

Abstract

“We are [NOT] here for the men”: Empathy and Empowerment in Jennifer Mathieu’s
Devoted

In recent years, the publishing niche of nonfiction escape memoir, authored by women who have left extremist Christian sects has seen quite a boom. There have also been a few YA titles that feature a similar plotline. The fiction all has a thriller structure focusing on the difficulties of escape and the powerful (masculine) forces that threaten the female characters. The nonfiction tends to read as survival stories. The protagonist of 2015’s *Devoted* by Jennifer Mathieu is Rachel Walker, a young woman inside the Christian Patriarchal Movement, commonly known as Quiverfull. *Devoted* is an altogether quieter novel; focusing on Rachel’s internal experience. Rachel begins a true believer who strives to meet expectations set for women, but she is intelligent and curious and most importantly empathetic, so she begins to realize the difficulties caused by her family’s beliefs for the women around her. As a novel set in an aggressively patriarchal society, it, surprisingly, doesn’t spend its time on the insurmountable power of the masculine. While there are male characters, they are not driving forces. Rather, it is the women, both adult and teen, who play all central roles: Lauren, another escapee and Diane, the woman who hires Rachel. Once outside, Rachel worries about her mother and sister. The paperback edition has the phrase “only she can save herself” on the cover, but, more truthfully, this novel imagines a world not dominated by masculine values, but one of empathy and caring where women can come together to support one another **and** save themselves.

Works Consulted

Joyce, Kathryn. *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009.

Mathieu, Jennifer. *Devoted*. NY: Square Fish. 2015.

Trites, Roberta. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children’s Novels*. Iowa City: University of Iowa. 1997.

Westover, Tara. *Educated: A Memoir*. NY: Random House. 2018.

Williams, Carol Lynch. *The Chosen One*. NY: St. Martin’s. 2010.

I’ve also located some articles about teens and religion in YA as well as nonfiction memoirs and other YA fiction.