

A savage wisdom by norman german



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Critical Analysis of “ A Savage Wisdom” By Norman German German’s eloquent portrayal of the real life crimes of Annie Beatrice McQuiston, utilizes historical facts regarding the aliases of McQuiston mixed with a romanticized, portrayal of her to deliver a compelling and rich tale of fact and fiction. German utilizes facts surrounding the Valentine’s Day murder of 1940 to paint a portrait of the only woman ever, to be executed by means of the electric chair in Louisiana’s history. McQuiston was more commonly known as Toni Jo Henry as this was her infamous alias. She was convicted and charged with the brutal Valentine’s day murder of Joseph P. Calloway for which she would die by the electric chair.

The year between when McQuiston met and married her husband Claude “ cowboy” Henry and the murder of Calloway were full of extremely rash acts of passion and desperation. Though this is factual, German is able to capably and masterfully depict McQuiston as a woman full of fire and enduring love before illustrating her as a murderess. German creates a backdrop of colorful Louisiana history while telling a story of ‘ Toni Jo’, a woman who falls in love with the very businessman that she is in real life, guilty of sleighing with a single gunshot to the back of the head.

German paints a fictional view of ‘ Toni Jo Henry’ as a popular girl who emerges from the depression; who finds herself in love with a man who would soon betray her. Certainly, the 25 chapter novel is quite a bit different from the actual events surrounding the life of McQuiston (Toni Jo Henry), but if nothing else, it lends a different rendition of how the story could have very well played out. The historical landmark of McQuiston’s tale is certainly, that she was the first and only woman to have ever been sentenced to die by electric chair in Louisiana, having actually served out her sentence.

McQuiston was indeed a woman of beauty, based on the historical photographs which have been preserved, of her. German builds upon this feature possessed by McQuiston such that she was able to succeed with as much as she did based on the merit of her looks. If anything, this may be the downfall of the piece. Certainly, the acts of McQuiston are reprehensible and lend nothing to be dismissed or excused; but she deserves to be remembered as being intelligent; albeit deviously so, before being remembered as a fair beauty. The depiction of McQuiston is certainly meant to be fictional, and is done in a brilliant capacity; but the novel may at times, attribute much of her ability to have gotten as far as she did on her female features before even her ability to strategize and think quickly.

Overall, German is truly an artist in his recreation of a somewhat uncommon criminal. It is challenging to select such a topic without leaning at times to the old stand by of sticking characters in gender roles. It would have been easier to have selected a similar story in which a male is responsible for a cold blooded murder where the murder itself would have been just that; a cold blooded and reasonless murder. In the case of females in the roles of a murderer or villain, authors tend to get caught in the rationale that women lure with beauty and act on passion. The truth of the matter is, Toni Jo was intelligent, and she killed a man who posed a threat to her agenda; just like many male killers have done before and after her.