

The memory of love by aminatta forna



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The Memory of Love by Aminatta Forna, takes us to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where a dying man Elias Cole, contemplates on a past obsession; Saffia, the woman he loved, and Julius, her charismatic, capricious husband. All three lives will clash in friendship, love, war, and will realize the unreadable effects of the past and the nature of obsessive love. Forna constructs her novel with three distinct narratives which move the reader back and forth from present time to when Sierra Leone was embroiled in civil war. Elias Cole tells his story of betrayal, disappointment and "lost years" in the first person, which tricks the reader into believing he's an honest man, this is also stressed by the author's beautiful writing rich in metaphors "songs of lost love" here Elias is deeply moody therefore this metaphor of falling in love touches the emotions of the reader even more. This also implies that Elias comes across as rather self-absorbed and selfish as Forna maintains the illusion of a monologue. Saffia, is presented as an obsession rather than a love at first sight, she remains shadowy as we only see her through his eyes. While in some novels the first person narrative brings us closer to characters, it was used here by the least sympathetic of the three main protagonists. In direct contrast to Elias is his university colleague, Saffia's husband who is described as charismatic before we know his name "Julius Kamara". On campus he walks with an "easy stride" two pupils run to meet him while Elias walked "unnoticed". As a result of these events the reader is the witness of Elias's rising obsession for Saffia, a good example would be when he writes down her license plate at this stage the reader could begin to question themselves on what is love and an obsession. Adrian Lockheart a psychologist escaping his life in England, arriving in Freetown in the wake of civil struggles with intensity of the heat unexpectedly finds a young surgeon

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Kai. When learning Adrian's profession his answer " Ok-ay" stresses his doubt and emphasising the fact that the english psychologist is uncomfortable with his new surroundings. This is further more shown when Forna tells the reader of the silences in sierra leonese conversations " He has yet to get used to it (silences)". Finally Forna contrasts the two characters: Adrian is " fumbling" while Kai is familiar with his environment as he prepares dinner. As a result Adrian is portrayed as an alien, Forna also implies this with scenery when she introduces the reader to his office with a " solitary window with six steal bars" and " a metal door". Elias Cole tells the story of the first time he went to Saffia and Julius's house. They talk about the imminent moon landings, that reiterate how far apart the ambitions of the first world(in this case the Soviets and the Americans) and the needs and aspirations of the africans. The reader could ask himself if Saffia and Julius's relationship present Cole as unafrican." to the first black man on the moon" Julius's toast establishes his cultural allegiance with africans, it is also important as it will have ramifications later on. Incidentally, there has never been a black man on the moon. In the forth chapter the pattern of switching between stories is not adhered, Forna didn't need a separate chapter but wished to emphasise the significance of the moment and maintains the illusion of a monologue by including narrative interjections from Elias as a contemporary narrator. Overall narratives unfold in multiple time zones, with Elias retracing and editing a decades-old obsession with his colleague Julius' wife, Saffia; and Kai and Adrian sleepwalking through their daily affairs. There's little immediate action in the novel, and instead, Forna advances the story through tightly executed scenes that reveal themselves later on, time bombs that detonate once their context becomes clear.