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Book Review on INK by Alice Broadway - Ruby Ducat

In Leora's world, people wear their hearts on their sleeves – literally. This text explores a culture where each significant event that occurs in your life is commemorated with tattoos. Every achievement, every failing, every moment is tattooed upon the skin of the marked, which makes it clear what sort of life they have lived. When a marked person passes away, their skin is taken from their body and turned into a book. Members of the community then judge the book filled with tattoos. If they deem the book to show a full and wholesome life, it is taken home by the deceased's family to be kept on a shelf with the rest of their ancestors books. However, if the book shows evidence of any wrongdoing, it is burned, and all memory of that person is erased from history.

The protagonist Leora is at a major changing point in her life. She is about to leave school and take the exams that will decide what she is destined to do for the rest of her life and her beloved father has just passed away. While she and her mother try to process his death, the government has cast doubt on whether or not his book is evidence enough of a worthy life. As she tries to piece together the mystery of her father's life, Leora discovers long-forgotten secrets about him, and about herself.

During the novel fairy tales and fables such as sleeping beauty and Rapunzel are woven into the narrative, these add depth and meaning to the plot of the story. Leora's character is well-formed, I was constantly rooting for her to do the right thing. The other characters in INK are less well developed, but there is hope for them to develop on their own since this is the first book in a trilogy. The novel also explores many themes which lead you to question our own society and the way that we live. "You've heard of love at first sight? You've heard of a prince that falls in love with the beautiful maiden the moment he sees her? You've heard the fairy tales and the happily ever afters?" I would nod, eyes wide. "Well, that's not our story," during the novel the characters discover not everything is as it seems in their ideal world and they must challenge their leaders, their teachings, and their own preconceptions to find the truth.

Though it's not fully clear why tattoos and skin books are the only ways a person can be remembered in this world, Broadway uses her unsettling premise to contemplate grief and loss, attempts to neatly categorise people and decisions as right or wrong, and the courage to push against norms in ways big and small. One of my favourite aspects of the story is the way the author has effortlessly linked the mythology of this culture in with Leora's journey to discover her own history.

Broadway elegantly portrays the way power can become manipulative, controlling, and deceptive. She successfully imagined a world that I wanted to learn absolutely everything about: I was left yearning for more. This novel is a great read for teenagers who enjoy a story with a touch of magic to it.