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A “soucouyant” is an evil spirit in Caribbean lore, a reminder of past transgressions that refuse to diminish with age. In this beautifully told novel that crosses borders, cultures, and generations, a young man returns home to care for his aging mother, who suffers from dementia. In his efforts to help her and by turn make amends for their past estrangement from one another, he is compelled to re-imagine his mother’s stories for her before they slip completely into darkness. In delicate, heartbreakin tones, the names for everyday things fade while at the same time a beautiful, haunted life, stained by grief, is slowly revealed.

Soucouyant Details

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Author : David Chariandy

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From Reader Review *Soucouyant* for online ebook

Hina Zephyr says

This is an achingly raw and sad book. Chariandy has captured a certain beauty even in the stark poverty and racism that follows this broken family from its roots in the Caribbean island to the bleak Scarborough bluffs. Each character has to battle their own demons. The book is similar in certain ways to *Still Alice*, in that the central character gradually loses herself in waves of dementia. But there the similarities end. Because Adele not only has to deal with her mental illness, she's had to fight racism and poverty all her life, which makes for a very unhappy existence.... and yet, there is something akin to great tenderness and love in her lucid interactions with her son.

Soucouyant is an evil spirit in Caribbean folklore, and like the name, the characters and their stories will haunt you long after you have turned the last page.

Fathima Cader says

This is a beautifully written book. I wouldn't be surprised if Chariandy writes poetry. I should look it up. He might have short stories published somewhere, too.

Thing is, I paused midway in this book to read Farzana Doctor's *Stealing Nasreen*, on which I thought I was going to write a paper. I didn't end up writing that paper, but reading *Stealing Nasreen*, though it's nowhere near as technically brilliant as *Soucouyant*, made me return to this novel with a certain amount of wariness. *Stealing Nasreen* is a much more straightforward narrative about immigration and sexuality. It isn't as shiny as *Soucouyant*, and that's what's interesting. I'd come to almost expect as inevitable that any story about minoritised communities must necessarily involve narrative techniques like reverse chronologies, self-reflexivity, ambiguity, etc. They're in every other widely-read "ethnic" novel. That they're also in *Soucouyant* isn't, by any means, a flaw in the novel; it's just that the pervasiveness of these techniques -- which *are* useful, after all, because they reflect certain aspects of postcolonial and postmodern lives -- now strikes me as more problematic than it once did. Can we no longer tell story front-to-back, beginning-to-end? Are we even allowed to? Or is that way of writing now purely the domain of "mainstream" novels? Has our resistance to falsely teleological narratives been so thoroughly co-opted by the international publishing industry that we've been forced, by our "niche" subject matter into niche writing styles -- to the point that we've even forgotten that how we write is *not* intrinsic to our subject matter. How we write is a choice we make, and it's a choice informed by how publishable our novels become.

OK, that was theoretical tangent that said nothing about *Soucouyant*, and now I've run myself dry. In short, I liked the novel, and I'd re-read it for the poetry.

Also, I just discovered Chariandy helped found Commodore Books, "the first and only black literary press in western Canada." Check <http://www.commodorebooks.com/>

Kate says

I really liked this novel. I like how it was very fragmented so that it was like he was simply telling the story

of his mother and wasn't just writing a novel. The main characters were really relatable and the depiction of his mother's memory loss was quite well done.

Emily says

A heartbreak novel mostly about a son who's returned to his mother after she's suffered for years with dementia. While I can see why so many people love this novel, I wished the ending had been tied into the rest of the novel more seamlessly. It wasn't a mystery novel. In fact, I found myself forgetting there were things to be "uncovered" until they came up again.

I just think it could have been more powerful for me had the past trauma of the novel's characters not been left as a surprise, almost plot twist, for the ending.

Stephanie says

I really enjoyed the first three quarters of the book for a few reasons: it takes place outside of Toronto, it illustrates an immigrant family's struggle with racism, and it is from the view of an adult child dealing with his mother's developing dementia. I thought that all of this was well done, however the ending of the book lost me: I thought that the author tried to put too much information into explaining the characters' backgrounds. Chariandy would have been better off to have revealed more of this vital information throughout the novel, and to not overwhelm the conclusion.

