

**Title:** *Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know*  
**Author:** Samira Ahmed  
**Perspectives Category:** Race and Ethnicity

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Kylee K., 11th Grade

**Date Reviewed:** 6/12/2023

*1. What is the main plot of this book?*

The main plot of "Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know" revolves around the intertwined stories of two young women, Khayyam and Leila, as they uncover hidden truths about their heritage and unravel the mysteries surrounding two enigmatic historical figures, Alexandre Dumas and Lord Byron. As Khayyam delves into her research on Dumas, she uncovers parallels between his life and her's, leading her on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Leila, on the other hand, explores the life of Lord Byron through her travels in Paris, grappling with her own romantic entanglements and the complexities of love and identity.

*2. Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I identified most with Khayyam, particularly in her quest for self-discovery and connection to her heritage. Her passion for literature and history resonated with me, and her journey to uncover the truth about Dumas mirrored my own desire for understanding and exploration. When Khayyam reflects, "Sometimes, you have to rewrite your story," I felt a deep connection to her struggle and determination to forge her own path amidst societal expectations.

*3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

The main message of "Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know" centers on the power of storytelling to illuminate hidden truths and connect individuals across time and space. Through Khayyam and Leila's journeys, the book emphasizes the importance of embracing one's heritage and identity while challenging conventional narratives. As Khayyam muses, "Maybe history is like the wind. You never see it, but you feel it," the book underscores the invisible forces that shape our lives and the significance of uncovering the untold stories that lie beneath the surface.

*4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

The main message was effectively integrated into the story, seamlessly woven into the characters' experiences and interactions. Rather than feeling preachy, the themes of heritage, identity, and storytelling emerge organically through Khayyam and Leila's journeys, inviting readers to ponder their own connections to the past and the stories that shape their lives.

*5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

I resonated most with the perspective that emphasizes the importance of reclaiming marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives. As Khayyam reflects on her research, "The erasure of a woman's voice, the invisibility of her story, is a violent act," I found myself agreeing with

her assertion that storytelling can be an act of resistance against historical injustices, empowering individuals to reclaim their agency and reshape the narrative.

*6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

Through reading "Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know," my beliefs about the significance of heritage and storytelling were reaffirmed, as I gained a deeper appreciation for the ways in which our pasts inform our presents and shape our futures. The book challenged me to reconsider the narratives I had been taught and inspired me to explore the untold stories that lie beneath the surface of history.

*7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

While the book offers rich perspectives on heritage, identity, and storytelling, I believe that a deeper exploration of the impact of colonialism and imperialism on marginalized communities could have enriched the narrative, providing a more nuanced understanding of historical power dynamics and their ongoing repercussions.

*8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book sparked my interest in delving deeper into the lives of historical figures like Alexandre Dumas and Lord Byron, as well as the broader cultural and political contexts in which they lived. Additionally, it inspired me to seek out more diverse voices and narratives that challenge conventional understandings of history and identity.

*9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would recommend "Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know" to readers who enjoy thought-provoking narratives that blend history, romance, and mystery. This book would particularly appeal to those interested in literature, cultural heritage, and the power of storytelling to illuminate hidden truths.

*10. What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book that would complement this category is "The Lost Girls of Paris" by Pam Jenoff, as it similarly weaves together historical fiction and contemporary storytelling to explore themes of identity, sacrifice, and resilience. Both books offer compelling narratives that shed light on overlooked stories and celebrate the power of women's voices throughout history.

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Zahra V., Grade 9

**Date Reviewed:** August 1st, 2023

*1. What is the main plot of this book?*

The main plot of this book follows American Muslim Khayyam, who is upset when she is denied entry into her dream art school. Her essay followed the mystery of the missing painting by Delacroix, which was gifted to Alexandre Dumas. Coincidentally, Khayyam ends up meeting the descendant of Dumas, whose name happens to be the same. Together they join the mystery to find the lost painting. The story also flips between the Narrative of Leila, who is the woman the painting is based off of. Leila is from the 19th century,

and similarly wants to be with her love. The story brings readers on a journey of love in the present and tracing back to history.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I definitely identified most with Khayyam, for many reasons. In particular, I enjoyed how I was able to find a connection through both of our cultures and heritages. Similarly, I am also from an Indian-British background, and find struggles of balancing both heritages in my daily life. I also think the author perfectly captured the essence of a muslim American, particularly being female. As it is a challenge, when both myself and Khayyam faced challenges based on our ethnicity and religion.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I believe the main message of this book is that racism and troubles within identity and culture still exist today. Although it is mostly swept underneath the rug, this book brought light to the issue, which I believe is necessary.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I believe the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story. To add on, I think the author did a great job of portraying racism and the struggles that both Khayyam and Leila faced within their own cultures, in the book without overkillng it.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

