

Good critical thinking about jean foster

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Margaret Cezair-Thompson novel, "The True History of Paradise," is a story about Jean Landing, a Jamaican woman who is determined to escape from her motherland of Jamaica. It is in 1981, and the country is sliding into anarchy after continuous political unrest. The author intelligently injects the storyline with the whole family background of Jean and Jamaica's whole history. This Jamaican history stretches from the pre-Columbian days up-to-the time Jean gets on her flight. The unfolding political turmoil in her country of birth causes her to make a decision to flee immediately. Even before making her final preparations, she receives piercing and devastating news that her sister, Lana, has fallen prey to death. The existing state of emergency in the country causes Lana's family to arrange a fitting funeral for her. Monica, Jean's mother, had not been in touch with her other daughter, Lana, for more than a decade. This causes her not to embrace the emanating grief fully. While on the journey out of Jamaica, Jean is taken through numerous memories bordering on her relationship with her mother who was detached from them, and the complex bond that existed between her and Lana. This story magnificently portrays the complexities present in families, and identities of race in an environment that is troubled with political wars.

At the start of the novel, Jean's racial identity is analyzed. When she hears dogs' bark at a goat wandering aimlessly past the garden gate, Jean puts on her faded red housedress. Her eyes appear light brown, which is practically an unusual colour for her eyes to pick considering she is of dark complexion. When her mother, Monica, was examining her immediately she was born, she had asked, "Where dis black pickney come from?" (Thompson, 1999, p.

1). This shows the contempt over dark-skinned people inherent in her. She practically loathes dark-skinned people, even her own child. This initially sows the seeds of her detachment from Jean, her own child. Jean was the daughter of Roy Landing, a black nationalist who is also a political idealist. Her mother, Monica, is light-skinned, and thugs refer to her as the "white lady," (New York Times, 1999, n. p). However, the white members of her ancestry were exceedingly poor. She acquires her wealth and scales the social ladder merely by making her own achievements. Monica, is a tough lady who loves pragmatism and has contempt for almost all ideologies; thus she develops a thick skin to stay through the unfolding political turmoil. On her flight, Jean reflects, "Selfish and adamant, would be the last drum left beating," (Thompson, 1999, p. 2). Essentially, her selfish nature and adamancy to move out of Jamaica, will see her pull through the impending turmoil but will sever ties between her and Jean.

Jean continuously counts fires close to her residence in the suburban highlands of Kingston. She heard about a fire on Molyneux Road close to the family business managed by her mother. She straightway phones her mother, and the secretary does not connect to her mother because she is busy. Her mother practically ignored picking her call and in fact her assistant was shouting to a delivery man, "She talkin' long distance. Hold' awn a minute," (Thompson, 1999, p. 2) Jean regrets making the call because of the dismissal of her mother. She feels pointless after realizing business was running as usual at Island Bakery. Her mother is completely detached from her daughter's concerns and goes on with her business without considering her daughter's input. This shows the unconcerned attitude of Monica. The

secretary advised her to “crawl back later,” (Thompson, 1999, p. 2).

Jean does not give up speaking to her mother and Monica finally gets on the phone. She immediately questions her fear. “What happen? You ‘afraid?” she retorts, (Thompson, 1999, p. 2). Monica was openly contemptuous of anyone who displayed fear. On this note, she considers Jean, a weak-minded person, in the mould of his late father, Roy Landing. Roy Landing lacked the drive to complete most of his paintings, he also failed to publish a story he had written while alive. Instead of tending to her daughter, Jean, to grow as courageous people, she takes the easy route of showing contempt because of minimal fear she displays. The daughter- mother relationship is in bad form, and it seems the Monica will not take an initiative to mend it.

The sudden death of Lana leaves Jean devastated. This tragedy bolsters Jean’s need to leave Jamaica because it does not promise a good future. Lana was Jean’s mother first child born out of wedlock. She has certain attributes that Jean lacks; she is beautiful, talented, light-skinned, and her head was covered by “good hair,” (New York Times, 1999, n. p). She is also extroverted meaning she connects with people more easily. Lana builds a reputation as a pop singer, thus utilizing her singing talents. Monica, Lana’s mother, rejects both her daughter and her father. This was one of the things that drive Lana to commit suicide. Lana’s demise is a devastating and untimely, “She panic, a hundred devils in her,” ((Thompson, 1999, p. 18). She died from madness-like possession of emotions which she fails to control effectively. She lacked resilience to face challenges and let-downs and overcome them. She lets depression consume her leading to her death and Jean’s loss of a close friend and half-sister. This accelerates Jean’s plans to

move out of Jamaica, and it seems she does not feel any emotional attachment to her mother. She is planning to travel over long distances out of Jamaica to escape the present turmoil and looming anarchy, and she is not bothering to take her mother with her. To her it is good riddance leaving her mother behind without considering her safety. This shows the strained relationship and loss of attachment between them.