Janice says

Scarborough Bluffs (where I grew up) ... Soucouyan is an evil spirit in Caribbean folklore ... his mother arrived in Canada in the early 60s, her childhood in Trinidad during World War II, suffering now from dementia in Ontario

Adam Hodgins says

this was so good, so sad and beautiful. I read it on a flight to Vancouver a couple of days ago, I'm already trying to convince people to read it

Miriam says

Excellent novel so far. A good follow up to Just Kids because Chiandry's voice is as tender and careful as Smith's.

Rob says

(8/10) More than anything the appeal here is the language, a kind of sad poetry that captures the loss and strange redemption here better than any plotting could. Chariandy's prose is a joy to read, and it's hung on a decent story too, about trauma and forgetting and the question of how much responsibility one has to other people, especially one's family. If anything the problem with *Soucouyant* is that it seems too small and partial, like a jagged fragment of something bigger -- at the end I was thirsty for more. Chariandy is definitely an author to watch out for.

Andrea says

Very, very interesting. Mental illness, immigration, and identity. All rolled into a very readable story.

Gilbert says

This is a book written by a prof at SFU. His parents were from Trinidad and lived in Ontario. I particularly enjoyed reading this in Tobago. It provided a flavour and perspective I couldn't have had otherwise.

Nicole says

So happy I read this book. It is just beautiful in so many ways.

James Murphy says

Soucouyant has a subtitle: A Novel of Forgetting. The thing is, it's more about remembering. And about the kinds of love carrying the tenderest and most caring freight. A soucouyant, the reader is told, is an evil spirit in Caribbean folklore. In a novel turned on its head, it can also be an object of love. I liked this lovely little novel a lot. It's compassionate and loving, and though it's a first novel written by a very young man, it's full of the understanding and strength that swell to wisdom in the reader's mind. Chariandy carefully and skillfully details character and the present as if adding dolce strokes of a bow bit by bit while leading up to the crescendos of memory making up the final chapter. Because it's a novel about a woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease and the son who cares for the difficult reality of her everyday while nursing the shards of her recollection, it's a novel about forgetting. But it's more about how we can overcome the deteriorations of the mind to reach back into the most tender regions of our memories. That this edition by Arsenal Pulp Press is handsomely made, too, adds to the overall satisfaction of the read. It's a pleasure to sit with something so beautiful, both to hold in your lap and to hold in your mind.

Sarah says

an interesting study of strained relationships between generations - loved exploring the Beaches through these eyes

Sally says

Mostly loved it but not sure the last 1/4 flows that well with the first 3/4. Beautiful writing.

Arsenal says

Finalist, Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction
Longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize
Longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award
Winner, ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Award (GOLD), Literary Fiction
Shortlisted for Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize (BC Book Prizes)
Shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book
Shortlisted for City of Toronto Book Award
Shortlisted for the Amazon.ca/Books In Canada First Novel Award
Shortlisted for the ReLit Award, Best Novel
Shortlisted for One Book, One Vancouver
Now in its 3rd printing!

Jean says

really enjoyed this book - especially poignant to read while working on our show about dementia. blends of the heartbreak of losing a loved one to dementia, and the struggles of being an immigrant and "the other" in a new homeland. author has a new book coming out this year and looking forward to checking it out.

Jennifer Irvine says

Really well written. Clear, melodic prose, strong characters. Not my experience with dementia, but an entertaining account anyway. Ending was a bit much. Why do books with rape, violence, prostitution and accidentally setting your mother on fire sell? Still, loved the beginning the most. Some parts engrossing.

Peachy says

Comprised of folklore, tragedy, racism, willful determination and eventually, Alzheimer's disease, Soucouyan is the haunting tale of one man's journey back to his ailing mother, and what he learns about himself and his roots along the way. Set in the Scarborough Bluffs, a beautiful suburb of Toronto, as contrasted by the ramshackle slums of Trinidad during WWII, the descriptions are breathtaking and shocking. More than just a novel, Soucouyan reads like poetry, and is magical in its style.

Bonnie says

Very few flaws, (and others may disagree that there are any at all); beautifully written.
