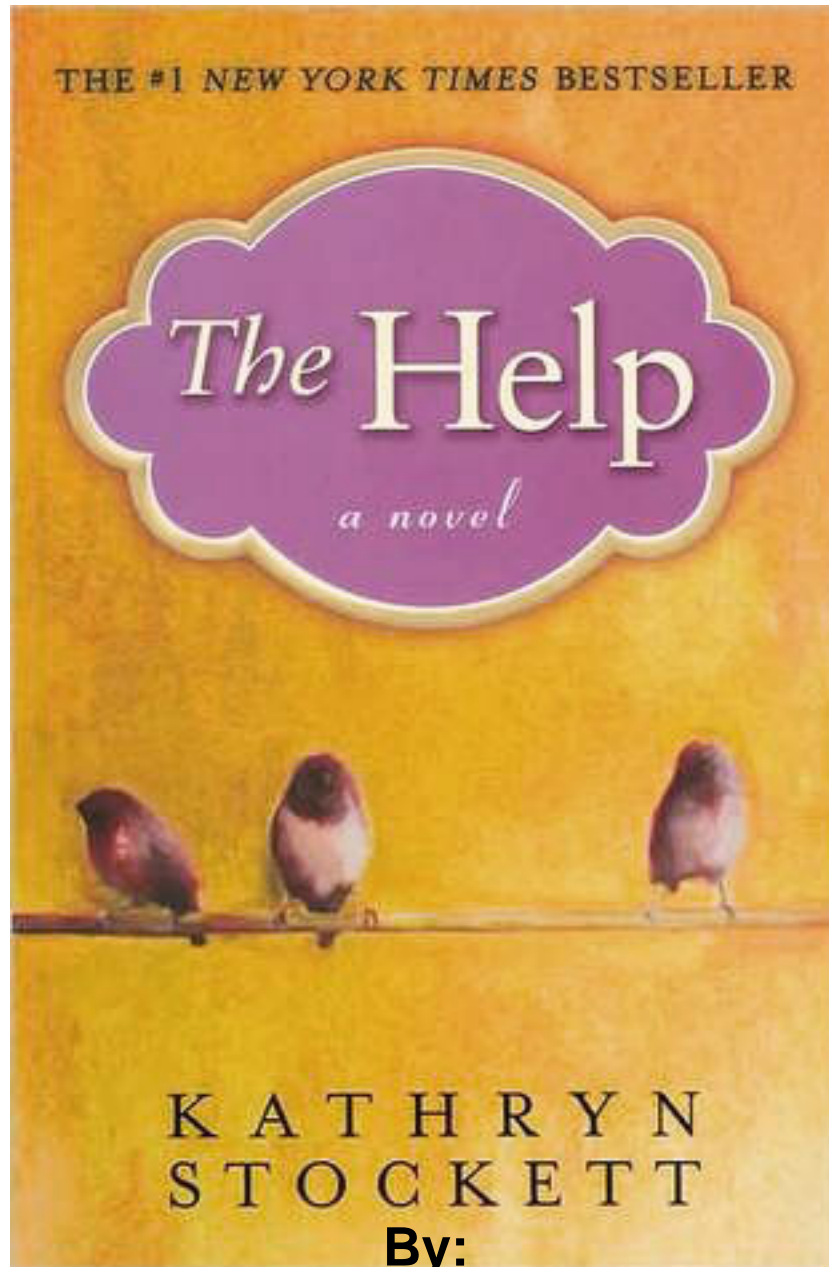


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By:
Kathryn Stockett

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What people Say:

Sparrow

I have this terrible, dreary feeling in my diaphragm area this morning, and I'm not positive what it's about, but I blame some of it on this book, which I am not going to finish. I have a friend who is mad at me right now for liking stupid stuff, but the thing is that I do like stupid stuff sometimes, and I think it would be really boring to only like smart things. What I don't like is when smart (or even middle-brained) writers take an important topic and make it petty through guessing about wh

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,

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, etc.). These are the books for which I have no patience, topics that maybe someone with more imagination or self-awareness could have written about compassionately, without exploiting the victimization of the characters. They're books that hide lazy writing behind a topic you can't criticize.

is one of these.

You've got this narrative telephone game in this book. The telephone game is pretty fun sometimes, and it is really beautiful in monster stories like

and

because what they are telling me is not intended as trustworthy or earnest. All of the seriousness in monster stories is an impression or an emotion reflected back through the layers of narrative. I don't feel that way about the topic of

Joe

I read the first paragraph of

, absorbing the words, but suddenly being caught off guard by the dialect. I stopped reading.

I shifted the book in my hands, flipping to the author's biography and photograph on the back of the dust jacket.

Staring up at me was this:

I thought. An affluent, white Manhattanite.

And one who apparently fancies herself a master at Southern Black Vernacular.

I rolled my eyes and returned to page one, fully prepared

I read the first paragraph of

, absorbing the words, but suddenly being caught off guard by the dialect. I stopped reading.

I shifted the book in my hands, flipping to the author's biography and photograph on the back of the dust jacket.

