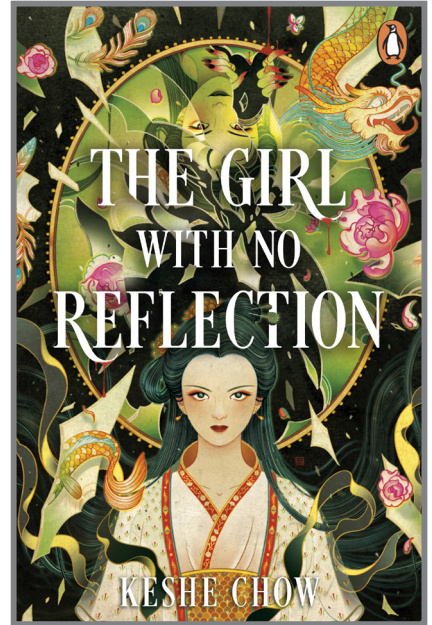


The Girl with No Reflection

AUTHOR
KESHE CHOW



SCIS: 5494660

ISBN: 9781761346804

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Violence, Sexual Content, Language)

SYNOPSIS

Ying Yue believes in love. So, when the royal matchmaker selects her to wed the crown prince, Ying hopes that love is exactly what awaits her. No matter that the royal family is notoriously reclusive, rarely leaving their walled palace—and no matter the rumours about the previous royal brides, who after their weddings, were supposedly never seen again. Ying knows that she was chosen for a reason. After all, why else would the matchmaker select her, out of all the girls in the kingdom?

Yet upon her arrival at the royal palace, Ying's dreams of a fairy tale wedding quickly disintegrate. Her husband-to-be is cold, stoic, and utterly infuriating—he and Ying can't make it through a single conversation without wanting to throttle each other. Left alone in her room, with only her own reflection for company, Ying begins to see things. Strange things. When Ying discovers a secret parallel world accessible through the palace mirrors, she thinks she's found the perfect way to escape her upcoming nuptials. In this mirror universe, the prince is kind and compassionate, and it isn't long before he and Ying start to fall for one another. But there is darkness in this new world, too. It turns out, Ying was chosen as the prince's bride for a reason—but not the reason she thinks. The two worlds have a long and bloody history, and Ying has a part to play in the future of them both. And the brides who came before Ying? By the time they found out what their role was, it was already too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keshe Chow is a Malaysian-born Chinese-Australian author of fantasy, romance, and speculative fiction. She won the 2020 Perito Prize, the 2021 Rachel Funari Prize for Fiction, the 2021 Yarra Literature Prize, the 2022 Victorian Premier's Prize for an Unpublished Manuscript, and the 2023 Uncharted Thrilling Story Award. *The Girl with No Reflection* is her debut novel.

THEMES

- Self-discovery and identity
- Perseverance and determination
- East Asian history, mythology and customs
- Roles of men and women
- Class structure and privilege
- Mirrors and reflections
- Friendship and family

- Adventure, romance, horror and fantasy
- Truth and morality

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Look at the cover—there is a lot happening! Consider the illustrations, colours and even the emotions you might feel. Using singular words, create a mind map of what you think this book might be about, just from looking at the front of the book.
 - Pick two of your words and expand on them in a couple of sentences. What elements of the cover encouraged you to write down these words? What links do you think they have to the story?
- Read the Author’s Note at the start of the book. Keshe Chow mentions the story is not an ‘accurate representation’ of the Imperial China era. As a class, discuss why you think authors take inspiration from the world around them. What value does it give to their storytelling? What obligations does an author have to the reader if writing about a historical period?

WHILE READING

Writing Style

- An important aspect of poetry is considering how you want to make the reader feel. Princess Ying experiences a whirlwind of emotions, from confusion and love to fear and affection. Reading pp 32–33, it is clear Princess Ying is anxious that something bad is going to happen after she’d broken the fángzhu mirror—write down the words and phrases on those pages that suggest she’s feeling this way.
- Flip to the first paragraph of p 71 where Princess Ying and the ‘Mirror Prince’ start exploring the mirror world—there is lots of imagery and striking descriptions of the many places. Create a drawing of somewhere you know of that might share this beauty. Do they make you feel a certain type of way when you visit them?
- The author regularly uses motifs, which are repeated objects or symbols that add meaning to the story—these play a big role in her writing style. Why do you think the repetition of objects or symbols is important for storytelling? Have you used motifs in your own writing?
- ‘Romantasy’, stories that combine the fantasy and romance genres, has been all the buzz on book social media recently. Princess Ying and Prince Zhang later develop a love for each other, amidst all the strange and mystical things that occur on both sides of the mirror. Write down a list of how you think each genre strengthens the other in a story. Why do/don’t they complement?
- The author has also described the book as a new word—‘horromantasy’, adding in horror to romantasy. A portmanteau is a word that blends the sound and meaning of two or more words. Can you think of other examples of portmanteaus, or come up with ideas for other genre blends that could become one new term?

