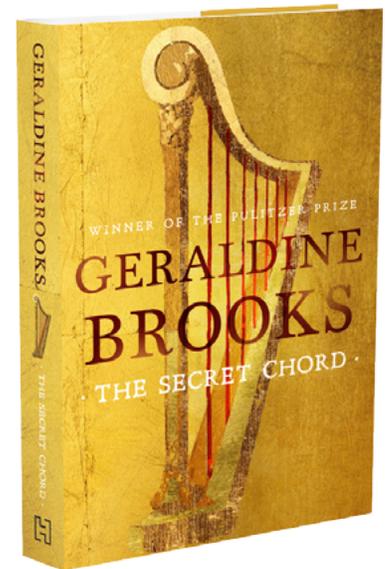


A compelling portrait of the morally complex hero King David.



Discussion Notes

1. David's third wife, Avigail, says of David, 'We may love him and yet not be blind to what he is. I've come to understand that he is what he is because of his faults.' (ch xi). King David is a deeply flawed individual who in the course of satisfying his own lusts sets in train tragic events that will rebound on him, his household, his line of succession and the destiny of his people. Geraldine Brooks has said that she's inclined to believe he must be a real historical personage, because no nation would willingly create such a flawed founding father. Do you find David a believable character? How do you think he compares to modern-day leaders? Are people willing to forgive character flaws in their leaders today?
2. David's first wife, Mikhal, says, 'Even you, Natan, must know what men are, when it comes to matters of sex and honor. I was his [Yonatan's] sister, and what fouled my honor fouled his.' And later, reflecting on Mikhal's story, the prophet Natan thinks to himself of women, 'Which of them ever is mistress of her own destiny? Highborn or peasant, it makes no difference.' (ch viii). Throughout *The Secret Chord*, women are portrayed as chattels: completely under the command of men, with no alternative but to do their bidding. Nevertheless, there are some memorable female characters in *The Secret Chord* – resilient and resourceful. What did you think of Geraldine Brooks' portrayal of female characters? Which women in the story were the most memorable for you, and why? Could women such as Batsheva, Tamar or Mikhal have taken any steps to avoid their sexual exploitation?
3. 'Soon enough, the boys' outrages went unremarked and unpunished. By the time they were nearing manhood, what had been mischief had become malevolence.' (ch xvii). David's older sons are portrayed as spoilt children who grow into dissolute and dangerous young men, indulged by David and accountable to no one for their acts of lust and cruelty. Were you shocked by the acts of David's sons? Are there modern-day equivalents for this poisonously self-indulgent lifestyle – amongst political leaders, royals or perhaps spoilt superstars and their families?
4. The prophet Natan has the foreknowledge – and the courage – to castigate David for his misdeeds and tell him how he must atone for his wrongs. Geraldine Brooks says of Natan that, reading about him in the Bible, she was intrigued to delve into the career path of such a man. Do you think she has successfully portrayed the character of the man behind the legendary prophet?
5. In *The Secret Chord*, Geraldine Brooks offers us a window onto a time of legend and brings a unique perspective to stories we thought we knew. It's almost as if she is channelling her characters, imagining, between the lines and verses of the Bible, a story of faith, family and betrayal that is epic in scope and vivid in description. Geraldine's other novels have been praised for this same ability to re-imagine history that allows readers to immerse themselves in historical moments. Did the story of King David come alive for you? Were you shocked by the level of violence and cruelty in the society portrayed in the book?

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