

A Ghostly Shade of Pale



A Superior Spectre

Angela Meyer

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A sensitive and susceptible reader could turn a ghostly shade when reading this book. It is otherworldly in more ways than it initially appears.

Angela Meyer has produced a work that on superficial reading is entertaining and intriguing but allows for contemplation of and rumination on deeper issues.

A Superior Spectre rolls the lives of two people into an overlapping experience. The two main characters are a very ill man, Jeff, living in the late 21st century and a young woman, Leonora, living in the second half of the 18th century.

Through the use of a 'tab', a futuristic device, Jeff is able to experience some of Leonora's life. As a result, she has brief

flashes which she finds puzzling and disconcerting. Jeff becomes addicted to his mind travel and can eventually achieve it without the use of the tab. His visitations become increasingly troublesome for Leonora, eventually disrupting her life in a major way. That is it in a nutshell, yet there is so much more embodied in this complex novel if we care to look.

Jeff is afflicted with an undefined disease and expects not to live long. He travels from Melbourne to an isolated part of Scotland to escape those who would want to treat him medically against his will. He is also leaving behind his sometime partner, Faye. In this, Angela Meyer explores complexities in relationships and leads us to questioning why someone would leave a situation in which he could be looked after. We are led to ask where the boundary is between receiving care from loved ones and their attention becoming a prison, if not physically then psychologically and emotionally.

Jeff's romantic and sexual preferences and desires are complex and we are given glimpses, through his thoughts and his interactions with his 'andserv', with an older woman who gives him shelter and with her young nephew, and in a way with Leonora. Through this, the author has the reader examine their own prejudices and proclivities. Some may find this uncomfortable.

Sex and sexuality and attitudes to sex and gender issues come up repeatedly in relation to Leonora in Victorian- era Scotland.

Like all good novels, this one gives the reader much more than a good story, if the reader wishes to look below the surface and under their own skin, and think about what they see there. Angela Meyer has crafted a work that has the potential to challenge us about many of the issues we face today, including those of gender, sexuality, identity, sanity, the use of mind-altering devices and drugs, our relationship with robots and other technology and general questions about the nature of reality.

Having reached the end of the novel and therefore knowing how it all fits together, the reader will be rewarded with extra insights on a second reading. *A Superior Spectre* would also make a wonderful subject for discussion among friends or in a book club and as a class novel in secondary schools.