as it is not used to work on its own and enjoy the freedom of living. The same happens with Methuselah after Nathan tells him that “(he is) free to go” (94) and grants him freedom. Methuselah had forgotten what freedom feels like and “it goes and then it comes back because its wings aren’t any count” (133). Because of this Methuselah cannot survive on its own and later he gets killed and eaten by a cat. Comparing Methuselah with hope Adah declares that she had found

hope “ fallen already” (185) and she adds that “ a piece of it [was there] beside their latrine, one red plume” (185).

In an act of celebration she “ stooped down to pick [its bones] up” (185).

Methuselah holds a lot of symbolic significance in the narrative The Poisonwood Bible as it reflects the current and the prospect situation of the Price family and The Congo in general. On one hand, it represents the locking up and later the freedom of the Price girls including Orleanna, and on the other hand, it represents the colonization of The Congo and the fact that The Congo could not cope up as a country after its independence.