



SUCH A FUN AGE: A BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

"Such a Fun Age" by Kiley Reid emerges as a must-read, seamlessly exploring contemporary social dynamics through the intersecting lives of Emira Tucker and Alix Chamberlain. The novel adeptly tackles themes of adulting, misperception, white remorse, and racial prejudice, delivering a profound commentary on the intricate facets of modern relationships. Rich character sketches unravel the complexities of major and minor players, while symbolism and literary devices like irony and foreshadowing intricately shape the narrative, challenging readers' perspectives. The work's social significance resonates in the context of 21st-century racial issues, drawing parallels with similar novels to provide a broader literary context. The general commentary applauds the book's colloquial language, unexpected climax, and Kiley Reid's debut success. In essence, "Such a Fun Age" promises a compelling journey through the intricacies of contemporary relationships and societal complexities, cementing its status as a captivating and essential read.

Step into the pulsating atmosphere of a Friday night, a well-deserved break from the week's workday shackles. The air crackles with the promise of laughter and music, a night of revelry with close friends on the horizon. Just when you thought the stresses of your work had retreated into the background, a jarring buzz from your phone disrupts your evening. It's your employer calling at 9 o'clock! What could be so pressing that it couldn't wait until morning?

Meet Emira Tucker, a 25-year-old graduate of Templer University. She's no stranger to babysitting for the Chamberlains, but a Friday night with work calls was the last thing she expected. Ah, "Such A Fun Age" by Kiley Reid, is a captivating short novel spanning 242 pages. Though published in 2019, it continues to ensnare my imagination. It weaves a tapestry of reality so intricate that you question if it's all fiction. The line between the two blurs as it etches itself into your mind, for these are the very incidents that unfold in our world. Perhaps you, too, have found yourself entangled in a similar narrative. The characters, Emira Tucker and Alix Chamberlain become more than just words on a page; they're reflections of our own lives.

The story kicks off with an irresistible hook, etching the words in your mind: "Take Briar somewhere... and I'll pay you double." Kiley Reid's opening lines are a masterclass in building intrigue. Amid the backdrop of a lively party, with the noise of conversations and music engulfing the surroundings, Emira's boss's voice barely reaches her. However, the urgency in those words compels her to leave her friends and hasten to Alix Chamberlain's enigmatic residence.

Alix Chamberlain, a 30-year-old affluent blogger and artist, seems rattled. Then, a surreal turn of events—a rock-hard egg smashes against her window. Was it random vandalism or a more sinister act, an attempt at destruction? The night brims with tension, and the enigma deepens.

To ensure her children's safety, Alix asks Emira to take little Briar to Market Depot. Little does Emira know that this simple errand will thrust her into a world of racial prejudice. Despite presenting irrefutable evidence to the contrary, she's accused of being a baby kidnapper. A crowd gathers, and a bystander captures the incident on film. Emira is humiliated but she needs to be silent because of her turbulent, erratic financial conditions. Alix is determined to correct this grievous error. When this viral video of Emira, resurfaces someone from Alix's past, both women are catapulted into a collision course that will shatter their preconceived notions of each other. To unravel the fate of the two women, you need to delve into the novel. The novel becomes a heart-pounding rollercoaster journey through the harsh realities of racism, unveiling the concealed layers of discrimination, aptly labelled as "covert racism." Characters like Alix Chamberlain and Emira's boyfriend, Kelley Cooperland, force us to confront the complexities of white guilt and the fetishization of Black individuals.

CHARACTER SKETCH:

Within the intricate tapestry of the novel, characters unfold across two tiers—Major and Minor—each contributing uniquely to the narrative's richness and depth.

MAJOR:

1) Emira:

At twenty-five, Emira is a vibrant soul hailing from Seawell Bridge, Maryland. A recent graduate of Templer University, she defied familial expectations, breaking the mold as the first to pursue a four-year college education in her family. All of her family members, had a proclivity for craftsmanship, except her. Yet, juggling a myriad of part-time jobs, including a stint as a typist at Green Party Philadelphia, Emira's journey took unexpected turns. For better survival instincts, she applied for a post of babysitter through sitter.com. Therein, she encounters the Chamberlains family. There an encounter with Briar, a two-year-old girl, woven Emira's heart with unfelt fuzziness and warmth. Despite her love for nursing, Emira grapples with career insecurity, surrounded by friends in high-flying professions. At the brink of financial independence, Emira faced the looming reality of being dropped from her parents' insurance on her next birthday.

2) Alix

In her 30s, Alix Chamberlain epitomizes wealth and success, Emira's employer and a woman of influence. Meeting her husband, Peter, at 25, Alix's life unfolds like a fairy tale. Yet, beneath the opulent surface, insecurities linger, casting shadows on her seemingly flawless existence. A trailblazer since her college days, Alix's vlog, "#LetHerSpeak," empowers women through poignant letters. Despite her professional triumphs, Alix grapples with the complexities of motherhood. Her schedule brims with seminars, college visits, speeches, and a quest to inspire youth. Torn between her aspirations and the influence of affluent friends, Alix's decisions echo the unspoken desires of others, underscoring the intricate dance of her life.

MINOR:

1) Zara:

A steadfast ally and Emira's confidante, Zara's nursing expertise is surpassed only by her unwavering support. During pivotal moments, Zara becomes a linchpin, unraveling the truth behind the Market Depot incident footage. Her instrumental role culminates in Emira securing a job with a fair salary, marking a turning point in their journey.