Motifs

The use of motifs is important for storytelling and self-discovery. *The Girl with No Reflection* contains some important motifs and symbols, including the most important one, referenced in its title!

Mirrors/Reflections

- Write down in a few sentences, what you think mirrors/reflections as a motif would mean if you were to incorporate it into a story of your own. What is the link between the two?
- ‘Ying’s scalp prickled, her entire body flooding with a very specific sort of need. This was her one chance to escape a loveless marriage. A promise of freedom, of adventure. Wasn’t that what Ying wanted? She had lived her whole life clawing at societal confines. Caged, not just by locked doors but by decorum and social mores. Trying to live up to whatever was expected of her.’ (p 50) ‘Reflection-Ying’ offers to take Princess Ying’s place in marrying the horrible Prince Zhang, but could it end badly? Write down a paragraph of what this quote tells us about identity and Princess Ying trying to find herself, separate from society.
 - What do you think it means to be ‘caged’?
- Draw a scene from *The Girl with No Reflection* that features mirrors/reflections as the main motif. Pick the most important quote from that scene to accompany your drawing.

Dragons/Fish

- In your own words, write a few sentences about what you think dragons/fish as a motif would mean if you were to incorporate it into a story of your own. What is the link between the two?
- ‘We are ignorant to the meaning of the dragon in the same way we are ignorant to the meaning of the universe, but there is something in the dragon’s image that fits man’s imagination.’ —*The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis
- Borges (Martínez, September 1967). Although the dragon is a mythological creature, it is full of historical significance. Refer to p 259, specifically where the carp turn into dragons—discuss with your table how being ‘the Fish’ ties to Ying’s imagination. What does the fish turning into dragons mean for Ying’s character development?
- Draw a scene from *The Girl with No Reflection* that features dragon/fish as the main motif. Pick the most important quote from that scene to accompany your drawing.

Representations of Chinese history, culture and mythology

- Why do you think Keshe decided not to accurately represent Imperial Chinese ‘history, politics, social order, spirituality, philosophy or customs’? Discuss the possible dangers of doing so for authors or anyone who writes creatively.
- Can you think of other books or films that do a similar thing with history or culture?
- Privilege and patriarchy were important to certain ancient dynasties, whereby women studied the arts and sciences and men governed the outer world. Princess Ying’s parents encouraged her to stay away from anything supernatural or mythical, but she would still sneak books out of Master Yuan’s extensive library on such things. How does Ying’s rebellious act comment on the societal pressures at that time?
- In what ways does mythology and folklore help Ying in her quest for knowledge and individuality?
- Many authors are heavily influenced by events and experiences that happen in their own life, especially how they were raised and who played a big role in their childhood. Although Keshe predominantly grew up in Australia, her roots are East Asian and women were ‘often peripheral to the stories’, Keshe says. Marriage, in particular, is a reflection of that, seen in Princess Ying’s arranged marriage. With this in mind, research the similarities and differences between marriage in Imperial China and traditional Chinese marriage today.
 - Choose one of the ideas you wrote down, and find someone else in the class who picked something different to you—discuss the research you found together and any links you can think to the story of *The Girl with No Reflection*. Consider important scenes, quotes and feelings you may have had to the marriage of Ying and Zhang . . . even their reflection-halves!

Emotion within genre—adventure, romance, horror and fantasy

- In theory, ‘genre’, as a concept, is seen by varying scholars as ‘fuzzy at the edges’—John Frow explains this in his critical book, *Genre*. For him, a book can use multiple genres and not one genre ‘amounts to belonging’ of a particular text. Do you agree or disagree, and to what extent?
 - Debate this as a class and see where your classmates land in this argument.
- A good example of adventure, romance, horror and fantasy working closely is pp 399–404, where Ying and Zhang are getting ready to fight in the Mirror war. Consider the below literary techniques in this scene and how they build emotion within the reader:
 - Dialogue
 - Character development
 - Pauses
 - Foreshadowing
 - Rhetorical questions
 - Physicality.
- Get into groups of three or four and follow the below instructions:
 - Each person must pick a genre from *The Girl with No Reflection*: adventure, romance, horror or fantasy.
 - Each person now must pick a different part of a story: orientation, complication, sequence of events and resolution.
 - With your chosen genre and story section, write a paragraph of a creative story that might interest you—consider emotion as the driving factor.

- Come back as a group, put all your sections together in order and read out what your final story is! This is a great way to observe the ways genre can be transformed and how personal emotions and feelings influence our own writing.