

December 20, 2010

Dear Ms. Lalonde:

I entered the library on a cold November day, my eyes scanning for a good novel to read. My feet shuffled over to the Fiction section and out of the corner of my eye, I saw a book with the name "Socrates". My fingers wrapped around the paperjacket book and I was met with disappointment as I read the back cover; it was not about the famous greek philosopher I was thinking about. Nevertheless I borrowed the book to read because my heart yearned for a good adventure novel, and *The Journeys of Socrates* by Dan Millman seemed to fit the description. When I opened the book, the pages became a portal to a true spiritual experience- one that will stay with me for eons to come.

This novel beautifully crafts together the strong emotions that pass through a person's mind as a situation alters to the winds of fate. Human emotion is an extremely difficult concept to understand, which is why experts like Shakespeare become famous for explaining the motives of the inner mind; Dan Millman is such an expert. The excerpt below demonstrates Millman's capability to capture the internal struggle of the determined protagonist:

"As winter came, Sergei's patience grew thin. He rode across frozen soil, wrapped in his burka, leaning into the wind. Grim and haggard, he pushed Paestka onward. But doubts plagued him. For all his skill and discernment, Sergei could not track men by sniffing the air, nor could he see the faces of men in a bent twig. He needed tangible signs, omens, clues- a sense of direction. Until he found something tangible, he could only follow rumors to gossip, and gossip to settlements, where he might find witnesses. In the meantime, his questions were answered by puzzled looks and fingers pointing in different directions." (p. 264)

This passage is only one of the many beautiful sequences that portray true emotion in this novel. In this paragraph alone, we can see the external atmosphere clearly, while feeling the inner turmoil caused by the situation. This book is about making peace within oneself and then sharing it with the world, but the story never takes itself lightly and goes the extra mile in portraying this message. Sergei, also known as Socrates, is on a desperate search for the most valuable thing in his life: his lost child that his loving wife had brought to this barren earth. After having the things he love destroyed once and once again, Socrates places all his hopes of this world in finding his daughter. As fate would have it, she is in the hands of his arch enemy and he must come into terms with himself before he does with his enemy. I chose this passage because it contains one of the many things the book wants to show it's reader: the need to come in terms with oneself.

What makes Millman's story so intricate and believable is how he establishes the connection between characters. Sergei's connection with Serafirm(his master) reminds me of the connection between my father and I. Serafirm not only corrects Sergei's mistakes and teaches

him, but Serafirm also guides Sergei spiritually. My dad plays his role as my guardian but he also advices me about life and how it's much like an everflowing river. My father is just as mysterious as Serafirm for he advices me to do many things which only time can make sense of. Sergei admits that Serafirm had become a lot like a father to him, "filling a role that Sergei had missed since childhood"(p.212). Sergei also understands that Serafirm never expects anything in return- a mutual feeling that I have with my father who never asks for anything in return...except perhaps love- and that "truth made Sergei love [Serafirm] all the more"(p.212).

As a reader, I was quite disappointed with the introduction of the novel. It was so dull that I almost decided to return the book and borrow a new one. However, as soon as the protagonist was introduced, the book became very likeable. This story is set in the 1800's and in Russia(two things that I a completely unfamiliar with), however, the story becomes very convincing and enjoyable as we find out more about young Sergei. This novel truly captures the feeling of growing up and ends up covering Sergei's whole life: his birth, childhood, marriage, and old age. His first sighting of his wife and his feelings toward her are so vividly and brilliantly explained that you can't help but crack a smile. His wife's death and the events surrounding it are so disturbing, I couldn't stop thinking about it even as I stopped reading. However, the novel's true masterpiece lies in the meeting between Sergei and Serafirm. As a reader I only had one question directed at Millman: How did you create such a wonderful combination of characters?

*The Journeys Of Socrates* is too wonderful to describe in short words. A dull introduction leads way to a brilliant story that reels the reader into satisfaction. It encouraged me to read more philosophical books and follow my passion of exploring the universe...and beyond. Even though it's a great novel, I must warn you of the graphic content. There is more than one instance where humans and animals are slaughtered in despicable ways. But perhaps this was needed, because Dan Millman was trying to show us that hope can be found even in the darkest of moments. From the snowy, dark plains of Russia, to the populated America, this novel carries us towards the true meaning of morality through Sergei. Don't miss out on reading this book, because it doesn't drag us into the meaning of life. It simply shows us how to live.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Millman', is written over a thick black horizontal bar that redacts the name.