2) Kelley Cooperland:

In the intricate web of past connections, Kelley emerges as the link intertwining Emira and Alix's worlds. Kelley is Emira's current boyfriend and Alix's past love. At a tense dinner party, he embodies discomfort, harbouring resentment from Alix's accusations against his friend, "Robbie." Their brief relationship crumbles, unveiling Kelley's complexities, including a perplexing dynamic involving another black woman and allegations of fetishization.

3) Briar Chamberlain:

A precocious three-year-old, Briar, Alix's firstborn, defies conventional expectations. Her intelligence sets her apart from her peers, forming a unique bond with Emira. While Emira treasures this connection, Alix sees Briar differently, leveraging her for public appearances. In the delicate dance between mother and child, Briar's innocence becomes both a source of endearment and contention.

THEMES:

The novel goes on fine lines. At first read, it might seem a light-hearted novel but reveals darker secrets of the human society that we presently live in.

Some of its themes are elucidated below:

ADULTING: "Such a Fun Age" transcends racial boundaries, delving into the uncharted waters of 'adulting.' What does 'adulting' mean to you? Both Emira and Alix grapple with their existential crises. Emira's career appears stagnant, a stark contrast to her friends' achievements, while Alix battles the unspoken challenges of motherhood. Kiley Reid takes you on a turbulent journey through the subtle nuances of these profound questions.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD: This narrative is a profound exploration of the universal theme of misperception. It serves as a stark reminder that even our closest friends may harbour hidden motives, and we may never truly decipher their intentions. Being an astute judge of character becomes an essential skill, one that can save us from unforeseen betrayals.

WHITE REMORSE: Another crucial element this novel wants to highlight is "white remorse". Throughout the story, Emira crosses paths with many conspicuous characters who present themselves as sympathetic and concerned for Emira. Yet it is purely due to their guilt and self-regard actions. After the Market Depot incident, Alix feels a tingling bud in her, as a culprit in this process. A perpetrator of her trauma. Yet her act of injustice during high school is in juxtaposition to that. They have an employer and employee hurdle that halts their friendship. Obsessed, she leaked the video herself. This shows her pride in white superiority. Furthermore, insisting her to feature in an interview further confirms our suspicions.

On the other hand, her boyfriend Kelley's action of fetishizing black women shows white indifference.

SYMBOLS USED:

The novel intertwines the usage of various symbols to make the story fascinating. They are described below.

a) **SPOONS THE FISH**

The fish symbolizes Emira's deep connection with Briar. She is observant of Briar's zany peculiar interest. After Spoon's death, Alix's nonchalant behaviour comes forth to the audience. She casually says to replace it before Briar notices. The attitude of Alix demonstrates how little she is aware of her daughter.

b) **THE LETHERSPEAK POLO UNIFORM**

It shows Alix's ineptitude to Emira's problems. Although she has not explicitly stated her to wear the uniform, Emira is bound to. It is the power dynamics that force her to wear it. She is an employee who has to follow the rules of her employer and please her.

c) **HANDS**

Hands play a significant role in the plot. Emira's family members are adept craftsmen who are successfully enjoying the fruits of their labour. Yet, Emira still needs to wait for the time when her hands find themselves. Unlike them, she is unenthusiastic about crafts.

LITERARY DEVICES USED:

- 1) **Irony:**
The novel employs the effective usage of situational irony. The characters navigate through unforeseen narratives that challenge the readers' perspectives.
- 2) **Foreshadowing:**
The novel skilfully takes into account the tactics of foreshadowing. Early on, we are given subtle hints of power dynamics between the two major characters. Furthermore, Alix' personally curated social media posts, highlight the difference between reality and social media. Additionally, it gives clues to a possible future conflict.
- 3) **Symbolism:**
The novel takes into account various symbols which share us a deeper meaning than perceived. The symbols have already been discussed in this manuscript.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The novel is seemingly significant in the 21st century when every month a person of colour, facing racial prejudice, pops up in our social media feed. In the harshest of scenarios, incidents of police brutality and murder erupt like wildfire across our Snapshots and Instagram feeds. Perhaps the most poignant example is the 2020 video of George Floyd. An ordinary man met a brutal demise at the hands of a white police officer, igniting a worldwide outpouring of public anger. It served as the catalyst for a global movement, prominently marked by the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on X (formerly Twitter).

OTHER NOVELS SIMILAR TO SUCH A FUN AGE:

- a) *That Kind of Mother* by Rumaan Alan: It tells us a tale of a white woman named "Rebecca" who feels weighed down by parental responsibilities despite her love for her newborn son. But things change and her perspectives go through a transformation with the joining of a black nanny.
- b) *Not My White Saviour* by Julayne Lee: It examines what it means to be adopted internationally and across racial lines, as well as what it's like growing up, hearing countless times how much better your life is because you were saved from your native country.

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

In my estimation, I'd award this novel a resounding 4.4 out of 5, with an additional 0.2 for the sheer astonishment that this marks Kiley Reid's debut work! The colloquial language in the book firmly grounds it in reality, forging an immediate connection between readers and the characters. While the plot occasionally ventures down familiar paths, the unexpected climax delivers a spine-tingling twist that will leave you breathless with wonder.

In the enchanting world of 'Such a Fun Age,' you'll discover a narrative that's not only swift and engaging but also brimming with humour and biting sarcasm. Don't be misled by the seemingly light-hearted tone; it artfully unravels the intricate power dynamics between its characters, leaving readers to navigate the complex waters of judgment. With a narrator whose voice is as accessible as a well-trodden path, it's no surprise that this book has resonated with a diverse and passionate audience. Prepare for a thrilling ride through modern relationships, where every twist and turn will keep you captivated from start to finish.