Clarion Review

Historical

The Mood of the Bystander
Chisom Achigbule
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Throughout history, the concept of a divine birth has graced the pages of fiction and nonfiction. In political intrigue, a mysterious child deemed by decree to be an influential entity, often endowed with special gifts, will rise as a beacon to some and a threat to others. These mystifying leaders manifest themselves as saviors or invaders in power struggles that change the world in a short time.

The Mood of the Bystander takes place during the reign of King Edward of England. Steeped in superstition and omen, this unsettling environment provides the perfect backdrop for the impending arrival of a man who will be known as the Divine Spear. The king is ordered by godly forces to sleep with a madwoman, but then discovers he has impregnated the wrong person. His queen is also pregnant with his heir, and he knows that someone else will give birth to a son who may be his blessing or his downfall. Woven into this bizarre scenario is a romance between Princess Victoria and Prince Andor, soulmates with a conflicting agenda.

Rich with period atmosphere, this farfetched tale will entertain connoisseurs of the sordid elements of English history. The story hits a low mark in believability, but Achigbule delivers his somewhat convoluted plot as a storyteller, not a literary historian. At times, he overplays stressful, emotional scenes, explaining rather than showing motivations, but he rarely veers too far from the action propelling his plot. His dialogue is occasionally stilted, often conveying too much information, and his narrative reveals indications of uncertainty and awkwardness with the language, which may be due to unnecessary scene breaks and formatting glitches. Yet at no point is his work incomprehensible, so for avid readers with no stringent demands looking for pure entertainment, this novel will be appreciated for an evening of light diversion. The author's strongest skill is his ability to keep the reader wondering what will happen next.

Chisom Achigbule was born in Nigeria. He received a bachelor of science degree in marketing from Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Nkpolu, Port-Harcourt. *The Mood of the Bystander* is his first novel.

Filled with danger and treachery in a royal battle of wills, Achigbule's book sets an edgy mood from the beginning. Written with the fervor of religious prophecy, his gripping purpose establishes the immediacy of commercial fiction. Fast-paced and brimming with confrontation, his style will capture enthusiasts of historical genre looking for the distraction of a new voice.

Julia Ann Charpentier