Lana is buried hastily the following morning because her body had burned. This is the push of Jean because someone has told her bodies that are burned decompose fast. Lana does not get a fitting send-off because practically, there is no time to seek explanations of his death or to engage in full-blown grieving. During the burial, Jean is attentively monitors Monica, her mother. For fifteen years she has not spoken to Lana, her elder daughter (Thompson, 1999, p. 7). She is busy stroking the wood with her hand that is well manicured and has lots of jewelry (Thompson, 1999, p. 7). Her mourning black and veil completely covers her face. She appears unmoved by her elder daughter's death and this shocks Jean.

Jean was the most attentive person among the mourners who were present. She practically counts the number of those present. Many are missing: Cherry, Mary, Roy, Daphne, and Deepa were long gone. Her intense attention demonstrates the attachment she had with her sister. When it is finally time to lower Lana's body to the grave, Jean is awakened, and the apparent demise of her sister hits her hard. Her sister was being carried to be laid to rest; "Lana's footsteps were not among those she hears trampling the wet grass," (Thompson, 1999, p. 10). Jean smells a perfume that is emanating from the jasmine hedge that grows in the cemetery. When Lana's

body is lowered into the grave, a gravedigger is let to shovel dirt into the open grave. Jean is unsettled with this. It seems wrong to her for Lana to be left there in the grave alone with the gravedigger. This portrays the humanity and a loving heart present in Jean. She loved her step-sister and even in death she is still concerned about her safety and welfare. The perfume imparted by the jasmine seems to her to be a good thing to grow close to her sister's grave. Somehow, her spirit will be accessible to the fresh sweet smell, and her final resting place will not be all gloom. Her mother's thoughts on the death and final burial of her elder daughter are conspicuously missing. The death of her daughter does not awaken her emotions or any blood connection to her daughter.

Jean's family history is extensive, volatile, a melting pot of many races and varying social standing. There are Rebecca Landing and Jean Falkirk, who are English colonists. Then there is Mr., Ho Sing, Chinese great-grandfather of Jean. There is also Moses Landing, Daniel Stern. Deepa Ramcharan was Lana's father who had Indian ascendancy. Despite the varying ancestral backgrounds for both Jean and Lana, Jean embraces her as her own sister, and the issue of ancestral origins does not get in between them.

Paul, who is the longtime neighbor, friend and someone Jean confides in, is the one who drives her across the island to go and catch her flight at Montego Bay. During this adventurous journey, the two embark on reflecting on the life of Lana, who succumbed to depressive illness. Attachment to her departed sister does not fade away. She remains her dear sister even in death despite the shadow of their unconcerned mother. She leaves the island immediately after Lana's hurried burial, still clad in a black funeral

dress (Thompson, 1999, p. 12). Paul was to drive her up to Trelawney, where he owned a farm. Upon reaching there, she would go to a small private airfield, where she will board a small plane and fly to Providenciales, where she will meet Alan. Kingston airport spelled doom and was rather risky to use on this escape journey.

The death of a diplomat and his wife had occurred there, and the immigration officers stationed there had transformed into monsters. While driving across the country, they pass the old capital, the Spanish Town and the old defunct sugar mill which was one of the first milestones for Jean and Lana when they went back to boarding school after the school holidays. As much as Lana was a bit older than Jean, they accompanied each other to boarding school, indicating that their bond started a long time ago.

Additionally, they pass Arawak museum they had earlier toured as a family. Lana did not want to go and she demonstrated this by lagging behind.

Monica had barked at him, " Stop draggin' you foot-bottom' round de place," (Thompson, 1999, p. 24).

This outing came to an end when Lana accidentally struck her forehead against a glass case that as used to display a stuffed iguana. Monica shoved the girls into the car and scolded Lana, " Why you cyan behave yourself?" (Thompson, 1999, p. 24). The accidental striking of the glass case had led to scolding displaying Monica's lack of remorse and gently treatment of her daughters. The sisters formed camaraderie since their childhood. After the scolding, Lana sang loudly: " Is jus' big fat lizard," (Thompson, 1999, p. 24). This was meant to cool down her mother who had become exceedingly furious over a small error committed by her daughter. This paints Monica as

someone who was impatient with her daughters since they were children, someone not ready to let her daughters make errors so that they can learn from them.

Jean's escape from Jamaica, can be construed to represent the escape of Lana from the depression she suffered from, and far away from her mother who was never there since she was a child. Jean escapes a rape-robbery-murder attempt, but she suffers knife wounds on her hand. This demonstration of people to be resilient and rise above the challenges they face. Lana could have braved her insurmountable challenges and even sought help from her younger sister instead of making an impromptu decision to burn herself.

In "True History of Paradise," the complexities that exist in families is profoundly portrayed. The reactions of various to challenges like political strife and anarchy is aptly presented. In times of challenges, we can decide to run from problems or form part of the solution. Being caring and possessing a human is also essential in cultivating healthy family relationships.

Works Cited

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