Caroline

I was uncomfortable with the tone of the book; I felt that the author played to very stereotypical themes, and gave the characters (especially the African American ones) very inappropriate and obvious voices and structure in terms constructing their mental character. I understand that the author wrote much of this as a result of her experiences growing up in the south in the 1960's, and that it may seem authentic to her, and that she was even trying to be respectful of the people and the time; b

I was uncomfortable with the tone of the book; I felt that the author played to very stereotypical themes, and gave the characters (especially the African American ones) very inappropriate and obvious voices and structure in terms constructing their mental character. I understand that the author wrote much of this as a result of her experiences growing up in the south in the 1960's, and that it may seem authentic to her, and that she was even trying to be respectful of the people and the time; but, ultimately, I thought that it was written from a very narrow, idealized, almost childish perspective of race relations without a true appreciation of the humanity and soul of the characters.

And the ultimate theme & message (i.e. "why, we're all the same - there's no difference between us after all!") only reinforced my feeling that this is written from someone who has a very undeveloped or underdeveloped concept of race and race relations in the United States. The author would benefit from exploring authentic African American voices (Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou) and understanding the scope, range and (most important) the foundation of the emotions genuine African American characters express as a result of their journey as a people in the US (hope, frustration, drive, passion, anger, happiness, sadness, depression, joy).

Annalisa

Here is an illustrative tale of what it was like to be a black maid during the civil rights movement of the 1960s in racially conflicted Mississippi. There is such deep history in the black/white relationship and this story beautifully shows the complex spectrum, not only the hate, abuse, mistrust, but the love, attachment, dependence.

Stockett includes this quote by Howell Raines in her personal except at the end of the novel:

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Stockett includes this quote by Howell Raines in her personal except at the end of the novel:

An eloquent way to describe Stockett's intentions for this novel. I know most reviews will probably

focus on the racial relationships in the book, but to me the most haunting statement was that when you are paying someone to care for you and their livelihood depends on making you happy, you can't expect an honest relationship.

I did not expect this book to hit so close to home. After all, I did not grow up in the South and completely missed the racial mind shift in the country. But the book isn't just about racism and civil rights. It's about the employer relationship too. And I did grow up in South America with a maid trying to keep herself out of poverty by making our crazy family happy. As much as we loved her, I can see so many of the pitfalls from these complex relationships in my own history. I know our maid was stuck between pleasing my mother and raising us the way she believed appropriate. I know it was physically hard to work from sunup to late everyday and emotionally hard to never relax because she wasn't the decision maker of our home and at any moment she could be reprimanded for making the wrong decision. She had absolutely no power, and yet she was all powerful to shape and mold us.

I needed her, felt bad for how much I imposed upon her, but I never voiced how much I appreciated or loved her. I took her for granted. Even though she was paid to love us, I know she did. We were her children, especially my youngest brothers. And yet when she moved back home, we lost contact. Was it out of laziness of our own narcissistic lives or was the complexity of our relationship so draining she cut the tie? It is my fear that she thinks we did not return her affection and only thought of her as the maid. I often think about her, we all reminisce about her wondering where she is, and more than anything, I just want to know that she is happy and tell her thank you. It is so strange that someone who is such a vital part of your childhood can just vanish out of your life. "They say its like true love, good help. You only get one in a lifetime." I know. Believe me, I know.

The story is strong and real and touched something deep inside me. I could so relate to the motherly love from Constantine to Skeeter, see that pain in the triangle between Aibileen and Mae Mobley and Elizabeth, feel the exasperation of Minny toward Celia, and understand the complexity of the good and bad, the love and hate, the fear and security. Stockett captured all these emotions.

I also loved the writing style. When style compliments plot, I get giddy. I don't always love grammatically incorrect prose or books about an author trying to be published, but here it works because it's honest. The novel is about a white woman secretly compiling true accounts of black maids--and the novel is in essence a white author trying to understand black maids. The styles parallel each other as do the messages. The point of Skeeter's novel is to make people see that people are just people no matter the color of their skin and Stockett's novel beautifully portrays that with both good and bad on both sides. The fictional novel cover is decorated with the white dove of love and understanding. To get us there, Stockett gives us three ordinary birds, a picture of ordinary life asking to be accepted for its honest simplicity.

This book is Stockett's masterpiece, that story in her that was just itching to get out. From the first page, the voice of the characters took vivid form and became real, breathing people. I loved Aibileen, but think I loved Minny's voice more because she is such a strong character. Besides the maids, I loved Hilly as a portrayal of the white Southern belle with the ingrained belief that black

people are not as good as whites, verbalized as "separate but equal" so it doesn't sound racist. My favorite scene was when Hilly says they have to be careful of racists because they are out there. She's a bit over the top, but if you've been to the South, not that far of a stretch. I just would have liked to find some redeeming qualities in her from Skeeter's perspective.

Ellen

The Kindle DX I ordered is galloping to the rescue today...

AND, for all the book purists (which would include me), this is a

, rather than a want. Post-several eye surgeries, I'm just plain sick of struggling to read the words on a page.

However, despite the visual challenges, I read all 451 pages of

yesterday. Clearly, the book held my interest. However, I spent last night pondering why the book wasn't as good as my nonstop reading would indicate.

Most of all, I thin

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