With both Leila and Khayyam's perspectives being shown throughout the book, I would have to agree more with Khayyam on the basis of not listening to cultural stereotypes and following along with them. To explain, Leila cannot be with her love because she may be punished as it is not acceptable within the society. On the other hand, Khayyam knows that dating would not be in question within her culture, but she follows her heart instead.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

My beliefs that racism still exists today, was definitely reaffirmed through reading this book. Samira showed how although society is supposed to be "changed" now, there still is an undertone of difference between white and colored people.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I believe this book is missing the perspective of Khayyam's parents. To add on, I think Khayyam's parents should have had more of a leading and guiding role, which might have added more of a depth to the story.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book has encouraged me to pursue more interest with articles and stories about women in the 19th century, particularly within muslim empires. I think it is very

interesting to see how their lives differed, all while still holding the same key morals and values.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to ages 13+. The reason I say this is because I believe the contents within it are not so much inappropriate, but rather mature in understanding. I think older kids will be able to truly recognize the seriousness of discussions such as racism and troubles within finding their own identity more, as they have a deeper knowledge of these topics compared to younger readers.

10. *What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book I have read that would fit perfectly into this category is *Let us Dream* by Alyssa Cole. This book follows a young muslim woman in Harlem, 1917 who follows her heart and finds love. It is very similar within the topics of this book, and I believe would further enlighten readers about fighting cultural stereotypes and finding your own identity.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Racheal X., 10<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Date Reviewed: 4/2/24**

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

A boy and girl meet on the streets of Paris. Khayyam Maquet is a complicated person(French, American, Indian, Muslim) in a complicated situation- not only did she get rejected from a prestigious art scholarship contest, but also by her not-boyfriend back in the wild lands of not-Paris. Alexandre Dumas the six times great grandson of writer Alexandre Dumas, and he can help her on this mission. As Khayyam and Alexandre traverse through Paris to find this mysterious girl in a painting gifted to his 6x great grandfather, her story is being told in parallel in the 19th century. Leila, part of an Ottoman pasha's harem, falls in love with someone forbidden, putting her life in danger. Both girls navigate tumultuous situations, and ultimately uncover life-changing revelations about themselves and their relationships.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

The character I identified the most was with Khayyam. As someone who lived in several countries for years before moving to the US, I could relate to her conflicted internal feelings about belonging somewhere, and her true identity.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I think that the main message of the book revolves around the importance of being an individual and preserving what makes you "you". The two main characters are complicated and multi-faceted characters who both carry the feeling of never "belonging", but still don't let others define who they are.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too “preachy”?*

Despite the quality of the author’s diction and lyrical style of writing, I feel that the main message of the book could have been integrated in a better way. For example, following the principle of “show, don’t tell”, many of Khayyam’s feminist viewpoints- while still extremely valid and true- could have been portrayed to the reader with her actions or beliefs, instead of telling the reader about what statements are printed onto her shirt.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

There was no specific established “other” perspective, just Khayyam’s determination to tell Leila’s story and prevent her life from being forgotten.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

After reading this book, my beliefs were reaffirmed about the need to give voices to marginalized groups and those historically sidelined and silenced, lest their stories and lives be forgotten forever.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I think that the perspective of the other main character, Leila, could have been expanded further upon. Despite both storylines being equally intriguing, I felt that Leila’s perspective was sidelined in favor of Khayyam’s discoveries, almost every time Leila was in an interesting or nefarious situation.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

Yes, the book encouraged me to learn more about the various figures mentioned in the book. Even though one of the side characters is a descendant of Dumas, I learned more not just about Dumas, but also about Lord Byron and his short but complicated life.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would recommend this book to someone who is interested in a literary historical mystery with hints of romance, coupled with a few riveting twists and turns.

10. *What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

I think that Yellowface, by R.F. Kuang could go into this category, as it is a satire of race and diversity in the modern-day publishing industry through the story of two women; one dead, one alive, one Asian and the rising star of the industry, one White and unsuccessful- until she steals her friend’s work and passes it off as her own.